

The Berbera Port Deal: A Geopolitical Development and its Implications in the Horn of Africa

Shahzadi Irrum ^a Aadersh Humza ^b

Abstract: *This study focuses on the mounting tensions in the Horn of Africa following a controversial deal in early 2024 between Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi. Under the agreement, Somaliland, a self-declared territory not internationally recognized, granted Ethiopia access to the Red Sea via Berbera Port for 5 decades. However, this move enraged Somalia, which considers Somaliland an integral part of its sovereign territory. For landlocked Ethiopia, the accord offers vital maritime access, which will boost trade potential to Europe and beyond through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Ethiopia, in return, vowed a thorough assessment of Somaliland's long-standing demand for international recognition, a move that could potentially trigger major geopolitical tension across the region. The research uses qualitative methodology, including a comprehensive review of literature, news reports, and academic sources, to analyze the deal's background, motivations, and broader implications. The study concludes that, along with Somalia, many countries are opposing the agreement, mainly due to their own strategic or geopolitical interests in the region. Also, the U.S. may have a hidden agenda to turn Somaliland into another Taiwan, using it as a strategic foothold in the region, possibly seeking to create a Taiwan-China situation.*

Keywords: Red Sea, Berbera Port, Contentious Deal, International Recognition, Sea Access, Violation

Introduction

Over the past four decades, the Horn of Africa has come to be seen as an infamously unpredictable, volatile, famine-prone, and environmentally wrecked region. For one or more of these recurring and sinister reasons, the region frequently makes headlines (Kessels, Durner, & Schwartz, 2016). The Horn of Africa, which includes landlocked Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, is well-known for its periodic intra- or inter-state conflict outbreaks. At present, tensions are escalating in the Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia, in the northern portions of Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland), and potential clashes between Somalia and Ethiopia because of the quest for Ethiopia to have access to the Red Sea (Pinto, 2019).

For the Horn of Africa, 2024 has begun with a contentious agreement that has set the stage for a tense year ahead. Due to the ongoing spat between Somalia and Ethiopia over Somaliland's Berbera Port deal, the Horn of Africa is in a state of heightened tension. On January 1st, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed inked a contentious memorandum of understanding (MoU) with President Muse Bihi Abdi of Somaliland, a territory that declared independence from Somalia in 1991 but lacks international recognition. In the agreement, Somaliland will lease 20km of coastal land to Ethiopia for 50 years for commercial marine operations. The leased land is closer to the Red Sea corridor, where Ethiopia plans to construct the naval base (Lawal, 2024). In return, Ethiopia pledges to recognize Somaliland as an independent nation—something no other nation has done in the three decades since the former protectorate of the British announced its withdrawal from Somalia. Additionally, Ethiopia granted the government of Somaliland a share in Ethiopia's flagship carrier and airlines (the largest airline in Africa) which presents Somaliland with an economic opportunity. In Somaliland, there has been great celebration over this deal, which sees the agreement as a long-awaited step toward gaining full acceptance on the world stage, potentially leading to United Nations (UN) membership (Bhattacharya, 2024).

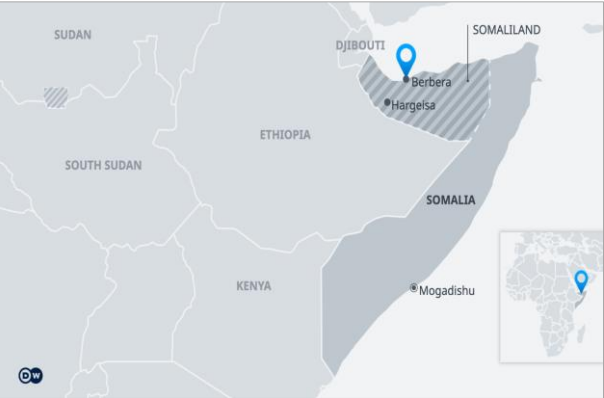
^a Research Assistant at Balochistan Think Tank Network, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

^b Associate Director at Balochistan Think Tank Network, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

However, the move caught Somalia by surprise. Somalia claims that Somaliland, a self-governing breakaway state, is a portion of its northern territory. Somalia fiercely opposes the deal, which sees it as a flagrant violation of its territorial integrity and an unlawful encroachment into its domestic affairs. Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland as an independent state feels like a dagger to the heart of Somalia's unity aspirations (Lawal, 2024).

The geopolitical upheaval caused by the East African accord has worsened existing problems in the region. Despite the risks, both sides understand the significant benefits at stake, further fueling regional rivalries. The region also faces the influence of two major world powers: one represented by the West, led by the U.S. and the other by the multipolar typically led by China. Apart from these global players, regional powers are also actively competing, continuing the struggle for dominance in this strategically important region (Bartlett, 2022).

Figure 1
Map of Somaliland's Berbera Port



Source: DW

Figure 2
Map of the Horn of Africa



Source: Pinterest

Figure 1
Map of Amhara and Tigray Regions



Source: The New Humanitarian

Figure 4
Map of Somaliland and Puntland



Source: Britannica

Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the background, motivation, and implications of Ethiopia-Somaliland agreement. The qualitative approach is chosen to gain in-depth insights into the perspectives of Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as the reactions of the global community. Data for this research was collected through a comprehensive literature review and content analysis of news reports and academic articles. The analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the tension in the horn of Africa and the Implications of Ethiopia-Somaliland agreement.

Historical Background of the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa, comprising Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and parts of Sudan and Kenya, has a rich but turbulent history of ethnic diversity, colonial legacies, and ongoing geopolitical conflicts. The roots of the contemporary regional conflicts can be traced back to the Scramble for Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Boddy-Evans, 2019). During this period, European powers divided the continent among themselves, with Italy, Britain, and France establishing colonies in the region. The arbitrary borders drawn by these colonial powers deliberately failed to reflect the ethnic and cultural realities on the ground and sowed the seeds of differences that later manifested as violent conflicts between different groups (Monteh, 2024).

In the post-colonial era, newly independent nations in the Horn of Africa faced numerous challenges, including governance, national unity, and economic development. The conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia is rooted in historical grievances, territorial disputes, and ethnic tensions. The borders established during colonial rule did not align with the ethnic and cultural divisions, leading to ongoing tensions (Zoubir, 2024). Many Somalis advocate for Greater Somalia, which includes regions in Ethiopia, fueling irredentist sentiments. The Ogaden region, predominantly inhabited by ethnic Somalis, has been a flashpoint, with groups like the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) seeking greater autonomy. Ethiopia has historically viewed such movements as threats to its territorial integrity, leading to military confrontations. The Somali civil war further complicated the relationship, as Ethiopia allegedly intervened to support certain factions against the Somali government. Ongoing instability in Somalia, along with Ethiopia's ethnic federalism and the Tigray conflict, is affecting their relationship, marked by cross-border skirmishes and accusations of support for rebel groups (Osman, 2018).

Figure 5

Map of Ogaden Region



Source: TRT World

Adding another layer of the regional dynamics is the self-declared republic of Somaliland. The dispute between Somalia and Somaliland centers on issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Somaliland, which declared independence from Somalia in 1991, was formerly a British protectorate that united with Italian-administered Somalia in 1960 (Seifu, 2024). Following years of authoritarian rule and civil war, Somaliland decided to break away, arguing for self-determination due to the failures of the central government. While Somaliland has established relative stability and functioning governance, holding democratic elections, the Somali government views it as a part of its territory and insists on maintaining national unity. The lack of international recognition for Somaliland hampers its ability to engage in global relations and receive foreign aid, perpetuating its isolation (Ferragamo & Klobucista, 2025).

The history of the Horn of Africa is a testament to the lasting impact of colonial legacies on ethnic and national identities. The interplay of these historical grievances, along with contemporary geopolitical struggles, continues to shape the region's future.

Geographical Location of the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa, also known as the Somali Peninsula, is among the top ten largest peninsulas in the world and a significant geopolitical region in East Africa. The region holds strategic and commercial importance due to its greater access to the sea. It is bordered by the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden (Ahmed, 2021). The Red Sea has two exits: The Suez Canal at one, and the Strait of Bab el Mandeb, which connects it to the Indian Ocean (Rondos, 2016).

Figure 6
Map of the Red Sea Exits: Suez Canal and Bab el-Mandeb



Source: BBC

The region is a key location as it links the three continents of Africa, Europe, and Asia which makes it a critical region for trade, military strategy, and geopolitics. Its proximity to the vital maritime routes and resource-rich areas further enhances its significance on the global stage. The region gained even greater significance with the completion of the Suez Canal in 1867, as the Red Sea developed into a crucial route for communication between Europe and the Middle East. From an economic standpoint, the Horn of Africa is a "mandatory" route for vital maritime trade routes via the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal. From a military perspective, the area is perfect for air and naval security operations. Furthermore, the Horn of Africa is an important geopolitical hotspot due to its closeness to crucial maritime lanes that provide the shortest route to oil-producing nations to Western markets (Bergantino, 2021).

Figure 7
Horn of Africa Provides Shortest Route to Oil-Producing Nations to Western Markets



Source: Financial Times

Besides, access to the sea enables the countries of the Horn of Africa to build ports. The top five ports in the region are capable of offering economic, military, and security services. Eritrea's ports of Assab and Massawa lie along the Red Sea shores, and the Djibouti port is a key place for a naval base and maritime trade. Somalia has the ports of Mogadishu and Kismayu, and Somaliland (a self-declared republic) has the port of Berbera. As a vital conduit between Africa and Europe, these ports contribute significantly to increased international connectivity and improved supply chain efficiency. All these things accounted for the geopolitical and strategic prominence of the Horn of Africa (Cafiero & Čok, 2020).

Significance of the Berbera Port

Berbera Port is the main overseas trade gateway of Somaliland. The port is strategically positioned on the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden, providing a critical access point to one of the world's busiest maritime routes. Originally constructed by the British Empire, Berbera Port was a run-down runway a few decades ago. The Soviet Union and the U.S. then refurbished it. Somaliland depends on the port for most of its necessities, including food to construction materials, cars, and furniture (Darwich & Bakonyi, 2022).

Figure 8

Map of Berbera Port at the Entrance to the Red Sea



Source: Financial Times

The port holds significant strategic and economic importance both regionally and globally. Its prime location is close to Bab-el-Mandeb Strait (a key maritime chokepoint), which connects the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea and holds immense significance for global trade and military strategy. The port is an attractive target for global and regional powers, notably the U.S., China, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), viewing it as a key asset in their strategic competition for influence in the Horn of Africa (Zaheer, 2024). The UAE is making significant investments in the region through its DP World business. With 50 terminals and 12 major developments spread across 32 countries, DP World, a UAE-based company, is one of the biggest maritime terminal operators in the world. It offers consulting, infrastructure development, and logistics services. Roll-on and roll-off vessels, passenger terminal handling, and general and bulk cargo handling are among its logistic offerings. The port's economic position has been further cemented by DP World's modernization and growth (Gupta, 2025).

In the modern period, the significance of Berbera Port has grown for several important reasons. First, the geographical location makes it an ideal transshipment point for goods traveling between Africa, Europe, and beyond. Due to its geo-economic significance, the port provides a convenient stopover for ships, lowering commercial transit times and costs. Also, the growing importance of the port is that it is a gateway for trade and connectivity for landlocked countries in the Horn of Africa, such as Ethiopia and South Sudan, giving them access to international markets, fostering economic integration and stability, and growth (Darwich & Bakonyi, 2022).

On a global scale, Berbera's strategic significance is magnified by its potential inclusion in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is seeking to improve global trade connectivity. As part of China's Maritime Silk Road, the port could serve as a critical node in expanding infrastructure and trade networks across Africa and Asia. Thus, Berbera Port not only supports the economic aspirations of regional countries but also playing a crucial role in global trade, security, and geopolitical rivalries.

The port's extensive road and rail network makes it easy and affordable for several nations to import necessary materials and export their goods. The region's economic growth and development could be boosted by this connectivity, which could also open up new commercial prospects (Sander, 2024). Berbera's development is also linked to the stability and security of Somaliland, a region that has been relatively peaceful compared to the rest of Somalia. The port's success is critical to Somaliland's international recognition and aspirations for economic self-sufficiency. A thriving port can contribute to regional stability by providing jobs, stimulating economic growth, and fostering trade ties that can lead to greater regional cooperation. As it continues to develop, the Berbera Port is playing an increasingly important role in shaping Africa's economic future and strengthening its links with the rest of the world (Stepputat & Norman, 2024).

The Motivations Behind the Agreement

The agreement between Somaliland and Ethiopia is driven by mutually beneficial motivations rooted in historical, economic, and geopolitical factors. The primary motivation for Somaliland in seeking recognition from Ethiopia is rooted in its long-standing desire for international legitimacy and the numerous benefits that official statehood would confer. Since declaring independence from Somalia in 1991, Somaliland has established a stable government, democratic institutions, its own constitution, passport, army, and currency. Despite these achievements and maintaining political contacts with several countries, Somaliland has struggled to gain formal recognition, which is crucial for its economic and social development. Recognition by Ethiopia, (a significant regional player) would not only bolster Somaliland's economy through increased trade and investment but also open the doors for international aid and financing essential for infrastructure and public services. Additionally, official recognition would enhance Somaliland's broader international legitimacy, allow Somaliland full participation in the Global community, such as the membership of the UN, and secure its future as a sovereign state (Opalo, 2025).

On the other hand, Ethiopia with 129 million inhabitants (as of 2024), is the second most populous country in Africa. However, because of its landlocked status, its economy is constrained. The two East African countries, Ethiopia and Eritrea were once united but in 1993, Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia because of the three-decade bitter war, as a result, Ethiopia lost its seafront. Since then, the East African nation has been cut off from the Gulf of Aden and has experienced severe economic hardships (Lawal, 2024). It has since attempted a number of strategies to regain the coastline and get access to the sea. Being landlocked undermines Ethiopia's ability to grow its economy, develop its military (navy), and exert influence in the Horn of Africa (Matshanda, 2023).

Due to Ethiopia's lack of sea access, which is hurting its economy, the landlocked nation has chosen to breach its geographic isolation to get access to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, which might enhance its access to Europe and beyond. The strategic agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland might open the door for Ethiopia to achieve its goals of diversifying its seaport access and gaining secure maritime access (Yimenu & McCabe, 2024). Ethiopia views Berbera as a strategic African base at the entrance to both the Red Sea and the Suez Canal (Burger, 2024). Currently, more than 95% of Ethiopia's cargo is handled through the Red Sea port of Djibouti, which has served as Ethiopia's primary trade route since Eritrea's independence. However, this dependence comes at a high cost, with Ethiopia paying \$2 billion a year in port fees to Djibouti, a significant burden for a country where a quarter of its 129 million people are still dependent on food aid. With a population of 129 million, Ethiopia's need for diversified sea access is driven by its demographic size. For Ethiopia's "survival," direct sea access is essential, which is why Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia has been determined to get it. As to his assertion, Ethiopia's destiny will be dictated by its ability to access the Red Sea, which might lead to either its advancement or downfall (Lawal, 2024).

He also feels that geography is hurting the country's economy. That's why he emphasized the importance of gaining access to the sea, describing it as an "existential issue" for his country, asserting that the Red Sea was Ethiopia's "natural boundary" and claiming that its population cannot live in a "geographic prison" (Waal, 2023). These assertions reflect a historical narrative similar to those used by Russia in its invasion of Crimea in 2014 and China in its claims over the South China Sea.

The accord has sparked new tensions in this region, where political instability is still a major contributor to poverty, displacement, and insurgency. The desire for recognition by Somaliland and Ethiopia to get access to the sea could alter regional allegiances and heighten geopolitical tensions (Bhansali, 2025).

The Tension between Ethiopia and Somalia

Simmering tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia have now escalated into a full-blown diplomatic dispute. Somalia expelled Ethiopia's ambassador, recalled its own envoy from Addis Ababa, and ordered the closure of two of its consulates in response to a contentious deal. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, the president of Somalia, responded aggressively to the agreement, sharply denouncing and rejecting the MoU and charging Addis Ababa with trying to seize a portion of what Somalia claims as its own land (Yibeltal & Kupemba, 2024). The Somali government said the agreement is "null and void" and "unacceptable", asserting that Somalia will not allow "an inch of Somali territory to be taken away" (Maruf, 2024).

The relationship between Somalia and Somaliland has been contentious for a long time since Mogadishu considers the self-governing region, home to 6.2 million people, to be part of its own territory. Hargeisa fought an independence war, primarily along ethnic lines, and separated from Mogadishu more than 3 decades ago. The historic deal, however, has heightened tensions in the already unstable region and angered Somalia, which views it as an unacceptable act of aggression and a violation of its territorial integrity. The deal is considered a land grab by Somalia, but Ethiopia claims it is commercial and essential to its economic needs (Abdisamad & Yibeltal, 2024).

According to Abiy Ahmed, the high costs of relying on the country's neighbors to access ports are unsustainable. The current deal provides Ethiopia with direct access to strategic waters and reduces its dependence on a single port. Abiy reportedly said, Ethiopia would secure direct access to a port either amicably or via force if required. "If it is not achieved by other means, war is the way" (Cusman, 2023). To stop Somaliland's statehood from being recognized, Somalia has also threatened to go to war with Ethiopia and stated that "Our strategic waters are not for sale". He urged Somali civilians to stand united against potential assault and warned Ethiopia not to escalate the situation into armed conflict (Harter, 2024). If the war escalates over a port, it would further destabilize the Horn of Africa, which is already in turmoil.

Potential Economic Benefits of the Agreement for Ethiopia and Somaliland

The potential benefits of the Berbera Port agreement for Ethiopia and Somaliland are numerous, as it could accelerate economic integration, expand trade, and generate shared prosperity for both countries, transforming the region's trade and development. For Ethiopia, a landlocked country, Berbera provides a crucial alternative to Djibouti, reducing transportation costs, improving trade efficiency, and stimulating economic growth, especially in the country's eastern regions due to their geographic proximity to Somaliland. This access to global markets will boost Ethiopian industries like agriculture and manufacturing, leading to increased foreign investment, particularly in infrastructure and logistics (Ibrahim, 2023).

Through the acquisition of a naval port in Somaliland, Ethiopia can enhance its maritime capabilities and exert influence beyond its landlocked borders. Currently, Djibouti hosts military bases for several foreign powers, including the U.S., China, France, and Japan. Besides, Ethiopia could potentially reduce its reliance on a single country and establish a counterbalance to the influence of other foreign actors in the region. Additionally, one of the greatest advantages for Ethiopia is that the port of Berbera is free from piracy problems, which can lead to increased trade and economic growth for the country. Also, the port will offer access to global markets, allowing Ethiopian products to reach international buyers efficiently (Sander, 2024).

Similarly, Somaliland will gain from increased port revenues, expanded trade routes, and enhanced investor confidence, which will attract foreign direct investment in sectors such as construction, services, and industrial development. Also, the port's expansion will provide jobs in construction and port management, contributing to economic stability and reducing unemployment (Itimoudis, 2024). It will diversify the country's economy, positioning it as a regional trade hub rather than relying solely on agriculture and livestock. In addition, the Berbera Corridor will foster deeper regional economic integration, facilitate the free flow of goods and services and making the region more competitive in global trade (Sulayem, 2021).

Overall, both nations will benefit from increased revenues through port fees, customs duties, and taxes, which will allow for reinvestment in public services and infrastructure projects, directly and indirectly boosting the local and regional economies. Both countries stand to experience significant economic growth, job creation, and improved regional connectivity. This will also have a positive impact on socioeconomic situations, particularly in Ethiopia, Somaliland, and East Africa (Mesurvey, 2024).

Potential Implications for Regional Stability

The Ethiopia-Somaliland deal has heightened tension in the Horn of Africa, a region already beset by multiple severe crises. Somalia which is the biggest opponent of the deal, is strongly backed by several countries and organizations like the U.S. Turkey, Egypt, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Arab League, which have supported Somalia's territorial integrity (Klomegah, 2024). Despite the criticism, Ethiopia and Somaliland seem unfazed and are committed to upholding the pact (Bhattacharya, 2024). The deal, according to some analysts, might lead to more hostilities in the Red Sea, a crucial international maritime route that has grown more hazardous due to the Israel-Hamas conflict (Terdiman, 2024).

Many countries in the region, notably Egypt, Djibouti, Eritrea, and the AU, denounce the contentious agreement. They oppose the deal for a variety of reasons. The Arab League, led by Egypt (which has a complicated relationship with Ethiopia), has been steadfast in its support for Somalia. Cairo, which has a long-running disagreement with Addis Ababa over the Nile waters and worries about competition in the Red Sea, has rejected the MoU, viewing it as a threat to its own regional interests. Cairo further interprets the agreement as an attempt by Addis Ababa to endorse its dominance and destabilize the region. Another issue that worries Djibouti is Ethiopia's substantial naval presence in the vital Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. Observers claim that the loss of this revenue, which Djibouti charges Ethiopia nearly billions annually for the use of its ports, might cause instability for the country, which has profited from this cash inflow for decades. In a similar vein, Eritrea's opposition to the agreement stems from historical ties, reservations about Ethiopia's marine access, and possible economic rivalry. Eritrea's alliance with Somalia is intended to offset Ethiopia's increasing power in the region. Moreover, the AU's resistance to the agreement is probably motivated by its concern that global recognition will spark other secession movements across the continent, potentially escalating regional instability (Darwich & Bakonyi, 2024).

Additionally, Ethiopia's anticipated recognition of Somaliland as an independent state is likely to have far-reaching implications if Mogadishu and Addis Ababa cannot find a middle ground. This ongoing tension may lead to permanent enmity between Somalia and Ethiopia. Due to the rapidly deteriorating situation between Ethiopia and Somalia, ongoing political and diplomatic activities around the Red Sea suggest that regional divisions can further widen as other countries stand behind the two warring parties (Ahmed H. Q., 2024). Consequently, the port deal is facing strong regional opposition, making its success less likely (Darwich & Bakonyi, 2024). If regional actors become entangled over the Berbera Port deal, the consequences could be severe and far-reaching. The conflict would likely disrupt vital maritime trade routes, leading to significant economic losses due to cargo delays, damaged infrastructure, and soaring insurance costs. These disruptions could further exacerbate humanitarian crises and hinder regional development efforts. Additionally, the instability could create opportunities for militant groups to thrive, increasing threats like piracy, smuggling, and other security challenges. In such a scenario, the fragile Horn of Africa region could face spillover effects from a potential escalation and wider volatility of existing tensions between neighboring countries (Cannon & Rossiter, 2019).

Reactions from the Rest of the World

As Somalia's assertion that the deal violates the values of maintaining territorial integrity, sovereignty, and non-interference in national matters has received substantial backing from the international community. Regarding regional peace, the U.S. has conveyed grave concerns and asked Ethiopia and Somalia to de-escalate tensions. With multiple statements endorsing Somalia's territorial integrity, Washington has adhered to its "One-Somalia" policy. Besides, the U.S. may be concerned about Ethiopia's expanding influence because it has historically been a dominant power in the Horn of Africa. By siding with Somalia against Ethiopia on this specific issue, the U.S. might be aiming to prevent Ethiopia from becoming overly dominant (Webb, 2024). One of Somaliland's closest Western allies, the United Kingdom, has similarly voiced serious concerns about the MoU, urging caution and stating that it supports Somalia's territorial integrity (Bir, 2024). There may also be a cunning plan in the British concern that Ethiopia gaining a foothold in the Somaliland region might weaken the British grip, which still holds on to the region.

Similarly, Turkey (a close ally of the Somali government) reiterated its support for Mogadishu's sovereignty and urged for direct talks between Somalia and Somaliland. The UAE, Somaliland's and Ethiopia's close ally, has not said anything thus far. The UAE is progressively expanding its sway over Africa and the Red Sea region. It has containerized and managed port infrastructures such as Djibouti, Somaliland (Berbera), and Eritrea (Assab), which allows the UAE to control critical trade routes and project its power in an area of geopolitical significance. However, the agreement would likely infuriate Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and Iran because it might allow the UAE to overtake them in the struggle to control the Red Sea (Darwich & Bakonyi, 2024).

On the other hand, Pakistan might face a tough decision regarding the Berbera Port deal, as it has strong ties with both Somalia and Ethiopia. Historically, Pakistan has maintained strong relations with Somalia dating back to the 1960s. The two nations are also a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which further strengthens their relations (Qamar, 2017). While, Ethiopia has recently established formal diplomatic relations with Pakistan, with the Ethiopian embassy opening in Islamabad in 2023 (Rehman, 2023). The two countries are actively exploring cooperation in various fields, including technology, education, and economic development. Thus, Pakistan's strong relationship with both Somalia and Ethiopia might put the country in a dilemma, as it must now decide whether to favor or oppose the Berbera Port deal, potentially straining ties with one of its valued partners.

Likewise, emerging China has taken a neutral stance in this situation, neither openly supporting nor opposing the Berbera Port agreement. Instead, it has focused on maintaining good relations with both Somalia and Somaliland. However, China is likely concerned about the growing presence of other world powers, particularly the U.S. and the UAE, in Somaliland, possibly through the Berbera Port. China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in the Horn of Africa as part of its BRI. These investments include ports, railways, roads, and energy projects aimed at increasing trade links and securing access to resources. It is quite possible that the success of Berbera Port can be seen as part of broader covert strategies of the U.S. and its allies to support Somalia's territorial integrity to contain the rise of China in the region, bearing geopolitical and geo-economic significance (Nyabiage, 2024). Overall, opposition from various countries reflects growing foreign meddling in the region, shifting alliances, and fears of potential conflict. It could disrupt trade routes, affect global maritime security, and draw in international powers. These powers may enter to protect their strategic interests, support allies, or secure access to important resources and trade routes. Their involvement can complicate peace efforts, as each power may have different objectives, leading to competing agendas and proxy conflicts or heightened tensions.

Recommendations and Conclusion

All stakeholders involved in the Berbera project must view it collectively as an opportunity for the betterment of the region's people. They need to make decisions that set aside conflicts in favor of a compromise-based approach, serving as a foundation for a brighter future for the regional community. The port's expansion is expected to improve trade routes and connectivity between the Horn of Africa and global markets, which can lead to increased trade volume for Somaliland and its neighbors. This will enable

this impoverished region, which has historically been marginalized and relied on the mercy of powerful nations, to stand on its own feet and move toward prosperity. Such an approach could set an example for the rest of the world. Otherwise, abandoning such significant projects can only worsen the situation of the populace. If the plan is canceled, the Somali government may celebrate, but the Ethiopian people will inevitably express strong anger and frustration. In the future, if Somalia announces any plans for the betterment of its people, Ethiopia will likely make any possible effort to obstruct them, turning the region a hotbed for further conflict.

Although the deal between Somaliland and Ethiopia is in its initial stage. Still, it has received strong backlash from regional and international actors, despite its potential to be a game changer for the Horn of Africa region. However, it is essential to consider that many countries are opposing the deal due to their own interests under the guise of Somalia's autonomy. Besides, some Western nations regard Africans as inferior due to racial biases and are resistant to the notion of granting them equal status. It is also possible that the U.S. secretly intends to turn Somaliland into another Taiwan.

Indeed, the U.S. is worried about its competitor China which is making strides to establish dominance in the region. This could significantly undermine American interests and ultimately dismantle its hegemonic system in this region. As it sees its influence waning, the U.S. may attempt to grab Berbera Port from Somalia through a backdoor policy under its own preferred terms to strengthen its grip on the region. Subsequently, it may become impossible for Somalia to free Berbera from the U.S. clutches in the future, just as it has become a dream for China to free Taiwan from America's control despite the longstanding Chinese strategic patience and its consideration of Taiwan as China's integral part.

In the evolving global landscape, if China gains easy access to the Berbera Port alongside the Gwadar Port, it would be a significant setback for the U.S. and its allies. A clear example of this is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project associated with the Gwadar Port, which is rapidly gaining prominence among global ports due to China's efforts and is seen as a symbol of a bright future for the people of Pakistan and the countries involved in this project. Similarly, for Somalia and the regional countries that, either intentionally or unintentionally, oppose the Berbera Port deal initiative, the CPEC project serves as a guiding light. If successful, the Berbera Port initiative could set a strong example, inspiring nations worldwide to pursue similar partnerships, catalyzing a chain reaction of transformative projects, driving sustainable development, strengthening global trade networks, and fostering shared prosperity.

When viewed through the lens of concerns, it also becomes clear that the Berbera Port deal is a pivotal development as well as having profound geopolitical implications for the Horn of Africa region. The deal is expected to intensify regional competition for trade dominance and align countries with foreign powers backing the Berbera Port project, which might compromise their ability to act independently. The involvement of foreign powers in regional affairs can lead to a fragmentation of the region and the creation of new fault lines. This involvement could also foster a climate of instability, thereby the already fragile region may experience deeper geopolitical fragmentation. While the deal carries both opportunities and risks, its full implications for the region's geopolitics are still unclear, and only time will determine how it plays out.

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