

“[T]urning the page on decades of conflict and underdevelopment in the Horn of Africa will require . . . democratization and the institutionalization of transparent, accountable governance.”

The Eritrea-Ethiopia Thaw and Its Regional Impact

MICHAEL WOLDEMARIAM

In a televised address on June 20, 2018, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki announced his intention to dispatch a delegation to Ethiopia. The mission was the first official high-level diplomatic contact between the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments in over a decade, and marked the beginning of a rapid thaw in relations that effectively ended Africa’s most intractable interstate rivalry. By early July, Isaias was playing host to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali in the Eritrean capital of Asmara, where the two leaders issued a landmark statement declaring: “The state of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has come to an end.” A week later, Isaias embarked on a reciprocal visit to Addis Ababa.

The resumption of people-to-people ties proceeded briskly from that point. Flights and telephone connections between the two countries were reestablished almost immediately. By September, the heavily militarized frontier was no more as border crossings reopened and trade ties were revived. In three short months, the accumulated discord of decades was swept away.

The rivalry between Eritrea and Ethiopia is part of a saga nearly 70 years old. After their land was federated with Ethiopia in 1952 and annexed almost a decade later, Eritrean nationalists waged a long struggle for national liberation. Victory came in 1991, when Eritrean rebels allied with insurgents in the neighboring Tigray region to unseat the Marxist regime of Mengistu Hailemariam and formalize Eritrean statehood.

These victorious rebel groups—the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)—then installed themselves as the rulers of Eritrea and Ethiopia, respectively. They fell out in 1998 over border and economic issues, leading to a two-year war that left more than 100,000 dead. Despite a peace agreement that formally ended that conflict, the two countries remained at loggerheads until last year’s diplomatic breakthrough.

The rivalry between Eritrea and Ethiopia had ramifications that extended far beyond the narrow confines of their bilateral relationship. Since ruling elites in each country had long regarded the other as the primary external threat, their mutual enmity came to define their foreign policies toward the entire Horn of Africa and other countries with interests in the region.

Eritrea’s tensions with Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia, and its broader international isolation, largely derived from the feud with Ethiopia. Meanwhile, Ethiopia’s troubles with Egypt and the Gulf states were worsened by the frictions with Eritrea. The Horn’s eight-country regional political bloc, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), was also affected: the dispute between two of its leading members led to years of institutional paralysis and dysfunction.

Given the centrality of the Eritrea-Ethiopia rivalry to regional dynamics, the rapprochement has prompted high expectations that it will have positive spillovers into the surrounding neighborhood. The public narrative conveyed by the international community, eager for some stability in this volatile corner of Africa, is that the summer thaw of 2018 could be a transformative moment for the Horn—a catalyst for a new era of regional peace and prosperity.

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At a September 2018 follow-up meeting of Eritrean and Ethiopian leaders in Riyadh, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres declared, “There is a wind of hope blowing in the Horn of Africa.” Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairperson of the African Union Commission, called the rapprochement “a major and historic contribution to the stabilization and sustainable development of the Horn of Africa region.” Abiy has predicted that regional integration will be the new engine of progress in the Horn.

In many ways, developments on the ground bear out this enthusiasm. The region’s leaders have sustained a flurry of diplomatic activity over the past year, shuttling between their capitals at what sometimes appears to be an almost frenetic pace. While the pageantry and symbolism of these visits on their own have been enough to change the tenor of the Horn’s usually cutthroat brand of politics, they have yielded tangible achievements. Several of the region’s most serious disputes, once considered intractable, have lost their sharper edges.

Yet the construction of a new regional order in the Horn of Africa will not be straightforward. Peace, in this context, comes with caveats. Just as the Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement has blunted old cleavages, so too has it exacerbated tensions, both within the region’s states and between them. At the very least, these areas of friction will make a new era of peace and development in the Horn, anchored in regional integration, extremely difficult to achieve.

The reality is that turning the page on decades of conflict and underdevelopment will require something that many of the region’s leaders are unwilling to fully embrace: democratization and the institutionalization of transparent, accountable governance in their countries. The Horn’s history of endemic crisis is deeply structural, grounded in the character of ruling elites and their relationship with the people they govern. The current constellation of governments in the Horn, some of which are autocratic and insecure, presiding over fragile domestic political settlements, looks like a shaky foundation for a new regional order.

The region’s center of gravity, Ethiopia, has achieved rapid but easily reversible progress in building a democratic order; the rapprochement with Eritrea would not have occurred otherwise. There are signs in neighboring states—Sudan, for

instance, where massive street protests in recent months have ended the 30-year reign of President Omar al-Bashir—that meaningful political change may be in the offing. But some savvy incumbent leaders are leveraging a new brand of geopolitics to forestall popular pressure for reform.

NEW PLAYER

The thaw in relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia in the summer of 2018 was closely tied to far-reaching internal changes in Ethiopia earlier that year. In February, a rising tide of popular protest provoked a crisis within the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. A few weeks later, the deeply divided coalition elected 42-year-old Abiy Ahmed as Hailemariam’s replacement.

Abiy’s selection represented a major redistribution of political power within the EPRDF: he had been chosen over the objections of the TPLF, the hitherto dominant member of the four-party coalition. The outcome was made possible through a fair bit of subterfuge and last-minute coalition building between Abiy’s Oromo People’s Democratic Organization and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM).

These two parties nominally represent the two largest ethnic groups in the country.

While the EPRDF has made some impressive gains in the domain of economic and social development, it chose to forge a highly autocratic political order when it seized power in 1991 after a protracted armed struggle. Abiy acted swiftly to undo this governance model, releasing political prisoners, welcoming back exiled opposition figures, and generally expanding civil and political liberties at all levels. The old national security state, once the instrument of repression, has been defanged. Many of its key personalities have been dismissed.

Changes in economic policy have taken longer to congeal, but Abiy’s government appears keen to drop the statist orientation of its predecessor and is openly contemplating liberalization of key sectors such as telecommunications, commercial aviation, and electricity. The new prime minister also made major adjustments in the realm of foreign policy.

On the question of Eritrea, however, there was no decisive policy shift by the Abiy admin-

Abiy’s sweeping reforms in Ethiopia can be a catalyst for political transformation in neighboring states.

istration—at least not one significant enough to explain the dramatic diplomatic breakthroughs of June 2018. The crux of the Eritrea-Ethiopia rivalry concerned Ethiopia's commitments under the Algiers Agreement, the 2000 treaty that formally ended the last Eritrea-Ethiopia war. It set in motion an arbitration process whose April 2002 verdict required Ethiopia to relinquish some of the border territories that had been the ostensible cause of the war and that it had controlled by force of arms.

Ethiopia initially rejected the verdict but eventually came to accept the idea of returning the territories, provided that Eritrea agreed to engage in dialogue on normalizing ties. Eritrea, for its part, insisted that Ethiopia must withdraw from the occupied territories in full before any talks could occur. The early June 2018 announcement by Abiy's new administration that Ethiopia would comply with the Algiers Agreement, while notable, did not constitute an unambiguous departure from the Ethiopian position under Hailemariam.

To his credit, Abiy demonstrated real initiative and innovation in his approach to Eritrea, particularly at the level of political and diplomatic tactics. His conciliatory public tone and his decision to engage the United Arab Emirates as a facilitator were helpful. None of this was easy and it entailed significant political risk. But the decisive factor was not so much what the new prime minister did as the simple fact that he was not his predecessor.

To a large extent, the Eritrea-Ethiopia rivalry was rooted in the mutual enmity of the dominant parties in each country, the EPLF—renamed the People's Front for Democracy and Justice in 1994—and the TPLF. The 1998 war was in many ways an intimate conflict, since these two parties had forged close bonds in the previous struggle against Ethiopia's Marxist regime. The rupture created serious bitterness and lasting sentiments of betrayal that made reconciliation difficult. The end of the TPLF's dominance offered the possibility of a partner in Ethiopia that the Eritrean government could trust—and a face-saving opportunity to declare victory while at the same time making key concessions on the border issue that would unlock the impasse.

Isaias has dropped the demand for a unilateral Ethiopian withdrawal from Eritrean territories that had underpinned his policy on the conflict for nearly two decades. Ten months after the June 2018 thaw, Ethiopia remains in control of these territories, including the flashpoint village of Badme,

even as the normalization of ties between Addis and Asmara has rapidly progressed—an approach the Eritrean leadership had rejected for years.

PEACE DIVIDENDS

Whatever the cause of the Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement, there is no doubt that it has diluted tensions along the shared frontier and opened a new chapter in bilateral relations. The specter of war no longer looms over the two countries.

People-to-people relations have resumed with relative ease, generating a burgeoning ecosystem of cross-border trade in everything from staple goods to electronics. Despite limited resources, transportation links are being rehabilitated. Relations between Abiy and Isaias appear warm and collegial, though a lack of transparency surrounding the rapprochement and the delay in negotiating formal cooperation instruments have drawn some criticism.

The dividends of the rapprochement extend beyond the realm of the binational relationship. Ethiopia's strategic conundrum has long been that it is the most populous landlocked country in the world, which imposes a major structural constraint on the growth and vitality of its economy. The solution, which has always been easier said than done, is regional economic integration that enhances its access to ports in neighboring countries and trade corridors connecting it to the region and the world. In this regard, peace with Eritrea, which has a long Red Sea coast, made perfect sense.

Yet the rapprochement was only one piece of the puzzle. It had to be converted into a regionwide political settlement that would create the impetus for deepening the integration of Ethiopia and all the neighboring economies. Three by-products of the Eritrea-Ethiopia thaw have diminished tensions in the broader region and built momentum for the political and economic order Addis wants to forge.

The first has been Eritrea's reabsorption into the regional political system. Under Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (1995–2012), and later under Hailemariam (2012–18), Ethiopia used its diplomatic heft to isolate Eritrea within the region and the international system more broadly. Partly as a result, Eritrea had lukewarm-to-chilly relations with its other neighbors, was barred from reentry into IGAD, and was subjected to a UN Security Council arms embargo and numerous investigations at the UN Human Rights Council.

Eritrea's diplomatic fortunes rapidly changed after the rapprochement with Ethiopia. In June 2018, Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (known as Farmajo) resumed bilateral relations with Asmara, and in September he entered into a tripartite cooperation agreement with both Eritrea and Ethiopia. In September, Djibouti and Eritrea resumed high-level diplomatic contacts and agreed to work together to resolve a boundary dispute that had kept them at loggerheads since 2008. In November, the UN Security Council made the momentous decision to end the Eritrea sanctions regime.

In December, Isaias traveled to Kenya for consultations with President Uhuru Kenyatta. In March 2019, another tripartite cooperation agreement was signed—this time by Eritrea, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. Meanwhile, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Kenya convened a three-way summit in Asmara. Eritrea's reabsorption into the regional system has not been seamless—it remains estranged from both IGAD and the African Union—but its relationships with the neighbors are much improved.

SOMALI RESET

The second area of progress has been in Ethiopia's relations with Somalia. Ethiopian elites—whether under the monarchy, the Marxists (who ruled from 1974 to 1991), or the EPRDF—have long viewed Somalia as a source of existential security threats. This is partly a reflection of the historical structure of political authority in Addis, which was dominated by a succession of leaders who represented the interests of the Christian highlands and maintained tenuous control over the Somali-populated periphery. Worried that Mogadishu might stoke discontent in the Somali borderlands, Addis at times has intervened in Somalia in a way that undermines the authority of its central state.

Abiy has sought to rebalance the relationship, viewing Somalia not simply as a nest of security threats but as a neighbor that offers the potential for mutual economic gains. He has sought to help strengthen Farmajo's domestic political authority by signaling possible reductions in Ethiopian support for many of the central government's rivals in the states of the Somali federation. For his part, Farmajo has indicated in public statements that he regards Abiy as a qualitatively different kind of Ethiopian leader.

Other factors that have strengthened relations between Addis and Mogadishu include reforms

bringing stability to Ethiopia's restive Somali region, as well as the real possibility that the African Union peacekeeping mission that has long propped up Somalia's government may be phased out. But the Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement played a role as well—the tripartite cooperation pact brought all three governments closer together. Moreover, the diminution of the Eritrean threat has given Ethiopia the space to use a lighter touch in Somalia. Although Eritrea had not been a player in Somalia for years, the specter of Eritrean involvement in 2005 provoked a highly destructive Ethiopian intervention.

ARAB INTERESTS

The third major dividend of the rapprochement has been a change in the tenor of relations between Ethiopia and the Middle Eastern states that are increasingly important strategic stakeholders in the Horn of Africa. One major pillar of Ethiopian foreign-policy thinking, dating back to the imperial era and again rooted in the historic structure of the state, was that the linkage between Eritrea and Arab powers posed a potent challenge to Ethiopian interests.

Under the EPRDF, this concern manifested itself in, among other things, Ethiopia's 2008 decision to break diplomatic relations with Qatar, then a key ally of Eritrea. The issue took on renewed significance in 2015, when the Emiratis built a military base in southern Eritrea that became the fulcrum of their operations against the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

The prospect of a hostile Eritrea under the Emirati umbrella threatened to disrupt a political and military balance between Eritrea and Ethiopia that had long favored the latter. Ethiopian diplomatic protests in the Gulf largely fell on deaf ears; the Emiratis offered rhetorical assurances but signaled no willingness to reconsider their relationship with Eritrea. In this increasingly tense strategic environment, a major clash in June 2016 between Eritrean and Ethiopian forces reportedly left hundreds of troops dead.

The rapprochement has changed this entire dynamic. Responding to Abiy's overtures, the UAE leveraged its relations with the Eritrean government to help facilitate the Eritrea-Ethiopia thaw, which in turn has opened the door to cooperation between Addis and the Saudi-Emirati axis. In June 2018, while the UAE was acting as a mediator, it injected \$1 billion into Ethiopia's ailing financial system and a further \$2 billion into other

sectors of the Ethiopian economy. It is now possible (but by no means certain) that the Emiratis will assist in financing Abiy's regional integration agenda, particularly in the area of transportation infrastructure, the connective tissue of any such effort in the Horn of Africa. Farther afield, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are working to bridge the divide between Ethiopia and Egypt over Nile water issues, though without much success so far.

Ethiopia's relations with the Saudis and Emiratis do not appear to be exclusive. In March 2019, Abiy visited Qatar, a long-standing Gulf player in the Horn that is at odds with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Complementarity and cooperation, rather than competition, now appear to be hallmarks of Ethiopia's relations with key Gulf states.

INTERNAL RIFTS

These shifts have hardly been seamless. Although the thaw has diminished the volatility of a number of regional fault lines, it has also exacerbated other disputes, both within and between the Horn's key states.

In Ethiopia, the rapprochement has further widened rifts within the ruling coalition. This is no small matter, since party and state have been virtually indistinguishable for decades. The TPLF, formerly the dominant party in the ruling EPRDF, maintains a long list of grievances against Abiy.

Some of this undoubtedly is a result of the psychosis associated with having held power for so long only to lose it to a former subordinate. Some of it is related to the political campaign the prime minister has waged against the TPLF—his supporters argue it was necessary in the face of sabotage, but others believe it has been gratuitous at times. In November 2018, the arrest of a number of Tigrayan officials on corruption and rights-abuse charges, and an associated documentary on state-run television, prompted the TPLF to accuse Abiy's administration of selective targeting. There are policy differences as well, on economic matters and the orientation of Ethiopian federalism.

Abiy's ally within the ruling front, the ANDM, has perhaps even tenuous relations with the TPLF, owing in large part to a dispute over the status of the territories of Welkait and Raya. Under Ethiopia's old system these territories belonged to the Amhara-dominated provinces of Gonder and Wollo, but in 1995 they were included in the Tigray

Regional State on the grounds that their population was majority Tigrayan. Now that there has been a rebalancing of power in Addis, the ANDM is pressing its case for a return of the territories.

This is an incredibly complex dispute, with claims and counterclaims that go deep into the murky waters of history and identity in northern Ethiopia. It is also explosive: over the past year, regional militias in both Amhara and Tigray have sought to boost their military capabilities while engaging in covert activity. Populist winds in both regions—part of a nationwide surge in ethnic nationalism—make de-escalation difficult.

In this context, the Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement has been profoundly unsettling for the TPLF, sharpening the security dilemmas it faces and complicating any hope for accommodation with its rivals within the EPRDF. The narrative advanced by much of Tigray's political class is that the rapprochement was designed to encircle the TPLF (and by extension Tigray), in order to keep it in check or even dismantle it. Although this view

is somewhat reductionist, it is not unreasonable to think that one element of the thaw was the mutual desire of Abiy and Isaias to corral the TPLF.

In December 2018, Asmara closed the main border crossings between Eritrea and Tigray,

just as the movement of goods from the Amhara region into Tigray was being disrupted. These events may have been unconnected but likely underscored for TPLF elites the political squeeze they were facing on their northern and southern frontiers.

MUTUAL SUSPICIONS

Another set of internal fissures is emerging in Eritrea. Since a crackdown in 2001 that obliterated political freedoms and inaugurated an era of austere autocratic control, the country's ruling elites have argued that reform is impossible given the Ethiopian threat. With the country in a state of emergency, they asserted, the times were too dangerous to erect the pillars of a democratic order and implement the 1997 constitution.

The most notable outcome of this perpetual crisis was a system of compulsory, low-wage national service of indefinite duration, which facilitated rights abuses and contributed to the outmigration of hundreds of thousands of Eritreans. The Ethiopian rapprochement, by eliminating the pre-

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text for autocracy, raised hopes that the government would initiate much-needed political and economic reforms. But nearly ten months after the initial thaw, neither the president nor his key lieutenants have signaled any willingness to do so.

Dashed expectations are now manifesting themselves in increased refugee flows, a surge of online antigovernment activism, reports of internal dissent within the ruling party, and even heavy criticism of the rapprochement on the grounds that it is jeopardizing the country's hard-won sovereignty. Eritrea may be at a critical juncture, as the unstoppable force of popular discontent meets the immovable object of an entrenched African strongman.

The rapprochement is also making waves in the internal politics of Somalia, where the tripartite agreement with Eritrea and Ethiopia initially encouraged Farmajo—inadvertently or perhaps by design—to pursue a more aggressive strategy for handling recalcitrant states in the Somali federation. The ongoing feud between Mogadishu and the regions over the balance of power within Somalia's federal architecture hinders efforts to reconstruct government institutions and defeat al-Shabaab, the Islamist insurgency.

Farmajo's efforts to interfere in state elections have dangerously widened the chasm. In December 2018, the federal government nearly provoked a major crisis in South West State when Ethiopian troops operating under the auspices of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) arrested Mukhtar Robow, the front-runner in that state's presidential election, clearing the way for Mogadishu's preferred candidate.

These tensions have also caused ruptures between Somalia and its neighbors, particularly Kenya. Nairobi's strategic interests in Somalia are varied but the maintenance of a friendly buffer region along the border is paramount. It has supported Ahmed Madobe's administration in the state of Jubaland, and worried that the tripartite arrangement would bolster Farmajo at the expense of Jubaland and its other interests. Those fears were heightened by rumors that Isaias aimed to create a narrower alternative to IGAD that would exclude countries like Uganda and Kenya, and eventually circumscribe Kenyan influence in Somalia.

In early March 2019, Nairobi launched a diplomatic broadside against Somalia over an ongoing

dispute related to their maritime border. That same month, Kenyan troop movements in Somalia suggested a possible reduction in Kenya's commitment to AMISOM, which is propping up the federal government in Mogadishu.

One other set of interstate tensions has emerged on Eritrea's frontiers. While Djibouti and Sudan do not view the Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement in zero-sum terms, they have concerns. Both countries are traditional Ethiopian allies that have their own distinct points of discord with Asmara. They were unsettled by Abiy's embrace of Isaias and the latter's reemergence on the regional stage.

Djibouti has an ongoing dispute with Eritrea over the border region of Ras Doumeira and the status of prisoners of war captured during clashes between the two neighbors in 2008. It took umbrage at calls from Addis and Mogadishu for lifting sanctions against Eritrea in the summer of 2018. Since the sanctions were partially related to that dispute, Djibouti complained that its allies had encroached on its prerogatives and disregarded

its national interests. Djiboutian President Ismail Omar Guelleh, who has feuded with Abu Dhabi over the commercial management of the Djibouti port, is also said to be worried about Emirati influence on the rapprochement.

Sudan closed what at the time was Eritrea's sole open land border in January 2018, citing Eritrean interference in its domestic affairs—a move that largely severed their relations. Asmara, for its part, still resents Djibouti and Sudan's alignment with Ethiopia's previous government.

Some of the tension between Eritrea and its neighbors has been papered over by Abiy's diplomatic efforts and the resumption of high-level contacts with Djibouti. Eritrea's relations with Sudan could improve with al-Bashir's ouster. But for now, the mutual suspicion among the leaders of Eritrea, Djibouti, and Sudan persists, and has bled into relations with Ethiopia. The most striking signal of this new reality is a small but perceptible realignment of Sudanese—and to a lesser extent Djiboutian—policy toward Egypt, perhaps the only player in the Horn with which Ethiopia has seemingly irreconcilable differences.

SUSTAINING PEACE

There is much to appreciate about the Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement, both on its own terms

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and in its regional effects. Yet the reconfiguration of relations in the Horn of Africa has produced contradictions that must be resolved for a new era of peace and development, anchored in regional integration, to be realized. Although the flurry of diplomatic activity suggests that a regional political bargain might be possible, critical questions must be asked: A bargain for whom? And to what end?

After the Cold War, the Horn, like much of Africa, witnessed a dramatic transformation that brought a new generation of political elites to power. Through a rehabilitated IGAD and other mechanisms, they too proposed to remake the regional order in a way that would enhance cooperation and secure peace and development. Those efforts were a dismal failure. Sudan fell out with its neighbors. Eritrea and Ethiopia went to war. The crisis in Somalia was left to fester and metastasize.

Why the halcyon days of the early 1990s gave way to chronic crisis is not hard to figure out. Elite pacts between regional leaders presiding over shaky and untenable domestic political settlements cannot deliver sustainable peace and prosperity in the Horn. Healing the internal and external rifts that cut across the region requires fostering and institutionalizing a genuine culture of peace, one that is deeply at odds with the personalistic, autocratic rule that has long been entrenched in many of the region's capitals.

If a new regionalism that attempts to circumvent basic questions of transparent, accountable, and representative governance is doomed to fail, what are the prospects for democratic change across the region? Abiy's sweeping reforms in Ethiopia, the Horn's center of gravity, can be a catalyst for political transformation in neighboring states. The *de facto* independent republic of Somaliland already has an established democratic political tradition. Sudan is certainly ripe for systemic change, as shown by the popular protests that have unseated al-Bashir. In Eritrea and Djibouti, long-ruling strongmen are approaching the twilight of their careers.

These countries will have to move forward on their own, but what transpires in Ethiopia can cre-

ate an enabling environment. First, Abiy's achievements must be consolidated through transparent and orderly national elections—and, over the longer term, the emergence of a durable national consensus. If the Ethiopian experiment works, the demonstration effects throughout the broader region will be great. But given the fragmentation of the Ethiopian state, the new populist environment, and the proliferation of ethnic violence in various regions of the country, it will not be easy.

Second, Addis will have to employ its diplomatic weight to reinvent the Horn's old regionalism and bring issues of good governance to center stage. Do Abiy's liberal inclinations stop at Ethiopia's borders, or do they encompass the broader region? Does his administration, amid Ethiopia's multiple internal challenges, have the bandwidth to pursue a truly progressive foreign policy?

There are constraints far beyond Addis's control. The region is now an arena of competition for great and middle powers alike, each seeking to cultivate local allies and extend its influence. The Horn's current strongmen, much like their predecessors, are leveraging these alliances to forestall much-needed political change. In this context, the influence of the Gulf states is particularly pernicious, since they engage in a brand of diplomacy that is personalist, cash-based, and opaque.

For this last reason, it will be Sudan, rather than Ethiopia, that truly tests the limits of the Horn's democratic potential. A popular uprising has brought down an autocrat, but it remains a distinct possibility that the country's security elites will thwart a democratic transition. In this effort, they could well be aided by any number of Middle Eastern states—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are likely candidates—that are keen to snuff out democratic revolutions in the Arab world and have the resources to do so. Rivalries between these players and Qatar and Turkey could also throw Sudan's nascent transition into chaos.

Where the chips will ultimately fall in the Horn is hard to say. The Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement carries great promise, but the road to a better regional order will be long. ■