



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY STUDIES**

**THE GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA:
SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHIOPIA**

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CERTIFICATION SHEET

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Dedication

To my beloved kids, whose smiles and love inspire me every day!

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, for His endless grace, wisdom, and strength throughout the course of this work. Without His guidance and blessings, it would have been impossible for me to accomplish this research. Truly, God has done so much for me, praise and glory be to His holy name forever.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

IGAD - Intergovernmental Authority on Development

CRDC - Civil Rights Data Collection

EPRDF - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

DDR - Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

MFA- Ministry of Foreign Affairs

SSR - Security Sector Reform

TPLF - Tigray People's Liberation Front

IPSS - Institute for Peace and Security Studies

SAF - Sudanese Armed Forces

RSCs – Regional Security Complexes

Abstract

This study examines the contemporary geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa (HoA) and their security implications for Ethiopia post 2018. First chapter deals with critical elements such as statement of the problem, research questions and research design. In this chapter it was identified that the Horn remains one of the most volatile regions in the world, marked by overlapping internal and inter-state conflicts, fragile political transitions, and intense involvement of external powers. In the second chapter review of relevant literature of contemporary Horn book chapters, peer reviewed journals, articles and so on were provided.

Third chapter dealt with Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory as a framework with which the thesis was guided by. The Horn as a complex in regards to Middle East Complex and sub complex was discussed including what Ethiopia's place in the whole Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Horn of Africa security arena. The following chapter outlined methodological approach. Primary data collected from five key informants was presented and discussed in the fourth chapter. And the final chapter presented findings that revealed that the region's security landscape is shaped by the competing interests of traditional powers, particularly the United States and China, as well as the growing involvement of Middle Eastern states such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The research identifies that Ethiopia's internal instability and evolving foreign policy since 2018 have further complicated its regional posture. The study concludes that sustainable peace and stability in the Horn depend on strengthening collective regional institutions, especially IGAD, and ensuring that Ethiopia's foreign policy prioritizes internal cohesion, cooperative regional engagement, and resilience against external manipulation.

Keywords: *Geopolitics, Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, Regional Security Complex, IGAD, External Powers, Red Sea, Peace and Security.*

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The Horn of Africa, Africa's easternmost part, is home to countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, and Somalia. The region has been undergoing major political and economic changes; it has been facing complex security challenges. In an extensive sense, throughout history, these countries' changes and complexity have never been just a concern of the countries themselves but the international community as a whole. The natural geographical setting of the Horn of Africa by default has made the region to become a strategic space for countries. For decade's traders, educators, and preachers passing through or settling in the region have shaped the region's ideological and physical structure. And through time, this has attracted the attention of powerful states' policies.

As a result of many factors, this part of Africa has gone through dramatic changes, especially after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. These historical shifts have occurred throughout the Horn of Africa, resulting in major political, economic, and social alterations. During these periods, civil wars, economic and political shifts, disintegrations, the birth of new states and ideologies have occurred. This has not just impacted the region but also the entire international scheme. And since then, at the end of the day, it can be said that the main factor of these dramatic changes is political turmoil, ethnic cleansing, and security issues.

After the cold war in a bird's eye view of the history of the horn of Africa, for instance in 1991 Ethiopia saw the end of a civil war with the change of government; the disintegration of Somalia; Djibouti surfacing as a major station of superpowers; Eritrea and later South Sudan forming an independent state respectively were the key phenomena that was a turning point for the region. The civil war in the then Sudan divided the country into two, creating South Sudan as a new state within of the region.

Djibouti's strategic importance for almost every superpower was undisputable; it has attracted many countries as a good spot for a military base, to hit economic and political goals. Following Ethiopia's agreement for the cession of Eritrea, thereby a landlocked country, the port of Djibouti became the only maritime gateway for Ethiopia as well. As a result, to this day,

Ethiopia has become economically dependent on the ports of Djibouti. And this dependence has created a marriage with Djibouti, making the port a matter of existence for Ethiopia. This and other factors are important to understand today's Horn of Africa and its politics.

Two decades later, after a continuous turmoil within the horn, relative stability in the region, with ongoing peace-enforcing missions and state reformation started bearing some sort of hope. Ethiopia became an economic and political stronghold with the West and international financial institutions. Shortly, however, the latest country to join the international club of countries drenched in cyclical conflict, mainly driven by the quest for power, with no apparent winner in sight. The scramble for resources and strategic space in the sub-region has further deteriorated South Sudan's hope for peace, and great powers backing different factions, mainly for the resources underground, has left the country worse than ever.

The scramble has continued intensely in Djibouti with China and the US as main players and Middle Eastern powers as late joiners. This wave of hustle and bustle has resulted in new interests shaping in the sub-region and has been detrimental to relationships among countries in the region, and most importantly, in national political economies.

The research intends to examine security implications for Ethiopia consequent to new geopolitical dynamics in the Horn of Africa. The research looks at external infringement in the region as a unit and countries in the Horn in particular indicating a balanced approach for Ethiopia in the current security predicament. The need to study the Horn of Africa, or the need for this research, for that matter, is about thoroughly investigating the complex dynamics of the region and putting forward evidence-based recommendations for a stable and developed part of Africa. This part of Africa is strategic and has a geopolitical impact stretching into the international system. The Horns' strategic importance stems from its geographical location bordering the Red Sea which hosts a substantial amount of international trade; notably the transportation of hydrocarbons from the Middle East. The Horn of Africa is a factor in a scramble for resources, and superpowers' strategic involvement in a military, economic, and political settlement from the Middle East to Asia and from Asia to the west is unsettling. These factors have created civil wars after civil wars, making the region a one spot for terrorism, destabilization, and underdevelopment with high displacement and migration.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Kimmage talks of a new world order in the making not only by Trump in the US but elsewhere as well after 2010, unlike the post cold war period where globalism has been overtaken by nationalism in China, Turkey, Russia, India as well as Europe. All vying to restore past glories at the expense of international cooperation. The 2016 Trump advent and the path others chose brought forth “populist, nationalist, anti-globalist spirit”. Kimmage attributes this pattern to Huntington’s clash of civilizations, not rigged in the strict sense but “performative and flexible”. An important word employed by Kimmage was “reconfigure”; redefining “competition over (and cooperation on) economic and geopolitical interests” globally. Kimmage did not simply mention Huntington’s theory as a frame; he made reference to claims of leaders of countries mentioned above as guarantors of this and that civilization. Then the new world order in the making will be dependent of Trump’s second pursued also by those who participate. Those poles of interest will then prescribe to the geopolitical remaking which questions ideals and norms of the post-cold war era such as rules-based system. At perils is Europe, left to scrap remnants of an order (Kimmage, 2025).

As per Kimmage, making America great again revolves around the idea of absolute dominance, not isolation but as a front runner in international politics. Kimmage underscored that, “Trump’s dislike of universalistic internationalism aligns him with Putin, Xi, Modi, and Erdogan”. These leaders primarily subscribe to what they define is their national outlook and expectation not vis-à-vis the rest of the world by from their own sense of self. Therefore, interest lies in the future and the present and not in history. The Ukrainian war was said to set the stage as a geopolitical pivot in normalizing conquest for territorial expansion. And on the other hand, the war, as opposed to popular belief, has not led to the demise of “international diplomacy”. The author claimed that multilateralism has been strengthened as a consequence of the war for instance in the BRICS. And also, when it comes to international cooperation among emerging powers, China and Russia are taken to be friends not allies; Russia and Turkey though not cordial have dialed down interactions in the Middle East and South Caucasus. Therefore, policy orientations of Russia, China, Turkey and/or India focused on “history and uniqueness” has not provided for the creation of an “axes” (ibid). Here the author is stating the state of current international relations and how those conducts are shaping world politics. One could argue that those

approaches disregard accepted diplomatic norms where relationships based on trust and mutual respect were once the building blocks of the international system.

Kimmage highlights that, the state of global affairs currently spells “disaster”. Implying the possibility of violent conflict in any part of the globe as Trump has to deal with a major war in Europe with complex and wide ramifications that has to do with territorial integrity. At the moment, the only guarantee in this respect is only reserved for the US. Whereas, neutrals do not bother about what goes on in Europe and in the meantime, Europe through NATO might react engulfing the world in to another world war. All might not be bleak for Kimmage; Trump might reach to some sort of agreements with Russia and China that could appease tensions. Kimmage sounds hopeful in that Trump’s disregard for the types of regimes Russia and China are perceived to be (ibid).

Yahya paints doom and gloom in the Middle East in the past 15 years pointing to wars from Syria to Yemen and Sudan. The region would face difficulties to overcome its ills due to “political disputes and grievances”. States in the region are short of expectations to deliver or “failing states” and this is propounded by geopolitical competition in the region making the pursuit of peace illusive. Competition among Iran, US, the GCC and Israel to shape the geopolitical land escape have led to the neglect of the “root causes”. Approaches of the aforementioned remain in a loop to effect change “regional order” with no give and take. Efforts to remedy are devoid of “political realities, local dynamics and broader consequences”. While detecting the challenge in the region impeccably, Yahya looks at ideal prerequisites as remedy as in transitional justice or accountable institutions (Yahya, 2025).

Back to Yahya’s investigative problem mapping, American, Iranian, Israeli, Turkish, and Gulf efforts to bring about change in the Middle East are all away from the fundamentals. The US conviction, accordingly is to weaken Iran; Israelis the demise of Palestine and Iran; Iran while championing the Palestinian cause as do the GCC tend to look for convert options to promote their interest; and the GCC through the Gulf Cooperation Council seek greater overall cooperation in the region while pursuing “two state solution” to the Palestinian question. Again, Yahya questions the motive and viability of every approach as it ignores the plight of the majority (ibid).

Governance is the key question for Yahya in the divided societies of the Middle East. However, the main preoccupation of countries in the region remains “influence”. The quest for “regional influence” has been exacerbated by external involvement pitting one against the other and leading to reciprocal support to dissidents of one another. This has led Yahya to depict similarities among Syria, Yemen, Libya and others where dominant figures were outed and the countries have faced fractured political predicaments. As a result, regional powers as Iran, Saudi or the UAE have waged proxy wars supporting different local politico-military actors to secure resources or to create buffer zones. Nevertheless, Yahya admits that peace processes such as the Saudi-Iran deal help ease regional tension and thereby giving respite to conflicting countries and/or parties. One has to agree with Yahya in that regional rivalry between the Saudis and Emirates needs to be addressed as it directly correlates with conflicts in Sudan, Syria and Yemen. In the same token, Qatari and Turkish ideological involvement in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi and the UAE have heightened “sectarian” antagonisms. Even though, Iran-Saudi concessions may abate ideological differences in the region getting local actors to commit may prove difficult (ibid).

The report put together by Asamoah of an event convening experts from ISS and IPSS focused on ways forward for Africa in the current international setting. Changes at the global stage coupled with the continent's own malice are said to present colossal fronts that the continent has to navigate and overcome. The global landscape is witnessing power politics a new by powerful countries, “shifting alliances” and the advent of “emerging powers, such as the Gulf countries and Turkey, in the global South”. Dynamic geopolitics and continental problems, therefore, require the continent's upkeep in securing its interests. Predatory colonial economic structures intensifying a dependent political economy and foreign interest pose a problem. The report zoomed in at the AU and its gathering considering those difficult circumstances and the deliberations thereby. The 2025 AU Summit as any other Summits held before, was highly political and the main issue was the election or selection of the political leadership of the Union's secretariat. The report asked the question of adequacy of the deliberations of the summit in light of the global as well as continental challenges Africa is facing (Asamoah, Policy Dialogue, 2025).

The report outlined factors leading to the continents persisting problems. Colonialism and its continued effects with a continent still loyal to former masters' languages, culture and interest drag it behind. Crippling the continental institution as well as leaders of respective countries from acting in accordance with their own interests. This has led to chronic problems such as food insecurity, "youth burden", and unabating conflicts were some of the salient challenges that the continent is facing (ibid).

Dokken outlined contemporary out look of security. There are changes the world over with the introduction of concepts such as human security. Those changes are attributed to "rapid geopolitical changes" after cold war with broadened definition and understanding of security. Not only definition of security was changed but the definition of has also shifted to threats to the international community such as terrorism, individual security such as human rights and welfare and threats at a regional level. Dokken also indicates that the context in Africa should be viewed in line with the global context. "African conflicts cannot be seen in isolation from the general sociopolitical situations in neighboring countries". History shapes intricate webs of alignment and enmity leading to anarchy specifically in poorly organized states (Dokken, 2008).

Dokken classifies thirteen RSCs in Sub Saharan Africa periodically from late 1990s to the first decade of the twenty-first century: -Angola, Congo, Namibia (South Africa); DRC, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Congo, [Botswana, Zambia, SA, SADC]; Rwanda, DRC, Burundi [UN, France]; Burundi, Rwanda, DRC [Tanzania, EAC]; Uganda, DRC, Rwanda, Sudan; Congo, Angola, DRC; Sudan, Uganda, DRC, Eritrea [IGAD]; Ethiopia-Eritrea, Somalia, Yemen [IGAD]; Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, U.S, UN; Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, ECOMOG [ECOWAS]; Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, ECOMOG [ECOWAS]; Guinea (Bissau), Senegal, ECOMOG [ECOWAS]; Senegal (Casamance), Guinea (Bissau). For Dokken complexes and sub complexes in Africa stand out as "there is a transnationalism related to civil conflicts that cannot be found in conflicts in other parts of the world" and existence of informal actors (ibid). One can observe from the trial to classify regional security arrangements in Africa by Dokken that the complexes or sub complexes demonstrated above are interrelated to one another and at the same time to global security arrangements.

'The Horn of Africa appears to be gearing towards a new order set off by a global competition of strategic interest by great powers in Africa'. Other factor, like the proxy war in Yemen by the

USA, is also a tilt towards a 'policy shift'. Following the US-China zero-sum game EU and Middle Eastern countries 'realigned' themselves according to their strategic economic, political, and military interests in the region. The US perceives Djibouti as its 'zone of influence', not only a military base, as a result, the presence of China in Djibouti is followed up by the US cautiously. And China's strong economic hold eventually controlled the port of Djibouti. The 'Red Sea maritime domain' has attracted attention from international players such as the EU, the Gulf, Turkey, Israel, and Iran (trtworld.com).

Developments around the Horn and Red Sea led IGAD to establish a taskforce through a directive of the Council of Ministers which deliberated on the geo-political and security dynamics of the red sea and the Gulf of Aden in 2019. The taskforce is supposed to assess threats, risks and challenges of geopolitical dynamics of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to the Greater Horn of Africa. The communique recognizes the enormous opportunities of the geographic positioning of the region. It also further appreciates the strategic interests of littoral and non-littoral IGAD Member States and the need to formulate shared norms, common goals and strategic coordination. The communique details that regarding the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden IGAD should play a central role. This role would enable IGAD "adopt a collective approach to challenges in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden by strengthening regional cooperation". The communique called on member states to cooperate on a regional platform incorporating other stakeholders including the AU. Member states are to assume a common position to protect the security and economic interests of the region including maritime security, migration, fight against terrorism, and others (COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE 46TH ORDINARY SESSION OF IGAD COUNCIL OF MINISTERS 27TH FEBRUARY 2019 DJIBOUTI).

Mashamoun underscores that the competition between Egypt and Ethiopia impacts the "wider security interests" in the Horn as well as the Middle East. The author highlights how recent Egyptian involvement in Somalia evolved driven by an MoU that Ethiopia signed with Somali Land. Ethiopia and Somalia mended fences through the mediation by Turkey. However, the author claims that the Ankara Declaration just "postponed" antagonism between Ethiopia and Somalia. Mashamoun argues that "current security dynamics in the Red Sea are an outcome of centralization of state authority in both Somalia and Ethiopia". According to Mashamoun, the MoU between Ethiopia and Somali Land was has in it a question of legitimacy and hegemony of

the Government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The author makes reference to internal instability in Ethiopia which has affected its regional and international standing. The author then turns to a simplistic and popular tautology of deflecting internal difficulties. But then also indicates a crude fact that Ethiopia is dependent on a single-entry point for its international trade; which seems a bit paradoxical (Mashamoun, 2025).

Mashamoun sees Egyptian Reentry in the Horn via Somalia in terms of continuity of “securitized Horn of Africa and Nile Basin foreign policy”. This idea is in congruence with other authors views that Egypt has been on and off in Somalia as opportunities arise vis-à-vis what transpires between Ethiopia and Somalia in relation to the GERD. Somalia and Sudan two spheres of influence that Egypt focuses on to keep an eye on Ethiopia. The fact that Ethiopia and Egypt failed to agree meant that Egypt has to stick to its age-old policy of brewing trouble in Ethiopia. One important point raised by Mashamoun is that, Egypt’s dwindling influence in the Middle East led its repositioning in the Horn with the rise of the likes of Turkey, Saudi, UAE. On reasons why Somalia under Hassan Sheikh Mohamud reached out to Egypt besides the obvious Ethiopia and Somali Land MoU, as Mashamoun’s outlined was internal political maneuvering. Following a move to centralize power by Hassan Sheikh tampering with the constitution situations went dire. As pointed out by an informant from IGAD and pointed out by Mashamoun the roots of Muslim Brother hood in Somalia via “Damul-Jadiid has its origins in Al-Islah, the Somali branch of the Muslim Brotherhood” (ibid).

The resurgence of Egypt in the Horn came with entrenched geo-political consequences. It dragged the conflict in Sudan to the disagreement between Ethiopia and Somalia further complicating an already regional conflict with multiple actors. It also led to a regrouping among Egypt, Eritrea and Somalia; two of those deeply embedded in Sudan not to forget errant forces in Tigray. Here the variables in play are numerous and connected with each other. Now one is forced to factor in the war in Sudan, unresolved issues in Tigray and Eritrean continued involvement, Egyptian interest in all that threatens Ethiopia, Somalia’s internal and external standing, and other actors ready to influence those conflicts to own interest with readily available resources. Two important points raised by Mashamoun are Eritrea’s fear of an Ethiopia with sea access and despite Egyptian involvement in the Horn that a destabilized Horn could affect Suez Canal operations. Meaning, though Egyptian-Eritrean interests collide when it comes to Ethiopia,

in terms of regional outlook Egypt may resort to ensure its overarching need of secure maritime flow. Another actor in play is Turkey. Driven by its desire to maintain influence in the Middle East and the Horn, Turkey could serve as an antidote to the Egypt led gathering (ibid).

Mashamoun talks about the Gulf in the Horn focusing on the Saudis and the UAE. Concisely put, “Saudi Arabia wants to protect, its Saudi Vision 2030 projects and the development of the ports on its western littoral; the UAE is mainly focused on being a regional commercial hub” are what the Saudis and UAE look after in the Horn. However, those powerful interested parties go about securing their need differently. A central discussion is that Gulf actors wield heavy influence in the Horn as well as with Egypt and Turkey given their surplus at home. Though economically powerful, when it comes to gearing towards a common approach in the Horn economic might hasn’t swayed neither Egypt nor Turkey from pursuing unilateral approaches. Mashamoun used the Ankara Declaration and incongruence amongst Egypt, Saudi, Turkey and UAE in aiding the process achieve normalization of relations; which happened on its own any way (ibid).

Terrefe conducted this research following the MoU between Ethiopia and Somali Land, a deal for sea access in exchange to recognition. The author does not dwell much on the contents of the MoU but implications. Interest is on the shift in policy direction in Ethiopia, a land locked country dependent on a single outlet. The ramifications, the author underlines, go far beyond the borders of Ethiopia and affect regional as well as international interests. Terrefe points out that, the new approach and associated “broader geopolitical dynamics” reflect “shifting trade corridors” and nouvelle actors in the region and beyond. The move is said to show interdependence of logistical infrastructure. Meaning link between Addis Abeba and Hargeisa is also regional in character. And as the Horn hosts one of the highest populations overhung, developing new route would mean creating a new political economy concerning those localities that reside in the area leading to further local friction/competition. This accordingly, is aligns with “realigning global interests, with the Gulf, Türkiye, China and the West reshaping their relations in the region”. The deal showed political regional weakness in the development of such facilities related with geopolitical realignment on the Red Sea (Terrefe, 2025).

Terrefe highlighted the relevance of Berbera as part of a “new regional security configuration”. Following enumeration of the political, economic, logistical, and financial hurdles that dependence on Djiboutian ports faced Ethiopia, and efforts as well as plans by Ethiopia along

with UAE and UK partners. Accurate projection of UK investments is thus tied with “Ethiopia’s national security interests”. Another interesting point raised by Terrefe is that acceptance of the deal by Somali Land elites would mean forgoing future “economic autonomy”. Besides, regarding the parallel development of commercial and military purpose establishments, Terrefe alluded that “geospatial analysis” indicated a military purpose port has been developed by the UAE (ibid).

Uncertainty and enmity involving Egypt, Eritrea, and Somalia, the quagmire in Sudan and “rising geopolitical tensions in the Red Sea” are said to stem Ethiopia’s quest for sea access. In general insecurity in the Red Sea concerns Ethiopia. Concerning Djibouti, the risk is not only logistical bottlenecks but “military logistics and intelligence of landlocked states” as Ethiopia was not able to protect information on arms imports during the war in Tigray. Terefe takes on the Ankara Declaration that did not resolve underlying issues. However, the agreement was reached on common security concerns that Ethiopia and Somalia share. The Ankara Declaration, hence, demonstrates how intertwined “the regions corridor port configurations are with security imperatives”. Exacerbated by Gulf and Turkish direct infringement in the region along with “Geopolitical and regional rivalries are exported to the Horn”. Competition and rivalry are seen in “race for ports, investments in agriculture, real estate, and mining, as well as military cooperation through arms deliveries, training, and mercenaries”. An example that Terrefe brought forth in this regard is the Egypt-Turkey Gulf and the Horn. accordingly, Egypt and Turkey follow diverging approaches; “Egypt with its ‘secularstatist, nationalist-militarist’ approach and Türkiye with its ‘pan-Islamist, neo-Ottomanist, expansionist, and religiously-militant project” (ibid).

Adeto analyses the security predicament of the Horn with RSC framework. He notes that existing literature is focused on systemic and domestic levels of analysis. Whereas post cold war conflicts are regional. Conflicts in the Horn are, therefore, regional stemming from fragility where states do not monopolize the means of violence with less or no government presence in the flanks. And also, with a characteristic of “privatised economies and security, and competing rebel groups, as well as multinational forces, vying for control of political space”. Thus, conflicts tend to regionalize and solutions are found regionally as well. Besides, “regional approach” enables empiricism as well as understanding. Conflicts are said to be analyzed in a systemic and

sub systemic levels. It brings together the domestic and the global conflict dynamics demonstrating convergence of security concerns, regional interdependence (Adeto, 2021).

In this context, Adeto points out that RSCs of the Horn and the Middle East border one another with a “pattern of security interdependence comprises more than twenty countries”. The Middle East RSC stretches from Morocco, Israel and Iran with all Arab nations in it with three subcomplexes; the Levant, the Gulf, and the Maghreb. The Horn RSC could be considered the fourth “weak subcomplex” considering that Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan are Arab League members with animosity towards Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, Adeto declares that the two complexes are separate. And he argues that from the three Middle East subcomplexes the GCC subcomplex is more relevant to the Horn RSC because of proximity and “significant impact”. Accordingly, Egypt is taken as one of the main links between the two RSCs as it is significant in the Israel-Palestine conflict and intent to establish a military base in Djibouti. And the war in Yemen as a proxy of the Iran-Saudi competition and its spill over into the Horn is another link. Adeto turns to IGAD vis-à-vis the Gulf RSC. IGAD as a recognized REC representing the Horn fails to mitigate conflicts amongst its members and in its membership figure Kenya and Uganda. This led Adeto not to consider IGAD as one of the main actors in the Horn RSC (ibid).

The Horn is a conflict zone and has been for decades. Currently, including Ethiopia, there are ongoing active and latent conflicts necessitating internal and external remedies. Besides socio-political and economic challenges that countries in the Horn face, there has been external involvement, which most of the time culminates in worsening peace and security situations. And now that we have a sort of international order reconfiguration, old problems seem to surface with new characteristics requiring constant engagement of policymakers as well as researchers to for solutions.

The intricate nature of the Horn makes it difficult for those tasked with finding solutions. It is an area where state formation has lagged or distorted; boundary problems persist, and identity questions are recurrent. In addition, the region has been prone to periodic droughts with a minimal response mechanism and low productivity. Low socio-economic standing, in turn, creates fissures that could be manipulated and used for political mobilization, extremist tendencies, insurgency, and the like. Add to this the geographical positioning and proximity to the Middle East, bestowing the region a geo-political importance, cannot simply be ignored.

The researcher categorizes the problem of the study as international, regional, and local. Generally, in the region, when it is an international concern, it means that the well-defined and frequently hidden agendas of superpowers' national interests affect the Horn. Also, the international system facing terrorism and migration can make the problem international. Within the region, relations among countries are characterized by a high degree of suspicion, security threats, and counterbalancing. When it is local, it means we are facing ethnic cleansing and a scramble for resources. Therefore, the study took into consideration those sticking points and come up with workable recommendations at the national as well as regional levels.

The researcher believes that security implications of the contemporary geopolitical dynamics in the Horn of Africa for Ethiopia have not been well established. Nor the way forward for Ethiopia and others in the region appropriately outlined. Given that geopolitical maneuvering is taking shape in the Horn at the time of writing, it is high time to take those factors in to consideration and find a way out.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General objective

The overall objective of the study is to analyze the geo-political dynamics of the Horn of Africa and the security implications of traditional and middle powers vis-à-vis the dynamics in the Red Sea sphere in particular to Ethiopia and the Horn in general. Ethiopia as a defacto anchor state in the Horn is prone to direct and indirect security implications that current geopolitical dynamics qualifies. Therefore, it is important to research current geopolitical dynamics in the Horn and the Red Sea theatre and consequent security implications for Ethiopia.

1.3.2 Specific objective

The specific objective of this research is:

- To assess the geopolitical background of the Horn of Africa to understand current predicaments.
- To examine the role played by great powers in shaping the current geopolitical dynamics of the region.
- To identify the motives of secondary powers that are engaged in the region.

- To explore the security threats existing in the region, affecting the region and the international system as a whole.
- To examine alternative options for countries in the Horn in general and Ethiopia in particular, out of security implications that accrue from the rivalry and competition of external powers which also perpetuates increased conflict in the Horn.

1.4 Research Question

This study attempts to explore and answer the following research questions:

- 1 What are the geopolitical and historical factors that shaped the current predicaments of the Horn of Africa?
- 2 Who are the traditional powers and how are they shaping the region?
- 3 Who are the great and the secondary powers that are engaged in the Horn? And what are their motivations?
- 4 How does an emerging geo-political dynamic in the Horn affect Ethiopia? And what are the plausible ways forward?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The research focuses on post-2018 developments mainly attributed to regional security. Of course, the background leading to developments that occurred in 2018 and beyond would be highlighted to give impetus to the research. The research is selective when considering countries in the Horn. Putting the main focus on Ethiopia, further focus is directed on Eritrea, and Somalia. This is because these countries contribute a great deal to the current security standing of Ethiopia as well as the region as a whole.

The research is not focused on natural disasters but human-made; it also does not contain the economic affairs of the Horn of Africa. It deeply argues aspects of security threats, civil wars, border conflicts, terrorism, national interests of superpowers, etc., from 2018 onwards. The research covered predicaments in the Horn, following national, regional, and international concerns for better or worse. The natural reaction would be to augment the negatives and

enhance the positives. The researcher tried to pinpoint what the negatives are scientifically and come up with a plausible way out for Ethiopia predominantly.

1.6 Organization of the study

This research is organized into five chapters, each addressing a specific component of the study in a logical and systematic manner.

The first chapter provides an introduction and background to the study. It presents the statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance, scope, ethical considerations, and organization of the study. The second chapter reviews related literature relevant to the research topic. It discusses theoretical foundations, previous empirical studies, and existing research gaps that this study aims to address. The third chapter focuses on the research methodology. It explains the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, instruments used, and data analysis procedures employed to achieve the research objectives. The fourth chapter presents the data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the findings. It analyzes the collected data in line with the research questions and compares the results with findings from previous studies. The fifth chapter provides the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. It summarizes the major findings, draws conclusions based on the analysis, and offers practical and theoretical recommendations for future research and policy implications.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Literature Review

According to the Horn Bulletin analysis the Horn is unique due to its geopolitical and geostrategic attributes making it attractive for external actors. Its location as a cross road linking Asia, Europe, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea increase its importance. The region is also engulfed with conflicts spanning its members in a “realigning” world. The region is faced with internal fractures, distant and powerful international organizations, and dependence on external powers that render it weak and prone to conflict. Dependence in turn turns Countries in the Horn in to geopolitical pawns to external powers. The analysis concludes in pointing out that “handling competing for geopolitical forces and having the ability to fend off external challenges would need concerted regional effort”. But is unlikely that countries in the Horn would cooperate given disagreement nationally and regionally (Horn Bulletin, 2023).

Again a 2022 analysis of the Horn Bulletin alludes that each member state in the Horn react to geopolitical challenges in a separate manner and as per leadership styles. Besides internal issues, regional dynamics, and external pressure influence decision making. The analysis puts forward a strong argument that the region is a “unique cluster of conflict in Africa vulnerable to external forces and unable to control its own fate in part because it is of strategic value to competing external forces”. The analysis puts forward another important attribute of the region: three bodies of water; the Nile, Indian Ocean and Red Sea which play into its geostrategic importance. Pertaining to its geostrategic importance, therefore, the region has been an interest to external powers beginning the 19th century (Horn Bulletin, 2022).

Yeboua and Cilliers compiled a special report of development prospects for the Horn up to 2040. In the report the authors summarized challenges faced by countries in the Horn. In general, governance, exclusion, discrimination, inequality, instability, and natural disasters were enumerated. However, the region has a positive development prospect with a young demographic dividend. Ethiopia and Sudan hold 89% of the region’s economy with agriculture and pastoralism as the main stays of the economy. Countries in the region remain dependent on aid and investment mainly from the GCC. But the abundance of challenges did not take away the region’s geostrategic importance (Yeboua and Cilliers, 2023).

Yeboua and Cilliers further provide background into the actualities of the Horn. countries in the Horn have gone through inter and intra state conflicts, and hosted major humanitarian disasters. The region has also seen some of the biggest inter state wars fought between Ethiopia and Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Djibouti and Eritrea. The report gives emphasis to border conflicts in the region among Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda and relates border problems with the marginalized in those countries who face security challenges and other natural disasters. The region is said to attract external interest politically, economically, and security wise.

To this end the report makes mention of military bases in the region including the US and Chinese bases in Djibouti. The authors euphemistically called the region a “become a laboratory where different foreign policy approaches and aid modalities meet”. A laboratory because of the current GCC and Turkish engagement in the region which puts together different modalities such as; “direct budgetary support, humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, and funding for Somali security forces. GCC investment amounted to USD 13 billion while ODA stood at USD 6 billion since 2007. Yeboua and Cilliers further highlight that GCC, Turkish, or Iran involvement in the region comes with requests to choose one over another. Worse countries in Horn are “often instrumentalized against each other instead of in pursuit of collective security” (ibid).

Bereketeab looks into the intricacies of conflicts in the Horn. External engagement in the Horn specially with the volatile Middle East is said to command attention. The Middle East as an oil producing region hosting the Israel-Palestine conflict pauses uncertainties. The Horn is attractive primarily because of its strategic location. But the discovery of strategic resources has increased. Accordingly, the end result has become “crisis of the state”, which in turn funnels insecurity (Bereketeab, 2013).

Hellquist and Bergenwall discuss antagonism in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden security theatres put as “two of the world’s most strategically important waterways”. The area has seen increased militarization by China, the US, and Russia. The authors indicate that the area lacked a concerted organization that dealt with maritime security. Accordingly, this was addressed through the Council of Arab and African States Bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (the Red Sea Council) in line with EU and UN recommendations. The EU was said to promote cooperation to

address security concerns in the Red Sea. The authors also touch upon GCC involvement in the Horn. for instance, Saudi Arabia is invested in the politics, military, and economic spheres in countries in the Horn which in turn were involved in the Saudi military campaign in Yemen. The authors are also cognizant of “extensive presence of external actors and intense geopolitical competition”. And the region will continue to attract external actors given its strategic maritime commercial significance. The regions importance increased following the Russia-Ukraine war in particular for European countries looking for options (Hellquist and Bergenwall, 2023).

Hellquist and Bergenwall also highlight that contention in the Middle East, political instability, conflicts, the Tigray war, and uncertainty of US policies in the region have compounded security challenges. And countries in this sphere have commonalities in “shared interests, regime types, and power asymmetries” (ibid).

Adeto underscores that the Horn is plagued by weak or fragile states. Weakness to provide basic services including security has led to insecurity in the region. Resuming overall standing in the Horn, Adeto touches upon young nations post 1991, major sea outlets, post 1991 disengagement from super powers saw non state actors joining the scene, and ongoing interstate conflicts have brought misery through “internally displaced people, refugee flows, transnational organised crimes, violent extremism and terrorism, illegal cross-border trades and flow of small arms and light weapons”. Adeto also points out that while situations are scary, actors from the other side of the Red Sea are embedded in the Horn. Interest and presence of external actors have complicated security concerns and are creating new ones. Adeto also discusses race for military bases on the costs of the Horn especially of China and Turkey, what Adeto calls ascending powers, bent on demonstrating power projection and wielding influence. It is concerning for countries in the Horn of such a variety of actors with intricate interests (Adeto, 2021).

Adeto enumerates ways that a regional approach facilitates “four levels of analysis and how to interrelate them: enables states to see internal cleavages, relations with others in the region, relations with Gulf and Middle East RSC, and roles of external actors in the region. Connection among the four levels for the Horn interaction with “global security structures” and “regional security structures” such as the Gulf is pertinent (ibid).

Hettyey tried to look at the state of relations between failed states and their neighbors in this case Somalia and countries who share borders with it. The author examined the relationship using the RSC theory looking in to East Africa comprising Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Uganda is also brought in to what the author calls the East African RSC but as an insulator between the East and Central RSCs but excluding Djibouti because of its limited interaction with Somalia and foreign policy capacity (Hettyey, 2012).

Henneberg and Stapel while acknowledging regionalization as a concerted means of addressing common challenges, indicate that the Horn does need such an arrangement. The authors deal with regionalization examining the HoA Cooperation that was initiated during the euphoria that Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia were in following normalization of relations with Eritrea. The proposed grouping is said to have security, economic, and political gains. As to the rationale of such an arrangement “domestic or international legitimacy, power-based and domestic coalition-oriented explanations” are outlined. However, the state of affairs among the three countries did not necessitate such an arrangement. Other factors hindering the initiative are required resources, overlapping regionalism, and “potential for forum shopping, and risk further complicating diplomatic relationships in the HoA. Overlapping regionalism as per the authors is prevalent in Africa where twenty-two organizations host and share the same members with “similar mandates” leading to noncompliance. The authors argue that if initiative is realized could compete with existing organizations such as the AU, COMESA, EAC, and most importantly IGAD. The authors also argue that IGAD has been effective in dealing with conflicts in Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. But IGAD is said to lag on economic integration. The authors indicate that IGAD is faced with “ineffective governance structures, poor communication, insufficient resources, and a lack of qualified personnel”. And the creation of HoA Cooperation exacerbates those shortcomings not to mention alienating Djibouti and Kenya. Strained relations with Djibouti and Kenya would affect Ethiopia more as it has logistics and infrastructure related projects in both Djibouti and Kenya (Henneberg and Stapel, 2021).

The Horn of Africa has been a bone of contention between the main combatants of the Cold War and continues to be to date. According to scholars, the Cold War's final stages came with the intervention of Russia in the Ethio-Somali war in 1977, which precipitated the US to reengage. ‘Recent policy pronouncements that seek to place “great powers competition” at the center of

American interests in Africa risk exacerbating this tendency. ' History repeating itself as a result of fierce competition between China and the US is distressing as well, as they also have hidden agendas. Chinese presence in the Horn is different from the Cold War context, in that the country has been one of the main trading partners for the countries in the Horn. This has also created distrust and a lack of established spheres of influence, which are worrying for future relations between China and the US. Besides, 'nationalism, regional balance-of-power politics, and internal political dynamics' complicate the matter further. Especially the competition between the two superpowers to shape the changes taking place in Ethiopia has been consequential for the Horn (Vertin, 2019).

Military base on the strategic Gulf of Aden is once again the point of contention between those great powers, 'through which approximately 15 percent of global maritime traffic travels, including over 4.7 million barrels of oil daily.' The contest in Djibouti is going on against the background of a tectonic political and economic change next door in Ethiopia. 'These outcomes have been shaping the geopolitical dynamics of the region for decades' (ibid).

2.1.1 Superpowers in the region

The Brookings Doha Center produced a report entitled 'Red Sea Rivalries', in which it is indicated that Gulf States are playing a dangerous role in the Horn. The report argues that the Gulf involvement in all sectors warrants a new outlook. Those actors from the UAE to Saudi Arabia and even Turkey are expanding into the region with their alliances and rivalries. The report also mentions the involvement of traditional players in the region, as well as China presenting 'opportunities and challenges (Vertin, 2019). The relationship that Gulf and Horn countries entertain could be mutually beneficial as the Gulf States are economically rich, and a framework could be developed in the security as well as economic fronts. Yet the area has become a center of attention through the 'establishment of bases or what is perhaps euphemistically called logistical facilities, highlighting the sensitivities of the presence of both China and the US in the area (ibid).

The area hosts security concerns of Asian, European, and littoral countries of the Red Sea, but mainly of Ethiopia. With all the interest going around, attempts to set a common security platform in the region have been heavily challenged by 'a transactional approach to policy,

aimed at winning individual loyalty in exchange for reward'. Case in point is Somalia, where competition among Gulf States has left the pace and state formation process lead and later supplemented by the AU in tatters. For countries in the Horn to reclaim their say in Horn affairs, they have to make sure that they become worthy counterparts. For that to happen, states in the Horn need to put their houses in order [manage transitions well] and require legitimacy in the respective nations that they administer (CRDC Digest, 2020).

The CRDC Digest alludes that the Horn is still precarious and prone to shocks and global changes, as the US-China economic, security, and geopolitical rivalry continues. Lessons could be drawn from the Cold War. 'The possibility of proxy wars cannot be completely ruled out,' and when we factor in social media, tensions could be inflamed in minutes. "Those that lack robust institutions and have yet to develop a strong national consensus around national security issues would be the most vulnerable in this regard." Ethiopia's transition since 2018, though promising, has to be sustained along its continued and positive engagement and leadership in IGAD in managing Horn affairs. It is also a question of how Ethiopia keeps its sovereignty when dealing with both the US and China, in keeping true to its long-held tradition of independence and neutrality (ibid).

IPSS and Tana Forum Secretariats' report on the situation of peace and security on the continent underscored the new world order that we have faced and its consequences for the continent. Accordingly, the type of Cold War order that we have seen for three decades has resulted in a different order. One where the rule of the game was deploying soft power, where what the report called emergent powers could play better than traditional powers. The post-Cold War period was said to present new and old peace and security challenges to the continent (IPSS, 2018).

An article by Alex Dewaale titled, *Beyond the Red Sea: A New Driving Force in the politics of the Horn in 2018* shows what the recent situation in the Horn looks like and how countries in the Horn are responding according to their capacities. Dewaale also acknowledges the scramble for seashore real estate. Nevertheless, also claimed that countries in the Horn are aligning themselves well to exploit the most advantages of their engagement with the Middle Eastern Countries, especially countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan. Dewaal also highlighted the fact that Middle Eastern involvement had also brought about a regional power imbalance. Dewaal also depicts the difference in approach of African states and Gulf States in terms of

foreign policy approach and how that affects their relationship with countries in the Horn (Dewaale, 2018).

According to the IPSS the Horn is a ‘security complex’. No matter how powerful countries try and establish a security framework with a single state in the Horn, none of the countries in the region can stand alone. Therefore, countries in the Horn should be ‘conceived of as a security complex given that security is a relational phenomenon’ and it has to do with not only individuals but also collective capacity, wishes, and threats. A security complex is attributable to perceived threats among two or more states, where in their relationship countries in the Horn oscillate between ‘cooperation’ and mistrust at the same time, sharing large borders and peoples of the same identity claim, which is the case for Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda. And since the relationships are highly intricate, ‘they also contain within them socioeconomic disparities, societal heterogeneities, and geographical boundaries that sometimes militate against the creation of a stable and robust security community (IPSS, 2018).

The new US-Gulf alliance, so to speak, has reached out to Eritrea, where a UAE military base has been established. The move by the UAE to secure several logistical ports and a military base in Asab is one of the key highlights. Middle Eastern countries were said to compete amongst themselves following ‘President Barack Obama’s doctrine of ‘leading from behind’, which led to the Yemeni war and later GCC fallout. Qatari style of leadership, notably its dealings with the Muslim Brotherhood, was said to be not tolerated by the rest of the GCC members and their allies. While Egypt and Israel allegedly support the UAE, Qatar has Turkey and Iran on its side (Vertin, 2019). The UAE and Qatar allegedly provide ‘weapons or military training to favored factions, bribe local officials, and compete for contracts to manage ports or exploit natural resources.’ In an attempt to attack the UAE’s interests, Qatar has been accused of funding the notorious terrorist group Al-Shabaab for a bombing that it carried out in the area called Bosaso. The attack was aimed at securing a port contract in Bosaso. Following the Gulf rift, Somalia has been pushed hard to take sides because of its ‘long coastline, which offers access to the region’s fast-growing markets and influence over vital shipping lanes from the Persian Gulf’ (ibid).

The least active country in the Horn, the UAE, has been in a bid to secure logistics hubs in the Horn. On the one hand, they assisted the Government of Somalia militarily, and on the other,

they have been accused of helping non-state armed groups in Somalia. The UAE is said to operate several ports in the Horn, mainly one in Assab, Eritrea. The UAE failed to sustain its relations with the Federal Government of Somalia when the latter found cash circulating without FGS knowledge. Somalia then sided with Qatar and Turkey, while the UAE moved along to support rebel regional states in Somalia (New York Times, 2019).

‘A toxic new contagion’ has become the Gulf rift. ‘That feud is now infecting the Horn, a neighborhood already fighting to cure its long-standing ills. ’A semblance of a humanitarian and commercial good friend, yet not liked by the Gulf UAE-Saudi alliance, accused of “neo-Ottoman” revival.’ Turkish involvement in the region is not out of the woods yet. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had visited Somalia in 2011, and the visit widened the bilateral cooperation with a special envoy appointed in 2018, intending to bring the Federal Government and Federal states to an agreement (ibid).

In 2005, Turkiye put in place an Africa policy called “Open to Africa Policy” aiming at fortifying Turkish commercial and diplomatic presence in the continent. Turkiye’s engagement in the Horn was also intensified with the Former President Omar al-Bashir of the Sudan in 2017. The visit brought about a military cooperation pact, USD 650 million, and a naval base. This is a development which has angered Egypt [which sees Sudan as its backyard]. Of course, the future remains to be seen with Omar al-Bashir ousted from power and Sudan in civil war. Most of Turkiye commercial interests in the Horn are with Ethiopia, and the Turks have also built schools and mosques. The relation between the two countries for some is an invigorated cooperation, countering Egypt (Nzau, Horn Bulletin, 2024).

Turkiye involvement in the Horn is said to be ‘economic and values-driven’. According to Turkish claims, ‘appreciation of the wider geopolitical currency followed as a result of time and changing regional circumstances.’ Turkey’s actions in the Horn today may be motivated in part by competition with Gulf adversaries, they acknowledge, while uniformly characterizing such moves as reactive.¹ Whereas, over time, the Suakin base in Sudan could supposedly be a military

outpost for Turkey. It is said that given the minimal capacity of the port, fears are misplaced as there are no apparent motives for military use (Vertin, 2019).

Saudi in its bid to oversee the Yemeni war, has been cooperating with the UAE. The country has been for a while trying to secure a military base in Djibouti with a site to be determined at a later stage. Since the port of Djibouti is crowded, a site more strategic was said to be proposed at a place called Obock, a less developed area requiring hefty investment (ibid).

2.1.2 The UAE's Africa push

Emirati companies are bringing capital and expertise to African investments, but the illegal gold trade remains a challenge. African Business, an online outlet, terms UAE involvement in the continent as “consequential”. To corroborate this claim, data investment and trade data are cited. Accordingly, the emirates secured agreements to ‘develop green initiatives’ in five African countries. African Business, citing FT Locations, underlined that ‘between 2019 and 2023, Emirati companies announced \$110bn of projects in Africa. According to the data provider FT Locations, \$72bn of them are renewable energy projects.’ Besides DP World, it is said to expand its portfolio into fintech, health, and mining with an earmarked USD 243 billion. This was said to indicate a ‘shift in global dynamics’ where “middle powers” were looking to fill the gap left by traditional actors. Africa business highlights that UAE engagement in Africa is long-term and strategically driven by its wish to move away from an oil-based economy (Vertin, 2019).

Accordingly, the UAE has advantages over traditional Western financiers in that it evades stringent conditions while delivering projects and or infrastructure in record time. In the fashion of China, the UAE has managed to steer away from visibility as a dominant external actor. On the other hand, emirate involvement in Africa was also seen as predatory in the extractives industry in trying to secure strategic mineral resources, notably gold. Consequently, it was claimed that ‘illicit trade in gold’ was being propelled by the emirate's presence in Africa (ibid).

African business highlighted that “gold serves as a highly liquid and globally valuable asset, reducing reliance on oil and gas”. This was corroborated by citing a report released in May by Swissaid, which claimed that “some 405 tonnes of undeclared output” ended up in the UAE in 2022. Therefore, one can deduce that not only expansion in port real estate or various investment

endeavors, but also predatory behavior in extractives, also poses a threat to Africa from the UAE. Gold had also proven pernicious in fueling intrastate wars in the Horn. The UAE is accused as directly involved in the Sudan war, for instance, enabling one of the warring factions to trade illicit gold for weaponry. The correlation between illicit gold and conflict in the Horn is not limited to Sudan but also features in the ongoing crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray. The military wing of the defunct TPLF is also accused of illicit gold trade concerning the war in Sudan, where its personnel are allegedly fighting on the opposing side of the faction supported by the UAE. As a result, the economic leverage that the UAE has on Africa is feared to lead to "imperialist or sub-imperialist" tendencies comparable to historical antecedents. This lurking danger, coated as "investments or partnerships," holds hidden dependencies as well as arm-twisting. As in many writings on the subject, African Business, citing reputable scholars and practitioners, alludes to "cautious optimism". The UAE's presence in Africa could be advantageous as long as it caters to the needs of Africans, especially job creation. Other gains in technology and optional financing could accrue given that Africans manage increasing competition (ibid).

2.1.3 Tigray

The regional power play was heightened, leading to the Tigray war. According to an article by the Institute of Security Studies, a new regional 'alliance' was formed by Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia in an area where mutual distrust is high. Following the reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, a tripartite block was developed for a short time, excluding the other Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) countries in the Horn. It seemed for a little while that those countries at loggerheads before were in agreement to work together. The September 2018 meeting produced an agreement between the three countries 'to build comprehensive cooperation, resulting in a joint commitment to build closer political, economic, social, and security ties and promote regional peace and security.' This move was said to question the existence of IGAD with a probability of establishing a bloc that could rival the already existing union (Demessie, ISS, 2020).

Gebresenbet and Tariku hailed the agreement reached between the Ethiopian Government and TPLF as a win – win for both parties. The agreement was also said to have implications on both domestic as well as regional dynamics dawning a new beginning in Ethiopian political history. the authors contend that the Tigray war threatened the existence the Ethiopian state. However, to

contend that the Ethiopian state is safe required the full implementation of the agreement. The authors also point out that the capitulation of TPLF meant ethno-nationalist movements in the country were curtailed. And another outcome of the end of the war was that the Ethiopian army came out strong from the conflict. Another unintended outcome was the dislodgement of the TPLF from its uncontested political dominance in Tigray and thereby in Ethiopia. The authors also shared an in-depth reflection on the transition in knowledge production and framing on the Horn as well as Ethiopia. During and following the conflict Ethiopian were lead in framing the context of the conflict and disseminating information (Gebresenbet and Tariku, 2023).

Gebresenbet and Tariku further underscore that the Tigray war and its aftermath saw shifting alliances following the “regionalization and internationalization” of the conflict. The war weakened Ethiopia and brought in to the scene other aspects such as GERD, Ethiopia-Sudan border disagreement, and the murky involvement of Eritrea [which could be seen in three phases; before, during and post war]; not to forget the Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia tripartite grouping. The war also saw a slowdown of relations with Djibouti and Somali Land and brought Kenya forward in regional leadership in IGAD (ibid).

The arrangement is now down in the drains as Ethiopia no longer enjoys cordial relations with both Eritrea and Somalia following the end of the Tigray war and Ethiopia’s MoU with Somaliland. The regional outlook changed dramatically after the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF. Later, the Ethio-Somaliland MOU on a maritime outlet for landlocked Ethiopia has instantly and strongly disrupted the relationship of Ethiopia with Somalia. Considering those developments, the tripartite alliance seems to fumble.

A Dubai based website recently interviewed the former Tigray interim administration President Getachew Reda. The interview was brief but timely and critical .The interview focused on why and how Reda was pushed away by a group in the TPLF. From what one can observe, the group consists of core members of the front who also control most of the military wing, as well as economic might. However, Reda, though a latecomer to the front’s leadership, held prominent government and party positions and was also a mouthpiece of the front during the civil war with the federal government Reda feared that secessionist sentiments could once again pop following

political upheaval in Tigray. For Reda, the turmoil in Tigray is all about political power and who controls it. Reda laments that the “old guard” in the front is adamant on mustering political power in the region and beyond (Bird Interview, 2025).

On engagement with Eritrea, both in 2018 and following, Reda forwarded some contrasting statements. He claimed that he was not that hopeful of thriving relations with Eritrea. But on his engagement, he did so to protect the people of Tigray from “being a pawn in regional conflicts”. A state that was involved and incriminated in the civil war in Tigray could in any way be steered towards the interest of the people of Tigray. In Eritrea, Reda was critical of the behavioral pattern of the country and its leader, Isaias Afwerki. Reda pointed out important points that Isaias was threatened by PM Abiy's ambition for sea access on the Red Sea. And that Isaias also feared that Abiy dragging his foot on disarmament was to use the so-called TDF in the push on Assab. Isaias's presumption of Abiy in 2018 as “ambitious and easily influenced” was also supposedly misplaced. On a related note, Eritrea's enhanced reach to Saudi Arabia was said to be typical of leaders in the Horn in extrapolating issues when threatened (ibid).

Eritrea will try and involve the Saudis and other Middle Eastern middle powers in the geopolitical entanglement in the Horn. Reda might be correct in this instance. If the Saudis decide to invest in the Eritrean port of Assab, the Emiratis will not sit idle. As in Somalia, the Emiratis and probably the Turks might also try and counter Saudi acquiescence of an additional Red Sea post. This could be seen through the discourse on whether the Middle Eastern and Horn security complexes overlap or not. The fact that Reda commented that leaders in the Horn extrapolate issues to the Middle East might somehow indicate an overlap. The failure in implementing the Pretoria Agreement, according to Reda, was attributed to the Federal Government. And alleged continued Eritrean presence in Tigray was “the elephant in the room”. But to put full blame on the federal government might not be justified, as the TPLF leadership could equally be responsible. The front's ardent and militaristic outlook combined with complex and diehard political crisis seems hard to resolve. The federal government accuses what it calls a splintering faction of the TPLF of collaborating with Eritrea and Egypt in the war in Sudan, supporting the SAF, and further exacerbating the state of peace and security on the continent. The federal government had also accused a faction of the front of coordinating and taking part in the continued violent conflict south of Tigray (ibid).

The war in Tigray which also spread to other parts of the country is said to have a lasting effect in many aspects in Ethiopia's "economy, social fabric and intercommunal relationships, its state-building process, and the safety and security of its citizens." The author claimed that the conflict involved regional and international state and non-state actors. One of the notable state involvements is from Eritrea which accordingly has resulted in border issue without a clear direction of bilateral engagement between the two countries. The conflict will continue to have far-reaching consequences – related to resources, trade and commerce, and regional stability – throughout the Horn of Africa region and beyond (A. Demmesie, 2023).

Even though the parties to the conflict signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) on 2 November 2022 in Pretoria, Eritrea was depicted by the author as a spoiler. Accordingly, Eritrea will try and secure its interest, primarily the dissolution of the TPLF. To safeguard its interest Eritrea is said to have established "relations at subnational level" in the regional administrations of Ethiopia. Another state actor cited is Sudan. Despite rocky and intricate relations between Ethiopia and Sudan, the main pull factor was SAFs involvement in the war on the side of the TPLF. The author indicated that Sudan's involvement and reach would, however, be limited because of the raging civil war in Sudan (ibid).

Even though the author has ranked Eritrea as the main spoiler, at the time of writing the greatest challenge to the implementation of COHA has come from within. There seems to be a power struggle of sorts going on in Tigray between the interim administration and a faction within the TPLF. But this not to down play Eritrean potency. On an international level, countries such as China, Turkey, the UAE and Saudi Arabia were cited regarding leverage on Ethiopia and Eritrea for the implementation of COHA. The AU and IGAD as regional actors tried a patchy mediation process. The author attributes the mediation process culminating in an agreement to ripeness at the battle field and role by those regional organizations. But rightly so, turned to the US and EU but in terms of encouraging and pressuring the partis. Demessie might have shied away from attacking the true nature of the involvement of the US in particular. According to observers with closer ties to the parties the US was a pen holder in the Pretoria talks. And later during implementation phases of the agreement the West was highly involved not only in facilitation as well as technical and financial aid (ibid).

What began as a civil war in Ethiopia has developed into a regional conflict with several layers of interest and influence. Eritrea is deeply implicated; the Sudanese military-led regime has been involved (with suggestions that Egypt has also engaged through a proxy); there was growing concern among other neighboring countries, including Djibouti and Kenya; and the GFDRE is receiving significant support from other regional and international actors, including China, Türkiye and the UAE. The US played a key role in the negotiation process, and was trying to build a concerted regional mechanism to respond to Ethiopia's crisis alongside the AU, IGAD, UAE, Kenya and Djibouti. The UAE, Türkiye and China played a role in providing military equipment to the GFDRE. Therefore, the war according to Demessie, attracted almost all neighboring countries, Middle Eastern Countries such as Saudi and UAE, Egypt, Turkey, great powers such as China, EU, US, and Russia, regional organizations such as the AU and IGAD and the UN. Demessie further elucidates briefly motives behind external involvement. Accordingly, Eritrea for its mere existence; Sudan because of historical border disagreement; Egypt GERD; a startled Djibouti over protracted conflict harming its economy, spread of conflict to its borders embedded in the Afar-Somali distrust, and emboldened Eritrea; Somalia's fear of diminished Ethiopian military engagement in the fight against Al-shaabab; and Kenya spillover of conflict. Demessie underscores that historical baggage clouds relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea and Sudan. Their diverging interests present distinct challenges for Ethiopia and must be carefully balanced in the process of consolidating peace. Eritrea is seen as a "major force in Ethiopia's political and security dynamics." Its leading motive being fear and mistrust of a big neighbor not to mention its hatred of the TPLF benefiting from the war in many respects (ibid).

2.1.4 Policy direction

The periodic CRDC digest puts the problem that the Horn in general and Ethiopia in particular face two decades after the end of the Cold War. Ethiopia requires a solid foreign policy. And for the base of a solid foreign policy, a unified country that is ready to address its problems remains important; and 'this is simply the smartest thing to do'. For obvious reasons, Ethiopia should struggle for its internal stability. 'The opportunity should never be created whereby non-Ethiopians could create a wedge between Ethiopians'. Internal factors matter for an effective, strong foreign policy; a nation that does not handle its internal affairs can easily attract the interest of others, which usually will not be in favor of the individual state (CRDC Digest,2020) .

Ethiopia has a historical advantage diplomatically in keeping its independence through the AU and IGAD, which are ‘critical for advancing Ethiopia’s foreign policy goals and for defending its national interest.’ As both multilateral institutions are critical for the national security and foreign policy objectives of Ethiopia, then it is advisable for Ethiopia to take the leading role in IGAD as well as in the AU (ibid).

Ethiopia has led IGAD since the 1990s, working for its security as well as ‘peace and reconciliation in Somalia. To surmount the challenge posed as a result of complications in Somalia, Ethiopia needs to strengthen its national unity. As in Somalia, the authors fear that external involvement from the get-go might compromise the transition in Sudan. Ethiopia, along with the AU, though in a difficult situation, played a critical role in the mediating process of Sudan (ibid).

2.1.5 Change of power in Ethiopia

As it has been mentioned from the beginning, countries in the Horn, in particular Ethiopia, went through a ‘tectonic’ internal transition. The Ethiopian People’s Democratic Front (EPRDF), a rebel movement that took power in 1990, faced widespread popular protest since 2014, ending almost three decades of rule. The protests brought a young leader, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, to calm the tide. As a new leader of the country, the Prime Minister did not disappoint his people as he embarked on wide-ranging reforms. These reforms were opening up the political space, freeing political prisoners and journalists, allowing in restricted and exiled media and politicians, and to top it all, made peace with Eritrea. The peace deal with Eritrea came about following the reconciliatory role of Gulf States, namely Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in 2018 in the signature of the “Agreement on Peace, Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation” (ibid).

Terrefe alludes to the tide that brought Abiy Ahmed to power, to the government’s plan to expand the Capital, the Addis Ababa Master Plan, which, according to Terrefe, was the final straw of long-standing structural challenges faced by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Like previous regimes in Ethiopia, the EPRDF engaged itself in what is called pro-poor projects, of which the Addis light rail and low-cost condominium housing are depictable. Terrefe calls those efforts “new urban projects as material embodiments

of political rupture, shifting ideologies and new priorities.” The projects accordingly heightened inequalities by pushing away those dislodged to the “periphery” (Terrefe, 2020).

Terrefe further alludes that the new administration is going through the same path in declaring ‘the construction of the 36-hectare luxury real estate complex *LaGare* backed by Abu-Dhabi-based Eagle Hills, as well as the 56 km river-bank restoration project *Beautifying Sheger*’. While the project is said to stand out ideologically from the EPRDF projects targeting the urban middle class and tourists, top-down decision making and appropriate consultation with those concerned are reminiscent of past practices; ‘a de facto resilience of the Ethiopian state’s authoritarian planning character’. Terrefe, citing one of the new projects of Abiy Ahmed, posits that it ‘bears higher strategic and geopolitical fruits as Addis Ababa looks to diversify its diplomatic and economic portfolio, while Abu Dhabi sees this as an opportunity to further expand its presence as soft power in the Horn of Africa (ibid).

For Mosely, Ethiopia could be placed as high as actors such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or the UAE, even if it does not possess the economic prowess those states have. ‘Ethiopian state’s pursuit of its perceived interest vis-à-vis its Somali-inhabited lowland periphery has made it the dominant foreign policy actor in the Somali arena.’ So, the changes that are taking place in Ethiopia vis-à-vis the Gulf crisis and spill over to the Horn, Ethiopia’s handling of the situation affects the Horn as a whole. The turning points of Ethiopia’s transition are the 2015-16 protests and Abiy Ahmed's ascent to power. Following violent protests, the ruling coalition EPRDF decided to reform itself after long years of authoritarian rule, alleging dominance of one of the factions in the coalition. Abiy Ahmed transformed by bringing in new members and forming a single party called the Ethiopian Prosperity Party (Mosely, 2020).

Melvin points out that the Horn has been heavily militarized with new establishments on the South side of the Red Sea besides the former presence of European colonial powers, ensuing further commerce-military confrontation. This has led to the ‘integration of the Horn into the Middle Eastern and Gulf, and Indo-Pacific strategic spaces’. It also has to do with the ‘interdependence of maritime and security agenda. Following the end of the Cold War, Melvin identifies four external security engagements:

- (a) support for African regional and international multilateral efforts to manage and prevent conflict;*
- (b) efforts to combat non-traditional security threats, notably terrorism, piracy, and maritime crime;*
- (c) The expansion of Gulf and Middle Eastern security into the Horn region, and*
- (d) The integration of the Horn region into Indo-Pacific security dynamics (Melvin, 2019).*

Impacts of the external engagement in the Horn, according to Melvin, are ‘securitization, external militarization, the intermixing of commercial and military interests, the rise of maritime security, the rise of geopolitics, and the shifting regional security policy of the US’. The implications are explained by the proliferation of international and regional security operations, mostly led by foreign forces, to deal with non-traditional security challenges such as piracy and maritime crime. This led to the establishment of varying forms of physical presence such as bases, training camps, logistics hubs, ports, and the like. Those security and military engagements have also shown tendencies of extending their original mandates, such as the ‘open-ended mission of the US counter-terrorism in Somalia’ or the extension of the Gulf Cooperation Council to long-term commercial interests’ (ibid).

The Horn in general and external forces has gained a ‘geostrategic significance in that the area relays Europe, Asia, and North America, thereby mashing up traditional security divisions between the Gulf and the Horn. The USA has shifted from Obama’s leading from behind employing regional powers such as Gulf States in the Yemen war, to seeing ‘Africa as part of a wider geopolitical struggle with China and Russia. Melvin further underscores that ‘after years of viewing the Horn exclusively through a non-traditional security lens, the US has recognized that the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait are strategically important to its ability to challenge China, notably in the Indo-Pacific region’ (ibid).

The Horn, therefore, is faced with risks following what Melvin calls external security politics. The new arrangements may lead to the ‘rise of proxy competition’, inflaming an already unstable region marked by transitions with heavy involvement of external actors, further creating ‘instability and fragmentation’. Somalia is the best example of proxy competition. Infringement

that started in Somalia in 2017 continued in Sudan's 2019 change of regime, similar actors on both sides with varying interests and approaches, including Gulf States' injection of USD 3 billion to Sudan. Involvements in the Horn are dangerous as they are not stand-alone security problems that derive from competition:

it is international competition among global and regional security actors across Asia and the Middle East that is increasingly driving the Horn's new external security politics, rather than local security challenges. This competition is dynamic and fluid, with formal alliances at best embryonic, which makes efforts to manage the new security environment particularly difficult (ibid)

Vertin proposes a forum where the Gulf and Horn States come together to discuss shared interests and fashion common solutions. A "Red Forum" where membership is as wide as the issues that would be dealt with, including development and security, while mitigating 'financial patronage'. In the Nile politics Vertin further outlines that membership has been a problem in previous endeavors to constitute a Red Sea collective. Egyptians have been vocal about who should be allowed in and as to which requirement: the Red Sea coastline (Vertin, 2019).

On a note that disrupted regional dynamics and also attracted attention from near and far, Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed announced that his government will not sit on the sidelines as the Red Sea, being re-partitioned by new and old powers, imposing new security challenges for Ethiopia in particular and the Horn in general. There are claims that this move will put the general security standing of the Horn into a worse spiral. The deal struck with Somaliland for a lease generated temporary antagonism from Somalia and also enticed other players in the region. Djibouti will no doubt try and maintain its benefits by working with those who claim the deal will threaten their very existence.

The Horn faces challenges from the mundane to the most complex. The latter is the involvement of external powers. The Emirates take prominence in this case in their efforts to expand their oil-based economy. Meaning, the Red Sea and its environs have become important. On the other hand, Djibouti have given access for many to establish military bases but Ethiopia; a country which was conflicted with the question of sea access to the level a taboo in the corridors of power. Horn is a geo-strategic space, mostly for maritime commerce (Abebe, 2021).

As part of the Red Sea security conclave by the location of oil-rich Middle Eastern countries opens prominence to the unknown. Resource-rich, currently strategic minerals such as oil and lithium are claimed to have been found in the region; Abebe tried to coin the existence of traditional powers in the region by association with the current projects in which those powers are involved. For millennia under various pretexts and or projects those powers have been around be it the war on terror or Silk Road or migration etc (Gebremichael, 2019).

Unlike Abebe's presumption that migration has been a positive force in the European-Horn relations, the conception and implementation of the Khartoum process have to be scrutinized. Migration is an age-old phenomenon and movement from and to the region has varying facets. To begin with contemporary Eurocentric conception of the movement of people is skewed, hinged on the barbaric hypothesis. One has to take note of Abebe's claim that the Horn could be one of the entry points for market access in Africa. This is trying to withstand the fact that any major producer in the world is not in any trouble to access Africa. However, Ethiopia has a market as well as production potential in the region. Ethiopia is also ready in terms of infrastructure development and policy orientation in light production and agro-processing, vying with the Middle East as a potential market. The forgotten gem, nevertheless, is expansion in terms of trade and commerce towards East and Central Africa (ibid).

Rightly so, Abebe listed four characteristics to demonstrate contemporary geo-political dynamics in the Horn: power projection and scramble for military bases, competition for commercial hubs, the Nile, and configuration of states in the Horn. Those characteristics are in one way or the other related to each other. For instance, literature shows that the Emiratis are engaged in maritime hubs real estate are also allegedly involved militarily in more than two conflicts in the Horn. So, be it to the Turks or Emiratis, anyone with the capacity and will to establish itself in infrastructure development could simply have the possibility to establish military engagements. The Nile is obscure and distant to the US, China, or Europeans, and less significant to Djibouti than to Egypt and Ethiopia, or Sudan. Once completed and operational, its use as a geo-political tool fades and will be reduced to a power plant that enables Ethiopia to project power once in a while. Abebe contends that power in the region is projected by external actors, including the US, in the form of establishing a military base. The bases are not postures. Meaning those hubs are active military installations protecting vital interests to the west of the Red Sea (Y. Abebe, 2020).

In a way, in fact value the race that Dubai has waged on port infrastructure development may look like a mere facility. Dubai proved lethal than any military base. For Ethiopia, at the moment, there are merely options than to befriend Dubai as it has also acquired shares in Doraleh. One can say that Dubai has entered the bloodstream of the Ethiopian economy; Ethiopia's existence. This has been a great strategy to control the region. Gulf Port Investments, unlike China, is not purely economic in intent, at least. The driving force behind Gulf investments is geo-economic and geo-political. Similar interests from China are reflected in SEA but not in the Horn. Abebe is on point, evoking current affairs in the Horn. Conflicts in the Horn, including Somalia and the new ones in Ethiopia and Sudan, have not remained national. As stated above, there seems to be a trend in the regionalization and internationalization of conflicts in the Horn. And almost all of the conflicts in the Horn seem to be related to one another. Talking about the civil war in Sudan, one has to mention political and military actors in Tigray, Eritrea, Egypt, the Gulf, and, of course, Ethiopia, as well as traditional powers with overarching interests in the region, such as the US, EU, and China. Middle Eastern involvement in conflicts in the Horn is pervasive and worrying (ibid).

It is against this background that one should try and see if Ethiopia's quest for sea access will indeed threaten the security of the Horn. The research argues that Ethiopia has the right to look for an outlet, which should be secured within a limited period, as the region is going through a re-engineering of sorts with almost every member in active conflict. Besides the deal with Somaliland, other options should be sought, thereby diversifying interest and addressing concerns.

Trials to reverse by Ethiopian leaders are abounding. Even the EPRDF government, after allowing Eritrea to break away, has sought to broaden options in collaboration with neighboring states, notably the effort to partially own Berbera. The Lamu Project with Kenya and considerations to develop Port Sudan was also in the pipeline, without much effect on diversified port access. Ethiopia has been, therefore, solely dependent on the Port of Djibouti for its commercial maritime needs and without entailing geopolitical and security concerns.

The lingering question is whether Ethiopians should remain spectators and passively accept their fate. In addition, is the vigorous move by the administration of Abiy Ahmed a threat to regional peace and security, as claimed by many? It also raises the question of whether it is an opportune

moment for Ethiopia to push for ownership not only for commercial purposes but also for an all-encompassing littoral presence. This is wise to consider as the world is going through a global order shuffle, and conflicts are ravaging the Sudan, Somalia, and even Ethiopia.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed alluded that an Ethiopia with full-fledged sea access could allow a strong regional security interconnection with an enhanced mutual trust in the Horn. If the status quo continues, Ethiopia would inevitably try and secure its interests through overt and covert means, thereby fueling the already destabilized region, with increased enmity and shifting alliances to Ethiopia. This could be corroborated by what Masrie underscored: 'Ethiopia's historical context and strategic geopolitical position bestow upon it the potential to either be a stabilizing force or a source of instability in the region'. This, according to Masrie, could be achieved only if it is supported by diplomacy and goodwill from neighbors (Marie, 2024).

In particular, Somalia's and Eritrea's reactions have to be looked at closely. The researcher is of the view that any type of diplomatic shuttle before the deal was announced in those countries would not have the desired effect. Eritrea, following its involvement in the Ethiopian civil war and its culmination with an agreement was no longer amenable. And the government in Somalia isn't in any position to engage in any meaningful engagement in the face of security challenges and the interests of many players wielding influence on policy decisions.

Unlike Masrie Hiram and Hussien, claim that Ethiopia violated international law by signing seashore agreement with Somaliland, has 'far-reaching consequences' to the region. The authors also echoed accusations by the Government of Somalia of threatening the territorial integrity of the country. The end point, accordingly, is to keep Somalia and Eritrea weak, not a strategic decision, referring to Ethiopia's history in keeping Somalia at bay. Whereas the authors also point out Westerners see Ethiopia as a power to counter threats such as Houthi attacks with a maritime projection capability. But Ethiopia, accordingly, is not fit because of its internal cleavages (Hiram and Hussien, 2023) .

Regardless of claims by Hiram and Hussien, a point that they made is that could ascertain the researcher argues that an Ethiopia with a maritime projection capability is a power to stabilize the Horn and greater Red Sea complex.

Cannon et Rossiter underscored that the fact that Ethiopia became landlocked after 1993 got in the way of its regional aspirations. They focused on the effort of the Ethiopian Government to develop the Port of Berbera by involving Gulf powers, notably the UAE. Accordingly, Berbera made sense because of its strategic location vis-à-vis Ethiopia, situated in the de facto state of Somaliland. Considering what goes on in the region in terms of power distribution, coupled with Ethiopia's internal cleavages, Ethiopia in the Horn won't be able to claim its rightful position. Like that of Hiram and Hussein, the authors claim that a weak and divided Somalia would allow Ethiopia to focus on the bigger picture. But the authors also admit that Somalia is not simply obstructed by an intrusive Ethiopia but by its political nature. Eritrea is referred to by the authors as one secluded in the Horn and internationally, of course, before the restoration of relations. Yet the merriments have come to an end following the agreement in Pretoria (Cannon et Rossiter, 2017).

The importance of the Red Sea didn't simply appear in the past decade or two. Its importance was reckoned since the heydays of the Cold War. The Red Sea is not only important because of maritime commerce but because of security, military, and political underpinnings (CIA, 1981). Therefore, Ethiopia's presence would decide its standing in international politics as well as neighborhood distribution of power as indicated by Cannon et Rossiter above.

Ethiopia's efforts to secure its meaningful presence on the Red Sea don't come at a time more pressing than efforts by Red Sea littoral states to set up a forum only for littoral states. Ethiopia, although with a stake, was not included in any way or form. Rather, it was pushed away from the congregation by states far and near with some direct enemy status or indirect maneuver to keep it at a distance. Members of the council saw the necessity to set up such a forum in a changing Red Sea security space (Custers, 2021). At the time when this arrangement was taking place, Ethiopia simply complained just stuck to diplomatic niceties. Besides, Ethiopia went through tectonic and bloody changes. The wars that were fought in Ethiopia made it necessary not only to win those battles internally but also necessitated the projection of power in its vicinity (Sori, 2021). It was not only a projection that observers and the Government of Ethiopia were able to gather following the declaration of intent by way of an MoU. Most importantly, those with concerns about Ethiopia represented in this space were shown. Save Djibouti and Somalia, as they have a direct stake in the matter, others, including Western powers, showed their colors (Webb, 2024).

2.1.6 Red Sea versus GERD

The Daily Nation article dwells on the antagonism between Ethiopia and Egypt, to begin with, on the GERD and the Red Sea as Ethiopia looks to secure access to a sea outlet. The author connects the dots between the ongoing conflict on the GERD on one hand, and Ethiopia's quest for sea access and the drama that followed in the theatre of Somalia, where Egypt decided to become militarily involved. Egypt knocking on Ethiopia's backdoor was said to be a nuisance for Ethiopia, with a fear of direct military confrontation concerning influence on the Red Sea. Therefore, Egypt resurfacing in Somalia was not only a direct reaction to the agreement that Ethiopia struck with Somaliland for sea access, but a continuation of the trilateral talks on the GERD, which didn't bear fruit. Add to this Somalia's internal political and military crisis then a quagmire of actors with varying interests but ad hoc alliances have emerged, further complicating the scene in the Horn (Daily Nation, 2024).

Egypt, according to Mutambo, has now left its "water security" mantra and has preferred to engage in direct military confrontation to protect its interests on the Red Sea. Others are said to have been concerned by Ethiopia's intent. None other than Turkey was put in this category following the outreach by Egypt, leading to commercial deals. Turkey, of course, is neither concerned nor interested in serving Egyptian interests. Rather, it has opted to use to occasion to reinforce itself in the region by playing mediator and calming the waves (ibid).

Harter underscores that Somalia's displeasure with the accord for sea access between Ethiopia and Somaliland was expressed by the swift pivot towards Egypt for military support against Al-Shabaab. The author tried to demonstrate Ethiopia's anxiety by citing public statements of the PM as well as top military leaders of Ethiopia. An interesting outlook in the article was that Egyptian involvement was said to be temporary, and the agreement reached for military support to Somalia was mundane. Besides, the seriousness of Egyptian military engagement was also questioned (Harter, 2024).

Other underlying factors for both were invoked, rendering both reluctant to get into a confrontation. For instance, Egypt was said to be more concerned with Gaza, Syria, and the like, while Ethiopia is still recovering from a civil war. Moreover, Ethiopia is still important in the fight against Al-Shabaab, which means that neither Egyptian involvement nor Somalia's quarrel would have a lasting effect. However, one positive outcome for Ethiopia was that the centrality

of the question of access to the sea for Ethiopia has come forth as a national security agenda. And this may have gained tacit agreement from others in the region (ibid).

2.1.7 Post-2018 Ethiopia and Reform

Pre-2018 Security Landscape

Ethiopia's Pre-2018 Security Landscape: Control, Challenges, and Reform Imperatives

Ethiopia's security landscape before 2018 was characterized by a tightly controlled state under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This regime prioritized maintaining territorial integrity, regime stability, and attracting foreign investment. However, this control came at a cost (Bayeh, 2020).

Centralized Control and Internal Threats:

The EPRDF employed a highly securitized approach, stifling ethnic mobilization and utilizing an iron fist against internal armed insurgencies like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) (ibid). This approach, however, resulted in human rights abuses like extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests. Additionally, the government's overreliance on methods like state of emergencies and internet shutdowns exposed underlying fragilities (Amnesty, 2019).

Inter-Ethnic Tensions and Regional Instability

Inter-ethnic tensions were another significant challenge. The government's focus on stability often neglected addressing the root causes of these tensions. This, coupled with the over-securitized response to internal threats, further fueled grievances (Gleixner, 2023). Regional instability added another layer of complexity. As a crucial U.S. partner in counterterrorism efforts, Ethiopia faced threats from a volatile region. The country's landlocked location and vulnerability to climate disasters like droughts further compounded its security concerns (Brookings, 2016).

Fragile Security and the Need for Reform

Despite economic growth, Ethiopia's pre-2018 security situation remained fragile. The proliferation of SALW and porous borders posed significant challenges. These challenges highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to security governance, prioritizing

accountability, justice, and inclusive consultations to address the underlying causes of conflict and instability.

Initiatives (economic, political reforms, PM)

Since April 2018, the country witnessed reforms on several fronts in which numerous initiatives have been introduced to reform the security sector, including leadership reshuffles, professionalization of institutions as well as ensuring civilian oversight. These efforts seem to have brought some changes in the modus operandi of these forces. On the political front, deliberate efforts were made to restore trust in public authority, enhance social cohesion, and tackle the growing ethnic tensions by promoting Ethiopian nationalism (Ethiopiawinet) as a unifying factor (Ethiopian Security Insight, 2020).

As stated above, in a bid to broaden the political landscape, PM Abiy Ahmed reshuffled his cabinet, released political prisoners, amended some of the country's restrictive laws, and legalized prominent opposition groups formerly labeled as "terrorists", thereby convincing several rebel movements to renounce their armed struggle. A significant milestone in this regard was taken to address obstacles that had hindered the involvement of opposition political parties in past elections. On 5 July 2018, the parliament abolished the prohibition on the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and Ginbot-7, political parties based abroad and had been previously labeled as terrorist organizations by parliament in 2010. These reforms contributed to the reintegration of foreign-based political parties and their leaders into Ethiopia, allowing them to establish offices and commence operations within the country. Following these, new structures such as the Ministry of Peace and the Reconciliation Commission were introduced, and institutions such as the National Electoral Board (NEBE), Human Rights Commission, and the security sector were reformed (the Reporter, 2015).

Reform is a long process that requires major political, social, and economic shifts. Post-2018 Ethiopia saw the return of politically affiliated media from exile following political parties that were or still are affiliated with those parties or warring factions. Since the transition, this was also accompanied by a relatively free legal framework and the reconstitution of the government communications wing. This was also aided by the lifting of bans on locally licensed CSO/NGO operating with funds, and gave an impetus for a promising future. Although the measures from

the government side were on the right track political affiliation of all media houses, be it electronic, mass media, or other types, played a crucial role towards in eclipsing the reform. The government used its outlets as its own communications tools, and the others were completely blind to other political realities (Media proclamation 1281/2021 and CSO proclamation 1113).

Military reform

The reform focused on six core issues. These are building a military that is obedient to the Constitution and free of political alignment, ensuring allegiance to the rules and regulations of the military than individual interests, strengthening the military through recruitment of capable personnel, improvement of armaments which entails arming the military with modern and technologically advanced weapons, capacity building through training as and ensuring accountability and transparency in the military (The Reporter, 2015).

Legal system

In the legal sector, there were notable reforms, including the establishment of the Legal Advisory Council and subsequent legislative reforms. Significant changes were made to repressive laws that had previously allowed for arbitrary detention and conviction. These reforms included the replacement of the Charities and Societies Proclamation with the Civil Society Proclamation and the introduction of a new law governing terrorism crimes, which addressed issues such as pretrial detention. The Advisory Council crafted the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism Crimes Proclamation as a replacement for the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation that had been in force since 2009 (ibid).

Challenges

According to the African Union handbook on SSG, one of the main challenges that reforms face is a lack of democratic governance before reform initiatives. It was evident that pre-2018 Ethiopia had a democratic deficit with a grave structural problem, leading to mass protests that directly led to violence. These problems included all sectors, and especially the military and intelligence sectors. As discussed above, the reform initiatives tried to address those concerns in trying to ensure inclusivity and representation (AU Handbook SSG, 2005).

Reforms in post-2018 also faced one of the classical challenges indicated in SSR literature: ensuring physical security post-transition. Following the demise of TPLF/EPRDF or during the process, administrative structures, as well as the military, intelligence, and police, were overhauled. This meant that the incoming regime had to reconstitute itself as swiftly as possible to provide physical security. This indeed proved difficult, and crime rates went up even in the capital. The other challenge was finance. As in any other reform process, the initiatives post-2018 had financial crunches. It is to be recalled that the outgoing administration left the bureaucracy with empty coffers, not only diminishing resources for reform but also for day-to-day government operations.

The post-2018 reforms also went into DDR. This meant that combatants were brought in from neighboring states with arms and intact command structures without adequate political agreement and financial means for reintegration. The fluid political conditions during transition gave rise to the almost immediate advent of armed political organizations vowing to topple the just-incarnated and “democratically viable” government. Some may argue that this was in part due to the nature of the government, but the SSR literatures indicate that transiting/post-conflict societies tend to resurgence, and there comes the proliferation of warring parties (IPSS, Conflict Insight, 2020).

Politicization and ethnicization, as discussed by Brinkerhoff, were also depicted in the Ethiopian scene. Not only throughout the sporadic political forces shaping and reshaping in the country, but also within the new ruling party taking over from its highly ethnicized TPLF/EPRDF. The new Prosperity Party was not able to shake off its ethnic mantles easily. As state power and access to resources are tied to power as in other cases in Africa, political forces within the ruling party and other political interests were driven on highly politicized ethnic lines (IPSS, 2020 and Hutton, The Future of SSR, 2010).

Sustainability in the Ethiopian holistic reform was stifled and trampled by the dwindling political will as well as minimized security, which were signs of the problem of mistrust and the desire to maintain and change the status quo and the friction thereof. This mark takes us to one of the worst periods of Ethiopia, where simmering unrest and disagreements here and there were mainly manifested by the TPLF-Federal Government war. This could be taken as an epitome of

the expression of the unsuccessful reform measures that were driven by political interests, which mainly wanted to maintain the status quo or change only part of it (IPSS, Conflict Insight, 2020).

2.1.8 Somalia; current over view

Somalia's initial point of civil war was said to take root, though debatable, in the 1980's through the proliferation of armed struggles against Siad Barre regime. After the fall of Siad Barre, Somalia fell in to an unending civil war. One of the main triggering causes was the Ogaden War with Ethiopia in 1977–78 (Samatar, 1998). Siad Barre despite initial gains lost the war sowing the seeds for future internal conflict, prompting the rise of several Somali liberation movements' intent on overthrowing the military regime (The World bank, 2005).

The loss in Ogaden then brought to the fore an armed movement by the Somali National Movement comprised of Isaaq members and Somali military holding the quest to rule North West Somalia. The armed struggle for the liberation of the North began in May 1988 (Africa Watch, 1990).

Major actors in Somalian Politics

Local actors; Regional Administrations (those entities are part of the federal arrangement but exercise greater degrees of autonomy and their level of relationship with the central government oscillates towards enmity and/or alliance), traditional leaders, clan-based authority, Islamic Courts/Al-Shabab recently, business people, Somalia civil society, local actors that blocked political transition (spoilers) that exercised some sort of military and quasi-administrative governance in the late 1990's and early 2000's; factional militias in the Mogadishu area collectively, that constitutes a significant bloc of clans, regions, and militia. Regional and International actors- neighboring countries (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya mainly and Eritrea following the Ethiopia-Eritrea war in particular) IGAD, UN, AU/OAU, EU, Arab League, the US (The World bank, 2005).

Taking in to account regional involvement, Ethiopia could be taken as one of the main regional external actors. The relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia could termed segmentary in that it involves nationalism under the fault lines. Ethiopia's political presence and Somalia's security influence is undeniable. Ethiopia's strong policy towards Somalia portrays it as the most difficult security problem aggravating and prolonging instability for the whole region. Since the era of

Mengistu, the relationship between the two countries has entailed a major support of each other's opposition parties where the tendency of all erupted threats has poking hands on both spectrums (Biruk, 2012).

External involvement in Somalia has been high following the end of cold war. Western powers, international organizations, and most recently Gulf States and other emerging powers have shown interest in Somalia in particular and the Horn of Africa region in general. The level of opposition meddling and growing power competition is starting to be overtly observed in times like the intra-GCC conflict that erupted in July 2017 over allegations by Saudi, UAE and Bahrain against Qatari and Yemeni factions for supporting extremist groups in the Horn of Africa (ibid).

Structural causes of the conflict

Legitimacy in the Somalian context is highly contested. Even before the establishment of the federal government and or the advent of OIC later Al-Shabab there were different pockets of administration in Somalia proper where military type of governance was administered by armed militias. Following the establishment of the federal government legitimacy was highly questioned by the involvement of external actors. And later due to ongoing violent war and battles legitimacy was again highly undermined. Because elections in Somalia proper were conducted and decided as per a formula known as 4.0 (agreed upon formula for numerical representation by clan (Daarood, 175; Hawiye 175; DigleMilifle 175; Dir 205 [of which 100 were Isaaq]; and minorities, 90. Composition of representation included clan elders, civil society leaders, intellectuals, ex-civil servants, and in some cases faction leaders) without the direct participation. This in turn, led to contestations as to how political power was accorded to whom and on what basis Menkhaus (Feierstein (2020).

According to Pitterson, causes and catalyzing factors in Somalia were said to be hard to distinguish. Accordingly, the very nature of politics in Somalia, which is 'decentralized' clan has become the center of gravity defined by 'clan-loyalty'. Colonial legacy also was said to play some sort of part in Somali politics yet with a changing nature of social component in the clan system. Most scholarly work on Somalia has somewhat taken clan differences as the basis for political disagreement in Somalia facilitated by 'manipulation' and 'constructed' towards a political end. Manipulation and politicization of clan differences was therefore seen not only as

cause but driver of conflict in Somalia. Yet, clan politics was not enough to explain power politics and disagreements in Somalia. Resource was the main driving force of conflict in Somalia. Resource rivalry and where political power rested were therefore the root causes of conflict accordingly. Besides colonial legacy and later form of governance also played their part. Clan divisions, culture and the availability of weapons furthered the root causes. Regional and international factors also had roles in Somalia; regionally Ethiopia as a threat and reduced interest of super powers during the cold war other 'contributing factors' (Pitterson, 2011).

Furthermore, Pitterson underscored that 'interests' not clan divisions were the root causes. In latter stages three general factors were also identified; "complete and protracted state collapse", "protracted armed conflict" and "lawlessness and criminality". And Pitterson refuted the failed state thesis in the explanation of the conflict in Somalia. Better yet, to adequately explain the nature of conflict in Somalia, "colonial and postcolonial contradictions of the local and regional political economy, which were heavily militarized by international intervention governed by geo-strategic logics" should be taken in account added to it what is called the "Somalia war economy (referring to the proliferation of war lords and armed groups that menaced the nation and an economy built thereof by regional and international forces in cahoots with Somali businesses as well as government officials) (ibid)

Somalia observers underlined that clan cleavages could be taken as sources of conflict—used to divide Somalis, fuel clashes over resources and power, used to mobilize militia, and make broad-based reconciliation very difficult to achieve. Governance in pre-civil-war Somalia as well as in periods following the establishment of some sort of governance structure could be cited as secondary causes. Some of the main Issues haunting the Somali polity do date could be enumerated as follows; governance, drought/poor food security, militarization/war-lordism, clan conflict, severe economic pressure, chronic political tensions, Endemic political instability is the main problem and so on (The World bank, 2005).

Factors for peace

A peace keeping mission by the UN was deployed in Somalia in the 1990's. This mission was one of international peace keeping operations which failed to quell violent conflict and was aborted after intense clashes with factional military entities that sprung in Somalia.

Security has been deemed one of the main factors in Somalia and that the governments in power failed to address security vacuums with Al-Shabab looming over most of South-Central Somalia. The Federal Government of Somalia in its brief for the recent Somalia Security Conference outlined that the administration will have to reassert public security and law and order if it is to establish legitimacy. Going back to full civilian order through the provision of security, and other essential public goods in the immediate term, establishing a robust economic system to ensure legitimacy would there for be paramount. With the phased withdrawal of the hybrid peace keeping and peace enforcing mission in sight the government laid a phased plan as well to reconquer and avoid hybrid political structures in Somalia (unpublished white paper of the Federal Government of Somalia for the Somalia Security Conference (2023)).

Current affairs in Somalia

Elmi identifies three “republics” in the Somali government which reigned in the country since its independence. Following civilian and military rulers, the country saw a devastating political spiral necessitating efforts from near and far to rebuild and sustain a country, government, state, and people, hence the third republic. Focuses on the government of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and on what is transpiring in the country’s politics, as well as military take-all approach modifications to the political settlement, shrinking political space caused by constitutional and electoral changes for the Third Republic, strong pushback from the opposition, and the absence of the international community. Somalia’s political settlement has proven resilient despite external shocks, prolonged civil war, and 15 failed reconciliation conferences. Djibouti in 2000 Arta Peace Conference, the Transitional National Charter outlined four pillars: democratic governance through periodic elections, the clan-based 4.5 power-sharing formula, a parliamentary system, and regional autonomy Warlords backed by Ethiopia opposed reconciliation conference in Kenya in 2002, sponsored by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which resulted in a refined political settlement—the Transitional Federal Charter (TFC)—in 2004 (Elmi, 2025).

Since 2000, multiple groups have joined the government, gradually increasing inclusivity by incorporating faction leaders (2004), moderate Islamists (2008), and regional actors like Puntland and Galmudug by 2012. New direction that consolidated power through a winner-takes-all approach in a divided society, it changed the political settlement through a new

constitution, and restricted the political space through self-serving election-related laws. This would form a national unity and a government that includes members from both coalitions (winners and losers of the 2022 dispensation). In a divided society such as Somalia, a winner-takes-all approach was a major political blunder on the government's part. Institutionally, power was centralized in the presidency, creating a situation where both the Council of Ministers and the parliament became rubber stamps (ibid).

First, the presidential system replaced the country's parliamentary system. Second, the federal system was weakened by the agreement on distributing powers and responsibilities.² Third, using the captive parliament, the president pushed for self-serving legislation (such as the Electoral Law, Election and Boundaries Commission Law, and Political Parties Law) to restrict the political space for his competitors. While maintaining the 4.5 clan power-sharing arrangement, the Electoral Law prescribes several systems for the different levels of government. For instance, a First Past the Post (FPTP) system prescribes open-list proportional representation⁴ for the two national chambers and closed-list proportional representation⁵ for state legislatures and local governments (skewing clan representations) new system, citizens can establish political organizations and political parties. These organizations must have political representation in member states and adhere to women's quotas and clan power-sharing. President Mohamud's proposals are not feasible due to a lack of political agreement among stakeholders, poorly designed and contextually inappropriate institutions, and challenges related to implementation. The introduction of a presidential system has alarmed the political class. The presidential system evokes painful memories of Somalia's military dictatorship, which precipitated the civil war. Moreover, the proposal of a presidential system was interpreted as a sectarian project intended to marginalize specific communities. The NCC agreement on the distribution of powers and responsibilities establishes three levels of governance. Somalia cannot financially support three levels of government (ibid).

Turkey in Somalia and the Horn of Africa

Turkey remains an important actor in the Horn, especially when it comes to Somalia. From a recent military agreement to support in security sector governance, Turkey seems to have gained a permanent foothold in Somalia. Turkey is not only interested in implanting itself in the Horn, but the ambition goes beyond influencing and thereby ascertaining a position in Africa and

beyond. In a way, it could be said that Africa and, more importantly, the Horn have become in the resurgence plans of the Turks in international politics. Many ponder what drives Turkey's engagement in the Horn. However, analysis or explanation of the motives will not save the Horn from dire consequences resulting from external competition. One of the implications was witnessed during the Tigray war in Ethiopia, where Turkey provided drones that altered the course of the war, thereby changing regional geo-political dynamics in the Horn. Tantamount to others in the Horn, Somalia turned towards Turkey for benefits in its ongoing state-building efforts, which lingered due to Western disinterest. In turn, Somalia provided Turkey with geostrategic positioning on the Red Sea, which also prompted competing powers to engage Somalia as well as others in the Horn for geostrategic locations and wider influence (Horn Bulletin, 2024).

Besides other factors motivating Turkey to engage in the Horn, the economic and defense gains are worth mentioning. Not only did Turkey sell weaponry, but it has also secured exploration rights of Somalia's oil resources. Yet, according to the author, the defense agreement was the icing on the cake as it was a direct response to changing regional and global geo-political dynamics. Notably, in the region, Ethiopia's "natural claim" to access to the sea, Egyptian resurgence in Somalia to counter Ethiopia, Somaliland's quest for recognition, and prolonged conflict in Somalia were driving factors pushing Somalia into the deal (ibid).

Somalia's Electoral Impasse and the Role of Middle East States

According to the authors, the type of politics practiced in Somalia has subjected it to external interference. A decade from the time of writing of the article, three main Middle Eastern powers, namely the UAE, Saudi and Qatar, have been deeply embedded in Somalian politics as kingmakers. Case in point, an unabated involvement has seen insignificant players in the region bringing in preferred candidates in the election in 2021. Authors point out that in the connected nature of international politics, the advent of the so-called "Arab Spring" led Middle Eastern powers to act aggressively in terms of foreign policy. Eventualities in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen involving the Saudis, UAE, and Turkey had also played out in the 2011 elections in Somalia. Following elections, what was going on in the Middle East again affected Somalia as well as most African countries, destabilizing political scenes with the infamous Saudi blockade over Qatar. Turkey's policy in the region was said to be influenced by Farmajo's fallout in Somalia,

forcing Turkey to cool down and follow a wait-and-see approach. Therefore, one could establish that Middle Eastern involvement in the Horn has not all been healthy based on give and take. Rather, their powers resorted to dictating, leveraging financial rewards to feeble political actors in the Horn (Canon, 2021).

An interesting actor in the geo-political hustle in the Horn is the de facto state of Somaliland. A new arrival in the soaring shore shopping on the Red Sea is said to be Israel. The renewed push from Israel is said to have “ignited a geopolitical firestorm in the Horn,” worsening an already precarious situation. If Israel were to acquire this strategic base, it would be able to secure a vantage point over Yemen and the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The recent Israeli move would potentially aggravate competition in the Horn, drawing in Ethiopia, Egypt, and Somalia, each looking to ascertain influence, presence, or territorial integrity. As in the tumultuous and paused Ethiopia deal, Somaliland is promised recognition. However, as the details of the agreements remain scant, it is not certain how far the deals go towards recognition. Somalia and its allies remain steadfast in maintaining territorial integrity. And this gives way to a complex and amorphous geo-political web implicating regional as well as international actors. Accordingly, the web entangles actors such as Ethiopia, Egypt, Turkey, Somalia, and others on one side or another (middle East Monitor, 2024).

Egypt tried to advantage of the temporary rift between Somalia and Ethiopia as vengeance for what Egypt considers lost “water rights”. This also coincided with the phasing out of the “peacekeeping” mission in Somalia, which transitioned to another arrangement whereby the composition making up the new arrangement was open for allotment. Egypt has taken advantage of the situation in sneaking into the arrangement, infuriating Ethiopia and concerning others in the region. Ever since, in typical Horn dynamism, alliances have again shifted and Ethiopia has managed to keep things cool by striking a deal with Somalia, and Egyptian enthusiasm seems to wane as practicalities prove difficult than anticipated ([Farid](#) and [Maher](#), 2024).

Sudan

The ongoing conflict in Sudan with mainly two conflicting parties supported by sub-regional as well as other external forces with vested geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-nomic interest in the Horn and the wider Red Sea. As per the report of AMANI Africa on Sudan dated April 2024 the

AU in conjunction with IGAD had put in place mechanisms to address dire situations in Sudan. One is the AU High-Level Panel on Sudan under the auspices of the Chair of the Commission as a result of AUPSC 1185 meeting in January 2024 spearheaded by the DPAPS. The department as lead in technicalities of the panel outlined that it would work towards bringing peace along with other stakeholders such as the people of the Sudan, IGAD, LAS and others. The composition of the panel is wide ranging from Mohamed Ibn Chambas, a veteran in multilateral institutions including the UN, and other experienced diplomats in conflict management (AMANI Africa, 2024).

Besides the panel, the AMANI report also indicated the existence of the Expanded Mechanism for the Resolution of the Sudan Crisis. The mechanism brings together multiple actors main among them being IGAD, UN, LAS, EU, the Troika, and countries including Ethiopia. The presence UAE, Qatar and Turkiye gives insight into the future of the mechanism as those countries are directly implicated in the conflict supporting one of the warring parties. Other traditional powerful states such as the US are also on board and together with the Toika their tendency to dictate terms vis-à-vis wider regional interests should be looked at. The mechanism has stated that it would work with the AU Roadmap and also vowed to be inclusive in mediation efforts (ibid).

The AU Road Map was a result of AUPSC meeting 1156 in May 2023. It used strong language such as condemn and demand as well as leading terminologies as in commends, endorses, welcomes and urges. The main focuses are cease-fire to allow the six-part plan calling for and paraphrased as follows:

- 1 A coordinated regional and international efforts under one umbrella
- 2 A wholistic cessation of hostilities
- 3 Humanitarian response
- 4 Protection of civilians and civil infrastructure
- 5 Role by neighbouring states and the region, and
- 6 Inclusive political process including signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement, towards a democratic civilian-led government (AUPSC Communique, 2024).

The communique puts emphasis on the coordination of efforts. This indicates that interests are dispersed and actors beyond direct instigators of the conflict hold sway on the process as well as the conflict itself. And that the AU anticipated to run in to difficulties when engaged not only from the conflicting parties but from actors claiming peaceful resolution. And by a way of easing contact welcomes other initiatives as supporting the process in line with the intentions of the AU. Another important aspect of the roadmap was the mandate on the Chair of the Commission to use good offices and envoys for reinforcement. The communique also addresses the IGAD track calling it important that three leaders from Djibouti, Kenya and South Sudan convened a committee to engage. But this could also be weariness from the PSC in that individual interests of those states could curtail or worsen situations. But concerns of spill over were cited besides immediate interest in the outcome of the conflict by neighbors (ibid).

Plethora of venues to address the conflict in Sudan. Seemingly the AU has taken a coordination role. But doubts could be raised on how effective a coordinator the AU would be is another concern.

The AMANI briefing citing UN Secretary General statement alluded that the conflict could have far reaching consequences affecting the Sahel, Horn and the Red Sea. Meaning the conflict attracts multiple interests from near and far and the approach should also be as broad as the interests including big and middle power players. This begs the question of coordinating capabilities of the AU as the actors may overlook the AU as a viable coordinating establishment able to bring varying interests towards a common end (AMANI Africa, 2024).

Another instrument deployed by the UN is a UNSC Resolution 2724 (2024) where with a similar tone with the AU called for parties to the conflict to cease hostilities referring to ongoing humanitarian concerns. And called for the UN Envoy Lamamra to use good offices to bring a solution in tandem with regional (AU) mechanisms and neighbors. The resolution tasks the Special Envoy to coordinate other mechanisms than the UN as opposed the AU Roadmap reiterating the AU's coordinating role. The UNSC also employed its sanctions regime by renewing the Sudan Sanctions Committee. This is yet another instrument by the UN used to force parties to negotiate. Considering the cloud on the effectiveness of sanctions the and tenacity of warring parties in Sudan positive outcome of sanctions could be farfetched (UNSC, 2024).

An article on European Council of Foreign Relations by Chughati and Murphy outlined that there are multiple tracks of mediation with varying interest. The authors have commended the EU for desisting from yet inventing another lone mediation. And have recommended that the EU coordinate with the US in making sure that the US supports a coordinated effort. The authors first condoned the Jeddah process supported by the US as it excluded some actors. And looked at IGAD led by Kenya, and pointed that IGAD didn't in account two crucial players namely Chad and Egypt leading to another process in Cairo including CAR and Libya. But the authors positioned the AU process as "low profile" because of its integrated roadmap and fragmented members invested in other initiatives. UN voyance was also pointed in predicting exclusion by the AU in terms of the "principle of subsidiarity". And proposed an integrated process citing UN's advantage of a far-reaching membership. The last statement could be testament to the personal experience of the UN envoy, a former Algerian diplomat and AU commissioner. So, not only did the UN had organizational comparative advantage but also personal clout. Derailment of the Sudan process according to Chughati and Murphy was not only because of multiple external tracks but due to the character of the Sudanese actors developed since the CPA. Sudanese actors focused on vested personal interest rather than culmination of the conflict. The authors don't stop there but propose division of labour by the aforementioned external actors for efficacy⁸ *ibid*. The transactional nature of the political economy of Sudan could be considered the cause the main spoiling factor of mediations (Chughati and Murphy, 2023).

Where as an ALJEZERA 2024 article reported that the Sudanese "Government", SAF, stepped out of the IGAD process accusing IGAD of partiality. The invitation of RSF, reportedly, by IGAD was seen infringement of IGAD on Sudanese sovereignty. This could be taken as a double standard on the side of the SAF as it was willing to seat on the table for instance in the Jeddah process. This could also be indicative of the power imperatives between a single country and a continentally recognised REC. On the other hand, interests of IGAD member states on the conflict as immediate neighbours could also easily trigger sensibility (Aljazeera, 2024).

A symposium organised by Internal IDEA in conjugation with a Sudanese CSO set out to examine the positive and negative sides of regional interventions in the Sudan crisis. The overall assessment of the symposium underscored that plethora of regional initiatives have a rather destabilizing effect. In its background it was indicated that Sudan was not new to external

involvement and all interested parties were present before the conflict began. All unrolled separate initiatives following hostilities from the AU to the UN and to individual and concerted country led initiatives. The report saw the synchronization of the initiatives but was in agreement with the assessment of Chughati and Murphy that existence of several initiatives enabled belligerents to choose one from the other. The report saw the AU road map as the main coordinating mechanism of those fragmented initiatives (IDEA, 2023).

2.2 Conceptual framework

2.2.1 Regional Security Complex

The researcher opts for the Regional Security Complex theory of Buzan and Weaver. Since the researcher intends to look into the geo-political dynamics of the Horn and not a case-by-case study of countries in the Horn, treating the Horn as a unit through the said theory would provide an outlook fit for the job.

According to Buzan and Weaver, regional security complex theory (RSCT) was said to enable examination ‘anticipate, and explain developments’ in a regional context. In conjunction with “unipolarity” and “center-periphery” concepts, it provides perspectives of great power friction in an anarchic system situating itself as a “substructure”. With this aspect, RSCT stands in mutuality with realism as well as liberalism with a constructivist tendency. RSC’s being was said to be dependent on regional friendship and enmity among ‘units in the system and drawing meaning of ‘actors and actions’ thereof (Buzan and Wæver, 2003).

Applying the theory, the authors aimed at foretelling an ‘emerging world order’ and using it to study specific regions. For this, the authors imagined an in-between the global system and the state. And that unit within the system of regional security structure emanates depending on suspicion of members in the subunit with other regional players within a defined regional boundary, where an “insulator” state mediates between the antagonistic parties. An “insulator” was said to be unique to RSCT, and it is a ‘location occupied by one or more units where larger regional security dynamics stand back-to-back’ (ibid). In contrast to Huntington’s “civilizational” delineations Buzan and Waever focus on actual patterns of security practice. And they state that focusing on “global” and not “regional” was counterproductive in Cold War approaches.

2.2.2 Security at the regional level

Accordingly, approaching security on a regional level was to help study security in a regional context away from the national and global levels of analysis. Interdependent nature of security leads towards a regional approach in that ‘no nation’s security is self-contained’. It becomes important to consider the system and subsystem approaches in examining “national security” (ibid).

The regional away from the global security dimension was said to be interrelated, ‘where the extremes of national and global security interplay, and where most of the action occurs’. Then, RCS is about the interaction of global players at the system level, where ‘clusters of close security interdependence at the regional level’ exist. As to what regions constitute RCS lies in what the authors called ‘the “natural” or “true”, cultural, geographic, or historical boundaries’ only. The authors saw it pertinent to redefine their original RCS definition as follows: -

‘a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another’ Ibid).

The aforementioned was said not to change the central theme of the idea that ‘substantial parts of the securitization and de-securitization processes in the international system will manifest themselves in regional clusters.

Regional Security Complex: Main Variables

Variables indicated were friendship, enmity, geography, as well as history of the actors. RCS thus emanate in the interaction of actors in an ‘anarchic structure and its balance-of-power consequences, and the pressures of local geographical proximity’. Geographic proximity, therefore, generates interrelations in security. Though security concerns all global, proximity differentiates the degree of pertinence. And power is another consideration that varies regionally (ibid).

Another concept entertained was “penetration” vis-à-vis powerful states and their capacity to infiltrate any RSC. This is intensified by balance of power thinking, forcing less powerful states in a complex to invite a more powerful actor. But the authors argue that instead of superpower

thinking, “local factors” should be considered in analysis with friction, coalition formation, bop, and “penetration” in the picture. Regional level analysis coupled with internal dynamics and factors such as history provides better clarity. It is important to all in the international system. RSC doesn’t apply to any formation, and no one could simply come up with a region. There has to be security interdependence among those in the subsystem. And the authors dictate that the consideration of a region is more a matter of social construct than any other consideration dependent on ‘security practice of actors’ and isn’t constant (ibid).

A constructivist view is employed to examine further the explanation of RSCs, which focuses on the “role” that friendship and animosity play in ‘Wendt’s social structure of anarchy’. Accordingly, a “role” stands out, creating a ‘social structure to a system or subsystem’. RSCs are also characterized by “durability” as being ‘social reality, which is more than the sum of its parts, and thus it can intervene between intentions and outcomes’ (ibid).

2.2.3 Horn of Africa

In light of the definitions, notions, concepts, and explanations on RSC by Buzan and Waever, the Horn of Africa could be considered a substructure within the global security structure. States in the Horn have had their ups and downs, from friendships to interstate wars, time and again. There exists enough historical and political background among those states with shared identities and cultures that has led to a social construct of a common framework as well as security interdependence. Though colonial boundaries still abound, except for Ethiopia and Sudan, social interactions in the region are prominent. Some may argue that states in the Horn may lack the finesse that authors in this reflection have tried to portray. Yet threats in the region are shared, and the security or insecurity of one has been detrimental to or assurance of the other. One can therefore argue that there is a linkage among states in the Horn meriting a substructure status.

Recently high penetration of big and middle powers is being observed, attributed to the geo-strategic location of the Horn. And those powers hold more than enough sway over states as well as other actors in the region in mitigating or exacerbating security. Security practice is also observable. States in the region tend to favor security with armed opposition, and recently, civil war has ensued in 3 states. This could be attributed to regime types and global power play affecting the security practice of political actors in the Horn.

One can't distinguish the national security of a Horn state from the other. Directly or indirectly the civil wars in Ethiopia and Sudan respectively have affected countries in the region. And countries in the Horn are at the moment at loggerheads owing to internal reasons as well as fears and alliances set up as a result. Shifting alliances are observed in the Horn over the last 2 years owing to the civil wars in the sub-region and backers across the Red Sea. Therefore, it could be said that the Horn reflects all depictions of a substructure that were discussed by Buzan and Waever.

2.2.4 The HoA and the Middle East

It becomes imperative to look into the convergence and divergence of regional security arrangements in the Horn and the Middle East. Gebresenbet and Yohannes examine the dynamics of the Horn-Gulf security relationship. The region was said to be under the influence of upcoming powers from across the Red Sea in a geopolitical tussle with Iran and Turkey. Authors indicated that they employed three case studies: “the Red Sea’s maritime security; Gulf intervention in conflict dynamics in Somalia, and the Gulf ‘factor’ in the recent Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement”. Cases were said to demonstrate a close Horn-Gulf relationship, which is regional with a new “security interdependence” soliciting a cooperation governing framework (Gebresenbet and Yohannes, 2019).

Authors mentioning scholars such as the late Berouk and Clapham contend that explanations do not serve contemporary predicaments, notably interchange across the Red Sea, and assert that Gulf presence is “inherent” in “conflict and security dynamics” of the Horn. Gulf was taken as part of the Horn if not in geographic location, just a feature of RSC consideration. And add to literature on the subject by resorting to a constructivist lens, providing the possibility of seeing RSC as “products of regionalizing logics of conflict and security dynamics” through a “transregional perspective”. Basic assumption, “all the states in a system are enmeshed in a global web of security interdependence,” putting Horn and the Gulf in a single RSC. The Red Sea space is a shared strategic maritime passage where the Bab-el-Mandeb chokepoint and the Suez Canal remain decisive to international trade, hence a great power interest. The end of the Cold War sprouted new and old actors (ibid).

Interdependence in Somalia could be drawn from geography, culture, Gulf geopolitical tussle and ongoing Somalia conflict; with Islam at the crux of relations and owing to its strategic

location. As a historical extension Somalia now hosts rival interests of Saudi, Iran, Turkey, Qatar among others. Gulf crisis proved to be detrimental to Somalia's fragile state making. Ethiopia-Eritrea "peace" though partly attributed to change in Ethiopia, the Gulf remained central due to concern of alleged Iranian and Qatari presence in Eritrea. And Ethiopia was pulled in by financial support. Showing increased Gulf self-interest in HoA related with other dynamics such as the Yemen war (ibid).

Trans-regional analytical angle, thus, helpful in "understanding conflict complexes" desirous of ameliorating analysis of "complex conflict dynamics" by examining "dimensions" and empirical "regionalizing process" of Horn-Gulf relations. Therefore, interdependence could be defined by boundary, of where the Horn starts and the Gulf ends, irrelevant in this case and devoid of "security independence" as opposed to the assertion by Buzan et al, including their "unidirectional" conception in the forms of "buffers, penetration, and overlay". The quest here is to move beyond mere "description". The Gulf was not all that powerful to diminish the security implications of the Horn. Meaning, what happens on the other side of the sea affects the seemingly powerful. Countries in the Horn possess the agency of self-serving decision-making. Authors borrowed the "idea of amity and enmity" from Buzan and Weaver as a tool of analysis; a perspective exposing fluid friendships and animosity. Accordingly, shifts in the Horn are observed in the Gulf (ibid).

Horn of Africa and Middle East RSC

J. Cannon and Donelli contend that the HoA and ME RSCs are more recently engaged but remain distinct as "groupings of states exhibiting intense security interdependence within a distinct region, but rarely between regions". The authors question the tendency to treat the regions as a single RSC following recent global developments. Authors have indicated that they have used quantitative and qualitative parameters "measuring the material power capabilities of relevant states". This also opted for "concepts and indicators such as threat perception and sub-regional alliances" as tools of analysis, building on RSC theory (J. Cannon and Donelli, 2019).

For J. Cannon and Donelli, the basic element is the overlap of major "security concerns," which can't be disentangled from members in a given RSC. Accordingly, RSCs could be "reconfigured," unlike the global system. And changes globally could have far-reaching

consequences. Thus, the consolidation of the said RSCs would be one of the few instances with political and security consequences. The regions are reportedly characterized by “instability, omnibalancing and incongruence between regime security and state security”. Consequences of the consolidation of “unstable” ME and “volatile” Horn may be heightened tension and/or “rebalancing”. The authors refer to works on the subject in that ME involvement in the Horn result of in has negative results of increased enmity and militarization of the Horn (ibid).

On the other hand, Verhoeven outlined that there is an increased interest from the Gulf in the Horn. And what is seen is that four competing powers in both regions, namely Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the absence of traditional powers to provide security. Verhoeven uses the term “macro-region” to describe what has transpired as RSC, but highlights that the resultant is polarization. The author goes back to history to explain how relations between the two regions have evolved into mistrust and suspicion. For Verhoeven, there is “geopolitical convergence between the Gulf and the Horn. Regionalization followed shifts in the global order with the advent of RSC from the work of Buzan and Waever, following the end of the Cold War and ensuing developments. Distinct features are the fear of insecurity and efforts to maintain insecurity. It is in this context that aspirants such as KSA and Ethiopia will try and claim their places, intertwining global and local political developments (Verhoeven, 2018).

Among many things, the port of Assab and its strategic location, compounded by the war in Yemen could clearly show the importance of the Red Sea in international peace and security. The port brings to the scene the US, Iran, KSA, Eritrea, and to some extent, Ethiopia. And the proximity that the ME and Horn have could be explained by Bab-el-Mandeb measuring only 27 km(Weber, 2017). Perhaps this point could only lead one to assume that, given recent increased interest and shifts in global and regional orders, the two regions are but one; convergence at this point and time would be most probable. The Gulf was not simply in need of an extra need of sphere of influence, but three factors pushed their shift southwards: decreasing oil prices, Horn involvement in the Yemen war, and the GCC rift (ibid).

J. Cannon and Donelli using the Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier analytical tool, came up with three “explanatory variables” to enumerate how RSCs are administered. The first has to do with regional structure pertaining to material power of “capability and polarity”; second, is about roles

as in who leads and who benefits from the leader; and the third has to do with orientation of propensity of members of the future direction vis-à-vis the present in terms of cooperation or keeping things as they are (J. Cannon and Donelli 2019).

Cannon and Donelli set out to examine the roots of RSC theory as developed by Buzan and Wæver. Accordingly, the theory “claimed” to provide regional and global developments in terms of relative power and mutuality. And also point out that when Buzan and Wæver refer to regions, geography is not the sole consideration, but also the interdependence of units. Interactions are also based on “anarchy, interest, behavior, and perception”. There is said to be a constructivist element to RSCs as well(ibid).

As indicated above, RSCs could alter in composition as political constructs. Authors cited Buzan and Wæver, and De Wilde, outlining factors leading to change as “maintenance of the status quo, internal transformation, external transformation, and overlay”. And chose transformational and overlay to make their case in that they show what happens when an external power becomes deeply into RSC or when “contraction or expansion” happens and why. Here, authors turn to constructivist and realist views, focusing on amity/enmity and material interest, respectively. Of course, the realist view explains more about the capability and wish of relatively powerful entities intervening in a given RSC (ibid).

However, Santini goes to the extent of doubting whether the ME could even be called an RSC as it has failed in its regionalization project. The intent is to take further what was developed by the RSC approach using an IR theory that enhances analytical scope. Drawing on the work by Jack Donnelly, Santini claims that the RSC conceptualization could be further developed by what is called hierarchy, where in a region there could be multiple poles of interest and multiple yet close to what Fana et al call as amity-enmity. Santini, distinguishing between regionalization and regionalism, emphasizes how ME states have failed in their regionalism project, with incessant mistrust prevalent. So, the Gulf came stronger in terms of regionalization, other traditional trials as post-Iran security arrangements. But, the Gulf regionalizing without the rest of what is considered the ME can be questioned. Indeed, the GCC is short of a regional mechanism enshrined with all the attributes of a regional security block (Santini, 2017).

In this case, one can argue that there could be convergence between the Gulf as a distant, poorly thatched entity and the Horn RSC. Because the Gulf simply focuses on who those enemies are near and far, and therefore, there could as well be in the Horn elucidating all sorts of interventions. Hence two Gulf camps in the Sudan financing war between warlords and many in Somalia financing every opportunity that resembles alliance or amity.

Cannon and Donelli contend that interaction could not lead to the claim of merging Horn and ME/Gulf RSCs. Though there is increased interaction. Engagements by Qatar, Turkey, and Iran are said to span three decades, and the Saudis have been around since the 1960s. Authors, however, accept that interactions have heightened beyond the usual, especially following 2011 revolutions in the ME. For the authors, more than anything, Iranian involvement in the Horn and reduction of oil prices led to an entrenched encroachment into the Horn, highlighted by the war in Yemen, which has proximity to the Bab-el Mandeb Strait. Then, ME regimes, including Turkiye, became immersed in Horn issues projects, aid packages, and whatnot (J. Cannon and Donelli, 2019).

Horn RSC and Ethiopia

Kłosowicz, in a review article, tries to locate Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa RSC. The aggregate was that the relationships are intricate. At the time of writing (2015), relations with Eritrea were rocky and talks on the GERD were simmering, and Sudan was not in the calamity it is in at the moment. Situations internationally were favorable to the then Government of Ethiopia with the US-led “war on terrorism”. A broad definition of the Horn is used to identify area of interest pegged with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) bringing together seven countries which form RSC as interdependent and tied together “typical of a politically and economically compact region” Therefore, the region possesses characteristics of RSC in that they are tied in all aspects and the in/security of one affects the other. Kłosowicz not only asserts that the Horn is RSC but also argues that Ethiopia has an important role as a regional and international actor. The author's assertion follows three-year field work in Ethiopia and critical analysis of existing literature framed in an ethnographic approach (Kłosowicz, 2015).

Following the introduction, the author sets out to examine the historical precedents. And quickly adopts the general conception that the “Amhara” fought to assert dominance from Melik to

Mengistu. And the civil war during the military regime and the war with Somalia were outcomes of bad policy. The author also seemed pro-EPRDF government, referring to Ethiopia then as “stable”, prospering with a strong government. Accordingly, one of the factors that puts Ethiopia as an important regional player is its “rapid” economic development, positioning the country on a path out of poverty. This was and still is highly debated, but the author has subscribed to the narrative of a prosperous Ethiopia.

Ethiopia was also more visible in regional as well as international politics to the extent of being labeled as an “anchor state” for the West, particularly the US, vis-à-vis regional security interest alignment. Not only alignment but attributes such as demography, size, and military standing made Ethiopia a “natural choice” to the West. Ethiopia’s importance improved following the “Arab Spring” in Egypt and consequent political instability that led to increased military assistance of up to 256%. Another factor put was Ethiopia’s sense of statehood contributing to its “stability” (perhaps this is why Ethiopia is prevailing despite the ensuing civil war and social unrest). However, Kłosowicz, despite accolades early on, turns to international fragility ratings, indices, as well as the human development index to portray that Ethiopia is far from stability and prosperity. And yet, alludes that it is an “island so stability” in a region otherwise fraught by ills (ibid).

By way of demonstrating enmity and amity, Koslowitz enunciates how bad relations with Eritrea following a two-year war presented a twin challenge to Ethiopia’s stability, also citing the former's involvement in Somalia. And a separatist armed opposition, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), camped in Kenya, distorting an otherwise exemplary relationship. Another neighbor, Sudan, went through a divorce, giving birth to South Sudan with spillover effects. Perhaps the best relationship to demonstrate enmity/amity may be Ethiopia-Sudan relations, rocky at times with distrust as the main explainer, owing to ideology. Somalia’s incessant instability and failed state-making processes are also said to be problematic for Ethiopia. Somalia becomes different considering Ethiopia’s military involvement and mistrust emanating from past enmity. Disagreement over the Nile adds to the complexity of issues as a triangular relationship involving Egypt and its overdependence on Nile waters (ibid).

The author, in trying to locate the place Ethiopia assumes in the RSC of the Horn overemphasized Ethiopia’s military security alignment with the US. This engagement didn’t

continue recently due to Ethiopia's internal situation and misalignment with western interests in the Horn in particular the US.

According to Kłosowicz, Ethiopia, as a "powerful" actor in the region, should be a hegemon naturally as a "regional leader and reliable international partner". All characteristics of power politics, especially demography, lean towards Ethiopia's hegemony. IGAD and other regional security mechanisms that Ethiopia participates in are also taken as parameters of its regional role. As indicators, Ethiopia's role in IGAD and role in the establishment of the East African Standby Force, along with its status as a troop-contributing state in peacekeeping missions, were mentioned. Interestingly, the author evokes the loss of access to the sea, making it Ethiopia one of the "most populous countries" with no outlet; probably a factor diminishing Ethiopia's influence in terms of consequent insecurity from lack of presence in the Red Sea economic implications (ibid).

More recently, Ethiopia is said to have better served itself in the ME RSC power play. It had fared well, though in the beginning, Ethiopia seemed a KSA ally, but then was said to have surfed the currents with wit. This was in 2015, and then Ethiopia seemed to have harvested its relations with all ME powers. Now that the war in Tigray has somehow culminated and another has started, and relations with Eritrea unsure one cannot be sure of how ME interests play regarding Ethiopia (J. Cannon and Donelli, 2019).

And according to Webber Ethiopia, "Hegemon by default", is wary of its landlocked status and all that is going on around it. Neighbors leasing out shores as military bases and unfavorable conditions for the GERD, compounded with spill overs from surrounding conflicts, present a grave challenge. Whether the GERD has been seen as a political project or not it has advanced despite vivid challenges presented to the governments of Abiy Ahmed and his predecessors. And infringement into Ethiopian politics, overt and covert, will continue. Unfortunately, Ethiopia has neighbors such as Eritrea and Somalia, and no matter how tactful, those neighbors will always present some sort of foreign policy challenge. But Webber may have been on point when translating recent shifts for Ethiopia in terms of cost for Ethiopia taking into consideration Sudan, Egypt, and increased interest from the US (Webber, 2017).

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The end result of research in the social sciences is to have reached at “findings being designed either for use in understanding a phenomenon, issue or to bring change in a program/situation”. Kumar outlines four research objectives: to describe (descriptive research), to explain (explanatory research), find relations between two more variables (correlational research), and examination of a subject area (exploratory research). And the means a researcher opts for to findings, methodology. Accordingly, a researcher applies certain “procedures and models of research methodology which help best achieve research objectives. Then findings from interviews and/or observations would be analyzed “identifying themes and describing” findings (Kumar, 2011).

The term methodology is a system of explicit rules and procedure in which research is based and against which claims of knowledge are evaluated. The researcher employed qualitative research methodology. It's basically well established that qualitative methods are best for describing, interpreting, contextualizing, and gaining in-depth insight into specific concepts or phenomena. The methodological approach employed in the research is part and parcel of the study an attempt to ensure the overall integrity and reliability of the findings and make a well-founded conclusion of the study. Exploratory studies are a valuable means of understanding what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomenon in a new light (Yin, 1994). In the study of social science, exploratory research aims at asking the relevant research questions, formulating research problems more clearly, developing the right conceptual framework and accumulating the necessary explanation. In an attempt to answer the research questions, the researcher has focused on the exploratory study approach in order to examine and dig into the

new geo geopolitical dynamics in the Horn Africa with particular emphasis on its foreign policy nexus of Horn states and other external actors. Accordingly, the study used secondary source of data; collected from books, published journal articles, published and unpublished theses and dissertation, governmental and non-governmental organization reports and magazines and other internet sources. Given the data gathered are qualitative, the study employed qualitative data analysis techniques. This thesis also employed a variety of documentary sources the provided additional information for the analytical aspects of the research. These include government statements, and speeches by higher officials in the region, reports by research think tanks, and other important sources. The study also used news articles, news analysis, and other secondary sources of information (Ojo, 2003).

Documents such as reports, white paper, AU and IGAD communiqués, AU Handbook, and APSA were reviewed in the conduct of this research.

The researcher ventures in to the abyss of the contemporary geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa in relation to invasive foreign involvement in countries in the region and chart evasive means for countries in the Horn from unwanted consequences. And maximize benefits that accrue from the competition of external powers. The research ponders on an exploration mission to establish the correlation between external involvement in the Horn of Africa and the consequences of those infringements vis-à-vis countries in the Horn and Ethiopia in particular taking in to consideration geopolitical dynamism in the region leaning on the newly shaping international order.

Thus, the study is correlational research aimed at better serving Ethiopia in the current geopolitical context. Current external involvement cannot solely be seen in terms of negative consequences as there could be opportunities that can be used to an advantage. However, given the precarious state of peace and security in the Horn, one cannot but primarily be weary of external involvement.

The researcher chose to conduct a semi structured interview sessions with selected informants from IGAD, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chatham House and African Union Commission. The informants were chosen for their expertise as well as experience. The interview sessions with the informants from IGAD and Chatham House were smooth where informants were willing to

engage further. Informants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs faced time constraints and at times were hesitant to discuss a few issues. However, the informant from the AUC, after agreeing to meet the researcher, was hesitant and resistant fearing sensitivity of issues and appearing partial.

Ato Selemon Abebe is a senior expert in IGAD office in Addis Abeba. He has also served in an IGAD mission to Somalia and is referred to as the informant from IGAD throughout data representation. The second informant is Ambassador Meles Alem from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ambassador Alem is a veteran diplomat who has served in Kenya as a diplomat and An Ambassador and he is referred to informant from MFA 1. The third informant is Ato Abel Demessie from Chatham House. Demessie is a researcher focused on the Horn and Ethiopia and has written on issues pertinent to this research and is referred informant from Chatham House. The fourth informant is Ato Daniel Tenker, Director of Peace and Security at the Ethiopian MFA. Tenker is a senior diplomat with extensive experience in multilateral diplomacy. And the fifth informant is Mr. Simon from the Peace, Security, and Political Affairs Commission of the African Union Commission. Mr Simon is currently a director at the Commission and has been with the commission for over two decades as a peace and security expert. The interview addressed the following questions:

1. What are the most pertinent geo-political milestones shaping current affairs in the Horn?
2. How is traditional power rivalry shaping up in the Horn?
3. Who are middle power actors engaged in the Horn? And what motivates them to engage heavily?
4. How does emerging geo-political dynamics in the Horn affect Ethiopia? And what plausible ways forward be conceived?

The questions were not strictly administered; where possible inferences were made and follow-up questions forwarded.

The data gathered from informants was then triangulated with the literature reviewed. This process helped refocus the research the contemporary issues pertinent to issue at hand. For instance, the informant from IGAD insisted that the research look into Sudan as the war has attracted various actors and has become regional in character. On the other hand, literature on

Chinese involvement in the Horn is somewhat exaggerated whereas informants while acknowledging the presence of the Chinese in relation to Belt and Road Initiative were doubtful of the predatory status assigned to the Chinese.

3.2 Research Design

A research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems. The plan is the complete scheme or programme of the research. It includes an outline of what the investigator intended from writing the hypotheses and their operational implications to the final analysis of data (Kumar, 2011)

The main focus in qualitative research is to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of a group of people. The study designs are therefore often based on deductive rather than inductive logic, are flexible and emergent in nature, and are often non-linear and non-sequential in their operationalization. The study designs mainly entail the selection of people from whom the information, through an open frame of enquiry, is explored and gathered. The parameters of the scope of a study, and information gathering methods and processes, are often flexible and evolving; hence, most qualitative designs are not as structured and sequential as quantitative ones (ibid).

Informants were allowed to venture in to the particularities of the issue in consideration. Allowing their hands on experiences to guide response. And at the same time possible answers were also pitched by the researcher in order to lead responses for a better outcome (Kielmann et al, 2012).

Methodologies that researchers apply enable researchers come up with a “construct” in examining particularities in the research. A number of questions help to determine the kinds of methods to pronounce and or measure a “construct”. Data generated through less structured methods are rich, explanatory, and often multi-faceted (Kielmann et al, 2012).

The researcher referring to methodological approaches suggested in qualitative research methodology literature, also employed “triangulation” as one of the means by which data was generated. This as per the literature helps enhances the capacity of the researcher generate data by connecting the dots. And given the nature of the issue under question triangulation becomes highly pertinent in informing the research of data that was not put forward openly (ibid).

Methodological preferences that researchers opt for determine findings of the research. Researchers could approach the mainly desk research of secondary print sources was applied. The examination of secondary print sources was corroborated by face-to-face interviews with selected experts in the field from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the African Union Commission, IGAD, and Chatham House.

3.3 Data collection methodology

The preferred way of data collection for the research was conducting interviews. The research has put forward four main research questions. From the outset, the researcher was of the view that semi-structured interviews would allow for the generation of valuable data. It was with this in mind, therefore, that informants were chosen based on their expertise and institutions that worked in. The researcher then worked on the validity of the research questions as to the extent and scope regarding the issue (Kielmann et al, 2012).

For ease and flow of information the interviews were not recorded. At the same time given the nature of the topic research questions were not strictly followed so that informants surf issues such as competition, external involvement, middle power surge in the Horn and the like notably with the informants from IGAD and Foreign Affairs. The researcher took detailed notes as informants delved in to the issues where possible supporting primary questions with follow up inquiries. This helped the researcher and the informants conduct sessions in a semi-structured manner avoiding limitations.

The researcher met the informant from Chatham House face to face as well as via telephone. As the informant researched issues close to the topic notably current issues spanning developments in the wars in Sudan and Ethiopia discussions centered on those issues. Prior relationship with the informant from Chatham House helped the interview process. There might have been some sort of limitations over sensitivity of issues. The researcher is well acquainted with the environment where the interviews took place as well as the informants themselves except that of IGAD.

The interview with the expert from IGAD delved deep in to issues beyond questions raised during the session. The interview lasted for an hour and a half. The informant not only was willing to provide information but went also provided guidance in the conduct of the research.

The informant also highlighted areas that the researcher should look in to closely. The researcher indicated at the beginning of the interview that the research assumes two limitations. First is the time frame of 2018 in examining geopolitical dynamics in the Horn. and second, countries of interest vis-à-vis Ethiopia in the Horn were mainly Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia. The informant indicated that the time frame was acceptable with a touch on general geopolitical history. But insisted that focus should also be on Sudan as the war in Sudan involves multiple actors in the sub region as well as external actors. The regional and somehow regional nature of the war in Sudan, accordingly, merited the attention of the researcher as it affects Ethiopia's security interests.

Informants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appeared a bit reserved despite a relationship the researcher enjoyed with the informants. The researcher is of the view that reservations emanate from the conduct of the craft as diplomats fear of consequences of information they share officially from superiors as well as counterparts from countries of concern. Besides, as both informants in the Ministry occupy positions which tend to make them busy the interviews were conducted somehow in haste. The most senior informant at the Ministry was provided four research questions on geopolitics in the Horn indicated in the first chapter of this thesis and other ten questions pertaining to regional security as well as maritime security. This allowed the senior informant to discuss the presence of external powers in the Horn and how it affects Ethiopia and others in the subregion; crucial bilateral aspects that Ethiopia has with Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia; Ethiopia's quest for sea access; the fate of IGAD in the face of a rapidly evolving world order; and other aspects that were not addressed by the questions.

The informant from the AUC seemed concerned of sensitivities spanning the issue under consideration. He was also pressed for time and preferred to reply in a measured, concise, and safe manner. The informant even went to the extent that his knowledge on the issue was limited on the issue. It took some convincing by the researcher for an interview which lasted 30 minutes. The fact that the researcher knew in person the informant as an expert in the Department of Peace and Security formerly helped in easing the informant in to gradually open up though in a guarded manner. By opting for a semi-structured approach, the researcher was able to acquire data from the informant at the AUC and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In general, the sensitivity of the issue made informants hesitant except the informant from IGAD. The informant from IGAD showed confidence and was also partial to the issue. The informant from IGAD was also content in the fact that the researcher saw IGAD as one of the ways forward in the disentanglement of the geopolitical challenges for its member states. One of the peculiarities of the separate five interviews was similarity among the responses. The response pertaining to external power involvement, in particular, hit similar notes.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Analyzing the data collected the researcher grouped the data in to four main categories; external power involvement, regional security, geopolitical dynamics in the horn and regional security dynamics. External power involvement in the Horn was further subcategorized in to traditional or super power involvement and/or competition, middle power involvement and emerging power involvement (Kielmann et al, 2012).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical protocols and recognizing the sensitivity of the topic and the political context. For any primary data collection, participants were briefed on the research aims, and informed consent will be obtained. Anonymity was offered and ensured for respondent.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The research tries to examine the security implications of contemporary geopolitical dynamics in the HoA. The focus of the research is the involvement of external actors with varying and divergent interests. This involvement heightens an already precarious situation of the region which is plagued with all types of economic, social and political ills. The involvement of Gulf states is given due attention as it has engulfed the HoA region with a carryover of political motives and standing. Infinite financial resource available for dispensation enables Gulf states influence governments and other entities in the Horn. And this research apart from understanding current geopolitical dynamics affecting the region as a whole and Ethiopia in particular, aims to chart a better way forward for Ethiopia.

With this in mind interviews were conducted with selected experts from three institutions. Informants were asked questions pertaining to contemporary geopolitical dynamics in the Horn, rivalry amongst powerful nations in the Horn, the motives and interests of middle powers specially Gulf states and the way forward. As the interviews were semi structured informants were free to discuss issues as they saw fit.

The informant from IGAD (20 May 2025) was presented with an option to directly the research questions or conduct a semi structured session where the interviewer-initiated conversation like thought provoking general as well as particular questions. The informant stated that he had ample time to engage in a semi structure format and the session proceeded as such. On the other hand, the informant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs preferred to receive beforehand and answer the research questions designed for this thesis with follow up questions from the interviewer.

Pertinent geopolitical milestones shaping current affairs in the Horn

The informant referred to the Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement as a milestone. Change of guard in Ethiopia following internal as well as external change that took place in Ethiopia and the global order enabled a positive step forward. Accordingly, normalization of relations between the two

countries impacted the Horn for the better. The end of a regime led by TPLF also led towards a new alliance among Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia (informant from MFA 1,1 June 2025).

The end of TPLF resulted in a war that intensified and spread South implicating other actors in Ethiopia besides the main warring parties including Eritrea. The war had a widespread effect than those directly involved. For instance, the relation with Sudan was downgraded due to the close relations that the former President Omar al-Bashir had with the TPLF led government. New dynamics in Sudan saw new level of external involvement of actors within the region as well as other middle powers such as UAE and Eritrea (1 June 2025).

The first point of discussion was in regards leadership in the Horn. The informant indicated that Eritrea following the rapprochement with Ethiopia after 2018 tried to reengineer institutional as well as alliance-based shift. In this process Eritrea brought Ethiopia and Somalia in to a tripartite form of an alliance where it assumed leadership in steering affairs of the Horn in interests. The informant indicated the efforts by Eritrea to come up with a new institutional setup as a move to replace Ethiopia's leading role in IGAD. He recalled that IGAD was once claimed as one of the main foreign policy instruments of Ethiopia. However, Ethiopia's internal political situation coupled with the emerging internal order brought an opportunity forth for Eritrea to play a hand in its vicinity. The informant underlined that Ethiopia should not refrain from affairs of the region as one of the leading members of IGAD. And play its proper role in the management of peace and security in the Horn. Ethiopia indeed proved decisive in the process of lifting of sanctions on Eritrea. However, apart from dealing with the sanctions on Eritrea, political commitment from the new leadership seemed to lessen when it came to IGAD (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

The informant recalled that IGAD was instrumental in all peace processes leading to the establishment of a federal state in Somalia save Egyptian processes. Better yet, as the leading regional institution IGAD served as a complimentary regional mechanism in the overarching continental architecture to manage peace and security in Somalia thereby in the Horn. Perhaps of the eight continentally recognized Regional Economic Communities in Africa, ECOWAS and SADC may fare better. Other than those RECs others remain in the same standing as IGAD in managing peace and security (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Apart from Ethiopia, Uganda wanted and sometimes acted as one of the major players in IGAD. But the fact that Uganda is heavily invested in South Sudan refrained its ability to do. Talking about Uganda and South Sudan led the informant in the way of the East African Community. Both South Sudan and Uganda and others are members of both organizations, more than shared membership at stake. The informant indicated that the membership of Somalia and South Sudan affects Ethiopian interests in the greater Horn. Given IGAD's recent predicament Uganda wants to retract its IGAD membership. The only retaining factor is that South Sudan is an IGAD member closely allied to Ethiopia (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Another point brought up by the informant was the fact that IGAD some IGAD members are also members of the Arab League. The Arab League in some of its deliberations dealt with issues where sometimes those deliberations (ibid). We are also seeing Egypt reappearing in the Horn again in Somalia and even more close to Djibouti. Longstanding enmity between Egypt and Ethiopia is being exacerbated by GERD as well as competition over the Red Sea. Another part of the puzzle indicated by the informant was the desire for independence by Somali Land against the claim for territorial integrity by Somalia (informant from MFA 1, 1 June 2025).

The informant touched on the severed relations between Kenya and Somalia due to unresolved maritime border disagreement. Nairobi sees Jubba Land as its buffer zone where as Mogadishu tries to reclaim control over its regional administrative units (informant from MFA 1, 1 June 2025).

The informant begun by notifying that three major trends could be observed in the Horn currently. role of middle powers; Qatar, Turkey, Saudi. The informant indicated that seven years ago some sort of policy independence reigned in the Horn. but now most have become satellite states or are looking like vassal states. in this regard it has become important for governments in the Horn to navigate the situation for better outcomes. States assuming policing roles are said to exponentially proliferate. Inter/intra state conflicts have proliferated implicating multiple actors at a time such as the war in Sudan which has both internal and external characters at the same time as well as the war in Ethiopia. Conflicts between Djibouti and Eritrea are still lingering, Ethiopia and Sudan on going Eritrea involved as a main actor with varying allegiances over time; Ethiopia, Somalia and Somali Land got in to a tussle with both intra and interstate conflict characters observed. Djibouti and Eritrea have for long been administered by a single political

elite and save those two it could be questioned if any of the countries in the Horn are self-administering. Another trend indicated by the informant was the change in international dynamics. The war in Ukraine has shifted international management of peace and security. The Horn has seen the dissipating of an anchor state over taken by characters of a rogue state (informant from Chatham House, 29 May 2025).

The informant underlined that the situation in the Horn revolved around two concepts; economy and security. Maritime security in the Horn and Red Sea arena shapes global economy. And post 2011 piracy became an issue on Red Sea. Piracy and the Houthi attacks on freight meant increased insurance premium. External presence in the Horn, therefore, is necessary given its strategic importance. The informant indicated that when talking about the Horn the definition “greater Horn” is preferable to properly grasp external involvement in the region. Agriculture was said to be the new interest that both super powers as well as middle powers were interested in. Besides economic interest countering terrorism was also cited. Constellation of various forces in the region was also attributed to countering an adversary. The US traditionally is concerned with countering terrorism and providing humanitarian assistance. And the Chinese focused on development and trade. On the other hand, Russia with no specific niche is present in Eritrea and Sudan (informant from MFA 2, 20 May 2025).

High external presence in the Horn makes the leadership in the countries independent and stifles political space for policy formulation and execution. Leadership and decision-making process in the Horn is being influenced externally save Ethiopia. Heavy external presence in the Horn would lead it to host conflicts. Those powers finance institutions thereby fueling instability. The US uses its soft power, China loans with high interest rates and short grace periods, Russia weaponry and private military (informant from MFA 2, 20 May 2025).

The informant indicated that issues such as piracy, conflict in Yemen, Gulf powers, and the Red Sea center the Horn. As a result, countries in the Horn such as Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan face direct negative impacts to their strategic interest. At the invitation of Somalia political, military, and security developments are taking place with actors such as Saudi, Turkey, and the UAE. This development is undermining the AU PSC agenda with parallel initiatives forgoing the AU. Parallel initiatives are shaped by Gulf interests. Gulf interests also featured in the Ethiopia and Somali Land MoU enabling Turkey play the neutral card. The informant

expressed concern that in general conflicting parties in the Horn have become disinterested in mediation as a result of external interference. Instead, focus is on expanding one's powers and capabilities (informant from AUC, 25 May 2025).

Explaining current affairs in the Horn, the informant outlined that Egypt besides Ethiopia has a stake in South Sudan and Sudan. While Egypt and Ethiopia quarrel over hydro politics Sudan serves as a buffer zone. Ethiopia and Somalia have a complicated relationship. Terrorism, irridentism, security, and population overhang characterize the relationship. Relations in the Horn in general were said to be competitive with constant national interests but involving pragmatism based on interest. Kenya for instance has rapid needs that may eventually lead to upsetting some in the region. Egypt claims hegemony in the region none have rivaled. Egypt maintains influence through covert support to different elements within countries in the Horn that keep its interests (informant from AUC, 25 May 2025).

Traditional power rivalry in the Horn

Discussing involvement traditional powers in the Horn, the informant indicated that the Horn has become "the center of political rivalry" between the US and Russia. The Chinese are present through their "belt and Road Initiative". All concerned with the flow of international maritime trade are engaged and worried about insecurity on the Red Sea waters. The current insecurity that alarms every actor is the Houthi phenomenon. The informant underlined that the Red Sea and Horn security complexes are "intertwined and interdependent". IS has become the biggest fatigue in Somalia in cooperation with similar groups in the continent such as Boko Haram and an Al-Qaida affiliated group in Mozambique. The advantages for such groups in the Horn are capability to recruit easily reproducing local recurrent dangers. In general, the significance of the Horn in terms of international peace and security was explained by the informant as the "precursor of WWII" (informant from MFA 1, 1 June 2025).

Westerners are said to have less interest of having a strategic partner in the Horn due to fatigue. The Chinese are on the sidelines as the economic front presented high risk in the region. And US security engagement shifted following regional as well as global changes and pivot to Indo-China, a relatively stable region. The US left affairs in the Horn to Middle Eastern powers. Both China and the US had their niche which seem to be relegated at the moment. The way the China

and the US deal with issues in the Horn are divergent further exposing the region to shocks. Divergent interests of China and the US stem from own interests and preoccupations. Those powers are on the verge of a pullout from the Horn leading to the unknown and antagonism among countries in the Horn and their backers (informant from Chatham House, 29 May 2025).

The informant also spoke of South Sudan in the context of external intervention in the Horn. two powerful actors were identified in South Sudan. China and the US. China sought presence in South Sudan to secure oil. And the U.S. still maintains its position as the guarantor of the peace agreement which led to the secession of South Sudan. And for Ethiopia, the relationship is delicate due to population overhung. The Dinka-Nuer factor requires finesse from the Ethiopian side (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Finally, the informant from IGAD expressed concern over the war in Sudan. The war has become regional as well as international in nature drawing multiple actors including the Government of Ethiopia and a faction of the TPLF. Gulf actors are main instigators supporting Sudanese warring parties. Gulf actors are also accused of predatory intentions in Sudan engaging in illicit trade in gold. Meaning Gulf interests in Sudan in particular and Horn in general have shifted from geopolitics and geostrategy to geonomy (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

4.2 Contemporary IGAD and Ethiopia

IGAD for Ethiopia

The next point discussed was IGAD for Ethiopia. The informant outlined that at the moment when we talk about IGAD and issues of concern that need to be tackled, reorganizing the institution is necessary. IGAD has a new treaty in place which has not been signed by Uganda. And two third of the members are yet to ratify the new treaty. Besides the instrument, the structure and secretariat need to be addressed as well for an effective delivery. Those problems are reflected in the conflict in South Sudan where the Ugandan conflict of interest has impeded a way forward (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

The informant underscored that Ethiopia should work on its status as an anchor state in IGAD as well as in the region to overcome challenges that might come up from the current geopolitical dynamics in the Horn. underpinning factor should be cooperation in the Horn by working towards gaining trust from other members such as Djibouti and Kenya. Accordingly, Ethiopia

should be the lead where other members fail to demonstrate interest. As other RECs IGAD also faces the predicament that its members are unable to meet even assessed contributions. In this case the threat is not only finance but also retaining members. The informant was of the view that Ethiopia should be constructively engage in the conflict in Sudan through an IGAD framework. This would, consequently allow Ethiopia assume its leadership in IGAD while retaining a member in trouble (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

IGAD and Somalia

As pointed out above, IGAD has been decisive when it comes to Somalia. Somalia's problem is generational requiring multifaceted solutions. Keeping up relevance in Somalia is vital in securing Ethiopian national interest in Somalia as well as in the Horn. another pertinent actor that used to cooperate in the affairs of Somalia in the IGAD framework is Kenya. Kenya is keeping tabs on Somalia bilaterally appointing an especial envoy to Somalia. Other players such as Egypt, although not new, are reentering the Somalian scene following the Ethiopia-Somalia temporary drift owing to the MoU between Ethiopia and Somaliland (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Somalia predominantly advised and guided by Ethiopia on the federal and region level is no longer Ethiopia's backdoor. Jubba Land, Middle Shebelle, Hirr, Galmudug were once under the influence of Ethiopia. And Ethiopia still has a card in terms of current legal configuration. It is with in this context that the bravado of the Hassen Sheikh government as a Somali nationalist during the announcement of the MoU with Somali Land was out of place. He forgot that situation that Somali national politics was in. He also over estimated his clan base made of a single clan, though the largest. Besides, Punt Land also still remains friendly to Ethiopia (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Somali Land especially since the 2000 Ethiopia-Eritrea war has been a good ally. A decisive arrangement in the political and security fronts is intact. The informant indicated that recognition even during the reign of Meles was held to avoid claims that Ethiopia had a role in the disintegration of Somalia. In return, Somali Land was protected against the tide the UIC. Attributing Ethiopia's intervention in the 1990's to the safeguard of Somali Land and not imminent threat to Ethiopia. Fighting Al-Shabaab at any cost as a threat to Ethiopia has

continued as a policy orientation of Ethiopia. And it has allowed Ethiopia to somehow salvage its presence in Somalia, with uncertainty prevailing over the Ankara Declaration ending hostility between Ethiopia and Somalia (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Sea Access and the GERD

Touted sea access by Ethiopia was followed in the conversation. The informant referred an IGAD initiative, the IGAD Red Sea Taskforce on Red Sea and Gelf of Aden in 2019. The taskforce, be it effective or not, is an expression that the issue of Red Sea and Gelf Aden is not only a concern of littoral states. Concerns and interests of non-littoral states in the Horn-Gulf arena should be heeded. Ethiopia at the time was able to establish a common position via IGAD through a declaration. Least, the declaration communicated a message to those whom claimed that Red Sea is none of Ethiopia's concern. Ethiopia's dependence on a single entry/exit meant it has to pay a heavy price. The MoU with Somali Land was no surprise as there were efforts to develop Berbera before. Berbera is next to Assab as a strategic port option. It serves South and South West Ethiopia with a reduced cost than Djibouti. Berbera is also important in that it is ideal for the need to be present in the Red Sea security theatre (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Invoking Red Sea naturally led to the informant towards internal issues and strategic element, the GERD. Delay in completion of the GERD and ongoing internal issues gave way to Egyptian involvement. Sudan was in the fence when it came to the GERD but internal political disagreements permitted that Sudan chose a side besides its interest. Armed internal decent was instrumentalized by external forces to exacerbate instability. This accordingly led to the compromise of the national interest of Ethiopia weakening its regional standing (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

External/Middle Powers in the Horn

The discussion, then was directed towards external power involvement in the Horn. the point of reference by the interviewer was middle powers. The informant automatically brought up Gulf Cooperation Countries and Turkey. Turkey's interest in the region could be seen in terms of history and religion; and GCC pivot, power projection, resources, and geostrategy. UAE in the region was put as a loner. It pursued a unilateral interest in almost all countries in the Horn,

notably Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. Qatar and UAE divided Somalia in to two and supported the federal government, regional administrations, and or other factions including Al-Shaabab as they saw fit. And support was not provided based on a set of shared principle. Rather, to gain ground in Somalia. In general, the Arab League was not happy with Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia. And involvement in a later stage also took shape in that sentiment. Ethiopia-UAE relations have to be examined. For the time being relation seem to thrive to the extent that UAE left Doralee port. Nevertheless, UAE involvement in Somalia poses a challenge to Somalia since 2018. The UAE touches everything and every entity in the Red Sea geopolitical and geostrategic sphere (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

An interesting point raised by the informant was the element of religion. GCC involvement in the Horn was said to be driven by a religious ideology related with the Muslim Brotherhood. IGAD intervention in Somalia was upheld by Western powers leading it to thrive upon the ashes of the Union of Islamic Courts. Accordingly, the Courts enjoyed the support of the Muslim Brotherhood and the attack and subsequent demise of the courts was seen as an attack on Islam (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Turkey on the other hand, mainly focused on establishing itself in Somalia. It did so by developing infrastructure leading to its military base and defense pact with Somalia. Turkey also secured access to Somalia's oil reserves. However, Turkish entry in to Somalia was also draped by religious sentiment supporting Salafists in Somalia. In the back of the Turks mind, rests the assumption that the Horn is the backdoor of the Ottoman Empire (informant from IGAD, 20 May 2025).

Discussing the involvement of middle Powers in the Horn, the informant underlined that "the Red Sea has attracted all governments and powers". As one of the most strategic international maritime trade routes between Asia and Europe. Actors such as UAE, Turkey, Iran, Saudi, Israel and others are present in the Horn looking after interests that have to do ports, farms and gold. Those actors run mutually exclusive interests in the region. For instance, the Iran-Saudi antagonism reinforces religious ideological forces often resorting to violence. Israel sees the Horn theatre as the backdrop of the threats that it faces in the Middle East. Meaning it looks after primarily its security interests relevant in the Middle East but somehow have to do with the affairs in the Horn (informant from MFA 1, 1 June 2025).

The informant went on and reflected on a few issues besides the research questions. the gap in the Red Sea management reflects different concerns from major actors such as the Saudis and UAE. Management is also characterized by poor coordination and adversary neutrality. To uphold the interest of non-littoral states in the region IGAD has come up with a mechanism to include those interested, the Red Sea Council. The Council could serve as a coordinating mechanism in the Horn (informant from MFA 1, 1 June 2025).

Regarding the involvement of Middle Eastern powers in the Horn, the informant separated to actors as Gulf, Qatar and Turkey. Saudi and Egypt are put in the same category and the UAE as a lone actor. Accordingly, the Turks hangover Ottoman nostalgia have been in and out of the region supporting different actors during various time spans. The Egypt and Saudi Arabia carry on open hostility towards Ethiopia harboring Eritrean sentiments. The UAE prefers non state actors, and proxy engagement. A loose alliance was said to exist among Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE. Those countries are rich with less population and right-wing political culture. This made them assume more risk, leaning more towards personal and blood ties in the conduct of state business (informant from Chatham House, 29 May 2025).

Concerning middle powers actors such as Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and UAE are said to be involved in the Horn. The informant indicated that Turkey plays a big role in Somalia and somehow in Sudan. Turkey provides weaponry to Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, including Al-Shabbab. Qatar is still active in Somalia. Egypt in engaged in Somalia and Sudan spanning its relations with Ethiopia. UAE relations with Somalia are put as “delicate” entertaining separate relations with regions and the Federal Government. UAE engagement in the Horn revolves around port management, resource notably energy, Agriculture, and digital finance. And Saudi is present in Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan mainly looking after its security interests. The informant highlighted that middle powers engage in the Horn because of geographic proximity, ideology. Economy, and security interdependence (informant from MFA 2, 20 May 2025).

Explaining the involvement of middle powers the informant indicated that core security support group to Somalia constitute UN, Turkey, China, Saudi, UAE, UK. The AU met them as a group. But the Saudis wanted to engage the AU separately. The Turks maintain a huge presence in Somalia via infrastructure development and military aid. Stakes in Somalia are high. Interests are not converging leading to an endless peace process. Sudan peace process lingers. Strategic Saudi

investment remains crucial in the Sudan war. Turkey could serve as a bridge. The consequences of the Sudan war are far reaching destabilizing the region as a whole (informant from the AUC, 25 May 2025).

Emerging geopolitical dynamics affecting Ethiopia and way forward

The informant was rather weary of what contemporary geopolitical dynamics meant for Ethiopia. The region is problematic. And of late rhetoric from Ethiopia on sea access has rattled those concerned in the region. Even Kenya was said to harbor some sort of fear towards Ethiopia. Countries in the Horn including Ethiopia seem to have fallen as proxies to middle powers. There are strong relationships with some middle powers (informant from Chatham House, 29 May 2025).

Ethiopia is a regional power house. The informant indicated that the stampeding blocks the Ethiopia faces can't be ignored. Ethiopia has continued to pursue its national strategic interests. Developing the GERD for electricity demonstrates this ambition. In this regard, Egypt meant to be a rival in the pursuit of Ethiopia's regional and global ambitions. A negotiated settlement on the GERD would serve both (informant from the AUC, 25 May 2025).

4.3 Discussion

The HoA is located in a strategic neighborhood but troubled with security, political, economic as well as natural disasters. Literature amply demonstrates the scale of the problem with inter and intra state conflicts that emanate from national cleavages in every country in the region. The cycle of conflict and misery has not abated. And to make matters worse currently major conflicts are ongoing in the region involving countries in the Horn as well as external actors. Not only this, but the international order is being reconfigured creating competition and rivalry among powerful countries and rising powers. This conflict is also playing out in the Horn security field vividly. We observe high militarization of the Red Sea coast at the security expense of countries in the Horn. This is why the region has to be studied continuously by scholars, experts, and practitioners.

Attempts at regionalization as panacea were made to address common challenges. Here we are talking about the Red Sea Council only involving littoral states and the short lived trilateral Horn

Initiative involving Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia. However, those initiatives were redundant to begin with requiring leadership and extra resources.

Informants are all in agreement that there is unfettered external interference in the affairs of the Horn by those who want to ascertain interests. Responses, however limited or measured according to the occupation and expertise of informants led to the generalization that external powers play constructive as well as detrimental roles. The proliferation of inter and intra state conflict in the Horn is one way or another attributed to interference besides own internal cleavages. Cold War like scenarios is being observed in the Horn where powerful external actors come with hefty resources to sway countries to take sides. This is also compounded with national politics as well as regional balance of power competition.

The focus and stress of the researcher is the involvement of middle powers. And to that end, informants have clearly shown that middle powers present in the Horn are fueling conflicts and exacerbating already worse situations. Cases in point are civil wars in Ethiopia and Sudan involving multiple actors not only locally but internationally. Those wars begun with political differences in respective countries. However, international actors with diverging interests have become part of the conflict even determining how and when hostilities end. Literature shows that Gulf states are deeply embedded in the current conflict trajectories in the Horn. And the negatives outweigh the positive. And this concerns Ethiopia. To withstand external pressure countries in the Horn are supposed to manage their affairs so that they put a concerted front. Far from coming together, countries in the Horn at the moment are war ridden.

External powers are not primarily present in the Horn with the aim of destabilizing the region. Interest ranging from strategic control to resource accumulation have been invoked in literature as well as responses from informants. The fact that super powers are engaged elsewhere in the remaking of international order gave way to less powerful yet impactful players with means to divide and play one against the other. One could observe that the Horn is also part of the restructuring process of global order. In this regard shifting alliances occur in the Horn as per dynamic interests of governments in the region and those willing to lend support. For instance, the Ethiopia Eritrea rapprochement saw a trilateral alliance forming which included Somalia.

The dynamics changed up on the agreement which ended active hostilities in Tigray. And those actors had/have different backers carrying varying interests at the same time. Literature reviewed in the second chapter also attest to this. We have seen that normalization of relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia at the beginning involved Saudi Arabia. And later in the cessation of hostilities the US was backing the TPLF.

External powers also act as spoilers in negotiation processes undertaken by IGAD, the AUC or other actors interested to curb violence. As indicated above parallel initiatives, one undermining the other occur. This doesn't simply reflect weakness of the conflicting parties themselves. It does also lead towards tremendous resources dispensed to acquire intended results. Therefore, the state of peace and security in the Horn is being compromised due to convergence security arenas notably between the Horn and the Middle East.

The researchers primary focus was the Horn and the involvement of external actors within this space. Discussions as well as literature demonstrated that examining the Horn also required at looking at the Red Sea as a strategic place. And actors on both sides of the Red Sea are concerned and involved in the space and affairs of the other. This is coupled with ongoing international conflicts of global scale where activities far away also feature in the politics and security of others.

One of the assumptions that the researcher advanced was that the situation in the Horn could be dealt with a revitalized if not resuscitated IGAD. With the exception of the informant from IGAD, naturally, others have shared doubts. Expecting IGAD to play the role it used to, let's say in Somalia, meant strong membership with an anchor state. And considering the transition in Ethiopia, that possibility rather seems bleak. However, the researcher is still adamant that with current affairs in the Horn and the Middle East Ethiopia and for that matter Somalia and Djibouti have no option but to get back to the drawing board. Middle Power interest and conduct in the

Horn would continue to be undesirous. Countries in the Horn have no option but to regroup to be heard. The Government of Ethiopia has to take the lead in this regard.

It would be imperative to see in what way those questions on maritime security in the red sea apply within the context of RSC and the Horn in a geo-political setup. In one way or another when we are talking about the geo-political dynamics of the Horn we are also talking about cooperation and/or insecurity among states in the Horn in the context of international politics, major developments near and far and most importantly the red sea. In light of Ethiopia's determination to move forward with the question of sea access officially any analysis has to bring in to consideration maritime security management in the red sea. Before Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's reign, though there were considerations and seemingly covert efforts in maritime security as well as sea access a more nuanced and anchor like behavior was opted for. But that approach did not seem to serve Ethiopia's interest and one could also say that there were miscalculations in assuming the big brother position in the Horn. one of the misleading factors could as well be western backing and accolade inappropriately placing Ethiopia as the "stable" big brother sacrificing strategic needs. The other and most pertinent miscalculation from the side of the EPRDF/TPLF (one we keep observing over and again) was that power is eternal. Even after the collapse of a regime after almost three decades, this paranoia of omnipresence lingers in the heads of TPLF old guard. The question of sea access was left for later and was only treated as a commercial not even economic question. As observed elsewhere, hegemons be them perfect or imperfect have to have their core national interests delineated and act for self-interest primarily. One credit that goes to TPLF goons might be acquiring a strategic pawn by a way of infrastructure development, the GERD. Apart from the nostalgic sermons, GERD could have emboldened Abiy Ahmed. So, everyone, including non-Ethiopians agree that raising and pursuing the question of sea access is paramount in the national security prism of Ethiopia. Ignoring the unpredictability of Abiy Ahmed, and how the media and opponents have portrayed him, it should be noted that he has invoked a timely and decisive question; which could also serve as a catalyst to current political as well as military problems in Ethiopia.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

The Horn has again reclaimed its infamous character for instability and conflict. Now more than ever changes within the region as well as global dynamism coupled with historical, structural, and political cleavages of the region have resulted in total chaos. There are active conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan involving state and non-state actors in the region with intense external powers implicated. The focus of this paper is to examine the current geopolitical dynamics in the Horn within the prism of security for a better outcome for all in the Horn.

The paper tried to look at situations in mainly Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan in terms of geopolitical standing employing a regional security complex approach as a frame. Literature consulted and informants interviewed have demonstrated that the security of those in the region is intertwined. And a conflict of whatever character affects one or more in the region. Indeed, there is interdependence in the region. The war in Ethiopia involved two or three states in the region directly.

The main concern of the researcher is to chart a better way out for Ethiopia out of the chaos the Horn is in. One of the hurdles discussed in the paper is the involvement of external powers. Mainly middle powers who have divergent interests in the region with all round capabilities to achieve what they seek. Notably Gulf actors, as they share the strategic Red Sea with the Horn,

have negatively impacted the peace and security of the region. Finance is the strong suit of the GCC. And unfettered financing capability led to proliferation of conflicts in the region. GCC actors also try and play a negotiator role. They either initiate peace talks between conflicting parties inline with their interest of derail a regional peace process, save the CoH between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Sudan at the moment is the textbook example of Gulf involvement in the Horn. Gulf heavy involvement in Sudan has become a precursor to a divided Sudan. Sudan is not only a showcase for direct Gulf involvement but Gulf proxies in the region taking sides as per GCC alignments with the Sudanese warring parties. Some in the region are deeply embedded to the extent that state military personnel are involved on one or the other side in Sudan. Had it not been to GCC direct involvement in Sudan, Horn countries with expressed or implicit interest in Sudan wouldn't have directly involved to this extent.

The paper also discussed the situation in Ethiopia post 2018. Change in Ethiopia euphoric at the start faced reality. Ethiopia hosted a major civil war in the North and is still plagued with insurrection. Peace with Eritrea was also short lived. And relations with other neighbors also soured as incertitude reigned in parallel with change of policy direction in Ethiopia. The question of sea access by a way of an MoU with Somali Land recently attracted unwanted attention from near and far. This move may have been better handled covert. However, it could be argued that the change in policy came in the right time. As the region and the world are being redefined and major international conflicts ensuing consequently, creating the narrative may have served the interest of Ethiopia. There are also arguments that vigorous approach for sea access is devised by the government to deflect internal instability. Nevertheless, introducing sea access internally has not swayed hearts. The government is adamant on reframing Ethiopia's geopolitical and geostrategic standing regionally and internationally. Though seemingly immature given internal instability, putting Ethiopia on its proper regional place is important.

It is clear that Ethiopia needs to restore stability by instituting overall reform that started after 2018. Economic reform is ongoing inline with international expectations is appraised by the government and partners as timely with positive outcomes. And the national dialogue platform is expected to deliver a political settlement where most could agree on. All in all, the reform process in Ethiopia is multi sectoral including the security apparatus and the civil service.

However, complaints from different parts of the society especially rising cost of life are rife. Similarly, claims that the national dialogue process is tainted with partiality are made by the opposition. But the government has no option but to continue with reform mending broken parts. The way out for Ethiopia is political settlement addressing issues that divide its society. Or else, capability to withstand external interference internally and regionally can't be fended. Of course, the government has the responsibility to muster the means of violence and restore order. It is in this regard that any sort of armed movement can't be entertained. As we speak, regional players such as Egypt and Eritrea are directly involved in political violence. GCC actors are also present in the political landscape directly or indirectly. GCC interests are fluid and even those considered friends could turn their backs at any given moment. This is why that getting affairs in order in house becomes paramount.

After dealing with internal issues comes the region. The Horn is infested with violence, inter and intra state. And Ethiopia is mainly concerned with the stability of the region as it is affected by spillover. Ethiopia is also a giant in terms of economy, demography, military might, and the like. To realize its potential, it has to bring together countries in the Horn for sustained prosperity. This is where a regional organization comes in to play. IGAD is one of the eight recognized RECs in the continent encompassing eight member states. Apparently, IGAD lacks qualities that could lead towards collective prosperity as well as security. Its ineptitude has led practitioners and scholars to search for a new organization better equipped to deal with malice in the region. Some have also forwarded the suggestion that Ethiopia should look in the EAC. However, the possibilities of creating a new organization consisting the same or tweaked membership are bleak. The Government of Ethiopia in its regional diplomatic work should look into bringing IGAD back to life. The diplomatic history of Ethiopia demonstrates that IGAD is instrumental in the conduct of regional as well as continental and international diplomacy. Ethiopia still has the tools necessary to reconstitute IGAD for its current foreign policy needs. And external infringement that taunts the Horn could only be effectively dealt with such a forum.

5.2 Recommendation

Ethiopia should prioritize strengthening its domestic political stability as the foundation for a coherent and effective foreign policy. The country needs to revitalize its leadership role within IGAD by promoting institutional reform, collective security frameworks, and coordinated

regional responses to conflicts. A balanced diplomatic approach toward global and Middle Eastern actors is essential to protect Ethiopia's sovereignty and avoid overdependence on any single external partner. Furthermore, Ethiopia should enhance maritime and Red Sea diplomacy through peaceful, cooperative agreements that ensure sustainable access to sea routes. Promoting regional integration, infrastructure connectivity, and trade among Horn countries will foster interdependence and reduce the likelihood of conflict. Finally, investing in national research and policy institutions dedicated to strategic studies will provide informed policy guidance and strengthen Ethiopia's capacity to navigate the evolving geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa.

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Appendix

List of informants

1. Selemon Abebe, IGAD, Senior Expert, 0911424962 – interviewed on 20 May 2025 at 10:30
2. Ambassador Meles Alem, Deputy Director General of African Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; meles.alem@mfa.gov.et- interviewed on 1 June 2025 at 11:30
3. Abel Demessie, Researcher, Chatham House; 0911870980- interviewed on 29 May at 11:00
4. Daniel Tenker, Director of Peace and Security, Office of the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the African Union; Daniel.tenker@mfa.gov.et- interviewed on 20 May 2025 at 14:00
5. Simon, Director of peace and Security, Peace, Security, and Political Affairs, African Union Commission; 0922330274 – interviewed on 25 May 2025 at 14:30

List of interview questions

1. What are the most pertinent geo-political milestones shaping current affairs in the Horn?
2. How is traditional power rivalry shaping up in the Horn?

3. Who are middle power actors engaged in the Horn? And what motivates them to engage heavily?
4. How does emerging geo-political dynamics in the Horn affect Ethiopia? And what plausible ways forward be conceived?