

Sovereignty Is Inviolable: Dismantling the Revisionist Logic of Ethiopia's 'Maritime Imperative'

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Context: The recent discourse surrounding Ethiopia's purported 'Maritime Imperative,' epitomized by Tsega'ab Amare's article in the *Horn Review*, represents a



sophisticated but legally hollow attempt to dress historical revisionism and territorial ambition in the garb of modern 'realpolitik.' By invoking a global shift from liberal institutionalism to 'power-based' realism, Amare seeks to normalize Ethiopia's belligerent stance toward Eritrean sovereignty as an inevitable byproduct of geopolitical evolution (Amare 2026). However, through my extensive analysis of international law, regional history, and the internal dynamics of the Ethiopian state, I have consistently exposed this 'imperative' to be – not a strategic necessity – but a pretext for aggression designed to mask domestic failures.

The Sovereignty Fallacy, and the Misuse of Realism

The central thesis of the *Horn Review* article rests on the pernicious doctrine that international law and sovereignty are now 'negotiable' in an age of realism. Amare cites the annexation of Crimea and the South China Sea disputes as evidence that “sovereignty ceases to serve as an absolute guarantee” (Amare 2026). This is a

profound misinterpretation of the international system. As I argue in *Sovereignty Under Siege*, the violation of international norms by some states does not render those norms obsolete; rather, it identifies the violators as pariahs (Gebremariam 2026a).

To suggest that Ethiopia's status as a landlocked nation grants it a right to sovereign Eritrean territory – namely the port of Assab – is to advocate for an anarchic regional order. While Ethiopia frequently cites the United Nations Convention on the **Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, it conveniently ignores the text of **Article 125**. While **Article 125(1)** grants landlocked states the right of access, **Article 125(3)** explicitly stipulates that transit states “shall enjoy full sovereignty over their territory” and have the right to take all measures necessary to ensure that such rights “shall in no way infringe their legitimate interests” (UNCLOS 1982). In my work, *The Genealogy of Aggression*, I deconstruct how Addis Ababa attempts to bypass these legal frameworks by framing its demands as a 'structural necessity' (Gebremariam 2025a). In reality, no amount of demographic weight grants a state the right to annex or forcibly “share” the sovereign assets of a neighbor.

Beyond maritime law, Ethiopia's neo-expansionist discourse constitutes a direct assault on the foundational pillars of the United Nations Charter. Amare's assertion that 'power precedes principle' is a rejection of **Article 2(4)**, which strictly prohibits not only the use of force but the *threat* of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. By suggesting that outcomes will be 'imposed' if negotiations fail, the Ethiopian narrative adopts a posture of illegal belligerence. Furthermore, **Article 2(7)** explicitly protects the domestic jurisdiction of states from external interference, affirming that the sovereign management of Eritrean ports is an internal matter beyond the reach of Ethiopian 'maritime statecraft.' As I emphasize in *Sovereignty Under Siege*, these are not optional 'liberal expectations' - they are the mandatory legal prerequisites for global peace and security (Gebremariam 2026k).”

The “Bashashafication” of Truth: Domestic Diversion as Foreign Policy

The narrative of “maritime statecraft” is inseparable from the domestic crises currently fracturing the Ethiopian state. The Prime Minister's focus on the Red Sea is a classic example of what I term 'The Bashashafication of Truth' – a revisionist strategy used to scapegoat external actors for internal instability (Gebremariam 2026b). By manufacturing a 'maritime dilemma,' the Ethiopian administration seeks to create a nationalistic rallying cry to distract from the intractable conflicts in the Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray regions.

Amare frames Red Sea access as a 'core national security issue' for 130 million people (Amare 2026). However, I have identified this as a *Prosperity Façade* (Gebremariam 2025h). Ethiopia's economic woes are not the result of being landlocked. As I

demonstrate in *The Red Sea Mirage*, Ethiopia enjoyed significant economic growth between 1998 and 2018 without utilizing Eritrean ports, proving that landlockedness is not a 'geographical prison' but a matter of internal governance and policy (Gebremariam 2025e). Nations like Switzerland and Rwanda thrive without coastlines; Ethiopia's *Geopolitical Quagmire* is the product of systemic corruption and its own belligerent regional policies (Gebremariam 2025f, Gebremariam 2025i).

Assab: The Cradle of Eritrea, Not a Shared Commodity

The *Horn Review* asserts that Ethiopia's interest in Assab is an example of "diversification and cooperative access" (Amare 2026). This is a euphemism for territorial revisionism. As I highlight in *Assab: The Cradle of Eritrea*, this site is a point of profound national significance that was never 'lost' by Ethiopia because it never legally belonged to it outside of the period of illegal occupation (Gebremariam 2025j).

The claim that Eritrea's resistance to 'sharing' infrastructure is merely 'cautious' ignores the fundamental principle of *uti possidetis juris* – the sanctity of colonial borders. This principle was reaffirmed by the **1964 OAU Cairo Declaration** and is enshrined in **Article 4(b)** of the **African Union Constitutive Act (African Union 2000)**. As I articulated in *The Inviolable Red Line*, the Red Sea coast is a sovereign Eritrean boundary that is not subject to 'negotiation' (Gebremariam 2025d). Ethiopia's suggestion that "shifting geopolitical forces will impose outcomes" is nothing less than a veiled threat of military aggression, cloaked in the language of 'realpolitik' (Amare 2026).

The Fallacy of Equilibrium and Regional Securitization

Amare claims that Ethiopia can become an "indispensable piece of geopolitics" by leveraging its weight (Amare 2026). This *Fallacy of Equilibrium* assumes that regional stability can be achieved by allowing a large state to bully its smaller neighbors (Gebremariam 2025c). On the contrary, I have shown in *The Aggressor Host* that Ethiopia's "Red Sea Gambit" has led to increased "regional securitization," forcing littoral states to view Addis Ababa as a threat rather than a partner (Gebremariam 2025b).

Instead of fostering connectivity, Ethiopia's rhetoric creates a false promise of prosperity that actually destabilizes the Horn. By prioritizing "targeted, issue-specific arrangements" over broad regional consensus, – such as the provocative signaling toward Somaliland – Ethiopia is attempting to bypass the African Union's foundational principles. This anarchistic behavior undermines the very "multilateralism" that Amare claims Ethiopia still values.

Conclusion: Principles Over Power

The narrative presented by the *Horn Review* is an attempt to legitimize Ethiopia's 'maritime imperative' through the cynical application of realist theory. It suggests that because the world is becoming more dangerous, Ethiopia has the right to be a source of that danger. This logic must be rejected.

Eritrea's sovereignty is not a 'negotiation,' and its coast is not a 'common economic opportunity' for Ethiopia to exploit. My *Urgent Response to Abiy Ahmed's Parliament Speech* remains clear: the path to regional peace lies in the respect for international law and the recognition of existing borders, not in revisionist scapegoating (Gebremariam 2025g). If Ethiopia wishes to solve its 'structural vulnerability,' it should look inward toward domestic reconciliation rather than outward toward the sovereign waters of the Red Sea. In an era where power seeks to precede principle, the defense of sovereignty remains the only viable defense against regional chaos.

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