



## Dynamics of Ethio-Somalian Relations Post 2018: Key Influencing Factors

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the post-2018 Ethio-Somalian relationships and major factors behind its dynamics. Despite Ethiopia's adoption of an 'open door and optimistic' foreign policy towards its neighbours in 2018, its relations with Somalia continued to swing between cordial friendship and hostile confrontation due to a number of circumstances. The study is guided by neo-classical realism, which blends systemic and domestic factors. The study used qualitative approach in conjunction with descriptive and analytical research designs. Data were gathered through key informant interviews with seven ambassadors, diplomats, researchers, and academicians; Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives; and an in-depth investigation of published documents and sources. The data gathered from both primary and secondary sources was analyzed by a general inductive approach data analysis. According to the findings, the post-2018 Ethiopian government's policy of non-intervention, regional integration, as well as the bromance between the two leaders and strengthened socio-economic links infused new positive energy into friendly Ethio-Somalian ties. However, the growing bilateral ties were cut short by the change of government in Somalia and the ensuing actions taken by the new president. The relationships deteriorated further as Ethiopia, which had made access to the sea a top priority, began to take concrete measures to realize it, and signed a MoU with Somaliland. The MoU-related tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia exacerbated regional instability, as Somalia formed a military alliance with Egypt and Ethiopia expanded its security relationship with Somaliland. Additionally, it forced Ethiopia to reevaluate its policy of non-intervention in Somali domestic matters. This signifies that Ethiopian foreign policy towards the region and Somalia, the political transition in Somalia, Ethiopia's geographical vulnerability, the activities and policies of neighbouring countries towards Ethiopia, and the interest and influence of regional and global powers have all shaped the post-2018 Ethio-Somalian relationship dynamics. The study recommends that bilateral antagonism and looming cloud of conflict in the region should be resolved via bilateral negotiation in a way that protects Ethiopia's access to the sea and Somali territorial integrity.*

**Keywords:** Access to the Sea, Ethio-Somalian Relations, Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland

### I. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia and Somalia are two neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is the sub-region's heartland, physically located in the centre of the Horn of Africa. Regarding Ethiopia's anomaly in the region, Quinn and Akyol (2021, pp. 2-3) put forth a number of prepositions, such as:- it is assumed to be an old state and a country that was never colonized; it is a majority Christian nation that is bordered by near-majority or majority Muslim states, next to the Middle East; it has fought several interstate wars, and due to strong external threats it used to propagate the Uti possidetis [pre-independence borders or boundaries are inviolable or sacrosanct]; it was part of the proxy war between the two camps during the Cold War; and it has a potential to be a regional hegemon. Ethiopia shares its eastern border with the Republic of Somalia.

The republic of Somalia [established following the end of colonial rule by the merging of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland in 1960] is strategically important state in the region not only because of its long coastline along the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden, but also because it is strategically located to control access to the Red Sea, Bal-el-Mendeb, and the Suez Canal, which is a key global commercial waterway or the world's largest economic corridor.

The Ethio-Somalian relationship is organic, stemming from their shared culture, religion, borders, languages, social ideals, and interests. Even though formal bilateral contacts began after Somalia gained independence in 1960,



formal relations between Ethiopia and Somalia began in 1956, when Ethiopia established its Laisson Office in the nation (Belete, 2012, p. 460). Since then, the two countries' political relations and been fluctuating between peaceful co-existence and mutual enmity.

The process of modern Ethiopian formation, colonial legacies, global ideological splits during the Cold War era, regional alignments, nationalism, and domestic political and security issues all played important roles in shaping Ethio-Somalian bilateral relations. Economic and security cooperation, on the one hand, and mutual destabilization and proxy war, border skirmishes, conventional war, military and political interventionism, and alliance formation with each other's opponent states, on the other, defined bilateral ties.

In 2018, popular protests drove the ruling party to implement internal political reforms, resulting in Prime Minister Haile Mariam Dessalegn's resignation in February and the election of a new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, on April 2 (Van, 2018). Leaders play an essential role in formulating foreign policy, interpreting it, and carrying out their country's tasks and responsibilities within the international system. While some new leaders choose to retain the status quo, others shift their foreign policy focus based on personal visions, political ideologies, or strategic goals. Ethiopia's new leadership made a little shift in its approach to neighbouring countries and national goals. This had an impact on Ethiopia's relations with bordering countries in general, as well as Ethio-Somalian relations specifically.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's ascent to power sparked initial hope about regional peace and stability. His leadership positioned Ethiopia as a potential stabilising factor in the Horn of Africa. His government normalised the two-decade diplomatic standoff between Ethiopia and Eritrea [earning Abiy widespread praise, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019, and worked to arbitrate crises in neighbouring countries like as South Sudan and Sudan, as well as foster regional integration. These initiatives were consistent with Ethiopia's historical status as a major participant in African diplomacy. The fresh impetus coming from the region's heartland, Ethiopia, had an impact on Ethio-Somalian relations as well. The initially strong friendly bilateral contacts were interrupted short, and the dynamics between Ethiopia and Somalia in the years following 2018 continued to fluctuate between cordial partnerships and antagonistic relationships. Despite this, there is no academic literature written to figure out the post-2018 Ethiopian government's foreign policy towards Somalia, the dynamics of the post-2018 Ethio-Somalian relationships, and internal and external factors shaping the process of the post-2018 Ethio-Somalian relationships. This motivates the researcher to conduct this study in order to fill the existing gaps by critically examining Ethiopia's post-2018 foreign policy, dynamics of Ethio-Somalian bilateral relations, and the factors driving Ethio-Somalian relationships between cordial partnerships and mutual antagonism.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To assess the trends of the post-2018 Ethio-Somalian bilateral relationships
- ii. To explore major internal and external factors that has been shaping the post-2018 Ethio-Somalian relationships dynamics.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism (Post-neorealism theory), which was coined by Gideon Rose in his work '*Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign policy*' of 1998, is a theory that relied on the assumption that the systemic account of world politics provided by neo-realism/ structural realism is incomplete, and it needs to be supplemented with better accounts of unit-level variables such as how power is perceived and how leadership is exercised (Zakaria, 1998). Accordingly, it tried to build a bridge between international structural factors and unit-level factors, such as the perception of state leaders, state-society relationships, and the motivation of the states. Walt also indicated that neoclassical realism places "domestic politics as an intervening variable [like leaders or how they perceive the international distribution of power, given that there is no objective, independent reading of the distribution of power] between the distribution of power and foreign policy behavior" (Walt, 2002, p. 211).

Neoclassical realism defines foreign policy analysis as systemic, internal, and individual. Neo-classical realism examines foreign policy by focusing on the relative strength of states in the international system as an independent variable; the structure of states and perceptions of decision-makers as mediating variables; and the behaviour of states in the international system as the dependent variable (Firoozabadi & Mojtaba, 2016). As a result, it provides a causal chain with three phases: independent variable (states' relative strength in an anarchical international system), mediating variable (transmitting factor that filters systemic forces), and dependent variable (the outcomes of foreign policy). This, on the other hand, indicates that relative power distribution among states (polarity), how states understand and interpret the international environment, and the intentions of other states or threats (perception and misperception), state structures

and institutions, political parties, elites, and leaders' interests or idiosyncrasies can all have an impact on foreign policy or state behaviour.

A sovereign state's foreign policy is impacted by both internal and external influences. According to Neo-Classical realists, these factors include systemic pressure (anarchy, security dilemma, polarity, relative power distributions), state-level factors (national interest, domestic politics, states' identity, national capability), and individual leaders' idiosyncrasies or beliefs [leaders' background, history, and profession] (Firoozabadi & Mojtaba, 2016). The complex interaction of the aforementioned factors dictates the substance and direction of a certain state's foreign policy decisions.

Neoclassical realists regard humans and states as selfish actors who prioritise their own interests, benefits, and survival. This rationalist understanding of states mostly influences state actions. Furthermore, power allocation among states (polarity) and the anarchic structure of the international system can foster a sense of competitiveness and insecurity (Rose, 1998). Domestic elements such as the political system, domestic institutions, and leadership can all have an impact on how a state perceives its own security and the actions of its neighbors. Relative power, which occurs when a neighboring country has a considerable growth in power or influence, can provoke sentiments of jealousy and a desire to balance the perceived threat.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study is designed to employ a qualitative research method, approach in conjunction with descriptive and analytical research designs. With regard to the source of data, the study draws on both primary and secondary sources. From *primary sources of data*, the semi-structured interview has been used. Pursuant to this, the data are collected from purposively and carefully selected respondents of key informants from Ambassadors, diplomats, researchers and experts. The informants include five active ambassadors or diplomats, and one academician and foreign affairs analyst. From these, four are Ethiopian representatives in Somalia, Puntland, Somaliland, and Djibouti and the remaining one is from officials and diplomats representing Somaliland in Ethiopia. The sixth one is a senior researcher at Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs, while the seventh is a high-ranking Ethiopian academics, researcher and foreign affairs expert who have written a variety of documents/papers on international relations, the horn politics, and foreign policy.

With regard to the *secondary sources*, materials such as books, journal articles, published and unpublished data collected from the archives of different institutions [mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], media reports, electronic sources, official documents, research papers, newspapers, magazines, reports, web sources, and others; and an in-depth analysis of respected scholarly works or documents have been used.

The study has employed the qualitative technique of data analysis. Accordingly, a *general inductive approach data analysis* and *thematic analysis* methods were adopted for this article. In these approaches, the process of analysis began with gathering (raw) data and subsequently organizing and preparing data for analysis. Then, reading through all data, and segmenting, categorizing (coding) data in order to interrelate themes/issues were followed. Finally, the analysis was concluded by interpreting the meaning of the interrelated themes/issue or deriving meanings from the information (Creswell, 2009).

As far as the theory is concerned, from among prominent international relations theories that deal with foreign policy, neoclassical realism or post-neorealism, which emphasizes that inter-states bilateral relationships is influenced not just by structural elements (the international system and power distribution), but also by internal variables (domestic politics, national interest, leadership perceptions, and state capabilities) is adopted.

### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 An Overview of Ethio-Somalian Relationships Dynamics from 1960-2018

As previously stated, Ethio-Somalian formal diplomatic relations began in 1960, when the Republic of Somalia was created from the confederation of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Despite various organic factors that could bind the two countries together, the colonizers invented Somalia's agenda of creating a "Greater Somalia" by taking territories forcibly from neighbouring countries, including Ethiopia, has been at the heart of their tense relations. The origins of 'the Greater Somalia project' can be traced back to British colonial governance (Belete, 2024). Douglas Dodds-Parker (1909-2006), a British imperial administrator who had previously served in Sudan [and joined General Wingate's Anglo-Ethiopian campaign to free Ethiopia in 1941], was the mastermind behind the Greater Somalian project. Ernest Bevin, a British Foreign Secretary (1945-1951) [who was instrumental in shaping Britain's postwar foreign policy], strongly supported this agenda, which aimed to create a united Somali nation made up of Somali-speaking peoples from French Somaliland (Current Djibouti), Northern Kenya, the Ethiopian Ogaden region, British Somaliland, and Italian Somaliland. The rationale behind Britain's project is that a newly born Somali country that gains

independence will remain within the framework of the British Commonwealth, allowing it to keep East Africa, the Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea area under British Commonwealth influence by connecting Greater Somalia with Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania (Interview with the Horn of African geopolitical Affairs Analyst, and Researcher, 2023). This ideology of "Pan Somalism" or "Pan Somali nationalism" became more popular among politicians, resulting in the destructive war with Ethiopia in 1977-78. From 1960-1991 border conflict, war, mutual suspicion, and mutual destabilization had characterized these countries bilateral relationships (Interview with Befkadu, Researcher at Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

In 1991, the two countries' governments changed as Mogadishu-sponsored rebel group took control in Ethiopia and Ethiopian-sponsored rebel forces deposed the Somali government. Both governments contributed significantly to the destruction and removal of one another from power by supporting anti-government forces battling both governments.

Their difference was that Ethiopia established a stable government by forming a transitional government, whereas Somalia entered a new chapter of civil war between rebel groups, following the pre-1991 conflict between the central government and rebel groups. Due to their dissolution, the armed groups in Somalia were unable to establish central governments. Northern Somalia [Somaliland] seceded and declared itself an independent state, while Southern Somalia devolved into anarchy. External forces such as extremist Islamist groups mushroomed in the country, and clan warriors, militants, and warlords were all involved in the conflict (Interview with Mukhtar, Ethiopian Ambassador to the Republic of Somalia, 2024). The battle emerged multifaceted, with ethnic groupings battling ethnic groups, clan militias fighting clan militias, warlords attacking peacekeeping operations, and clan militias fighting warlords. The infrastructure was devastated, famine occurred, lawlessness ensued, and it became a theatre of agony, typifying a failed state.

The post-1991 Ethio-Somalian political relations had no meaningful episodes at inter- governmental level until 2006; when Somalia re-opened its Embassy in Addis Ababa. Seyoum Mesfin, Ethiopia's foreign minister, also reopened the Ethiopian Embassy in Somalia in 2007 (Interview with Mukhtar, Ethiopian Ambassador to the Republic of Somalia, 2024). The main reason behind the non-existence of formal diplomatic relationships before 2006 was the collapse of Somalia in 1991. The central government lost presence in a substantial portion of the territory of the state and failed to exercise power over the country following the removal of the dictator, Said Barre (r.1969-1991), from power by rival clan militias in 1991. Since then, as previously said, perpetual civil conflict, statelessness, starvation, piracy, terrorism and violent extremism, kidnapping, and displacement have remained the defining features of Somalia (Mehari, 2017).

To curb the post-1991 security threat from Somalia, Ethiopia has been positively working *internally* by answering nationality questions via granting Ogaden the status of a semi-autonomous regional state, and *externally* fighting extremists and terrorists in the state, and helping efforts focused on re-building effective central government in Somalia.

The 1991 collapse of Somalia and Ethiopia's internal political rearrangement changed the politics of the Ogaden officially recognizing Somalis in Ethiopia as one of the nations, nationalities, and peoples of the country. Hagmann and Mohamud (2005) argued that despite various continuities in Ogaden politics like weak state institutions in the region, the central government's exerting direct control over the region, and armed resistance against the central government via Ogaden National Liberation Front(ONLF), the formation of the Regional State of Somalia in 1991 had played a huge role in mediating stereotypical or political consideration of Somali and Ethiopia as an opposite in terms of language (Cushitic vs. Semitic), economy (pastoralists vs. settled cultivators), religion (Muslim vs. Christian), politics (egalitarian kinship vs. hierarchical feudalism). Doing so, the government took the first post-1991 internal measure to deter a threat from the failed Somalia. Allowing the blossoming of a new –'Ethiopian-Somali' or 'Somali-Ethiopian'- identity has also helped a lot in domestic politics in attracting the Ogaden (Somali of Ethiopia), which has been included as one of those five areas needed to accomplish the project of 'the Greater Somalia', to Ethiopia in a permanent manner(Interview with Saeed, Ethiopian Ambassador to Somaliland (Hargeisa). The measure played a significant part in preventing people from being open to Islamic extremism making their identity more closely tied to their ethnic relatives than to religious characteristics, like Ethiopia's relatively sizable Muslim community.

From the two interdependent *external* measures, the bold one has been fighting extremists and terrorists in Somalia. Ethiopia perceived the extremists in Somalia as a national security threat looking at their policy and the subsequent different terrorist attacks in Ethiopian territory, including hotel bombings, assassination attempts, and others. The second *external* measure has been helping efforts focused on rebuilding an effective central government in Somalia. A sense of gratitude for Somalia's support during the pre-1991 armed conflict was ingrained in Ethiopian authorities during the 1990s, motivating them to give the peace-building endeavor in Somalia the serious consideration it deserves (Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation, 2017). As previously noted, the Somali government is a major supporter of the rebel factions that took control in Addis Abeba in 1991. Prior to 1991, they had an excellent connection. A former senior Somali government official told Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) that the leader of the new government, Meles knew Somalia very well, as he lived in Mogadishu when he was a

liberation leader in the 1980s. Meles and Eritrean leader Isayas Afewerki "lived together in a villa behind Tawfiq Hotel, north Mogadishu, and were handled by the National Security Service, provided with travel documents and Somali passports, trained and given a Tigrayan radio frequency" (The New Humanitarian, 2001, p. 2). This prompted the 1991 government to develop sympathy for the Republic of Somalia.

After several Somalia national reconciliation conferences, the first Transitional Federal Government (hereinafter TFG) was established on the 14<sup>th</sup> attempt at the Eldoret conference in Kenya in 2004 (Interview with a Horn of African geopolitical Affairs Analyst and Researcher, 2023). The birth of TFG after two years of the peace negotiation process by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has played a crucial role in the process to end statelessness and civil war by forming an overarching strong centralized federal government in the country. Ethiopia has played a major role in this very intensive negotiation process, with the assumption that Yusuf will abandon Somalia's claim to Ethiopia's Ogaden area (Solomon, 2009). Afterward, Ethiopia relentlessly helped the TFG, which initially was functioning from Nairobi and later moved to Baidoa, South Western Somalia, in 2006 (Interview with a Horn of African geopolitical Affairs Analyst and Researcher, 2023).

Islamic fundamentalism has continued to pose a significant threat to Ethiopia's national security and territorial integrity by exploiting the power and security vacuum created in Somalia. Terrorist attacks were carried out by Al Ittihad al-Islamyia in Dire Dawa and Jigjiga. This organisation, based in Somalia, assassinated Ethiopia's minister of transportation, Dr. Abdulmajid Hussein, in his office (Interview with Mukhtar, Ethiopian Ambassador to the Republic of Somalia, 2024). After taking control of Mogadishu, the hardline UIC [headed by Hassan Dahir Aweys] has done everything it can to push Ethiopia to war with itself, despite its professed goal of establishing peace and enforcing Islamic law in Somalia. It has forged close links with different groups opposing the Ethiopian government; made irredentist claims against the Ogaden; and established close alliances with Eritrea. UIC contains the combination of two groups-*the nationalists* who demand 1/5 of Ethiopian territory [all of the current Somalia regional state of Ethiopia and the larger part of Oromia] and the *fundamentalist terrorists* containing those who trained in Afghanistan]. Furthermore, ICU declared jihad against Ethiopia (Interview with Mukhtar, Ethiopian Ambassador to the Republic of Somalia, 2024).

Finally, in the late 2006, the Ethiopian parliament gave the government the green light to take any measures against the extremist ICU (Zeray, 2007, p. 667); and in the meantime, TFG formally requested Ethiopia to enter Somalia and help it to reaffirm its hold in the capital (Alebachew, 2017). Thus, with the grounds of self-defence, combating terrorism, and the call of the legitimate TFG government, Ethiopian troops entered Somalia in September 2006. It successfully defeated the ICU and expelled it from Mogadishu within a few weeks. In January 2007, the TFG, led by Abdullahi Yusuf, entered Mogadishu from its headquarters in Baidoa (Interview with Mukhtar, Ethiopian Ambassador to the Republic of Somalia, 2024).

Additionally, Ethiopia played a huge role in the 2012 Somalia adoption of the first federal constitution, which brought an end to TFG and the birth of the Federal Government of Somalia (hereinafter FGS). August 2012 marked the official transfer of Somalia from a transitional to a formal government. The centralized Federal Government took the place of the TFG, which had been first created in 2004. Between 1969 and 2024, one-man-one-vote was unthinkable due to the country's dictatorial political system (until 1991) and civil war (after 1991). Until August 2024, when its cabinets accept universal suffrage and let the people to elect their leaders, citizens vote indirectly through clan delegates, leaders, and elders (Reuters, 2024). Thus, the government was initially constituted using the 4.5 formula without an election because the civil war was ongoing and a nationwide poll was not conceivable.

Until its troops joined the peacekeeping forces of African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) in January 2014, Ethiopia had worked closely with the Somali government in strengthening its security sector via the provision of training for the police as well as defense forces. In the huge move during PM Hailemariam Dessalegn, 4000 Ethiopian peacekeeping forces joined the AMISOM in combating extremism and terrorism. For Ethiopia, the involvement has reduced the military and financial burdens by easing logistic expenses in the border area operations. Above all, the deployment of Ethiopian forces played a huge role in strengthening AMISOM's peacekeeping force (Harald & Berouk, 2018).

Later on, the objective of AMISOM shifted from engaging in an active fight to dislodging the extremists from different towns to putting pressure on the terrorist Al Shabab group and letting the FGS commence the process of building strong government institutions in January 2015. Since then, in executing its responsibility under AMISOM in sector 3, facilitating the 2017 parliament election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed [a.k.a. Farmajo] and providing all types of assistance to the FGS for the sake of making it stand with its two legs and bear all sorts of state responsibility independently. The third zone (sector) contains Ethiopia's rigorous security line (buffer zone), which extends from Beldwein to Baidoa. It serves as Ethiopia's defence zone against attacks by Somali extremist and terrorist forces. This fence prevented terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab from attacking Ethiopia's border region (Belete, 2024). Ethiopia continued to play an important role as a crucial actor until Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed assumed office in mid-2018.

## 4.2 The Post-2018 Ethio- Somalian Political Relations

In mid-2018, political reform inside Ethiopia's dominant ruling party resulted in a change of leadership, with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed taking office. Following Premier Abiy's ascension to office and the subsequent internal political reform in the country, efforts and work have been undertaken to improve bilateral relations with all surrounding countries, including the Republic of Somalia. The new foreign policy devotes special attention to neighbouring countries (The 2019 Ethiopian Foreign Policy Document, 2019, p. 29). The new policy also avoided labelling neighbors as enemies or allies, as well as us-versus-them and allies-versus-foes orientations. The policy revised the previous premise, which reduced the importance of neighboring states to security issues and sees neighbors from security perspectives, and it emphasized their economic and security importance. In general, themes such as 'the horn first', 'inside out approach', 'partner diversification', 'regional integration', 'non-intervention', and 'access to the sea' have emerged as essential elements of the post-2018 government's foreign policy.

The new leadership's foreign policy reorientation has had a significant impact on the political interactions between Ethiopia and Somalia. The significant increase in the working and official visits of heads of states and high-level officials to their respective capita cities has played a significant influence in the two nations' significantly changing and growing economic, security, and people-to-people interactions.

### 4.2.1 Factors behind the Strengthening of Ethio-Somalian Relationships

The post-2018 Ethiopian-Somalian relationship was strengthened by different factors like as the actual application of the foreign policy ideals of non-intervention, trilateralism and regional integration, and expanding socio-economic ties.

#### 4.2.1.1 Non-Intervention in the Ethiopian Somalia Region and the Republic of Somalia

The new leadership established non-intervention as a major component of both domestic and foreign policy. This is to allow Ethiopian federal semi-autonomous member states to exercise their legal power without the intervention of the Ethiopian federal government, as well as to avoid interfering with the internal affairs of neighbouring sovereign states. Accordingly, in contrast to previous Federal government leaderships, the new leaderships implemented the principle of non-intervention in regional state matters, particularly in leadership appointment and policymaking. Like the 1991 self-ruling right granted to Ethiopia's Somalia regional states with the capacity to promote its culture and identity, the new leadership's policy of allowing the region to genuinely manage itself pleased not just Somalis in Ethiopia, but also people in the Republic of Somalia (Interview with Saeed, Ethiopian Ambassador to Somaliland (Hargeisa), 2024). Making Ethiopian Somali speakers feel comfortable, as well as making the republic of Somalia's nationalists lose their instigating reasons, the new strategy has played a significant part in boosting the two countries' friendly relations.

The new government ended the pre-2018 political and military intervention in Somalia's domestic politics and relations with regional governments and tribes. It focused on intra-governmental interactions with Somalia's federal administration (Interview with Saeed, Ethiopian Ambassador to Somaliland (Hargeisa), 2024). This stance of the new administration led to the termination of formal bilateral relations with the *de facto* state of Somaliland, which had been operating autonomously for more than thirty years and had strong relations with Ethiopia before to 2018. Additionally, it initiated the process of reunifying Somaliland with the Somalia Republic. Despite some intellectuals' belief that Somaliland had served as a security buffer zone for Ethiopia for three decades, during which time Ethiopia experienced no terrorist attacks and Ethiopia had good relations with it, the federal government arranged conferences three to four times to bring the two leaders of Somalia and Somaliland together to resolve their differences (Interview with an official of Somaliland Embassy in Ethiopia, 2024).

On June 16, 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed paid a historic official visit to Moqadishu, Somalia. Following Premier Meles Zenaw's visit to Somalia in 2007, this second visit by an Ethiopian leader was enthusiastically received by his Somali counterpart President Mohamed Abdullahi. The two leaders discussed bilateral and regional concerns in general, as well as the major means for revitalizing their economic, social, security, and political connections in particular. *'I am not here to laminate the past, but to build a new chapter, a new cooperation, a new vision....'* said the prime minister in a statement from Somalia's Presidential Palace (Muhumed, 2018, p. 4). During his visit, he also revealed his vision of a single market, based on the principle of respecting the sovereignty of one another. *"There is no better positioned country that benefits from stable Somalia than Ethiopia,"* President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo added (The Somalia Star, 2018).

Finally, they released a joint Communiqué outlining their extensive cooperation and relations. Several issues have been raised in the 16-article Communiqué, including the formation of a Joint Cooperation Commission (JCC) at the Ministerial Level to promote trade and diplomatic activities (Art. 4), joint investment in four key sea ports between the two countries, and the construction of the main road networks and roads that would connect Somalia to Ethiopia

(Art. 7), and cooperating to counter terrorism and deal with cross-border security challenges (Art. 9), and mutual regard for both nations' sovereignty, geographical integrity, political independence, and unity (Art.11) (Somtribune, 2018) When Prime Minister Abiy addressed the Ethiopian Parliament on the key points of the agreed-upon statement, he mentioned the potential of future political unification of the two states under one leadership, rather than a contract to invest in four Somali ports.

#### **4.2.1.2 Trilateralism among Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia and the two Leaders Bromance**

The main regional foreign policy of the new Ethiopian leadership was realizing regional integration. In 2018, Ethiopia's new government responded to critical demands from Eritrea and the Republic of Somalia. It accepted as well as pledged to implement the Algiers Agreement without any preconditions with regard to Eritrea, and it promised not to interfere in Somalia's domestic affairs. The favourable climate among the three resulted in the formation of a new trilateralism, which has been described as a high-speed or mini-IGAD in the region. In September 2018, Premier Abiy of Ethiopia, President Isias of Eritrea and President Abdullahi of Somalia conducted tripartite summit in Asmara, Eritrea. Finally, the three issued a joint declaration with four points: to foster cooperation that advances their people's goals, to strengthen economic, political, security, and social ties, to maintain sub regional peace and security, and to establish a Joint High Level Committee to coordinate their efforts within the framework of this Joint Declaration (Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation Between Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea, 2018).

Accordingly, on September 5, 2018, Prime Minister Abiy and President Abdullahi Mohamed met for the second time in Asmara, Eritrea. Where they had the first tripartite summit, along with Eritrean President Isaias, the three leaders resolved to strengthen their economic, security, social, and political ties. President Mohamed Abdullaahi undertook his first official visit to Ethiopia after Premier Abiy's ascension to office on November 8, 2018. This working tour was to join Ethiopian and Eritrean leaders for the trio's second tripartite conference at Bahr Dar, Ethiopia. The subject of the November 2009 Summit was Somalia. The leaders at this summit emphasized the necessity of maintaining Somalia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence, as well as their unwavering support for the Somali people and the federal government of Somalia and all of its institutions (Addis Standard, 2018).

On March 5, 2019, Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi /Farmaajo/ arrived in Addis Abeba for a one-day working visit. According to the Prime Minister's office, President Fermaajo and Premier Abiy discussed strengthening regional stability per their previous agreements, mechanisms to ensure Kenya-Somalia relations are reinforced, joint port infrastructure development, and ensuring that Somali and Somaliland relationships are handled in a way that supports regional peace (Addis Standard, 2019). Following an in-depth discussion of the four agenda items listed above, both presidents flew to Nairobi, Kenya, to discuss the diplomatic schism between Kenya and Somalia, with Dr. Abiy acting as a peace broker. The two countries have previously recalled their respective envoys and are in a diplomatic feud, owing mostly to a disagreement over control of an offshore oil-rich territory in the Indian Ocean, which they later took to the International Court of Justice of the United Nations. With the assistance of Dr. Abiy, the two countries discussed the disagreement that arose as a result of Kenya's accusation of Somalia for offering to sell four offshore oil blocks located in the disputed area to European companies, and both agreed to work together towards peace and to take measures to deescalate tensions.

Both leaders met in Asmara on January 10, 2020, for the third tripartite summit, where Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia suggested the formation of a new strong bloc, the Horn of African Cooperation. The strong cooperation between the two governments was also put to the test when the relationships between the Jubaland region and the federal government of Somalia failed and both were confronted militarily in March 2020. Premier Abiy demonstrated his close friendship by sending Ethiopian forces to support the Somalian National military forces, which eventually captured the bothersome fugitive politician, Abdirashid Hassan Abdinur (Roba & Selam, 2021, p. 10).

Premier Abiy and President Fermaajo's fraternal friendship remained intact even during the Tigray Conflict erupted in November 2020. During the battle, the Republic of Somalia strongly supports the Federal Government. Various organizations, including the UN, have accused Somalian soldiers of siding with the Eritrean army and Ethiopian national troops. According to the UN assessment, Somali fighters trained in Eritrean facilities at the time fought alongside the Eritrean army while donning Eritrean military uniform. Despite the government of Somalia's denial of involvement in the conflict, hundreds of Somalian youth families who claimed their children were recruited and brought to the Tigray conflict as mercenaries protested Fermaajo's government and demanded their children's return (Africanews, 2021).

The date of June 21, 2021 was regarded as a watershed moment in the two countries' bilateral relationship. On this day, the leaders of the two countries agreed to engage in a barter trade in which Somalia exports fish to Ethiopia in exchange for Chat/Khat (Ethiopian News Agency, 2023). While the Tigray conflict raged on, President Abdullahi Farmaajo attended the launch of Ethiopia's new government on November 4, 2021.

Even after the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (hereafter ATMIS) replaced AMISOM to assist long-term peace, security, and stability in Somalia, the Ethiopian military and state forces continue to play an important role in

combating Al-Shabaab in Somalia. ATMIS is to continue to function until Somali forces are competent of handling their own security. Since then, "*Ethiopian troops are covering 60 percent of Somalia*," according to Field Marshal Birhanu Jula, chief of staff for the Ethiopian National Defence Force. He continued: "*If we were to withdraw, the Somali government would not sustain*" (Ashenafi, 2024). As a result, Ethiopia continued to make significant contributions to the country's peace and stability while making significant sacrifices.

#### 4.2.1.3 Strengthening Socio-Economic Ties

As far as people-to-people relationships is concerned, all of Somalia's clans are in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has 34 Somali clans, ranking first in the region. Only 15/16 of them may be located in the Republic of Somalia (Interview with Saeed, Ethiopian Ambassador to Somaliland (Hargeisa), 2024). Their Ugazes [religious and clan leader] are likewise headquartered in Ethiopia. They speak the same language as Ethiopian Somalis. Somalia's regional state adopted an alphabet that was previously used in Mogadishu. Not only are Somalis present in Ethiopia, but so are Ethiopian clans. Somalia contains Ethiopian Oromo clans. For example, the Ajuran or Ajuuraan clan, which belongs to the Oromos Arsi clan, can be found in Somalia. They have been entirely adopted into Somalia. They reside together in the South Western state of Somalia. The Digil Mirifle (Rahanweyn) clan, which speaks Mai-Mai or Af-Maay and is recognised for its distinctive dialect, is thought to have migrated from Harar and Bale. They are heavily oppressed clans that frequently flee to Ethiopia when things goes wrong (Interview with Mukhtar, Ethiopian Ambassador to the Republic of Somalia, 2024). Impressive works has been done to interconnect peoples around the border.

As far the economic relationships is concerned, Ethiopia sent \$265 million products to Somalia in 2022. Ethiopia's top exports to Somalia were potatoes (\$17.1M), cassava (\$36.3M), and other vegetables (\$187M). Ethiopia's exports to Somalia have grown at a 100% annualised pace over the last five years, from \$8.28 million in 2017 to \$265 million in 2022 (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2022, p. 1). Even though security is Ethiopia's top priority when it comes to the Horn of Africa as a whole and the Republic of Somalia in particular, this policy needs to be re-considered because Somalia is one of the top two nations thought to be the source of Ethiopia's hard money, with transactions totaling over 750 million dollars (Interview with Saeed, Ethiopian Ambassador to Somaliland (Hargeisa), 2024). The Ethio-Somali economic relationship has grown by 40.8 percent over the last 20 years, and the country is currently the leading importer of Ethiopian products. The two countries' trade exchange is now worth more than 380 million dollars, with Ethiopia benefiting the most. The government is trying to capitalize on it (MoFA 2024, p. 290). Ethiopia has made financial and human sacrifices to support Somalia's failed state. Ethiopia has offered military, policy, educational, civil aviation, and information communication support to Somalia over the previous two decades to help stabilize the country. It has made significant sacrifices alongside other bordering countries, the IGADD, and the AU. During its tenure as IGAD chairman from 2008 to 2019, Ethiopia made significant efforts to counteract al-Shabaab's terrorist presence in the region. It is hardly an exaggeration to argue that today's transitional government in Somalia, as well as its regional governments, are being constructed and operating on Ethiopian blood and donations (Aklilu, 2024, p.129). Since Somalia's leadership changed and Ethiopia placed a greater focus on access to the sea policy, the once-burgeoning post-2018 Ethiopia-Somalian ties have begun to erode.

#### 4.2.2 Factors for Deterioration of Ethio-Somalian Relationships

Due to several internal and external factors, the thriving Ethiopian-Somali connections that bloomed after 2018 were cut short and began to enter another chapter of mutual suspicion and enmity.

##### 4.2.2.1 Political Change in Somalia

The change of leadership dramatically changed the Ethio-Somalian relationships. However, both tried to resume the superficial bilateral relationships. On May 15, 2022, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected President, succeeding Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, Premier Abiy's ally (Roba & Selam, 2021). The Ethiopian Premier, together with his delegation, travelled to Mogadishu to witness the inaugural ceremony of Somalia's new President on June 9, 2022, where both committed to collaborate on bilateral and regional issues.

However, the connections did not remain amicable because the new government knew Ethiopia was pro-Farmaajo during the election. Ethiopia supported the previous president primarily to preserve the tripartite agreement between Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. That is why Ethiopia supported Farmajo's unsuccessful attempt to illegally extend his authority, which enraged both the federal regions and the power competitor. Thus, the new leadership of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud first leaned towards Ethiopia's biggest adversary, Egypt. Bypassing Ethiopia during his first official visit [which encompassed Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Egypt, the UAE, and Turkey in May, June, and July] the new president paid a visit to Egypt and held a joint press conference with Egyptian President in June 2022 (Peace Research Facility, 2022). Regarding the Nile and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi hinted that Egypt and Somalia agreed on the GERD issue, indicating the implicit endorsement of Somali President Hasan Sheikh of the idea that implementing unilateral policies on the international river is extremely

dangerous. Ethiopia was incensed by this, which prompted the Somali government to later declare its neutrality on the Nile dispute in a statement. Early in September, there was evidence of increased coordination between the intelligence services of Egypt and Somalia. Cairo provide training to members of the Somali National Intelligence and Security Services. Egypt also supplies the various security services of the Somali state with arms, technology, and air support. The diplomatic fracture exacerbated when the state media, Ethiopian Broadcasting Cooperation, had reported that the new Somali government is a supporter of the TPLF in the Tigray war fought between the federal government and the TPLF, even though the Ethiopian government later said that it does not represent the views of the government. The allegation was from the fact that Hasan Sheikh was promptly welcomed by the TPLF, the group fighting against the Federal government in the north, because the two had close ties while the new president served as president from 2012 to 2017 while the TPLF dominated Ethiopian politics. Furthermore, President Hassan Sheikh appointed three people to the top positions against Ethiopia's best interests.

Furthermore, President Hassan Sheikh appointed three people to the top positions against Ethiopia's best interests. Mukhtar Roobow Mansuur, the former Alshabab commander and military group's deputy to the new government cabinet, Mahad Salad, Egypt's close ally to the director of the National Intelligence and Security Agency, and Hussein Sheikh Moalim, the TPLF sympathiser to the National Security Advisor (Peace Research Faculty, 2022). Premier Abiy's proposal for removal or replacement of these officials was refused by the government of Somalia. Finally, reversing former President Mohamed Farmaajo's decision to ban Kenyan chat (Khat) and allow the importation of Chat (Khat) from Ethiopia, the new president permitted Kenyan chat to be reintroduced into the Somali market (Interview with Ethiopian Diplomat to Somalia (Puntland), 2024)

These steps compelled Ethiopia to seek ways to prevent the Somali administration from taking anti-Ethiopian measures. It was decided to temporarily reconsider its non-interventionist policy towards Somalia in order to exert pressure on the Mogadishu government. Ethiopia began to use interventionism to respond to the new president's acts. Ethiopia established direct contact with semi-autonomous Somali areas. Ethiopia's group was formed by Abdiiaziz Lafta-Gareen, the president of the Southwestern region, who met Mustafe Muhumed Omer, the president of Ethiopia's Somali regional state, in Jigjiga city and held a secret meeting with Ethiopian military intelligence and Puntland's president, Said Abdullahi Deni (Ingiriis, 2022). This 'dual-track policy' of treating the centre and the periphery equally prompted the Mogadishu government to reconsider its policy towards Ethiopia.

Recognized that taking this course would have an impact on both governments since they are heavily dependent on one another in terms of security and the economy, and actions were taken to reverse the trend and start building harmonious relations. In the midst of war in Tigray, the newly elected President of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, conducted his first official visit to Ethiopia on September 28, 2022. Along with their representatives, the two leaders raised and discussed a variety of bilateral and regional matters. On the discussion where the two governments called on the UN Security Council to lift the 30-year-old arms embargo imposed on Somalia so that the country can equip itself and shoulder its security responsibilities independently (Tesfa-Alem, 2022). Besides, agreements have been achieved on minimizing unwanted foreign influences, working together to eradicate their mutual security threat, terrorism, and cooperatively doubling efforts to solve climate-related problems like as drought. Furthermore, both parties agreed that Ethiopia's help in strengthening the capacity of the Somali Federal Government through training and scholarships for civil employees and security personnel should continue (Tesfa-Alem, 2022).

To woo the new leader, Ethiopia hosted traditional leaders, religious experts, and members from major sectors of the Dhulbahante clan [who want to secede from Somaliland to join the Republic of Somalia] in Jigjiga [the capital of Ethiopia's Somali-speaking regional state] from December 10 to 15, 2022. The group was from the Somaliland regions of Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (hereinafter SSC). The Dhulbahante clan region, also known as the Khatumo [with their capital in Lasanod], has been under Somaliland's administration since 2007, when the Hargeisa government took it from Puntland. Khatumo, an area located between Puntland and Somaliland, was claimed by both, who invoked clan loyalties and colonial boundaries to buttress their positions. This clan has accused the Somaliland authorities of ethnic marginalisation, demanding greater autonomy and regional statehood (Hassan, 2022). They described the preceding fifteen years in Somaliland as a repressive period in which one clan (the Isaaq Clan) dominated and reigned while their tribe was marginalised. The Dhulbahante announced their want to join Somalia rather than continue to be governed by Somaliland (International Crisis Group, 2023). During the conference, they concluded that using force is now the only way to end the occupation. This eventually led to the Lasanod armed confrontation in February 2023 between the Somaliland National Army and local Dhulbahante clan militia forces, also known as SSC forces (International Crisis Group, 2023). Despite Ethiopia's efforts to genuinely normalise bilateral relations, the ostensibly friendly appearances never stopped the two countries' severely divided and deteriorating relationships.

#### **4.2.2.2 The Ethio-Somaliland MoU and External powers Influence**

Ethiopian foreign policy approach with regards to the port from 1991 to 2018 had been a policy of diversifying choices, and strengthening the Ethiopian economy so that neighboring countries compete with each other to make



Ethiopia utilize their port. After 2018, however, the issue received more attention and a policy of having access to the sea or possessing a port that Ethiopia can administer adopted (Interview with Birhanu, Ethiopian Ambassador to Djibouti, 2024)

Accordingly, referring to Ethiopia's population tsunami as well as historical, geographical, economic, and ethnic claims, including Ethiopia's legitimate need for access to the sea, Prime Minister Abiy requested that the unofficial bloc containing Ethiopia [by neighbouring countries] be disbanded and that neighbouring countries assist the state in its existential question of sea-access. In the 'Red Sea speech' in October 2023, Prime Minister Abiy described restoring sea access as an existential issue for the growing Ethiopia and expressed Ethiopia's willingness to engage in negotiations with any state that would provide it access to the sea. He emphasized the peaceful ways through federation/confederation, land exchange, and granting the part of large Ethiopian firms and projects like the GERD, Ethiopian Air Way, and Ethio-telecom. Somaliland remained mute, while other neighbouring states, primarily Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia, not only expressed their refusal to engage in conversation, but also saw the statement as tactless, bold, and a challenge to their sovereignty (Badar, 2023). An interviewee of the study (Befkadu, a researcher at Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2024, and the Horn Geopolitical affairs and researcher, 2023) said that the responses of neighbouring states along with some earlier regional happenings have affected Ethiopia's post-2018 government's outlook and policies regarding the region and Somalia. This compelled the government to reconsider its idealistic and optimistic policies and shift its attention to Ethiopia's national interest.

Direct access to the Red Sea is critical to Ethiopia's economic growth and development. Ethiopia needs relief from dependence on Djibouti [95%] and Somalia [5%] for foreign trade, which has cost it \$2 million per day in transit and roughly \$1.5 billion per year (Hashem, 2024, p.6). Thus, the Ethio-Somalian relationships began to further deteriorate in October 2023, when Somalia rejected Premier Abiy's assertion that recovering sea access was of existential importance to Ethiopia's growth. Somalia's Foreign Minister, Ali Omer, has indicated that his country will defend its assets, especially ports, and will only negotiate business and trade with partners. Omar emphasised the importance of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, emphasizing that these issues are non-negotiable (Cacciati, 2023).

When Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Addis Ababa on January 1, 2024, Ethio-Somalian mutually suspicious bilateral diplomatic relationships turned into mutual enmity. The central point of the agreement was Ethiopia's willingness to reconsider its recognition of Somaliland in exchange for 20 km (12 miles) of sea access for Ethiopia [for port service and naval forces]. The Republic of Somalia, which claims Somaliland as its northern regions, saw the MoU as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The leader stated that no one has the authority to cede any land in Somalia and that no portion of our territory, sea, or air can be violated. He went on to say that the country views the MoU as an aggression and an obstruction to the region's good neighborliness, peace, and stability, which is already facing numerous challenges (Abdisamad & Kalkidan, 2024).

Somalia's objection was followed by other measures such as recalling its ambassador to Ethiopia; declaring the pact 'null and worthless'; refusing to provide Ethiopian Airlines permission to fly its high-level team to Hargeisa for talks on the MoU; gathering international opposition to the pact and galvanizing its friends and international organizations to help push Ethiopia to terminate the agreement; inciting 'the Greater Somalian agenda', saying Ethiopia grabbed Somalia's land, and organizing a protest march in Somalia; establishing ties with anti-Ethiopian parties, following the President's visits to Cairo and Asmara; and regarding the presence of Ethiopian troops as a direct danger to its territorial integrity and appealing for their evacuation once the ATMIS mission ends in 2024. Ethiopia, which had reached an agreement with an actor that had been autonomous for the previous three decades, demonstrated its willingness to engage in discussions to resolve the issue.

The issue of sovereignty and territorial integrity may not be the only reasons why the Mogadishu government reacted so strongly, given that several countries have made agreements with Somaliland over the last thirty years, and the Mogadishu government has never exercised power over Somaliland since 1991. Great powers with naval bases in the Horn of Africa, as well as Ethiopia's possible regional adversaries, Egypt and Eritrea, were not pleased with the MoU. An interviewee of the study, Befkadu, a researcher at Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs (2024) claimed that "the return of Ethiopia was viewed with suspicion by the great powers that have military bases in the horn of Africa along the international water and have been sending ships and doing whatever they want over the water body of the region. This is because Ethiopia is a strong, independent state with a successful naval history, a large naval force, and the ability to band together regional states that are leasing military bases to these great powers". He added that despite its poverty, Ethiopia is a resilient state with a great deal of diplomatic, economic, and social potential, which could influence the status quo. This caused these great powers to oppose the MoU and persuade the Mogadishu government to oppose it.

Egypt had been working to offset Ethiopia's influence in the Horn of Africa because it was deeply concerned about the GERD, its own water security, and its geopolitical interests. The post-2018 Ethiopian government has embraced a strategy in which Ethiopia's fate is defined by its role in the Nile River and the Red Sea. The Nile River issue is nearing resolution, with Ethiopia's GERD having completed more than 90% of the project and beginning to

generate electricity. The MoU would also provide access to the sea, a port, and a naval force presence on the Red Sea, which Egypt considered as a significant blow to its regional clout. Thus, Egypt sought to strengthen its relations with Somalia by exploiting the Ethio-Somalian schism as a chance to counterbalance Ethiopia. This resulted in the signing of a military and security agreement [a defence pact] between the two. As a result, Egypt gave military assistance to Somalia (Webb, 2024). Egypt strengthens relations with Eritrea and Somalia, forming an "axis" against Ethiopia. Thus, it is logical to deduce that Egypt has strengthened its relations with Somalia through military aid, alliances, and diplomatic efforts, escalating tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia and further destabilising the already volatile region.

The propaganda of the Mogadishu administration, which began Somalia's fight with Ethiopia in the 16th century with Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim Alghazi and continued through the 1977/8 Ogaden war and the 2006 confrontation with the UIC, was ignored by the majority of the five regions under the federal government. The majority of them backed the MoU, taking sides with Somaliland and the Ethiopian government (Interview with Mukhtar, Ethiopian Ambassador to the Republic of Somalia, 2024). The friction, however, is being exploited by the Al-Shabaab group, with whom they are fighting together (ICG). Al-Shabaab, with its primary goal of establishing a Sharia-based hardline Islamic state, constituted an existential threat to Somalia and its neighbours. It is crucial because it has been considered as a government in the making in Somalia. Hence, it is a government, even if it is not recognized. The terrorist group taxes the majority of workers. The majority of common people put their trust in Al-Shabaab for security. It has an administrative and security network in the rural area (Interview with the Horn of African geopolitical Affairs Analyst and Researcher, 2023). The group may be able to recruit additional fighters and increase its power as a result of this disagreement between the two main actors working jointly to defeat it.

The disagreement between Ethiopia and Somalia over the MoU, as well as the subsequent alliances between Eritrea, the Republic of Somalia, and Egypt, were viewed as a threat to regional stability. Somalia formed a military alliance with Egypt, and Ethiopia reciprocated by forging a military alliance with Somaliland. Egypt provided Somalia with weapons, while Ethiopia trained the greatest number of Somaliland soldiers. Furthermore, despite reports of alliances between Al-Shabaab and Houthis in Somalia, and Ethiopia's government's claim of alliances between the Al-Shabaab and Oromo Liberation Front's army, Somalia's government has called for all Ethiopian peacekeeping forces to leave the country by December 2024, and it intends to excluding Ethiopian forces from the post-ATMIS mission, unless Ethiopia withdrew from the MoU. While the question of who would maintain the failed Somalia's security in the absence of highly experienced Ethiopian forces has been a source of concern, Somalia's plan to bring Egyptian forces to its country, as well as the tension it creates between Ethiopia and Egypt and Ethiopia and Somalia have made the future peace of Somalia and the region look bleak. Thus, the region's security was dire due to rising radicalism and Al-Shabaab influence, Egypt's arrival, the security of the Red Sea, and the growing interest of major and middle-sized powers in the area. Given the trajectory, numerous regional and international actors have called for diplomatic talks to de-escalate regional tensions caused by the MoUs.

The disagreement followed by allegations and counter allegations between the two states. In an interview in which he denied Somalian allegations that Ethiopia was shipping weapons to Somalia's Puntland, Field Marshal Birhanu Jula, commander of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, issued a warning, stating that if accusations of interference and incitement of civil war against Ethiopia continued, Ethiopia would not only ship arms to Somalia, but would also take any necessary actions (Garowe Online, 2024, p. 1). This was followed by a military conflict between the Somali Federal member state of Jubbaland and the Somali Federal government in December 2024. Ethiopia, determined to preserve its influence in Somalia, has indicated that it will keep soldiers in Somalia beyond the ATMIS withdrawal deadline of December 2024. Ethiopia is a good friend of the Jubbaland leader, who, together with the South West State federal member states, openly resisted the Somalian federal government's desire to evict Ethiopian forces. Finally, the defeat of Somali federal government forces near Raas Kambooni caused it to abandon its precondition of negotiating with Ethiopia only when Ethiopia terminated the MoU pact with Somaliland and signed the Ankara Declaration with Ethiopia the next day to alleviate tensions. Somalia dropped its objections to Ethiopia's involvement in the peacekeeping mission that would replace ATMIS, acknowledged Ethiopian soldiers' sacrifices for Somalia's stability, and agreed to negotiate Ethiopian access to the sea (Thomas, 2024).

Following the Ankara Declaration of Ethiopia and Somalia, it appears that Somalia has embraced the role and relevance of Ethiopian military in the post-ATMIS mission. An interviewee of the study (Befkadu, a researcher at Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs (2024) said that Ethiopian forces have played a dominant role in Somalia's security and peacekeeping operations for more than two decades. This force is capable of operating effectively in Somalia in the same way that Somali forces do. Ethiopian military have merged with the population; they can speak Somali and understand the psychology of the community. Most importantly, their protracted stay has allowed them to learn about the topography, psychology, and war tactics of terrorist groups. This insight allowed them to effectively paralyse terrorist organisations in Somalia. Thus, including this effective force may benefit not only Somalia, but also regional stability.

To summarize, Ethiopia has never had a coherent, predictable, or lasting foreign policy towards Somalia. This was due not only to Ethiopia's national interests, but also to the Horn of Africa's dynamic nature. Situations and politics in the Horn change frequently, necessitating new strategies and actions, making it impossible to adhere to the ideals outlined in the paper. Premier Abiy's rise to power and his policies of reintegrating the region, refraining from meddling in Somalia's internal affairs, re-uniting Somalia and Somaliland, and severing previous Ethiopian ties with various sub-state actors in Somalia have resulted in positive bilateral relations. A positive relationship between the leaders of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia was also established. However, external parties who were dissatisfied with the news that the three had taken part in the Tigray conflict (2020-2022) began working to undermine this trilateralism. Even though Ethiopia supported President Feroj in the election, another president with anti-Ethiopian policies took office. This terminated trilateralism and harmed Ethio-Somalian relations when the new leader began to adopt actions that jeopardised Ethiopian national interests.

Ethiopia's numerous attempts to restore friendly relations were similarly met with deaf ears in Mogadishu. The situation worsened when Ethiopia stated that it wants to have access to the sea and own ports through negotiations with its neighbours. This is because Somalia interpreted Ethiopia's quest as a demand to violate Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The actions and policies of surrounding countries against Ethiopia forced Ethiopia to reconsider its idealistic and optimistic foreign policy and transition to a more realistic foreign policy that prioritises its national interests. Finally, Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland after its neighbours, notably Somalia, refused to support Ethiopia's pursuit. By signing the MoU, Ethiopia and Somaliland promised to assist each other in satisfying their 30-year thirst for sea access and *de jure* recognition respectively.

Even though Somalia has had no control over Somaliland, a *de facto* state with its own passport, currency, identity, political system, military and security apparatus, economic system, and stability for over thirty years, Mogadishu saw the agreement as a violation of its sovereignty. It also developed positive connections with Ethiopian rivals such as Egypt and Eritrea, and it initially called for the removal of Ethiopian peacekeeping soldiers from the country following the completion of the ATMIS mission in December. In place of Ethiopian troops, it invited Egypt's army to Somalia. The arrival of a large number of weaponry from Cairo in Mogadishu, the fear that these weapons would fall in the hands of terrorists in the country, and Egypt's decision to deploy 10,000 troops to Somalia all contributed to regional security tensions.

Ethiopia and Somalia cannot afford mutual hostility right now, given their domestic challenges and the complex regional dynamics. Ethiopia is resolved to peacefully gain access to the sea. Leasing coastal areas to Ethiopia is not harmful to Somalia if viewed rationally outside of the perspective of some Somalis who still see bilateral relations through the lens of historical tension and regard leasing land to Ethiopia as a violation of national sovereignty that would result in domestic unrest and opposition. Engaging in such a lease could provide Somalia a strategic negotiating advantage in its diplomatic dealings with Ethiopia. Somalia may be able to boost economic growth through port services, more trade, and investment by leasing coastal lands. In Somalia, especially in coastal areas, the construction of ports and associated infrastructure may stimulate local economies and generate jobs. Ethiopia's naval presence and increased military power would provide a strong peacekeeper in the region and help to stabilize Somalia. Given Ethiopia's military expertise and resources, it would increase the effectiveness of peacekeeping efforts against a chronic threat to regional stability. Thus, it is natural to conclude that the post-2018 Ethio-Somaliland relationships have been shaped by the new foreign policy orientation of the post-2018 Ethiopian leadership and the post-2022 new leadership of Somalia's policies, as well as the actions and policies of neighbouring countries towards Ethiopia and external regional and great powers' influence.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

Throughout history, the Ethiopian-Somalian relationship has been marked by both peaceful coexistence and mutual suspicion or violence. Since 1960, the Republic of Somalia has been the greatest security threat to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti due to 'the Greater Somalian agenda' of seizing territory from these states and uniting all Somali-speaking people in the region under one state. As a result, in terms of security, Ethiopia's foreign relations and diplomacy have prioritized the Republic of Somalia over others.

Ethiopia's regional foreign policy places a strong priority on security in the Horn of Africa. In 2018, the country's new leadership highly emphasized the foreign policy principles of non-intervention, regional integration, and Ethiopia's access to the sea. Accordingly, Ethiopia stopped the pre-2018 governments' 'interventionism' and 'divide and rule policy' towards Somalia, and Ethiopia ceased meddling in Somalian affairs and severed ties with the Republic of Somalian federal state members, including Somaliland. Moreover, Ethiopia has attempted to mediate and bring Somaliland and the Republic of Somalia together after they had been divided for more than 30 years. Consequently, a

positive mood was established between the leaders of both countries, and various cooperation efforts were launched between Ethiopia and Somalia.

Although both institutional and inter-leader connections are important in international relations, institutional relationships tend to persist longer because to their formality and stability. The Ethio-Somalian relationships, which were partially constructed on the two leaders' bromance, deteriorated when Somalia's new leader took office. The new president's tight alliance with Egypt, on the one hand, and the Ethiopian government's renewed commitment to resolving Ethiopia's thirty-year geographical incarceration, signaled a clash of national interests between the two and the beginning of mutual hatred. The MoU and the influence of external powers exacerbate the mutual antagonism.

The continuing MoU-related tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia have disastrous security consequences for the region, particularly for both nations. Other interested intermediate and great powers, as well as the region's primary security threat, Al-Shabaab, are taking advantage of the situation and raising tensions. The links between Somalia, Eritrea, and Egypt have caused Ethiopia to reconsider its post-2018 non-interventionism, with engaging in Somalia's domestic affairs and forming alliances with various federal areas, warlords, and clan leaders being the best option. It is ridiculous to imagine Egypt will not try to destabilize Ethiopia from Somalia, and Ethiopia will not respond. This may endanger Somalia's fragile stability, as it will become a battleground for Ethiopia and Egypt. From the study, it is evident that the major factors making the post-2018 Ethio-Somaliland relationships swing between amiable ties and mutual enemy have been systemic and domestic factors such as the post-2018 Ethiopian leadership's foreign policy, the post-2022 Somalia's government actions and policies, regional developments, the actions and policies of neighbouring countries towards Ethiopia, and the external regional and great powers' influence.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The current geopolitical tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia are linked to long-standing historical, political, and territorial conflicts between the two, necessitating a broad strategy to permanently resolving the rift. Both governments should prioritise resolving domestic political and security issues. Neighbours are like siblings by blood, not friends, and they cannot be changed or replaced by another. The fates of these two states and their citizens are intertwined. Therefore, both must endeavour to convince their respective populations that they are not enemies, and they can do this by establishing mutually beneficial socioeconomic and security partnerships. Both have various potentials that they require from one another. For instance, Ethiopia needs access to the sea, and Somalia has a larger coastal area that it might lease to Ethiopia in exchange for economic and security benefits that balance the lease. By exchanging what they need from one another and forming an economic integration that may cause both to be concerned about the security and economics of the other, they can permanently influence the perspective of their population, the area, and the globe towards their relationships. Ethiopia's access to the sea is critical not only for the two, but also for larger region. Empowering Ethiopia to take on significant regional responsibilities it could benefit regional security measures by addressing common regional and Red Sea area issues like piracy and terrorism.

Steps must be taken to elevate bilateral partnerships from leader ties to institutions that can endure regardless of who is in power. Governments should also pursue a somewhat proactive foreign policy towards one another, never jeopardising the national interests of the other countries. Both should recognise not just the rivalry of regional and global powers for influence in the region, but also that these powers are there not to serve either of the two, but to further their geopolitical interests. Both should actually understand each other's needs [namely Ethiopia's want for access to the sea and Somalia's desire for stability and territorial integrity] and try to resolve differences bilaterally rather than inviting further actors who may bring their own interests and exacerbate issues.

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### Appendix I: List of Key Informants (KI)

Code	Name	Position/Description	Month/Year
KI1	Befkadu Bogale	Researcher at Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs	August, 2024
KI2	Amb. Mukhtar Mohamed	Ethiopian Ambassador to the Republic of Somalia	January, 2024
KI3	Amb. Saeed Mohamed Jibril (Ph.D).	Ethiopian Ambassador to Somaliland (Hargeisa)	January, 2024
KI4	Anonymous(Ph. D)	Horn of African geopolitical Affairs Analyst, and Researcher	December, 2023
KI5	Somaliland Embassy	An official of Somaliland Embassy in Ethiopia	June, 2024
KI6	Anonymous	Ethiopian Diplomat to Puntland	January, 2024
KI7	Amb. Berhanu Tsegaye	Ethiopian Ambassador to Djibouti	January, 2024