



Center for Policy Analysis & Research (CfPAR)

Brief Policy Review: Somalia's Regional Diplomacy

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If one looks at the conditions that exist in the Horn of Africa today in terms of its political and security conditions, it is clear that it is asymmetrical. This is when Ethiopia and Kenya are compared to Somalia. Somalia has totally collapsed after the last wave of democratization in the early 1990s was totally hijacked by warlords with no vision for governance. As a result, Somalia is the top failed state in the world today. Ethiopia, on the other hand, was saved from the crises that could have come with the uprisings of the late 1980s and early 1990s that toppled the last dictatorial and socialist government of Mengistu Haile Mariam. For Kenya, it was only in 2007 when [elections led to a statewide ethnic violence](#). In order to save Kenya to become a failed state, the international community acted swiftly, and the Kenyan leaders who were behind the ignition of the ethnic violence were indicted at the International Criminal Court under the UN mandated concept of [responsibility to protect or R2P](#). As Kenya was protected from internal turmoil in the aftermath of 2007 presidential elections, Somalia was under a total occupation of Ethiopian forces in order to defeat the Islamic Courts Union (ICU).

In 2011, Kenya invaded Somalia in order to "deter" al-Shabaab from entering its territories from the Somali border, and even though the invasion was a unilateral decision, Kenyan leaders argued that they had "permission" from the transitional government of President Sharif Ahmed. Moreover, Kenya and Ethiopia are the main actors of IGAD, a regional organization that is an umbrella that combines five more founding countries that Somalia is one of them. This regional entity is now fully a "stakeholder" in the political development of Somalia as it is part of the "decision-making" process. Being a "stakeholder" and participate in the political agenda of a sovereign country with a "permanent government" that could have handled its political and security issues independently raises many questions about the agenda and the motives of IGAD in Somalia. Kenya and Ethiopia have more weigh on this regional organization than any other member state especially when it comes to the issues pertaining to Somalia. Moreover, despite the resistance that many Somalis have been maintaining against the inclusion of Kenya and Ethiopia into AMISOM forces, the two countries have finally succeeded to join AMISOM peace-keeping mission even though security is still one of the biggest challenges that Somalia is going through.

With that asymmetrical power and influence in mind, Somalia's Prime Minister [had a bilateral talk](#) last week with Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta in Nairobi. Even though the agenda of the bilateral talk was circulated around the repatriation of the Somali refugees in Kenya, there are other issues that both Kenya and Somalia need to look for solutions. There are two crucial cases that are on the table. One is Kenya's direct influence on the political and security development on

Somalia's regional government in Kismaayo. The other issue, which is the most important case, is the dispute between Kenya and Somalia on the demarcation of the border line between Somalia and Kenya's territorial waters. As the maritime case has already been submitted to the International Court of Justice, Somali leaders need to challenge Kenya's political influence on the Juba region. Since Kenyan forces started their presence in the region, public information is very limited.

In order to balance the power in the Horn of Africa, Somalia's political sovereignty is crucial. The importance of Somalia's political sovereignty can only be shown by the Somali leaders when they interact with their regional counterparts. On the other hand, as the international community played a significant role in saving both Ethiopia and Kenya from internal turmoil in the late 1980s and in 2007 respectively, the international community must also play a positive role for the recovery of the Somali institutions. Somalia cannot afford depending on others to provide security for its people and government. As long as efforts and resources that the international community pours into the Horn of Africa are not directed toward the rebuilding of Somalia's state infrastructures, regional countries will only keep a weak Somalia that can easily be exploited. The condition of a weak Somalia that has been the case over the last two decades has, in fact, security implications that will not only be limited to Somalia, but to the region and beyond.