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WORKING IN CRISIS REGIONS OF THE WORLD IS THE KEY TO A DIPLOMAT'S SUCCESS



According to the conclusions of the Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community as of 5 February 2024, Ethiopia is characterised as a country ‘undergoing multiple, simultaneous internal conflicts, heightening interethnic tensions and the risk of atrocities against civilians.’ The general description of security challenges provided by the authors of this document is the result of an analysis of ‘the potential for interstate conflicts and domestic turmoil in other countries around the world, which continues to pose challenges for US national security and threats to allies and partners.’ American experts state that ‘rising tension and instability from these flashpoints can be exacerbated by the intensifying global power competition given the complex and interconnected security landscape. Conflicts, particularly those that disrupt global trade and investment flows, might lead to rising energy prices and increased economic fragility even in countries that are not directly involved [...] Regional and localised conflicts have far-reaching and sometimes cascading implications for not only neighbouring countries, but also the world.’¹

The major issues remaining of concern to all leaders of the continent are the COVID-19 pandemic and other epidemics and their consequences; the food crisis; climate change and warming (soil erosion, desertification, crop failure due to drought); growing poverty and extreme poverty; security instability (coups d'état, separatism, civil wars, terrorist activity); uncontrolled internal migration due to the growth of Africa's population and the resource and financial capacity of local governments to address the threat of continental overpopulation.

The activities of the Embassy of Ukraine in Ethiopia in 2023–24 proceeded against the backdrop of the negative consequences on African countries of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In addition, Russia has been conducting

¹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence (2024) *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*, 5 February. Available at: <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2024-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.



Figure 1

military and technical expansion in the region: while the targeted thematic comparative analysis identified only two Russian military bases at the end of 2020 (Fig. 1)², there were five of them in Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sudan at the end of 2023 (Fig. 2)³.

Experts also point to 11 alleged bases of the Russian PMC Wagner (as of 2023) in *Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, DR Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, and South Sudan.*

Due to these reasons, African countries have become very pragmatic actors in the current development stage of the international system.

As for possible negative consequences due to violations of international law, the most high-profile incident was the visit of



Figure 2

² SBM Intelligence (2020) *Chart of the week: Foreign military presence in Africa*, 11 November. Available at: <https://www.sbmintel.com/2020/11/chart-of-the-week-foreign-military-presence-in-africa/>

³ SBM Intelligence (2023) *Chart of the week: Foreign military presence in Africa*, 10 August. Available at: <https://www.sbmintel.com/2023/08/chart-of-the-week-foreign-military-presence-in-africa-2/>

the so-called president of the Somali region of Somaliland, Muse Bihi Abdi, to Addis Ababa in early January 2024 to sign a Memorandum of Partnership and Cooperation with Ethiopia, with the main agreement being the transfer of a 20-kilometre coastline to Ethiopia for 50 years on the condition that Ethiopia recognise Somaliland.

As a result, the official Mogadishu immediately convened an emergency meeting of its government to consider options for responding to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's attempt to encroach on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia, recalling its Ambassador from Addis Ababa for consultations. In addition, Somalia called on the UN Security Council, the African Union, the Arab League, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to help protect its territorial integrity and to exert diplomatic pressure on Ethiopia to restore international law.

In this context, the Ethiopian side took these steps in addition to the crisis in its relations with Egypt, Eritrea, and Sudan. Motivated by its formal accession to the BRICS on 1 January 2024 with the support of Russia and China, Ethiopia has generally moved to the path of open confrontation with neighbouring countries in its foreign policy.

As for Sudan, in early 2024, Addis Ababa hosted Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, leader of the Sudanese paramilitary group, who met with Demeke Mekonnen, Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister. The parties discussed ways to find peace in Sudan from the perspective of 'Ethiopia, the main generator of peacemaking ideas in the Sub-Saharan Africa region'.

This action led to harsh criticism from the head of the Transitional Sovereignty Council of Sudan, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and aggravated the already extremely tense relations between the two countries.

For its part, official Khartoum strongly condemned 'the countries that hosted Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo', describing it as 'interference in the internal affairs of Sudan'. The head of the Transitional Sovereignty Council of Sudan, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, categorically refused to visit Addis Ababa and Djibouti, where talks with the leader of the Sudanese rebels were to take place under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa (IGAD) to find ways to resolve the situation in this country, which is currently embroiled in armed conflict. As for Egypt, these trends developed against the background of a deadlock in the negotiations between Addis Ababa and Cairo on the water allocation of the Blue Nile River, where the Ethiopian side has single-handedly decided to build a dam for the Renaissance hydroelectric power station since 2011.

When planning rapprochement with the Somali region of Somaliland, bypassing the position of the official Mogadishu, Ethiopia was encouraged by the fact

that Russia had stepped up supplies of electronic warfare systems (Krasukha-2) for the Ethiopian military in late 2023, Türkiye — spare parts and warheads for drones (Bayraktar), the UAE — guided aerial bombs (Mark 8), China — AK-47 and Type 56 assault rifles and drones (Wing Loong G1).

In this sense, it is also worth mentioning the Ethiopian-Chinese solid trade and economic cooperation: in January 2024, China agreed to inject almost \$2.5 billion into the Ethiopian economy (construction of a dry port, railway, roads and infrastructure). For this purpose, the parties even established the Centre for Network Investment in Ethiopia.

The Prime Minister of Ethiopia relied on the support of the BRICS member states, which the country joined on 1 January 2024, as well as from the Middle Eastern states, which were the leaders of international support for the unrecognised territorial entity of Palestine in its confrontation with Israel at that time. He also hoped for the support of the Russian Federation and China, which have veto power in the UN Security Council.

Describing his plan to representatives of the international community in Addis Ababa, Abiy Ahmed voiced the story of ‘the priority of the interest of the Ethiopian people, with its total population exceeding 120 million people, who urgently need Ethiopia’s diversified access to the sea for survival’. The Prime Minister relied on alleged consultations on this issue with neighbouring Eritrea and Djibouti.

However, ‘it was due to the refusal of the official Asmara to satisfy Ethiopian aspirations to gain access to the Eritrean port of Assab, as well as the significant commercial burden on the Ethiopian economy due to the use of the Djibouti port for more than 30 years, that a decision was made to conclude a Memorandum of Partnership and Cooperation with Somaliland.’

In this regard, it should be noted that Abiy Ahmed did not dare to attack Eritrea by force to gain access to the port of Assab, as armed groups from the rebellious Ethiopian regions of Amhara, Oromia, Afar and Tigray, which were not under his control, declared their readiness to support the Eritrean side in such a case. Russia also plays an important role, having signed agreements with Eritrea on military and technical cooperation in early 2023. Primarily, it concerned the construction of infrastructure for the logistics base of the Russian Navy in the local ports of Massawa and Assab.

In Ethiopia’s government-controlled cities, there were festive mass demonstrations in support of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s ‘diplomatic talent’. In addition, the EU’s statement on the above recalled ‘the importance of respecting the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Somalia, the Charters of the African Union and the United Nations. This is key for the peace and stability of the entire Horn of Africa region.’

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has enlisted the support of Egypt, the Arab League, and Türkiye in an effort to solidify a pro-Somali coalition.

In particular, already in February 2024, the Federal Government of Somalia signed in Ankara an Agreement on Cooperation with Türkiye on Defence and Economic Relations, where the main provisions of the document, which is valid for ten years, relate to planning and ensuring joint air, land and sea operations in case of defence; construction of ships, building and operation of ports and facilities, creation of the necessary legal mechanisms for this and unification of laws regulating the maritime sphere between the two countries; taking unilateral and joint measures to combat all types of threats in the sovereign maritime zones of both countries, especially those related to ‘terrorism, piracy, illegal fishing and smuggling’; construction of separate and joint facilities, establishment of appropriate security zones; training, support for education and provision of equipment to the army of the Federal Republic of Somalia; creation and management of coastal security facilities; development and modernisation of naval forces.

Regarding the prevention of marine pollution, the parties agreed that Somalia will grant free access to its territory to all Turkish companies engaged by Türkiye to implement the provisions of this Agreement, with the official Mogadishu providing appropriate security zones. If the parties intend to conclude additional agreements on this issue, Türkiye and Somalia decided to exercise this right by signing additional protocols to the Agreement.

The Turkish media published an interview with Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, in which he said that the UN Security Council had lifted the international arms embargo on his country and that Somalia would further purchase Bayraktar drones from Türkiye for its needs. In return, Türkiye will terminate the sale of these drones to Ethiopia.

The head of the Federal Government of Somalia, Hamza Abdi Barre, made a statement that the signing of the Agreement would ‘put an end to any fears of further growth of terrorism in Somalia, acts of piracy, illegal fishing and external encroachment or threats to his country’s maritime waters’, referring in this context to Ethiopia.

The signing of the Somali-Turkish agreement with official Mogadishu, to which Türkiye has already delivered most of the necessary equipment for the implementation of its projects, coincides with the intensification of



Figure 3

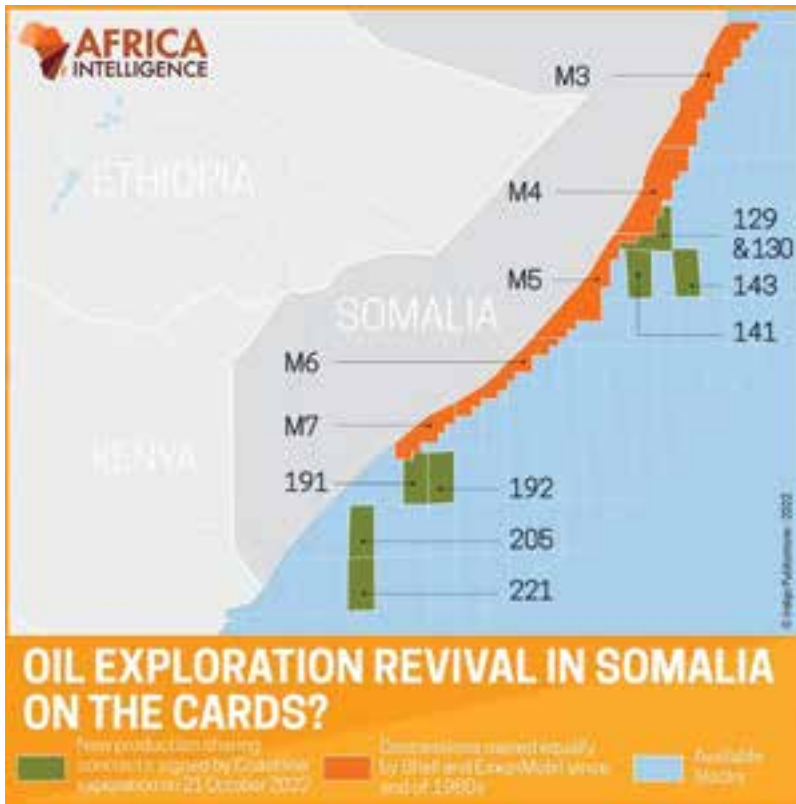


Figure 4

Somalia's contractual and legal relations with other countries worldwide, as the offshore of this African state is rich in oil and gas reserves, which makes the relevant offshore exploration a promising business (Fig. 3)⁴, (Fig. 4)⁵.

Aware of the unpredictable development of the situation in terms of possible negative consequences for Ethiopia, in early March 2024, the head of the Ethiopian government, Abiy Ahmed, resorted to so-called shuttle diplomacy, focusing on closer ties with Kenya.

Thus, Abiy Ahmed's state visit to Kenya, where President William Ruto warmly welcomed the Ethiopian Prime Minister, resulted in the signing of a joint communiqué, which local experts called 'a broad-based document without a clear subject matter', as the leaders of Kenya and Ethiopia mainly 'stressed the need to maintain peace, security and stability in Africa as a prerequisite for economic growth and development'. Despite the accompanying

⁴ Esau, I. (2024) 'US player secures three deepwater blocks in Africa's final offshore frontier', *Upstream*, 12 March. Available at: <https://www.upstreamonline.com/exclusive/us-player-secures-three-deepwater-blocks-in-africa-s-final-offshore-frontier/2-1-1609787>

⁵ Africa Intelligence (2022) *Somalia: How Coastline Exploration bagged first oil deal of HSM era*, 2 November. Available at: <https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-africa-and-the-horn/2022/11/02/how-coastline-exploration-bagged-first-oil-deal-of-hsm-era,109840928-art>

protocol textual assurances of friendship and solidarity, Abiy Ahmed and William Ruto reaffirmed the recognition, respect and importance of protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, condemned the practice of unconstitutional changes of government in African countries, and ‘the inadmissibility of external interference in the internal political processes of African countries’, which primarily referred to Western states. This emphasis is considered key, as it clearly outlines a new paradigm of relations between African states and the Western world.

One of the most striking doctrinal manifestations is the event that took place on 2 March 2024 in Addis Ababa. According to local news headlines, it was dedicated to the 128th anniversary of the Ethiopian people’s victory over foreign colonisers, which refers to Italy’s attempt to spread its culture and customs in Ethiopia during that period.

It is noteworthy that the planned title of the event, which was initially put in official invitations to foreign diplomats as a panel discussion on Harnessing the Spirit of Past Victories for Africa’s Development, was changed by the local Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Adwa: Victory of the Black People a few days later. In addition, with the assistance of China and the UAE, an expensive reconstruction of one of the locations was carried out in the Ethiopian capital.

In order to closely monitor the processes that took place in January–March 2024 around the situation with Ethiopia’s signing of the Memorandum of Partnership and Cooperation with the unrecognised territorial entity Somaliland, which is the sovereign territory of the Federal Republic of Somalia, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee met in Addis Ababa in those tumultuous days for the parties to the diplomatic conflict. In the presence of the US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Mike Hammer, and the head of Ethiopian intelligence, they discussed regional security in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The same day, the Ethiopian side provided Molly Phee with an opportunity to meet with the Ethiopian Minister of Finance, and the parties discussed the state of affairs with the reform of the local economy and the prospects for further cooperation between the official Addis Ababa and the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

All these talks concerned the critical human rights situation in Ethiopia: the meetings with the American side took place against the backdrop of harsh criticism from the US, EU, UK and other countries of the Global West against Abiy Ahmed for another bloody massacre — extrajudicial executions carried out by federal government-controlled forces in early 2024 against almost fifty civilians in the city of Merawi in the Amhara region, where a special legal regime of state of emergency is maintained.

The United Kingdom, owning a 30% stake in the Berbera seaport (Somaliland region of Somalia), sought to put all possible diplomatic efforts to prevent the escalation of tensions in Sub-Saharan Africa due to Ethiopia's political agreements with the regional authorities of Somaliland. The official Mogadishu perceived them as a violation of the UN Charter by the Ethiopian side, an encroachment on the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Along with the diplomatic efforts of the Global West aimed at preventing the Sub-Saharan Africa region from becoming a hotbed of danger, Kenya also tried to resolve the diplomatic crisis between Ethiopia and Somalia by initiating talks with delegations from both sides of the conflict in early March 2024.

The Kenyan and American sides mediated these talks; Somalia was represented by Ali Mohamed Omar, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and several other confidants of the Somali president, and Ethiopia was represented by an interagency delegation of secret services and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, no agreement was reached, as the Somali side demanded that Ethiopia first and foremost officially withdraw from the Memorandum of Partnership and Cooperation with Somaliland, deny any future encroachment on Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and make a statement confirming that Somaliland is an integral part of Somalia.

In turn, aiming at the outcome regarding Somaliland, the Ethiopian side devoted the following weeks to attempts to escalate tensions on the Ethiopian-Somali border (locations Balanbale, Buuhoodle, El Barde, Tuur Dibi and Ferfer), sending several infantry battalions accompanied by a Grad MLRS division for military manoeuvres. At the same time, the Ethiopian Prime Minister tried to intensify political communication with former Somali President Mohamed Farmaajo, who, according to Abiy Ahmed's plan, together with the seventh president of the country, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (until 2012), was supposed to create preconditions in the Federal Republic of Somalia 'for a political uprising that would begin with a motion of no confidence' in the current president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who has been in office since May 2022.

In the first days of April 2024, official Addis Ababa hosted a delegation from the Somali region of Puntland, whose leaders had previously refused to recognise the central government of Somalia due to the controversial draft of the country's new constitution.

When Ethiopia intended to undermine Somalia's sovereignty in this way, on the same day, 4 April, official Mogadishu demanded that Ethiopia close its consulates in Hargeisa, the administrative capital of the Somaliland region, and Garowe, the Puntland region, and Ethiopia's Ambassador to Somalia, Muktar Mohamed Ware, was ordered to leave the country within 72 hours. This means bilateral relations between the Federal Republic of Somalia and Ethiopia have crossed the line into a deep crisis.

On 17 January 2024, the 1192nd regular meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council was held at the headquarters of the AU, where the main issue was to discuss the situation between Ethiopia and Somalia.

The AU Peace and Security Council adopted a statement calling on foreign countries to ‘respect the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of African Union member states’. At the same time, against the backdrop of the diplomatic conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia, the Council also recommended that both sides ‘refrain from any action or verbal reflection that could negatively affect the current close good neighbourly and friendly relations’.

In the traditional AU manner, the Peace and Security Council, represented by 15 African countries (three seats each for Central, Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Africa), called for ‘commitment and support in preserving the unity, territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of the African Union member states’. In the final provisions of the statement, the Council noted the urgent need to engage Oluṣegun Ṣobasanjo, the AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa and former President of Nigeria, who turned 87 in March 2024, to facilitate dialogue between Somalia and Ethiopia.

Emphasising the AU’s multifaceted activities, we note that on 14–15 February 2024, the 44th session of the AU Executive Council at the level of foreign ministers took place in Addis Ababa. Its leading speakers were Chairperson of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia Taye Atske Selassie, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Claver Gatete, and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Comoros Dhohir Dhoulkamal, who also chaired the meeting.

The session of the AU Executive Council considered the reports and presentations on the 47th regular session of the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the AU member states held in January 2024; the activities of the AU, its bodies and leadership in 2023; and the assessment of the performance indicators for the implementation of the AU’s 2023 objectives: ‘mechanisms to accelerate the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area’. The discussion of the concept and the so-called roadmap of the AU’s activities for 2024 also took a prominent place: ‘Educate an African fit for the 21st century: building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality and relevant learning in Africa’. The participants discussed the modality of the AU’s participation and priorities in the G20; preparations for the election of the new senior leadership of the AU Commission; the formation of a list of prominent African representatives (moral authorities) for their membership in the Commission to oversee the selection of candidates for the new leadership of the AU Commission; and the draft AU Partnership Strategy and Policy. In his speech, the Chairperson of the AU Commission spoke about the work of the African Union Peace Fund. The participants also discussed the achievements

of the Council of Ministers of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement; the results of the AU institutional reform; the situation in the Pan-African Parliament; draft legal instruments on amendments to the AU Charter on the Administrative Tribunal; and the draft Protocol to the AU Charter on the Human Right to a Nationality in Africa and the Eradication of Statelessness.

The 44th session of the AU Executive Council was also attended by the Foreign Ministers of Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Ghana, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, and Tunisia as well as the Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Sudan.

Given that the sessions of the AU Executive Council at the level of foreign ministers usually precede the annual sessions of the AU Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government, the 37th session of the AU Assembly was held in Addis Ababa on 17–18 February. The meeting resulted in the transfer of the respective chairmanship for 2024–25 from the Union of the Comoros to Mauritania, as well as a draft concluding document, which experts tended to consider exclusively African-oriented, as its subject was the solidarity of the AU member states to transform this international intergovernmental organisation into an independent actor in the modern system of international relations. In addition to joining the G20 in the autumn of 2023, the African Union is ambitiously seeking to obtain at least two permanent veto seats on the UN Security Council and five non-permanent seats by initiating UN Security Council reform.

It is proposed to declare 2025 the Year of Justice for Africa through Reparations, where narratives about ‘neocolonialism and the need for the collective West to be responsible to Africans for slavery’ should prevail.

These aspirations of the African Union states, which the so-called Accra Proclamation reinforced in November 2023, regarding the need for the continent to demand ‘compensation for colonialism and slavery’ from the countries of the Global West, have caused concern among EU member states.

One of the measures aimed at consolidating the agreements of the African Union countries following the 44th session of the AU Executive Council at the level of foreign ministers, as well as the 37th session of the AU Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government, was the extraordinary 22nd session of the AU Executive Council, which took place in Addis Ababa on 15 March 2024. The main item on the agenda was the discussion of the modality, gender approach and rotational mechanism for the AU’s senior leadership elections scheduled for February 2025.

Participants heard a report from the Permanent Representatives Committee of the AU on the preparations for the election race, taking into account the results of the 2018 institutional reforms to reduce the number of AU Commissioners’ portfolios from eight to six.

Delivering his opening remarks, Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mauritania and current Chairperson of the AU Executive Council, stressed the importance of the upcoming elections, as the individuals elected to the AU's senior leadership for 2025–29 will determine the continent's ability to integrate, unite and successfully continue to meet the legitimate aspirations of the people in line with the purpose and goals of the African Agenda 2063.

At the meeting of the AU Executive Council, the floor was also given to Taye Atske Selassie, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, who in his speech stressed 'the importance of adopting a pragmatic approach to ensure that elections to the AU leadership positions are conducted under existing principles and rules in order to preserve the integrity of the AU'.

The main point of the Ethiopian foreign minister's speech coincided with the essential thesis of the speech of Moussa Faki Mahamat, the current Chairperson of the AU Commission, on 17 February 2024 at the opening of the 37th session of the AU Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government, where the first question was a rhetorical one: 'How much longer does this building have to stand?'. The politician was referring to the African Union, which has been in crisis in recent years due to disintegrative political processes in its member states.

The main outcome of the 22nd extraordinary session of the AU Executive Council was the decision that in 2025–29, East Africa, which includes Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, will be granted the right to nominate candidates for the post of Chairperson of the AU Commission for the first time in the last twenty years.

Taking into account the gender approach, which was also an important consideration for the session participants, it was agreed that the Chairperson of the AU or their deputy would be elected from people of different genders.

While the AU has clear criteria for these positions, in addition to a panel set up to objectively assess the high calibre of outstanding Africans, one of Africa's independent consulting groups will also be involved in the selection process.

Analysing the media and information work of the Embassy of Ukraine aimed at better understanding with the leadership of Ethiopia and the African Union regarding support for Ukraine, it is worth noting a smooth but noticeable transition in 2023–24 to more active support by the AU member states for President Zelenskyy's Peace Formula. At the same time, some African states, remaining resource-dependent on the aggressor country, are cautiously trying to continue to profess the principle of 'neutrality' in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war.

In this context, it is also necessary to consider the traditional motto of the AU member states: 'African solutions to African problems', as in their perception of the world, Ukraine is a distant European country.



Figure 5

At the same time, in early 2024, experts from the African Center for Strategic Studies analysed the geography and scale of disinformation influence, including that of the Russian Federation, in African countries (Fig. 5)⁶. The study shows that despite 33 information campaigns during this period, Ethiopia is one of the least vulnerable countries on the continent to Russian propaganda thanks to the proactive work of our Embassy in public diplomacy and combating fakes against the backdrop of martial law in Ukraine in 2022–23.

In general, 2023 and the first half of 2024 were crisis years for Ethiopia due to the intensification of internal armed confrontations. In particular, since January 2024, several hotbeds of armed civil conflict have continued to burn in Ethiopia in the Oromia and Amhara regions, where separatists hostile to the Federal Government — the paramilitary groups SHENE and FANO — are active.

All of this has forced diplomatic missions of foreign countries to update protocols for the possible evacuation of their embassy staff in case negative trends spread to the capital, Addis Ababa. That is, if the rebels hostile to Abiy Ahmed from the Oromo and Amhara regions break through with weapons to the capital, foreign diplomats and their families will be immediately evacuated outside Ethiopia.

⁶ Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2024) *Mapping a Surge of Disinformation in Africa*, 13 March. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mapping-a-surge-of-disinformation-in-africa/>