

The Egyptian-Eritrean Military Axis Might Make the Horn of Africa Crisis Explode

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Egypt's purported military deployment to Eritrea is threatening to spark a multinational conflagration in the powder keg Horn of Africa region.

This part of the world has always been tense and at risk of war, especially in the past few years ever since Ethiopia began constructing the Grand Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile River. The Horn of Africa became a [zone of competition](#) in the “Gulf Cold War” following the GCC and Egypt’s campaign against Qatar last year, and it’s this combination of water wars and proxy wars that makes the region so volatile. The latest developments concern Egypt’s purported dispatch of troops to the western Eritrean base of Sawa near the Sudanese border, which in turn prompted Khartoum to recall its ambassador from Cairo, [officially declare](#) a “potential security threat from Egypt and Eritrea” in the area, and fortify the frontier.

Egypt and Eritrea [both deny](#) that any troops were sent to Sawa, but some reports indicate that this move was actually in response to Turkey clinching a deal to develop the Sudanese island of Suakin near Port Sudan late last year which some observers suspect to be a front for secretly building a naval base in the Red Sea. Ankara and Cairo have been at odds with one another ever since President Sisi’s 2013 coup against pro-Turkish Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammed Morsi and President Erdogan’s apparent sponsorship of this same organization that’s banned in Egypt and most of the GCC states. Both parties evidently have interests in the Horn of Africa and now seem to be countering one another in this strategic space.



Greater Horn of Africa map (Source: author)

President Erdogan’s visit to Khartoum late last year was [recently followed](#) by Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki’s trip to Cairo last week where he met with his Egyptian counterpart and both leaders pledged to “support the security and stability in the region”, hinting that the rumors about the development of fast-moving military ties between the two [allies in the War on Yemen](#) might actually be true. If so, then this would be a very destabilizing event because of Eritrea’s history of supporting armed militants in the surrounding states, including the Al Shabaab terrorist group that resulted in the country’s [ongoing sanctioning by the UNSC](#) since 2009.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir told his Russian counterpart in late November that the US wants to [divide](#) his country into five parts, and it appears as though he's now convinced that [Eritrea](#) is tasked with executing this scenario just like it's already trying to do against Ethiopia. Egypt, which has a serious bone to pick with Ethiopia over the Grand Renaissance Dam and is presently experiencing very strained relations with [Sudan](#) over this issue and Khartoum's port deal with Ankara, likely sees a strategic opportunity to "kill three birds with one stone" by destabilizing its two regional rivals while establishing a military patronage relationship with an envisioned client state crucially located at the mouth of the Bab el Mandab chokepoint.

Egypt and Eritrea are now aligning against Ethiopia and Sudan, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE supporting the former pair while [Qatar](#) and Turkey back the latter one. China has a naval base in nearby Djibouti while Russia was [offered](#) one in Port Sudan, so both multipolar Great Powers have a stake in the peaceful outcome of this developing crisis and could potentially help mediate a solution to it just like how Beijing [suggested](#) it could do last summer between [Eritrea and Djibouti](#).

The post presented is the partial transcript of the CONTEXT COUNTDOWN radio program on Sputnik News, [aired on Friday Jan 19, 2018](#):

https://video.img.ria.ru/Out/MP3/20180119/2018_01_19_CONTEXTCOUNTDOWN136190118_i_so1dxl4.bue.mp3

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