

**Balancing National Priorities: Ethiopia's Ankara Declaration and Its Implications for Diplomatic Success - A Commentary**

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*The Ankara Declaration, signed between Ethiopia and Somalia on December 11, 2024, with Turkish mediation, represents a pivotal step in addressing longstanding regional disputes in the Horn of Africa. Rooted in the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and cooperative security, the declaration aims to foster stability through multilateralism, intelligence-sharing, and joint economic initiatives. Turkey's strategic mediation, leveraging economic investments and cultural ties, underscores its growing influence in regional conflict resolution. While the declaration offers Ethiopia a platform to bolster its diplomatic standing and economic recovery, challenges such as territorial disputes, extremist threats, and external geopolitical pressures persist. Therefore, sustained commitment and inclusive governance are crucial to translate the accord's aspirations into lasting peace and collaboration.*

**Keywords:** *Ankara Declaration, Ethiopia-Somalia Relations, Horn of Africa Diplomacy, Regional Stability, Turkey Mediation*

## Introduction

The Horn of Africa, encompassing countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, has long been a region marked by complex conflicts and shifting alliances. These dynamics have been influenced by historical territorial disputes, ethnic tensions, and competition over resources. Nowadays, the recent political tensions and disagreements between Ethiopia and Somalia due to Ethiopia's quest to access the sea routes and signing the Memorandum of Understanding with the Republic of Somaliland boomed the political rivalry in the region and beyond.

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On January 1, 2024, Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the de facto state of Somaliland to get direct access to the sea in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Chanie, 2024; Kalkidan Yibeltal & Damian Zane, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2024; Yusuf, 2005). This maritime deal with Somaliland granted Ethiopia access to 20 kilometers of Somaliland's coastline for 50 years, facilitating the establishment of an Ethiopian naval base and enhancing trade through the Berbera port. The MoU significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa. Since Eritrea's secession in 1993, Ethiopia has been a landlocked nation; the agreement provided Ethiopia a strategic maritime outlet to the Gulf of Aden, bolstering its naval capabilities and expanding trade opportunities (IISS, 2024; Maxwell Webb, 2024). This development was viewed as a means to counterbalance regional rivals and enhance Ethiopia's influence in maritime affairs. This maritime deal immediately ignited regional tensions in the Horn of Africa (HoA), where the HoA is characterized by its continual geopolitical tensions and instability.

Thus, Somalia perceived Ethiopia's engagement with Somaliland as an infringement upon its sovereignty and a potential threat to its territorial integrity. This tension threatened to disrupt their cooperation against common security threats, notably the extremist group al-Shabaab. The friction also risked destabilizing broader regional security dynamics, as both nations are pivotal players in the Horn of Africa. In response to the MoU, the Somalia government sought diplomatic support from regional allies, notably from Eritrea, Egypt, Djibouti, and Turkey, to reinforce its position against the agreement (Chanie, 2024). Besides, Somalia also threatened to expel Ethiopian troops who played a great role in both the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), a move that could have significant implications for regional security and the fight against al-Shabaab. Furthermore, Somalia has also ignited its position to ban the Ethiopian troops from participating in the new active African Union-led mission in Somalia- the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM).

The situation has further complicated regional dynamics, as Somalia has sought support from Egypt and Eritrea, both of which have historical disputes with Ethiopia (Chanie, 2024; Yusuf, 2005). Egypt's apprehensions are deeply rooted in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project on the Abay River (Blue Nile). Cairo fears that the dam could significantly

reduce its vital water supply, leading to heightened tensions with Addis Ababa. By aligning with Eritrea and Somalia, Egypt seeks to bolster its strategic position against Ethiopia's upstream control over the Nile waters. On the other side, Eritrea's alliance with Egypt and Somalia is influenced by its historical adversarial relationship with Ethiopia. The longstanding border disputes and regional power dynamics have led Asmara to view Ethiopia's ambitions with suspicion. Due to this ambition, collaborating with Egypt and Somalia could offer Eritrea an opportunity to counterbalance Ethiopia's regional power dominance in the HoA.

Consequently, to implicitly influence Ethiopia's quest for direct access to the sea route, the Tripartite Anti-Ethiopian Axis, consisting of Egypt, Eritrea, and Somalia, was formed on October 10, 2024, at the Capital of Eritrea (Tyson & Liam, 2024; Teklemariam, 2024). Egypt, Somalia, and Eritrea viewed Ethiopia's economic and military developments, including its naval ambitions, as potential threats to their national security. This Cairo-Asmara-Mogadishu Axis against Ethiopia's double-track diplomatic power in the region has been reversed by the Ankara Declaration, Turkey, on December 11, 2024. After a year-long diplomatic rift, Somalia and Ethiopia agreed to restore their historical diplomatic ties. This reconciliation effort was facilitated by Turkish mediation, leading to the Ankara Declaration, in which both nations committed to resolving disputes through peaceful communication and dialogue. Ethiopia's engagement in the Ankara-mediated agreement was a strategic response to diplomatic isolation, economic imperatives, and the need to mitigate regional tensions in the Horn of Africa.

The signing of the Ankara Declaration, which was facilitated by Türkiye and signed between Ethiopia and Somalia on December 11, 2024, in Ankara has great implications for Ethiopia's diplomacy within the region of the Horn of Africa as it reaffirms principles such as respect for state sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference, and Ethiopia's right to direct access to the sea (Addis Standard, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024; Ragip Soylu, 2024). The declaration demonstrates how – multilateralism can be seen as the best strategy for resolving historical grievances and constructing cooperation frameworks premised on state sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also specifies activities, including intelligence exchange for anti-terrorism purposes and the joint development of cross-border trade centers and transport corridors, which will lead to increased investment, security collaboration, and trade (Esra Tekin, 2024; Fatih, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Last but not least, the accord further defines the structures necessary for collaborative surveillance and dispute management, including the composition of a joint supervisory board and the reconvening of periodic review conferences. It highlights the changing realities in the Horn of Africa, where longstanding animosities and intricate international relations define interaction. Still, certain issues like territorial disputes, extremist violence, and external geopolitical competition may serve as hindrances to achieving what the declaration sets out to achieve. Hence, the dedication of the parties to the contract, together with all relevant participants, will be direly needed to attain the intended purpose for which the contract was initiated.

### **A Strategic Shift in Regional Diplomacy**

Turkey has significantly expanded its influence in the Horn of Africa through its proactive and strategic mediation efforts. Under this context, the Ankara Declaration exemplifies an increasing phenomenon of Turkey's involvement in a broader trend of conflict resolution in the Horn through leader-to-leader summit diplomacy. Ethiopia and Somalia have set a precedent for addressing longstanding disputes by prioritizing mutual respect and dialogue (Blinken (press statement), 2024; EEAS Press Team, 2024; Esra Tekin, 2024b; Fatih, 2024; UN Press Release, 2024). The agreement's emphasis on sovereignty, territorial integrity, and cooperative security frameworks signals a pragmatic approach of both countries to foster stability in a historically volatile region of the Horn of Africa.

Moreover, in the recent Ethiopia-Somalia negotiations, Türkiye adopted a comprehensive approach, leveraging its economic investments and cultural ties to foster trust between the two nations. Hosting the talks in Ankara provided a neutral venue conducive to open dialogue. Türkiye's impartiality was reinforced by initiatives such as offering technical expertise for infrastructure development and proposing monitoring and conflict-resolution mechanisms. These measures not only alleviated immediate tensions but also laid the groundwork for sustainable cooperation.

By integrating economic partnerships with diplomatic mediation (The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 2024), Türkiye exemplified its ability to address sensitive issues tactfully and promote sustained negotiations between the two nations. Its strategic use of investments in trade, infrastructure, and cultural diplomacy helped build trust and strengthen relations between Ethiopia and Somalia. The Ankara Declaration, a product of these efforts,

exemplifies Türkiye's growing role as a regional mediator. Moreover, this aligns with broader international goals, including U.S. interests, by demonstrating the impact of coordinated diplomatic and economic strategies in resolving complex regional disputes (Ragip Soylu, 2024).

### **Implications for Ethiopia's Diplomatic Trajectory**

For Ethiopia, the declaration offers an opportunity to strengthen its regional standing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, 2024), but this potential hinges on how effectively the nation addresses its domestic challenges, such as political fragmentation, which undermines cohesive governance, and economic instability marked by inflation and high unemployment (Addis Standard, 2024; EEAS Press Team, 2024; Fatih Yurtsever, 2024). These issues are compounded by the lingering effects of internal conflicts, including the aftermath of the Tigray War, which have strained national resources and disrupted social cohesion. Addressing these challenges is essential for Ethiopia to align its domestic policies with the declaration's goals and emerge as a stabilizing force in the Horn of Africa. Issues such as political fragmentation, economic instability, and the lingering effects of internal conflicts could either bolster or undermine Ethiopia's ability to capitalize on this diplomatic opening (Ayele, 2024; Bionda, 2024). By aligning its domestic policies with the goals of the Ankara Declaration, such as fostering inclusive governance and accelerating post-conflict reconstruction, Ethiopia can position itself as a stabilizing force in the Horn of Africa. The agreement allows Addis Ababa to focus on internal challenges, such as post-conflict recovery and economic reforms, while maintaining constructive relationships with its neighbors. It also positions Ethiopia as a cooperative player in the Horn of Africa, potentially attracting greater international support and investment.

### **Challenges and Future Prospects**

Despite its promise, the declaration's success depends on sustained commitment from Ethiopia and Somalia, supported by clear mechanisms such as joint monitoring committees, periodic reviews of progress, and sustained international engagement to ensure accountability and adaptability to emerging challenges in the volatile region of the Horn. As a result, issues such as border disputes and the presence of extremist groups remain potential flashpoints for the two nations and the region. Besides, the involvement of external actors, including Gulf states, continues to *vie* for regional influence, which could complicate the path to long-term stability of the Horn region in general and the two nations in particular. Therefore, a solid commitment from

the two nations and a collaborative governance grand strategy are very important for implementing the Ankara Declaration based on the non-zero-sum game perspective.

### **Conclusion**

The Ankara Declaration exemplifies a step forward in balancing the national priorities of Ethiopia for peace and development in the Horn of Africa. By fostering mutual respect and emphasizing cooperative security, it offers a model for resolving regional disputes. The accord describes Ethiopia's potential to enhance its diplomatic influence *via* achieving double-track diplomacy while reinforcing the importance of Türkiye's mediatory role and the strategic backing of international actors, such as the United States. The combination of these factors underscores the declaration's broader implications for regional and global diplomacy, which paves the way for a more stable and collaborative Horn of Africa region. Thus, Ethiopia's diplomatic capacity to leverage this momentum could re-exemplify its role in regional diplomacy while setting down a solid foundation for sustaining peace and stability in the Horn of Africa region.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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