
THE ETHIOPIA- ERITREA- TIGRAY BORDER CONFLICT AND IMPLICATIONS ON SECURITY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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Abstract

The Ethiopia-Eritrea and Tigray border has remained a contested issue in a volatile region in the Horn of Africa. The border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea is dated back to the colonial era and culminating in a devastating war that lasted from 1998 to 2000. This study, therefore, examines the causes, challenges and implications on security in the Horn of Africa. Frustration-aggression theory serves as the framework while the case study design is adopted by the study. Data were collected from secondary sources. Findings reveals that both Ethiopia and Eritrea have strong national identities and historical grievances, which have fueled tensions and territorial claims; while nationalist sentiments and aspirations for self-determination have also played a significant role in shaping the conflict dynamics. In addition, the desire to protect national interests and assert sovereignty has contributed to the protracted nature of the conflict. The study indicates that border conflicts have far-reaching implications for both countries and the East African region, the conflict resulted in significant loss of life and displacement of people, leaving deep scars on both nations. The conflict led to the closure of borders, severing economic ties and hindering regional integration. However, in 2018, a historic peace agreement was signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea, ending two decades of hostility. This agreement resulted in the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, the opening of borders, and the resumption of trade and people-to-people interactions. It was a significant step toward stability and cooperation in the region. The paper therefore recommends that it is crucial to prioritize dialogue and mediation, provide humanitarian assistance, ensure accountability for human rights violations, foster peace-building and reconciliation, promote regional cooperation, and address the underlying causes of the conflict for long-term stability and promoting peace in the region.

Keywords: United Nations, Diplomacy, Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict, Horn of Africa

Introduction

The initial struggle for Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia and the subsequent armed conflict marked a significant chapter in the region's history. The tensions escalated with Eritrea's declaration of independence in 1993 and the subsequent border dispute that led to the Ethiopia-Eritrea war from 1998 to 2000. The recent intensification of conflicts in Tigray, starting around November 2020 and ending in November 2022, has brought renewed attention to the region (Amnesty International, 2022). The multifaceted nature of these conflicts, involving ethnic, political, and regional dimensions, has raised concerns on both regional and global levels. The involvement of various actors, the impact on civilian populations, and the potential for destabilization in the Horn of Africa are all aspects that draw international concern. It is essential for the international community to address the root causes of these conflicts and work towards sustainable solutions that promote peace, stability, and respect for human rights in the region. (Alemseged, 1997).

Perspective on the root causes of the conflicts between Ethiopia and Eritrea, particularly emphasizing the territorial dispute over the Tigray region. The involvement of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian government's military operation in November 2020 further complicates the situation and has contributed to the escalation of tensions. The ongoing border dispute, coupled with internal conflicts in the Tigray region, indeed presents a multifaceted challenge. The lack of a comprehensive resolution framework has led to severe consequences, including widespread displacement, human suffering, and concerns for regional stability. The humanitarian crisis in Tigray has drawn significant international attention and condemnation due to reports of human rights abuses and atrocities (Amnesty International, 2022).

Addressing the complexities of this situation requires not only a focus on resolving the historical border issues between Ethiopia and Eritrea but also addressing the internal conflicts within Ethiopia, particularly in the Tigray region. A comprehensive and inclusive approach, involving regional and international stakeholders, is essential for promoting peace, stability, and respect for human rights in the Horn of Africa. Understanding and addressing the Ethiopia-Eritrea-Tigray border issue is crucial for fostering peace, stability, and cooperation in the Horn of Africa. This research seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform diplomatic efforts, humanitarian interventions, and conflict resolution strategies in the region.

Conceptual Clarification

Horn of Africa (HoA),

The Horn of Africa is indeed a region with diverse geography, encompassing countries such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti. Additionally, broader definitions may include parts or all of Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. The term "Greater Horn Region" expands the scope to include Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania (Clapham, 2017). The Horn of Africa is strategically located the southern boundary of the Red Sea and extending into the Guardafui Channel, Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean, adds to its geopolitical importance. The region shares a maritime border with the Arabian Peninsula, emphasizing its connection to Western Asia. The Horn of Africa has a complex history, marked by diverse cultures, historical trade routes, and interactions with various civilizations. It has been a region of historical significance due to its role in trade, migration, and geopolitical dynamics.

Border

Borders define the extent of a political or territorial entity, separating it from others. They serve as the physical manifestation of territorial limits. Borders are closely tied to the concept of sovereignty, reflecting a nation's control and authority over its defined territory. Borders regulate the movement of people, goods, and services between different political or territorial entities. Immigration policies, customs regulations, and border control measures are often implemented to manage this movement (De Waal, 2003). Borders can influence resource allocation, as the control and ownership of specific territories may impact access to natural resources, such as water, minerals, or arable land.

Conflict

Conflict is generally termed as struggle or disagreement between parties. It is characterized by opposing interests, needs, ideas, values, or goals. It can manifest in various forms and at different levels, ranging from interpersonal conflicts to large-scale international disputes. Conflict is a natural part of human interaction, and it can arise in various contexts, including personal relationships, workplaces, communities, and between nations (International Crisis Group, 2003). This should be understood that in order for conflict to exist there should be difference in position or interest between opposition groups over certain values.

Literature Review

Background to the Conflict

The Ethiopia-Eritrea and Tigray border conflict has its roots in a complex historical background. (Clapham, 2013). He explores the historical background of the Horn of Africa, providing context for the state formation and decay experienced in the region. Understanding the historical factors shaping the political landscape is crucial for comprehending the complexities of conflicts in the area. Intricate relationship between ethnicity, nationalism, and the processes of state-building in the Horn of Africa. Ethnic diversity, historical grievances, and struggles for power are identified as influential factors in both the formation and disintegration of states.

Clapham further shed light on the historical context and underlying causes of the Ethiopia-Eritrea and Tigray border conflict. Territorial disputes, issues of nationalism, and competition for resources are discussed as key elements contributing to the conflict. The analysis delves into the political dynamics between Ethiopia and Eritrea, emphasizing the role of nationalism and how it intertwines with territorial disputes. The scramble for resources is identified as an additional factor shaping the relationship between the two countries. The impact of external actors, including colonial powers and international interventions, on the political landscape of the Horn of Africa. Understanding how state formations have been shaped by external influences provides insights into the challenges faced by countries in the region (Clapham, 2013).

By examining these factors, Clapham's work contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the historical, political, and external influences that have contributed to the Ethiopia-Eritrea and Tigray border conflict. This historical perspective is valuable for policymakers, scholars, and individuals seeking to grasp the roots of the ongoing challenges in the region. However, detailed historical account of the intertwined histories of Ethiopia and Eritrea, with a particular focus on the Tigray region (Clapham, 2013). It highlights the beginning of the relationship between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the

Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) from their collaborative beginnings against the Derg regime to their eventual divergence.

The TPLF and EPLF initially collaborated in the struggle against the authoritarian Marxist Derg regime in Ethiopia. Both groups sought social revolution and the right to self-determination. The relationship between the TPLF and EPLF soured during the war against the Derg regime, primarily due to differences over ethnic and national identity, border demarcation, military tactics, and ideology. Despite their differences, both the TPLF-led Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the EPLF achieved significant victories in the late 1980s, leading to the overthrow of the Derg in May 1991 (Institute for Security Studies, 2018). The post-Derg era marked the beginning of a new phase in the rivalry between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Eritrea gained independence, and the TPLF-led front formed the government in Addis Ababa. The conflict in Tigray holds intense interest for the Eritrean leadership. The historical context and complexities of the relationship between Eritrea and Tigray are seen as a destabilizing fault line for Ethiopia and the wider region. This historical analysis provides valuable context for understanding the complexities of the Ethiopia-Eritrea and Tigray conflicts, emphasizing the deep-rooted historical factors that continue to shape the region's political landscape (Ried, 2020).

Colonial Era

Italians began settling along the Eritrean coast in 1870. This initial settlement was motivated, in part, by a desire to defeat French expansion in the region. The United Kingdom shifted its position from supporting Egyptian rule in Eritrea to supporting Italian colonization. In 1885, British assisted the Italian troops to occupying Massawa, uniting it with the colonized port of Assab (Institute for Security Studies (2018). The death of Emperor Yohannes IV in 1889 was taken as advantage by Italy to occupy the Highlands which was accepted by the new Ethiopian monarch, Menelik II. On January 1, 1890, the Italy announced the creation of the colony of Eritrea, deriving its name from the ancient Greek name for the Red Sea, Erythreus. Massawa initially served as the capital before being replaced by Asmara in 1897. (S/RES/2002 2011).

Anticolonial revolt by the Ethiopian troops led by Emperor Menelik II broke out after the seizure of agricultural fields in the highlands, leading to the Battle of Adwa in 1896. Ethiopia's victory in this battle brought about a peace treaty where Ethiopia renounced claims to the Italian colony in exchange for recognition as an independent state (Institute for Security Studies, 2018). The Italian administration began series of developmental and infrastructural projects in Eritrea from the late 1880s, these includes construction of the Eritrean railway, ports, roads, telecommunications, factories, administrative centers, and police stations. The period was regarded as contributing to the development of Eritrean national consciousness (S/RES/2002, 2011).

In 1932, Protestant missionaries were expelled by the Fascist government and implemented policies that limited the rise of an Eritrean elite, restricting access to education and urban services. With Mussolini's rise to power in Italy, Eritrea became a base for implementing expansion ambitions in the Horn of Africa. Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, and Mussolini declared the birth of the Africa Orientale Italiana in 1936, comprising Eritrea, Somaliland, and Ethiopia. Thus, Eritrea became the industrial center of the Italian East Africa Empire, with significant employment opportunities for Eritreans in administration and factories. S/RES/2002 (2011). This historical context provides insight into the colonial period, which

has had lasting effects on the relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea and is relevant to understanding contemporary geopolitical dynamics in the region.

Eritrean Independence

in the late 19th century, Eritrea faced colonial domination by the Italians, followed by imperialism and military rule under Ethiopia. The historical context shaped the aspirations of Eritrean nationalists for self-determination rather than secession (Institute for Security Studies, 2018). The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) spearheaded a national liberation movement that spanned three decades, including a challenging period in the late 1970s, internecine splits, and a strategic retreat to a mountain redoubt in the far northwest. The EPLF successfully defeated the Ethiopian army which was backed by the Soviet and gaining control of all of Eritrea in May 1991.

The postwar era began with optimism, marked by a successful referendum in which the larger percentage of the population voted for independence. The EPLF became the ruling party, and a consultative process was initiated to draft a new constitution. Border war erupted in 1998, with Ethiopia, leading to significant militarization of Eritrean society; this conflict had a lasting impact on the region (Human Rights Watch, 2021). In 2001, political reforms were called for by a group of leaders who played crucial roles in the liberation war. However, President Isaias Afwerki responded with arrests. This marked a turning point, leading to the closure of political space in Eritrea. Eritrea faced economic decline, international sanctions, and isolation. since 2001, which worsen the economic situation of the country. (<https://www.csis.org/analysis/eritrea-independence-struggle-and-struggles-independence>)

Recent Tigray Conflict

The conflict, which began in November 2020, involves military operations by the Ethiopian government against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the ruling party in the region. The Ethiopian government initiated military operations in Tigray against the TPLF. This indicates an internal conflict with significant consequences for the region's stability. Civilian structures in towns, including essential facilities like hospitals, schools, factories, and businesses, were targeted and affected by shelling, looting, and destruction (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The impact on civilian infrastructure suggests severe humanitarian consequences. The conflict involves not only Ethiopian federal forces but also regional militias, indicating a complex and multi-faceted conflict. Eritrean armed forces are reported to have played a role in the conflict. Their involvement adds another layer to the complexity of the situation. The fighting and restrictions on humanitarian access created a significant displacement crisis. Thousands sought refuge in Sudan. The conflict left at least 2.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the region (International Crisis Group, 2003).

The reported events suggest a dire situation with widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and a significant humanitarian crisis. The international community, including humanitarian organizations and human rights advocates, has expressed concerns and called for efforts to address the crisis, provide aid to those affected, and work towards a peaceful resolution. The situation in Tigray remains complex and continues to evolve, requiring attention and efforts to alleviate the suffering of the affected population (De Waal, 2003).

Bargaining and New Beginnings

In the early 1990s, leaders Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and Isaias Afeworki of Eritrea engaged in talks of reconciliation and new beginnings. Agreements were signed on economic cooperation, defense, and citizenship. The atmosphere appeared to be one of moving beyond

the grudges of the liberation war. Meles Zenawi, as a notable guest, attended the Eritrean independence celebrations in 1993, signaling a positive diplomatic gesture. However, underlying tensions persisted. In 1997, unresolved border disputes erupted due to Eritrea's introduction of a new currency (Kibreab, 2009). This move, outlined in a 1993 economic agreement, led to a collapse in commerce as Tigrayan traders often refused to recognize the new currency. Full-scale war began in May 1998 over the conflicted border hamlet of Badme.

The conflict, however, quickly spread along the shared, 1,000 km long frontier, involving air strikes on both sides. The root causes were deeper than border disputes, involving regional power dynamics and long-standing antagonisms along ethnic lines. In July 2018 peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea was signed by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki. This agreement ended the 1998-2000 war, but it also marked the marginalization of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). This peace agreement had implications for internal Ethiopian politics, particularly the marginalization of the TPLF, highlighting internal power struggles. (Richard, 2020).

Emperor Haile Selassie formally annexed Eritrea in 1961, leading to the organization of Eritrean independence movements, initially the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in the 1960s and later the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in the 1970s. In 1974, the Marxist military junta known as the Derg ousted Emperor Haile Selassie in a coup but continued to fight against the EPLF. The EPLF persisted in its struggle for independence despite setbacks (Kibreab, 2009). In 1977, Soviet support to Ethiopia enabled the Derg to regain the upper hand. Despite facing major offensives between 1978 and 1986, the EPLF continued its resistance. The EPLF capture of Afabet, the Ethiopian Army headquarters in 1988, prompted the Ethiopian army's withdrawal from the western lowlands. In May 1991, the Mengistu regime fell, and rebels captured Addis Ababa. The EPLF took control of Eritrea, leading to bargaining and negotiations in London to formalize the end of the 30-year war. (www.washingtonpost.com)

In April 1993, Eritreans voted in UN-supervised plebiscite, overwhelmingly approving independence. A provisional government was established, and Issaias Afwerki became president in May 1993. Despite initially strong ties, relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia began to fall apart in the mid-1990s. Contentious issues included the Yirga Triangle, border disputes, and economic matters. A border commission was set up in 1996, but it failed to settle the issues due to the introduction of new currency by Eritrea in November 1997, leading to economic disagreements (Kibreab, 2009). In May 1998, Eritrean troops entered the disputed territory, leading to conflict with Ethiopian forces. The fighting escalated into a brief air war by June, with a substantial troop buildup on both sides. Despite declarations of victory by Ethiopia in February 1999, no peace settlement was reached, and the two sides resumed hostility later that month (Neethling, 2004). This historical narrative outlines a series of events that added to the complexity of the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia, involving historical grievances, political changes, and territorial disputes, leading to periods of conflict and strained relations (www.washingtonpost.com).

Methodology

A secondary data analysis approach was adopted to investigate the Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Tigray border conflicts and their attraction of international interest. The study will rely solely on existing data and information from a wide range of sources, including academic literature, journals, news articles and other relevant secondary materials as available on the internet. This method is chosen due to the nature of the research topic, which requires travelling to volatile areas to seek information and language barrier, thereby making us focus on

understanding historical and contemporary aspects of the conflicts based on the analysis of available data. The research entails the use of qualitative research method, which is a research approach that is used in various disciplines to explore, understand, and gain insights into complex issues, human experiences, and social contexts. It is particularly useful as it provides the privilege to gain in-depth insights into complex phenomena or when quantitative data alone is insufficient to use

International Interventions

There were international responses to the conflicts in the region, particularly the involvement of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) in calling for an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful resolution. Additionally, the mention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Board's findings in 1998 reflects the recognition of Eritrea's economic progress in the years leading up to the conflicts (United Nations Report, 2022). The board expressed concern over the border conflict but endorsed Eritrea's policies and practices in economic reconstruction and social rehabilitation. The Directors of the IMF acknowledged Eritrea's achievements in implementing structural reforms, reducing fiscal deficits, and introducing its currency, the Nakfa. However, the Directors also noted that the ongoing conflict could hinder Eritrea's plans to further reduce macroeconomic imbalances and accelerate economic growth.

The adverse effects on fiscal policy were highlighted, despite the commendable reduction of the budget deficit in 1997 (United Nations Report, 2022). International community, through organizations like the IMF, was closely monitoring the economic implications of the conflicts in the region and recognized the challenges Eritrea faced in maintaining its economic progress amid the hostilities. The broader context of diplomatic efforts and international engagement underscores the interconnectedness of political and economic considerations in addressing regional conflicts. (IMF, 1998).

The UN-led International Interventions

Following diplomatic interventions by various players, including the Organization of African Unity (OAU), In June 2000, both parties signed a ceasefire agreement in Algiers, Algeria. This agreement aimed to create a security buffer along the conflicted border until a proper ruling could take place (United Nations Report, 2022). Six months later, a Comprehensive Peace Treaty was signed, outlining broader terms for the resolution of the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The ceasefire agreement and the subsequent Comprehensive Peace Treaty called for the establishment of a UN peacekeeping mission to oversee and monitor implementation, redeploy forces to agreed-upon positions, and oversee the 1000 km-long border and a 25 km-wide Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) which necessitated the creation of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) (United Nations Report, 2022).

UNMEE was given the responsibility of drawing out a plan to a final resolution of the border conflict, primarily through arbitration by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). The EEBC was tasked with arbitrating the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Its role was crucial in determining the final resolution of the contested border. This diplomatic process and the involvement of the United Nations, including the establishment of UNMEE and the arbitration by the EEBC, were aimed at finding a peaceful and lasting resolution to the longstanding conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The process highlighted the importance of international mediation and institutions in resolving regional conflicts (ICG Africa Report (1998).

However, there were challenges and complexities involved in the management of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict and the roles of the UNMEE and EEBC. The initial agreements established the UN system, particularly UNMEE, as responsible for conflict management, while the EEBC was an independent legal entity tasked with resolving the core issues of the conflict (Omna, 2022). This dual arrangement posed challenges in coordinating efforts between the two entities. While UNMEE and EEBC had complementary roles, they were substantially and strategically different. UNMEE focused on peacekeeping and managing the security environment, while EEBC had the legal mandate to address the fundamental issues of the border dispute. UN Security Council Resolution 1430 made some amendments to the mission mandate of UNMEE's, obliging the mission to assist the EEBC in implementing its delimitation decision. Despite this amendment, the two institutions continued to work independently (Omna, 2022).

Despite being faced with challenges, UNMEE, in its five years of existence, was relatively successful in its peacekeeping mandate. It effectively monitored the cessation of hostilities, coordinated security through the Military Coordination Commission (MCC), and the successful management of the security zone. The tensions over the boundaries of the hot zone, within UNMEE's territorial mandate, reflected the broader challenge of achieving a political resolution to the conflict. Legwaila the head of UNMEE engaged with both parties and worked to get the proposed boundaries accepted. However, challenges persisted in reaching a consensus, highlighting the broader difficulties in achieving a political settlement. (Neethling, 2004).

There were constant challenges faced by UNMEE in the years following the acceptance of the proposed boundaries for the buffer zone. Despite the acceptance of the proposed boundaries, UNMEE faced difficulties in dissuading the parties, particularly Eritrea, from deploying her military personnel along the buffer zone's boundaries. Eritrea restricted the UN transport in 2005, limiting UNMEE's freedom of movement, including within the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). The restrictions imposed by Eritrea on UN transport in 2005 significantly hampered UNMEE's freedom of movement (Richard, 2020). This restriction was a notable challenge, affecting the mission's ability to carry out its peacekeeping activities. Due to this there were several interventions from the UN Security Council to keep the air space between Asmara and Addis Ababa open. This intervention suggests that ensuring essential logistical support and communication between the mission's headquarters and key regional capitals faced recurring challenges. As pointed out by the UN Secretary-General, the lack of cooperation with the UN system by Eritrea, was identified as a major challenge to UNMEE's work. This lack of cooperation hindered the mission's ability to effectively carry out its obligation and maintain freedom of movement (Melakou, 2004).

Establishment and Mandate of the Boundary Commissions

The Boundary Commission was established as part of the peace process between Eritrea and Ethiopia. It was tasked with delimiting the border based on colonial agreements signed in 1900, 1902, and 1908 between Italian, British colonial governments and the Ethiopian Emperor. The Commission operated under the direction of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. During the Algiers Agreements, both parties had agreed to accept the Boundary Commission's ruling as final and binding, with no right of appeal (Richard, 2020). The composition of the Commission included five members of international repute, nominated by both parties.

- Sir Elihu Lauterpacht, CBE QC (President – appointed by lawyers from both sides)
- Professor W. Michael Reisman (appointed by Eritrea)

- Judge Stephen M. Schwebel (appointed by Eritrea)
- His Excellency, Prince Bola Adesumbo Ajibola (appointed by Ethiopia)
- Sir Arthur Watts, KCMG QC (appointed by Ethiopia)

However, the Commission made its final ruling on April 13, 2002, Ethiopia objected some aspects of the ruling. In its submission, Ethiopia questioned the interpretation of evidence being used by the ruling and highlighted challenges in implementing the decision on the ground. The Algiers Agreement did not allow appeals against the Commission's decision. And with Ethiopia objecting to aspects of the ruling, a deadlock was reached, creating a challenge for moving forward in the resolution process (Richard, 2020).

In order to prevent the resumption of hostilities as the arbitration process failed, the UN Secretary-General appointed Lloyd Axworthy the former Foreign Minister of Canada, as a Special delegate. Axworthy's role was to persuade the two parties towards negotiation. The hope for a negotiated settlement faced challenges as Eritrea refused to cooperate with Lloyd Axworthy. Eritrea argued that Axworthy's mission was not legal and allowed Ethiopia to ignore the earlier ruling which should be final (United States Institute of Peace, 2020). The inability to achieve a political settlement and the lack of demonstrated political will from both conflicting parties posed significant obstacles. Previous efforts, including those led by UNMEE head Legwaila Legwaila, had also failed (United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

The Critical Role of the African Union

African Union played an active role from the beginning in preventing the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia and securing a ceasefire. However, the AU's efforts faced challenges and limitations. The AU's perceived shortcoming is attributed to its admiration for Ethiopia, one of the involved parties. Ethiopia's significant status among AU member states, including hosting the AU headquarters, has imposed limits on the AU's intervention in the conflict. The AU underwent an internal transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the AU (Siphamandla and Emmanuel, 2006). This transition may have further weakened the AU's ability to intervene effectively in the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict. The AU has been criticized for offering very few fresh initiatives beyond diplomatic missions similar to those offered by the United Nations (UN).

However, Eritrea viewed these initiatives as lacking confidence in international law. Eritrea's dissatisfaction with the AU's approach to the conflict is reflected in its decision to recall its envoy to the AU in November 2003. This move suggests a loss of confidence in the AU as an avenue for advancing Eritrea's strategic regional interests (Siphamandla and Emmanuel, 2006). The stalemate in the conflict is attributed to two sets of realities. Firstly, the parties' choice of arbitration as a conflict settlement mechanism, which tends to be zero-sum and does not facilitate win-win solutions. Secondly, the failure to consider in-country imperatives, suggesting that the chosen conflict resolution approach may not address the root causes effectively. The arbitration process, chosen by the parties, is criticized for potentially prolonging the conflict. The winner-losers dynamic resulting from arbitration might not incentivize the winner (Eritrea) to seek alternative methods for reaching a common ground or reconciling tensions (Siphamandla and Emmanuel, 2006).

United Arab Emirates

Tigrayan forces verified that the UAE was providing assistance to the Ethiopian army with drones sent from an airbase in Eritrea at the beginning of the war in November 2020. These drones were reported to have played a role in nullifying Tigrayan forces and contributing to the early success of Ethiopian forces and their allies. As the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF)

made significant military gains in November 2021, the Ethiopian government reportedly sought renewed military support from the UAE. This partnership was allegedly confirmed through satellite imagery and reports from Al Jazeera. Satellite imagery reportedly recorded approximately 119 cargo flights from the UAE to Ethiopia since August 2021. The remnants of missiles at the sites of airstrikes, including the bombing of civilians in Alamata, Tigray, in December 2021, were allegedly linked to Chinese-made machinery purchased by the UAE (Omna, 2022).

In October 2021, U.S. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Jeffery Feltman, announced that the Ethiopian government was engaging in a "bombing campaign" using drones from "questionable sources," including reportedly from U.S. adversaries. Foreign-supplied drone use in the conflict has reportedly affected TDF supply lines and caused indiscriminate civilian injuries and deaths. The deliberately decimated health system in Tigray, targeted by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), Eritrean troops, and allied militias, has made it challenging for survivors to receive medical care. Due to the ongoing threats of drone strikes, humanitarian aid agencies have chosen to cease operations in Tigray, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the population (Omna, 2022).

United States of America

An announcement was made in October 2021 by Jeffery Feltman, the U.S. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, that the Ethiopian government was engaged in a "bombing campaign" utilizing drones. Feltman specifically mentioned that these drones were sourced from "suspicious sources," including countries considered U.S. adversaries (Omna, 2022). Tsadkan Gebretensae of the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) recalled that there were reportedly 10 drones in the sky simultaneously. This suggests an intensified deployment of aerial weaponry by the Ethiopian government. The use of foreign-supplied drones is noted to have played a significant role in the conflict in Tigray. The impact includes affecting TDF supply lines and causing indiscriminate civilian injuries and deaths (Omna, 2022).

Humanitarian Crisis

The conflicts have brought about a severe humanitarian crisis, with reports of widespread violence, displacement, and civilian casualties. Thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge in neighboring countries or within Ethiopia. The humanitarian situation has raised concerns about the safety, well-being, and access to basic necessities for the affected population. Survivors of aerial bombardments in Tigray face challenges in receiving medical care due to the deliberate targeting of the health system by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), Eritrean troops, and allied militias. The ongoing threats of drone strikes have led humanitarian aid agencies to cease operations in Tigray, further complicating the situation (Omna, 2022).

Human Rights Concerns

There have been reports of human rights abuses, including sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, and destruction of properties. These allegations have raised concerns about the protection of human rights and the need for accountability for any violations committed during the conflicts.

Regional Implications of the Conflict

The conflicts have wider regional implications, as they have the potential to destabilize the Horn of Africa region. The tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea could spill over into

neighboring countries, exacerbating existing political, social, and economic challenges. The conflicts also have implications for regional trade, security, and cooperation (Institute for Security Studies (2018).

Historical Factors

After gaining independence from Italian colonial control in 1941 and 10 years of British rule, the UN established Eritrea as an independent region within the Ethiopian federation in 1952. Ethiopia's full annexation of Eritrea as a province 10 years later began a 30-year violent conflict for independence that ended in 1991 with Eritrean fighters defeating government forces (Institute for Security Studies (2018). Eritreans overwhelmingly approved independence in a 1993 referendum. Isaias Afwerki has been Eritrea's only president since independence; his rule, since 2001, has been termed as highly autocratic. His government has created a highly militarized society by instituting an unremarkable program of mandatory enrolment into national service divided between military and civilian service with indefinite length of service. A two-and-a-half-year border war with Ethiopia that erupted in 1998 ended under UN guidance in December 2000. A subsequent 2007 Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) demarcation was rejected by Ethiopia. More than a decade of a tense “no peace, no war” stalemate ended in 2018 after the newly elected Ethiopian prime minister accepted the EEBC’s 2007 ruling, and the two countries signed declarations of peace and friendship (Institute for Security Studies (2018).

Following the July 2018 peace agreement with Ethiopia, Eritrean leaders engaged in critical diplomatic moves around the Horn of Africa, enhancing regional peace, security, and cooperation, as well as facilitating rapprochements between governments and opposition groups. In November 2018, the UN Security Council lifted an arms sanction that had been imposed on Eritrea since 2009. The country’s restoration with Ethiopia led to a resumption of economic ties, with increased air transport, trade, tourism, and port activities, until late 2020, but the economy remains agriculture-dependent, and Eritrea is still one of Africa’s poorest nations. Eritrea faced new international condemnation and US sanctions in mid-2021 for its participation in the war in Ethiopia’s Tigray Regional State, where Eritrean forces were found to have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity (Omna, 2022).

Political, Ethnic, and Economic Dimensions of the Conflict

Despite being an ethnic and territorial minority, making up just six per cent of the over 110 million people in the country, the Tigrayans of Ethiopia managed to control all facets of state authority unquestionably for 28 years since taking power in 1991 following the Ethiopian Civil war that began in 1974. Through the Tigrinya People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), founded in 1975, the Tigrayans became the most important force in the resistance against the communist Derg regime that ethnic groups nationwide were fighting. By joining forces with these other groups, the TPLF led a coalition of four ethnic-based parties known as the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to control the government in 1991 (Institute for Security Studies, 2018).

However, the rise to power of Abiy Ahmed as the Prime Minister in 2018 led to radical changes in Ethiopia’s structure resulting to a civil conflict just two years later. Ethiopia believes that Eritrea charges an outrageous fee to export Ethiopian coffee through the Eritrean port. There was also conflict regarding use of the U.S. dollar for transactions, instead of local currency. Relations between the countries were further tensed after Eritrea introduced its own currency in November 1997, then bristled when Ethiopia said it would trade only in

dollars. Eritreans complained that letters of credit were being required and new duties levied (Institute for Security Studies, 2018).

Conclusion

The Ethiopia-Eritrea and Tigray border conflicts emerged as significant geopolitical concerns, which caught the attention of the international community. The prolonged disputes led to widespread human rights abuses, displacement, and humanitarian crises. It emphasized the complex nature of ethnic and political dynamics within the Horn of Africa, posing challenges to regional stability. The international community responded with a mix of concern, condemnation, and calls for dialogue. The conflict's humanitarian toll prompted widespread calls for accountability and efforts to address the primary causes of the violence. The role of external actors, both in exacerbating and mitigating the conflict, added layers of complexity to the situation. Efforts from diplomatic channels, regional organizations, and global institutions were initiated to facilitate dialogue and find lasting solutions.

Recommendations

Based on the Ethiopia-Eritrea and Tigray border conflict, the paper recommends the following actions:

- i. **Dialogue and Mediation:** Encourage diplomatic efforts to facilitate dialogue and mediation between Ethiopia and Eritrea to resolve the border dispute. International organizations and regional bodies can play a crucial role in facilitating negotiations and ensuring a peaceful resolution.
- ii. **Humanitarian Assistance:** Provide immediate and sustained humanitarian assistance to the affected populations in Tigray, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. This includes ensuring access to food, clean water, healthcare, and protection services for those impacted by the conflict.
- iii. **Accountability and Human Rights:** Call for an independent investigation into human rights violations and hold those responsible accountable. Support efforts to document and address the reported atrocities, including sexual violence, massacres, and displacement, and ensure justice for the victims.
- iv. **Peacebuilding and Reconciliation:** Support initiatives that promote peacebuilding and reconciliation among conflicting parties. This can involve encouraging dialogue, fostering trust-building measures, and promoting inclusive processes that address underlying grievances and promote long-term stability.
- v. **Regional Cooperation:** Encourage regional cooperation and involvement to establish a peaceful and stable environment in the region. Engage neighboring countries and regional organizations to support efforts towards conflict resolution and provide assistance to affected populations.
- vi. **Long-term Development and Stability:** Support initiatives that address the root causes of the conflict, such as socio-economic disparities, ethnic tensions, and governance issues. Investing in long-term development programs, infrastructure projects, and good governance practices can contribute to stability and reduce the likelihood of future conflicts.

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