

**Eritrea and Somalia:**  
**Cooperation and Partnership**  
**For Peace and Stability**



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Last week, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President of Somalia, arrived in Eritrea for a multi-day visit. It was his second such visit to the country in the space of just several months, following his trip this past July. These trips, which include extensive consultations at the Heads of State level, tours of various national development projects, and visits to Somali troops undergoing special military training, reflect the strengthening relationship between Somalia and Eritrea. Disappointingly, but perhaps ultimately not surprisingly, the growing solidarity between the two countries, especially in terms of defense and security, has elicited a loud chorus of inexplicable opposition from a number of Western voices. In addition to being misguided and unfair, this response is hypocritical and rooted in arrogance.

**Western hypocrisy and double standards**

In recent months and years, several Western countries (along with a fair number of foreign analysts) have expressed misguided criticism and significant

negativity toward Somali-Eritrean efforts to strengthen bonds, establish genuine cooperation, and tackle mutual challenges, rooted in a shared vision of a region that is safe, at peace, and prosperous. Back in September 2018, Eritrea and Somalia (then led by Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo”), joined by Ethiopia, inked a multifaceted cooperation agreement, while earlier this year, in mid-July, Eritrea and Somalia signed a deal to strengthen their partnership in numerous areas. One particular target of the constant criticism and disparagement has been the two countries’ growing security collaboration, with some voices even spreading unsubstantiated and even outright false claims about the cooperation between two sovereign, independent states, insinuating “malign desires” on the part of Eritrea and fantastical plots about seeking regional hegemony. Others have attempted to portray the growing relationship and Eritrea’s alleged role in the region, as an “alarming” or “toxic” development and projected only failure.



Although it holds a rich history, the past several decades in Somalia have unfortunately been characterized by a tragic cycle of prolonged civil war, chaos, insecurity, and terror. Throughout, however, the country’s resilient people have continued to seek peace and worked to improve the situation of the country, with

recent years involving renewed efforts to form a credible government and establish a professional, competent national defense and security force.

Eritrea's training of Somali troops, conducted as just one dimension of the two countries' broader, multifaceted cooperative framework, and carried out upon the expressed will, desire, and request of the government in Somalia, should hardly be controversial. Around the world, regional or bilateral frameworks of defense and security cooperation are extremely common and remain active. They occur as the sole prerogatives and decisions of the sovereign states concerned, and no other states have the right or veto power to endorse or determine the security and defense architectures entered between states out of their own volition and in accordance with normative agreements entered between them.



Yet in a demonstration of sheer hypocrisy and double standards, the same Western countries that incessantly condemn Somali-Eritrean efforts to cooperatively pursue peace and security are themselves all active members of a wide range of security frameworks and military alliances. What is also particularly perverse and incredibly cynical about Western condemnations of Somali-Eritrean efforts to cooperatively address major, in fact often existential, regional and terror-related challenges is that so many of these issues can directly

be traced to the West’s long history of inept policies and fundamentally flawed approach to the region. Furthermore, it is the West, never particularly shy in touting its own supposed “accomplishments” and “contributions” to making Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa region more secure and stable, which boasts an utterly dismal and catastrophic record of intervention and meddling in Somalia.

For years, at the expense of locally-led, indigenous initiatives that held the potential to perhaps pacify or stabilize the nation and allow Somalis to finally take charge of their future, the West, under the overarching banner of “counter terror”, followed a strategy of financing and arming an array of warlords, who only wreaked havoc. Recall, too, that the rise and spread of the nihilistic terror group al-Shabab, which for long had been only inconsequential, was in fact a direct outgrowth of the disastrous and illegal 2006/7 invasion and occupation of Somalia by TPLF-led Ethiopia, conducted with the support and backing of the United States.



In the years since, the United States has conducted more than 250 airstrikes and ground raids in Somalia (resulting in scores of civilian victims), while training and arming an array of proxy forces and providing billions in security



assistance, with billions more provided in humanitarian and development assistance. Despite this massive outlay, in recent years Somalia has continued to experience a steady rise in militant Islamist events and fatalities, and al-Shabab remains powerful in its ability to conduct complex attacks (locally and across the region). Only weeks ago, it brutally massacred approximately 150 people in the heart of Mogadishu, the capital.

Against this overwhelmingly dismal historical backdrop and based upon their own catalogue of far from stellar “contributions”, how Western countries can now seek to criticize local actors and attempt to restrict them from working together for peace and security in their own region is not only the height of hypocrisy and arrogance, but also extremely puzzling.

### **Historical solidarity**

There are other important aspects of the strengthening Eritrea-Somalia relationship that must be kept in mind. The ongoing cooperation between the two countries is actually rooted in a longer history of solidarity, with Somalia having been one of only an extremely small group of actors that extended Eritrea support during the latter’s long independence struggle. As well, although some voices have alleged malign, hidden motives behind the growing partnership, both countries recognize that the successful fight against terror and insecurity in Somalia is a fundamental prerequisite for peace, stability, and security across the entire Horn of Africa region.

Last, contrary to many portrayals, Eritrea’s position is longstanding and highly consistent. The country has always maintained that there cannot be an exclusively military solution to Somalia’s challenges, as they are ultimately rooted in complex social, economic, and political issues. Moreover, any lasting, sustainable solution can only be achieved through an inclusive political and reconciliation process that comprises all relevant constituent groups, and with years of international engagement and external intervention in Somalia delivering only terrible results, only an internally determined process can be effective. Rather than being externally driven and directed, the process has to be Somali-owned and Somali-driven, and ultimately be based on the will and choice of the Somali people.

Back in the early 1990s, as the international community, led by the United States, was preparing to intervene in Somalia, Eritrea expressed its deep reservations about an external intervention that it felt had a vague mandate and lacked a well-defined long-term peace or exit strategy. It also suggested that Somalis could resolve their problems on their own, with the international community and neighbors being limited to a facilitative, supportive role. When the American-led international humanitarian mission eventually degenerated into outright disaster, Eritrea sought to bring together the different Somali parties in an inclusive dialogue. Subsequently, during the many following years when Somalia was locked in internecine violence and conflict, Eritrea remained strongly opposed to the interference of neighboring countries and other actors pushing for outcomes that fulfilled their own agendas. Instead, it consistently encouraged the establishment of peace in Somalia based on local ownership and initiative, and with the inclusion of all Somalis.



Later on, throughout the period leading up to, during, and then following TPLF-led Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in late 2006, Eritrea was firmly opposed to the military intervention, and it frequently criticized American and TPLF-led Ethiopia's heavy-handed interference in the country's internal affairs. It regarded such involvement as being much more concerned about Western geopolitical interests than actually supporting stability in Somalia or promoting regional peace and security.

Today, Eritrea and Somalia share an array of vital interests, as well as a history of solidarity and fraternal ties. They have sought to work together to promote stability, economic integration, prosperity, and peace. While these developments toward cooperation have been met with unfair criticism and negativity, they are much-needed in a region that has long been associated with conflict, poverty, and terror

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**Shabait**