

# Challenges and Breakthrough for Horn of Africa Regional Integration

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**Abstract:** Horn of Africa (HoA) region brushed multiple frontlines for the last four decades; Outsiders were playing proxy politics within the area. Uncertainty and insecurity, extremism and radicalization, poverty and inter-state and intra-state conflict become accepted. Besides HoA is one of the most vital shipping lines in the world. Historical breakthroughs emerged in the region when the reformist leader Dr. Abiy becomes the Prime minister of Ethiopia. Proactive moves of ending longstanding disputes and conflicts between the states in the region such as Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict. Therefore, this paper seeks to critically calculate the breakthrough and challenges ahead for the leaders of the region to bring successful regional integration. Specifically focuses on three countries namely Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. A critical analysis on the tripartite summits among the leaders of the three nations, the declarations, the points of action as well as the ramification of the change envisaged will shed more light on the progress of the social and economic integration in the region. Moreover, this paper will navigate through the challenges and achievements that are likely to be realized from this integration, considering the political diversity that currently exists among these three countries.

**Keywords:** Regional Integration, Challenges and Breakthroughs, Regional Political Situation, The Inflection Point of Change, Tripartite Summits

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## 1. Introduction

Horn of Africa (HoA) is home to Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia countries, although some broader delineation says 'Great Horn' which includes Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. This region hosts close to 270 million people, hundreds of ethnic groups, dozens of climatic zones, and various differentiated levels of human development, colonial history, and modern political influences [1]. HoA is the most politically dynamic region in Africa; it has been a natural playground for players inside and outside Africa, besides one of the world's most vital shipping lanes.

The mix of poor governance, mutual destabilization, and external interventions are the combustible ingredients of the region always hovering on the edges of insecurity [2]. In the days of the East-West Cold War, the region was one of the spaces within Africa where the superpowers fought proxy wars which were always to the detriment of the peoples of their client-states and neighboring region [3]. The region has

riddled with inter-state armed conflict, poverty, droughts, extremism and famine. Dictatorships and authoritarian regimes have ruled much of the region and contributed to a broken political and social its system. Decades of underdevelopment; coupled with social disparity and divisions along ethnic, religious, tribal, cultural and political lines have contributed to the conflicts and social upheavals within the region [7]. The available estimates nonetheless make clear the massive predominance of Ethiopia in the region, which with roughly ten times the population of Somalia (Including Somaliland), twenty times that of Eritrea, and a hundred times that of Djibouti, accounts for over 85% of the region's people [5]. Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy developed in 2002 shows the national interests and elaborated on what the end of the state of foreign policy should be and how it may best be achieved. Also, it articulates the contribution that foreign policy must make to the attainment of national priority goals which are to the furtherance of Ethiopia's efforts to achieve the developmental status of a middle-income country by

2025 [13]. This making Ethiopia the leading country that has a concrete agenda to leverage these rapidly changing geopolitical dynamics to achieve its goal above.

Somalia was one of the first states to a breakdown in the aftermath of the collapse of the Cold War era. No central government whatsoever for the last 27 years, it has 2,000 miles of coastline skirting one of the world's great trade routes; meanwhile, Somalia's shores became synonymous with piracy and terrorism, the Federal Government now improving in areas of security, state building and restoring the central government role and state characters. Somaliland was a British protectorate before it merged with Italian Somalia in 1960 to form Great Somalia<sup>1</sup>. Somaliland broke away after central government collapsed in 1991; unlike Somalia it has a strong sense of national identity such as workable political structure, consistently more secure and democratic with fifth President in 27 years. No international recognition, they lack to access international tables and financial admittance [5].

Eritrea won its independence in 1991 from Ethiopia, and become a respected internationally recognized in 1993. Has to suck so far in close to three decades? Once hailed as a beacon of hope for the Horn of Africa and a possible 'Singapore' of the region, it is now mired in poverty, repression and bitter recriminations with almost all its neighbors. The only possible answer we have is to say the personality and policies of one man: Isaias Afwerki. He is in both towering figures who led his people to independence and the dictator who now holds them in servitude [7]. A high number of citizens and escaped outside the country because of the internal rigid politics and poverty. This country now facing new policies surroundings both from international and regional levels such the new approach of Ethiopia leader who immediately advocated to lift the international sections affected this country for the last ten years, without internal preparedness and changes, no forgiveness and no political reform.

However, this paper examining the challenges and breakthrough of smooth Horn of Africa full-Regional integration in areas of economic, security and culture and political by focusing the three countries namely Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea thru analyzing their historical situations from 1991 to date.

## 2. Regional Political Situations After 1991

Somalia and Ethiopia were proverbial adversaries, plotting the subversion of one another by supporting armed rebellions within their borders in the 1980s. The similarity of the fate of the two states ended in the aftermath of the downfall of their respective governments. Disciplined insurgencies in Ethiopia

and Eritrea created disciplined states, and the challenge for these were largely on or inducing them to serve the interests of the peoples on whom they were imposed. The Somalia experience was the opposite: weakly organized insurgencies, often closely replicating the indigenous social formations and especially clans from which they were formed, had considerable difficulty in transforming themselves into effective power [5]. These dissimilarities created the current realities of Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea as illustrated below.

### 2.1. Ethiopia

Like other countries in the horn, the country's historic breakthrough happened on 28th May 1991; when rebels stormed the presidential palace. Unlike Somalia, Ethiopian retained pragmatic approach to authority—as an Amhara proverb has it *'the sun that rises tomorrow will be our sun; meaning the government that rules tomorrow will be our government'*. Most strikingly of all during that time, the monthly civil service salary was due just a few days after the takeover, where it was paid in full and on time [5]. Civil servants stayed at their posts, and transferred their allegiance to the new regime, as indeed they had done in the first post-civil war when Meles Zenawi became Prime Minister of Ethiopia. The country adopted the ethnic based federal system of government. Meles presided over autocratic governance structure which ultimately gave him unfettered chance to consolidate state power in the hands of Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Ethiopia has partly succeeded in its endeavor to rebuild and restructure its security forces, economy and infrastructure and emerged as the uncontested hegemon of the Horn of Africa region, with significant influence to other countries in the region. Although Ethiopia troops are part of AMISOM peacekeepers, it has direct communications with Somalia regional administrators<sup>2</sup>, which seems that every regional leader should secure first some sort of relations from Addis Ababa, which was the biggest concern of Somalia Federal Government in Mogadishu.

### 2.2. Somalia

The Indian Ocean newsletter caption on 10th February 1990 entitled 'Somalia: A country without Government' from that date Somalia become like a sinking the ship; what was in store for Somalia was observed like disastrous [8]. Somalia precipitated a bloody civil war that destroyed much of the country and its institutions including its once strong and highly respected security and intelligence forces. The breakdown of Somali state and the lack of a legitimate central government since 1991 placed the country in a precarious position, rendering it a lawless land controlled by ruthless warlords and a fertile ground for criminals, pirates and extremist groups. It gave foreign entities like Ethiopia Kenya and Uganda all kinds of justifications to intervene in its internal politics. Ethiopia sent thousands of its troops into

<sup>1</sup> Great Somalia was a dream in 1960s –70s to combine the Horn of Africa regions in which Somali ethnic live who historically inhabited such as Somaliland in Britain protector, Somali Italian, Somali French, Somali Ogaden in Ethiopia and Somalis in North Kenya.

<sup>2</sup> Somalia Regional Administrations are Puntland, Jubaland, South-West, Galmudug and Hirshabele

Somalia on the premise of protecting the weak transitional government in 2006 [19]. This incursion finally came to an end in the ignominious withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Mogadishu. The restoration of some semblance of Somali government took about two decades and culminated in the completion of the political transition and the formal recognition from the international. According to the current ruling Federal Government's strategies of restoring inclusive politics, anti-corruption battles and reinstating statehood dignity; it created optimism for Somalis; although its conclusions are not yet definite. Alshabab rebel and other organized movements are the biggest challenges to Somalia Stability; this constrained Government to control immense land in Southern - Central Somalia with sequential terrorist attacks inside the Capital and many times has cornered the legitimate Government into a small strip located in the capital of Mogadishu [10].

Somaliland is an observable reality in the region; it sustained its security, state building and economic recovery without international cooperation. Somaliland claimed its separation from Somalia to which it had initially consented and declared de facto independence in 1991, which is functional but not internationally recognized [11]. Unlike other countries in the region, Somaliland built a well-regulated political marketplace with a multi-party system and held a succession of competitive elections in which the loser has gracefully accepted his loss-- including the presidential election [3]. Somaliland has failed to achieve international recognition in 28 years; because of the absence of comprehensive strategies and qualified policies to negotiate with Somalia and to exercise its right of self-determination and influence external partners to be ready to accept its geostrategic concerns about security as well as economic and political interests. This status quo state in Somaliland is questioning the consistency and sustainability of the de facto status if not managed rapidly.

### 2.3. Eritrea

The Eritrean war of independence did not begin in Asmara, with its industrial workers and educated bourgeoisie. It began in the lowlands when the discontented leaders of Muslim communities and a handful of radical students made common cause. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was their vehicle, founded in Cairo in 1960, and organizationally modeled on the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale [12]. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) was set up in 1970 by more radical elements in the ELF, among them Ramadan Nur and Isaias Afewerki. The EPLF was a rigorous vanguards organization, drawing upon the Marxist- Leninism so prominent in those years and especially Isaias's Chinese training [7]. Following an irregular internecine war with the ELF, the EPLF became the sole active military [5]. Eritrea got independence in 1993 from Ethiopia; the country's approach of state building and regional relations become immediate a militaristic. Isaias confronted Sudan in 1994 and Djibouti and Yemen in 1996. In October that year, Eritrean generals joined in the planning of Rwanda led operation to

remove Mobutu Sese Seko and dispatched commandos and political advisors to the Congolese rebels. Following that rapid victory, Isaias is reputed to have said that his army could march all the way to South Africa. Although Eritrean culture recognizes the heroic leader, as a Tigrinya proverb puts it: *'whoever reigns is my King; that which rises (from the East) is my Sun.'* Isaias considers himself as the natural leader of the region, yet, whatever his weaknesses, he did little to encourage a cult of personality and leadership. There was a bloody war between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1998 to June 2000, named 'Badme war' with the final peace agreement to in 2018, twenty years after the initial confrontation. This last war with Ethiopia led much state failure such as political and economic isolation [13].

## 3. The Influence of the Global Powers on the Horn of Africa Region

Since 2000, global powers<sup>3</sup> have been sharing this region such as the United States and China with splitting interests between America's military-industrial security sphere and China's economic and trade relations. China's rise has been integral to Horn of Africa and other African region's development and other states are now projecting powers in ways that challenge "US hegemony." India, the Gulf States, Turkey, China, Russia, UK and even the EU have all shown more significant interest in the region, and each has different objectives that may complement or contest American and Chinese dominance [1].

The ongoing war in Yemen has drawn in interest from the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which have increased their military presence in Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia. The Yemeni conflict itself is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran that is having knock-on effects in the Horn. Eritrea and Sudan used to be allied to Iran but have switched their allegiance to Riyadh, much to Israel's satisfaction, as the two countries were primary conduits of arms and support to Iranian proxies Hamas and Hezbollah. Recently Saudi Arabia Announces New Political Bloc for the Red Sea which combines six countries bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden; exclude Eritrea [14]. However, increasing influence from the Gulf has also brought Turkey onto the scene, which has tried to balance Emirati [15]. The GCC4 is developing its own Horn of Africa strategy [15] King of Saudi Arabia has made it clear that it regards the Horn—notably Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia—as its security belt.

HoA has been a natural playground for players outside the region and Africa. The mix of poor governance, mutual destabilization, and external intrusion are the combustible ingredients of an area always hovering on the edges of

<sup>3</sup> Global powers are nations or states that, through their great economic, political and military strength, able to exert power and influence over not only their own regions of the world, but beyond to others

<sup>4</sup> Member States of Gulf Cooperation Council are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

insecurity and abiding impoverishment. It is this mix that the region is challenged to overturn into a virtuous cycle of participatory government; regional integration that focuses on building a regional economic market, political stability, and thus a region that can negotiate on its behalf with the outside world rather than retail its interest to the first buyer.

## 4. The Inflection Point for Change

There have not been any significant political developments in the Horn of Africa region before Abiy Ahmed rose up and took office in April 2018. Although he encountered stiff resistance from his party 'Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front' (EPRDF), within weeks, concrete and symbolic steps were being taken on both national and regional levels. To exemplify this, he lifted the state of emergency<sup>5</sup>, released thousands of prisoners and ended the state of war with neighboring Eritrea which was a situation of 'no peace, no war' for the last 18 years. His government has released thousands of political prisoners, met and engaged with the political opposition and civil society to discuss reform, invited previously exiled political parties to return to their country and contribute the state reform process. Abiy has also embarked on major institutional reforms, including the security and the justice sectors. In less than 100 days, the Prime Minister has turned a new page in Ethiopian history, restoring hope and optimism in the direction the country is taking [16].

One of the most critiques against Abiy Ahmed is a '*populist*' in the mold of Turkey's Erdogan, India's Modi, and U.S. Pr. Trump, its account worth contemplating; which happens to be wrong. The argument runs that Abiy, despite being a member of the ERPFD, has mostly sidelined the party and appealed directly to the public over the heads of his colleagues. He has monopolized power and decision-making at the expense of deliberation and consultation, and that he has cultivated a messianic image through set-piece spectacles [17]. Populism is fundamentally a style of politics, in which "the people"—an imaginary moral monolith—is pitted against an enemy, typically "the elite" or, in nationalist populism, immigrants. It is antagonistic, divisive, and hostile to pluralism. Although analysts argue that Abiy does not fit this mold of populism, since his addresses are not fiery blasts of political invective; they are more like sermons as well he does not even have a personal Twitter account. If Abiy has a buzzword, it is "*medemer*," an Amharic term which more or less means "unity," or "adding together." It suggests reconciliation, not division.

Dr. Abiy has normalized the relations with bordering and strategic countries such as Eritrea, Somalia, Egypt, Sudan Kenya and Uganda. He has also signed a peace deal with the oppositions such as a peace accord with Ogaden National Liberation Front, a separatist movement that has sought self-determination for the Somali region of Ethiopia. This ended a

long-standing conflict with the Ethiopian state; which shaped Ethiopia's relationship with its Somali region, as well as Ethiopia's relationship with Somalia.

All the leaders in the region positively responded the Abiy's new leadership and his diplomatic styles. The Eritrean President confidently reflected the constructive engagement from Ethiopian Prime Minister and stated in his first likeness speech about this case "Eritrea and Ethiopian people lost an opportunity of two generations for over half a century due to policies designed to promote external global agendas, The events and developments that have unfolded in our region in general and in Ethiopia in particular in the recent period warrant appropriate attention" [18].

Somalia's president, Mohamed Abdullahi, welcomed Dr. Abiy's suggestion of new cooperation by asserting that there is need to change the old and unproductive approach of hostility and insecurity into a more positive and collaborative approach geared towards measures such as economic collaboration. The president also mentioned that initially Ethiopia had laid the base for enhancing Somalia conflicts but that channel has now been cut, and hence there is a hope for collaborative measures that will foster regional integration and well-off [19].

## 5. The Recent Diplomatic Bonhomie

Immediately, after Dr. Abiy came to the power; engaged the regional leaders of all neighboring countries such as Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, Egypt and Kenya, exclusively he suggested holding a tripartite summit of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia first time in History and President Isias Afwarki hosted the first summit; to restore political confidence and establish historical diplomatic ties between their countries.

### 5.1. Asmara Summit

This was held between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018 with the aim materializing inclusive regional peace, security and economic cooperation. Considering that the peoples of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia share close geographic, historical, cultural and religious ties with a common interest, the leaders discussed on the need to bolster the historical ties to achieve the lofty objectives and respect each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The leaders also issued a joint declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation with the following four points: (a). the three countries shall foster comprehensive cooperation that advances the goals of their peoples. (b). shall build close political, economic, social, cultural and security ties. (c). shall work in coordination to promote regional peace and security. (d). the three governments as a result of this establish a Joint High-Level Committee to coordinate their efforts in the framework of this Joint Declaration [9].

### 5.2. Bahar Dar Summit

On 11th November; Leaders met a second time in Ethiopia, reviewed developments and achievements since

<sup>5</sup> The state of emergency declared a day after Ex-Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned amid social unrest on 16th Feb. 2018

Asmara Joint Declaration on Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation. They noted with satisfaction the tangible and positive outcomes already registered and agreed to consolidate their mutual solidarity and support in addressing challenges that they face individually and collectively. In this regard, they stressed the importance of respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Somalia as well as their firm support for the Somali people and the Federal Government of Somalia and all its institutions. They also commended them for the progress they are making towards peace and stability. The meeting welcomed the impending lifting of all sanctions against Eritrea and underscored their conviction that this act would enhance peace, development and cooperation in the region. They also reaffirmed their commitment to an inclusive regional peace and cooperation. Shortly after the three countries formally agreed to enhance economic, political, social, cultural, and security cooperation, Ethiopia opened its first embassy in 20 years in Eritrea and less than two months after Eritrea reopened its embassy in Addis Ababa.

## 6. The Hard Work That Lies Ahead

Giving birth to a baby is the most natural thing any woman can do, but child husbandry is the nut to crack. Several questions immediately follow the ululation with which these initiatives have received; Ethiopia has brought Somalia and Eritrea to the fold without acknowledging the potentiality of Djibouti and Somaliland that have significant seaports. Another thing is the demarcation of Badme is a thorn in the flesh among others. There are many descending voices within Ethiopia against Abiy's initiatives than they are from outside. To convey successful regional integration in economic, security and political arena, leaders should contemplate critically and sacrifice their ambitions and comforts for the sake of their people and prospects for their societies. On this path of change it is with many challenges lying ahead to achieve full regional integration in serenely effectively:

- a) Once the honeymoon period of Ethiopia and Eritrea reconsolidation is over, there will be the enormous challenges of dealing with various political and economic issues and satisfying a diverse constituency with diverging demands, such as demarcating the border at Badme town, which initially kicked off the war in 1998 and sustained the intractable political and military standoff since 2000. In early June, Abiy agreed to cede the town to Eritrea following the United Nations ruling. However, that decision not been received equally by the residents of the towns in the northern Tigray region, where many soldiers died. Veterans there are already calling Abiy's gesture an act of betrayal and have threatened violence if forced to leave.
- b) Balancing Economic Sharing between the countries has ports into Ethiopia markets such as Djibouti, Somalia, Somaliland and Eritrea. It is now apparent that Abiy securing port access throughout the region is a crucial

objective of his foreign policy this far. He announced joint seaport investments with Somalia and participated in the opening of the China-backed Djibouti free trade zone, which constitutes a gateway to international markets for landlocked Ethiopia. However, even though Eritrea's and Somalia ports are not as developed as the ones in Djibouti, Asmara and Mogadishu might make demands that Addis Ababa will have to agree on to nudge this truce forward.

- c) The biggest stemming issue from this rapprochement and regional integrations is how much the new developments will be a catalyst for change and implication to democracy in Eritrea. Since independence in 1993, Isaias has overseen a one-party state that has oppressed its people, forced them into conscription and cracked down on critics. Eritrea needs political reconciliation, forgiveness and inclusive politics and democracy for all to navigate the zonal wind of change and development.
- d) Somalia Federal Government does not control the whole country, as well as its regional states, are not accountable to the central government. Some of the states cut the ties of relations several times. Somalia Parliament filed impeachment motion against Somali president; significant allegations were that the president secretly signed agreements with other countries. Those agreements mentioned are such as the tripartite summit in Asmara, Bahar Dar with Ethiopia and Eritrea. Also, the insecurity and terror groups operating in Somalia can be an impediment to smooth regional integration.
- e) The Failure of Somalia and Somaliland talks can hinder the regional peace, stability and successful integration. Talks should bring peaceful result either Somalia's goal of reunification or Somaliland's conviction of a two-state. The solution must be peacefully and democratically decided by the electorates of Somaliland and Somalia. Regional leaders should be involved and solve this case diplomatically and amicably in the right time. This is so because if any solution would have arrived without own people participation, it will make the region a perpetual conflict zone in Africa.

## 7. Conclusion

The Horn of Africa is the most dangerous region in Africa where interstate and intrastate conflicts are typical, as well as famine and droughts compounded with economic downturns, have been rampant for the last four to five decades. This region becomes susceptible to the outsiders to exploit the area, its discontents, and its resources. Arms merchants, human traffickers, and ideological carpetbaggers already abound in the Horn of Africa. Above all, this region has a geographical strategy, and locational importance is being a conduit of billions of trade and transshipment pass through Bab Al Mandab on the Red Sea and the Gulf each year.

Ethiopia has a border in seven countries; is the largest in population, and economic, it provides over 86 percent of the

Nile waters, politically is the most influential country in the region and beyond. Any change with Ethiopian politics and stability can easily affect the area. First time in Modern History of Ethiopia 'Oroma Ethnic' Leader was elected to be the Prime Minister; Dr. Abiy who has revealed to be a visionary and charismatic leader and has shifted the regional paradigm of political, security and economic landscape. Immediately, the leaders of Somalia and Eritrea changed their political directions and accepted the decisive move in the region.

The road to succeed into these new regional integration such as to challenges of economic growth, political homogeneity and democratization, security of trade, the fight extremism, and build robust regional platforms for economic integration all need to be converted into a joint effort that will allow for the inclusion of the Horn of Africa into a stage of security, political and economic cooperation. These new Diplomatic thaws between Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, should be expanded and engage Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan and as well as IGAD as facilitating and technical forum.

On the thorny issue of Somalia and Somaliland talks for reunification or successful two-state solutions remains precarious. By Ethiopia and Eritrea courting Somalia the lesser they become Somaliland admirers. On the other hand, at any point they try to embrace Somaliland because of its strategic positioning, this will, by all means, jeopardize any regional treaty. Hence any other lesser player has to be careful. Over and above all, strategically managing the external interest into the region to build mutual benefit remain a challenge since foreign countries have differences in their favorite country to deal with based on their interests.

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## Biography



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