

Diagnosing Ethiopia's Tigray War: Reverberations in the Horn of Africa

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Abstract

The flare-up of hostilities in Ethiopia's Tigray district in November 2020 is simply the aftereffect of a forced battle between so-called reformist Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's central government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). This previous revolutionary development ruled Ethiopian legislative issues for over 25 years before Abiy's rise to control of power in 2018. Numerous Ethiopians considered the TPLF's rule authoritative, and misconducts executed under its authority stirred up scorn in several groups. The fight additionally displays ethnic strains in the country, which have been exacerbated as of late as the nation goes through political and financial modifications. The advancing battle has effectively brought about outrage, expanded the flow of refugees, and stressed territorial relations. This research article provides an account of the origins of the TPLF and the Tigrayans, Eritrea's involvement in the conflict, the sources of tension, and the paths to war. Finally, the repercussions of Ethiopia's Tigray conflict and its corollaries on the Horn of Africa. Specifically, the article draws on the Protracted Social Conflict Theory to explain Ethiopia's Tigray conflict. The answer stipulates a hint at addressing the current problem.

Keywords

Conflict, Ethiopia, Africa, Eritrea, Tigray

Introduction

Ethiopia, Africa's oldest sovereign country with a population of around 115 million, has undoubtedly played a critical role in securing territorial security

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in the Horn of Africa (Ams Integritat 2020; BBC 2022). Despite the political and economic upheavals of the second half of the twentieth century, the country has become one of the continent's most prominent economic and political players. In fact, after the fall of the tyranny of the military junta and the establishment of a formal ruling alliance (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)) in 1991, the nation created a structure of ethnic federalism to properly decentralise and disseminate roles that previously belonged exclusively to the central government to states that are divided along ethnic lines. Conversely, under the leadership of Meles Zenawi (who served as head of state from 1991 until his demise in 2012), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was successfully driven into total threat against the Derg. Consequently, authorities from Tigray, an area that makes up about 6% of the general population, held disproportionate power inside the federal apparatus, eventually prompting widespread discontent coordinated towards the new political elite that culminated in a well-known uprising in 2015 and the rise of Abiy Ahmed Ali to the office of Prime Minister in 2018 (Ams Integritat 2020). Furthermore, since taking office, Abiy Ahmed, the first ethnic Oromo chairman of the ruling coalition, has vowed to reform the federal government in the spirit of 'solidarity and reconciliation', reflecting 'the demands of protesters who felt Ethiopia's political elite had obstructed the country's transition to democracy'. Abiy Ahmed, who has 'liberalized politics, established a new party (the Prosperity Party), and removed senior Tigrayan government leaders accused of corruption and oppression', has enraged Tigrayans as they are deeply dissatisfied with their newfound prosperity (Ams Integritat 2020).

Furthermore, many Tigrayans have grown even more outraged as a result of Abiy Ahmed's Nobel Peace Prize and a dramatic turn of events in 2019 that saw peace with neighbouring arch-enemy Eritrea and caused the TPLF to refuse to participate in the governing coalition (Ams Integritat 2020). Tensions had undoubtedly reached a breaking point by the autumn of 2020. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, the Tigrayan regional government declined to postpone the parliamentary elections scheduled for September 2020, causing the national government to declare the election void (O'Grady 2020). The Ethiopian Parliament then voted in October 2020 to cut Tigray's budget and formally cut connections with its regional administration; Tigray's government responded by calling the steps 'war declarations' (Ams Integritat 2020). Finally, by November 2020, Abiy Ahmed 'accused Tigrayan forces of storming an army base to steal weapon' and had initiated a campaign to disarm the TPLF's 250,000 strong-armed wing and reclaim power to advance his federalisation ambition. However, as the humanitarian situation rapidly deteriorates, telecommunication connections, internet access and civilian mobility have been severely restricted since 4 November 2020, aggravating the predicament of many Tigray citizens who are already internally displaced. According to the Reuters Staff (2020a, 2020b), 'hundreds of lives were lost, more than 41,000 refugees fled to Sudan, widespread destruction, and displacement of people from their homes has occurred'. Against this backdrop, this research article draws on the protracted social conflict to clarify why the current conflict in Ethiopia exists and how it can be resolved.

Methodology

The method of content analysis was used in the study. The study is qualitative and relies on documentary evidence while gathering data; hence, this method was chosen mainly for that reason. Consequently, it has become essential to use the content analysis process employing secondary data sources (Afriyie, Jisong, and Yaw Appiah 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Edward Azar developed the protracted social conflict theory to describe conflicts that arise from ethnic groups protracted and sometimes violent battles to meet their most fundamental demands, such as security, acceptance, recognition, representation in political institutions, and economic liberties. Azar (1990) asserts that ethnic groups create identity groupings based on people who share common interests to meet these demands. Ethnic groups typically harbour deep-seated animosity towards one another based on race, religion, tribe and culture in long-running societal disputes. These identity-based conflicts are primarily motivated by a pervasive fear of extinction, which only intensifies among vulnerable communities plagued by the dread of repression or persecution. Ethnic differences and the risks that come with them are typically caused by the dominance of government institutions and structures by a single ethnic group or an elite coalition, which denies the rest of the population access to opportunities and the means to meet their most basic human needs (Azar 1990). According to the protracted social conflict theory, four primary variables lead to violent conflict. These conditions include the deprivation of human necessities, the function of government, international connection and communal aspects.

The four main factors that led to violent, protracted social conflict were present in the Tigrayan conflict. The communal element or feature of one of the requirements served as the TPLF's rallying cry. Humans attempt to meet their developmental goals by forming identity groups, according to Fisher (2001). In Ethiopia, a divide-and-rule system in which some communities were given preference over others fuelled the emergence of politically influential organisations. Additionally, the desire for ethnically dominant political organisations was fuelled by a historical pattern of antagonism between communities. These conditions exist because Ethiopia and Eritrea were at war between 1998 and 2000, and the conflict was officially proclaimed in 2018 (Melesse 2020).

Due to the unreliability and inability of the government to provide for the basic necessities of the population, many people in Ethiopia place a great deal of dependence on their social groups. This is the basis for the communal component of life in Ethiopia. That explains why it has controlled the ruling coalition since the TPLF overthrew the Derg military regime in 1991. From 1991 to 2018, the TPLF's dominant coalition controlled coalitions with four other major ethno-regional parties. The second and third prerequisites, deprivation of human needs

and the role of government, were exacerbated by Abiy Ahmed's marginalisation of TPLF leaders after the 2018 election and the federal government's decision to delay national elections in 2020 (Melesse 2020). From 1991 until 2018, the TPLF dominated Ethiopian politics for 27 years. Before 2018, TPLF members served as the heads of Ethiopia's military and intelligence services. The TPLF administration abolished the previous Ethiopian army after winning the conflict in 1991 and converting its soldiers into the new Ethiopian army. Due to its increased political and military might, the TPLF could fully seize control of Ethiopia's economy, natural resources and foreign investments.

Additionally, the TPLF exercised social control over choosing religious leaders. However, in 2018, widespread protests began to jeopardise the TPLF's power and control. Despite being the largest tribe in Ethiopia, the Oromo ethnic group has always played second fiddle to the TPLF, so the leaders of the coalition led by the TPLF did not see Abiy Ahmed as a danger to their hegemony. As soon as he assumed office, Abiy Ahmed launched his anti-corruption crusade, which had a tremendous impact on the economic clout of the Tigrayan elite. The new administration also initiated economic changes, such as privatising state-owned companies that Tigrayans mainly operated. The new prime minister also implemented security sector reforms by appointing new military and intelligence heads in place of TPLF allies. Since the TPLF lost control of the federal government, ethnic-based hostilities have escalated in all regional states, with the exception of Tigray, according to a report by the Foreign Policy Council (Melesse 2020). According to human rights watchdogs, most of these attacks were funded and planned by those negatively affected by Abiy's government, even though there is intense hatred between the various Ethiopian ethnic groups. The central government's cut in financing for the TPLF region, which the TPLF leaders characterised as an act of war, was a significant move. According to the protracted social conflict theory, the prime minister's series of initiatives since 2018 satisfy the requirements for government engagement as a prerequisite to protracted conflict.

Who Are the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the Tigrayans?

The TPLF arose during the 1970s as a small local army of Tigrayans battling against Ethiopia's military tyranny, a populace the central government had disregarded for quite some time. The Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups represent over 60% of Ethiopia's populace, though Tigrayans, the third-biggest ethnic group, represent simply 6% to 7%. Despite this, the TPLF developed to be the country's most formidable insurgent movement, leading an alliance that removed the government in 1991 (Walsh and Dahir 2021). With the TPLF at its helm, the insurgent coalition became Ethiopia's ruling alliance. The coalition comprised four essential parties, each of which was shaped generally along ethnic and geographic lines, and it upheld a federalist system that gave Ethiopia's regions incredible impact. Meles Zenawi, the TPLF's leader, led Ethiopia from 1991 to 2012.

During that time, the nation emerged as a steady government in an unstable region and experienced monumental economic development.

Nonetheless, the government savagely stifled political adversaries and restricted freedom of expression, and torture was regular in official detention establishments. Mr Abiy, whose father is Oromo, became Prime Minister in 2018 because of anti-government protests. Numerous Tigrayans were stripped of positions of power, and several others were charged with corruption or human rights infringement. His administration additionally censured programmes carried out under Tigrayan authority. His activities infuriated the TPLF, resulting in a schism between the organisation and the central government. As part of his endeavour to dissolve ethnic and regional power blocs, Mr Abiy merged the ruling coalition into a single party in 2019. The TPLF did not join the new party.

Nevertheless, as the International Crisis Group indicated at the beginning of the conflict, it kept up with control of the Tigray regional administration and a security force of up to 250,000 armed men (Culbertson and Whiteside 2021). The government's objective in the fight is to capture or murder TPLF authorities, including a portion of Ethiopia's past political and military leaders. The federal government delisted the TPLF as a legal political party in January, and in May 2021, it was designated a terrorist group (Walsh and Dahir 2021).

How Did Eritrea Become Involved in Tigray?

To resolve this inquiry, one should think back to the 1970s, when the TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front battled the Derg regime together. Despite their disparities, Meles Zenawi and Isaias Afwerki, the heads of the two rebel groups, united forces and initiated a last push in 1991, conquering Addis Ababa and Asmara. Meles became Prime Minister of Ethiopia, while in Eritrea, Isaias seized power, and the nation became an independent state. The relationship between these two leaders deteriorated over time, culminating in the border conflict of 1998–2000, which killed over 100,000 people (Neuman 2021). The conflict ended; however, the TPLF-led government's relationship with Isaias would never recuperate. In Ethiopia, the TPLF effectively lost control in 2018. It had been the government's dominant party, but the ruling coalition chose a new prime minister after widespread protests. President Isaias exploited Abiy Ahmed's ability to veer from his predecessors' perspectives on Eritrea. Eritrea's leader called Abiy to Asmara, where Eritrean crowds welcomed the new prime minister with celebration. Abiy returned the favour, and Isaias got the equivalent exciting greetings in Addis Ababa. The two leaders inked a formal treaty in Saudi Arabia in September 2018, cementing their relationship. The bilateral relationship grew dramatically after that, and Abiy and Isaias were consistently in contact. They conducted nine official visits to each other's capitals or joined joint missions to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in just over two years. They conducted their final meetings at their separate military bases. On 18 July 2020, Abiy inspected troops and military equipment at Sawa, Eritrea's most significant military training base. On 12 October 2020, Isaias

visited Ethiopia's Bishoftu airbase, which houses the country's air force. According to reputable sources, President Isaias convened his closest confidantes on the eve of the Tigray crisis. He professes to have expressed that Eritrea should accept that it has a limited economy and an extended Red Sea coast that it cannot patrol on its own. He is claimed to have advocated for forming a 'union' between Ethiopia and the United States, at least in economic cooperation and maritime security. If this is right, he gives the impression of repeating Abiy's grandiose dream of restoring Ethiopia's previous empire-state. Although Isaias was previously in charge of Eritrea's decades-long struggle for independence from Ethiopia, this suggestion may be more plausible than it appears (Neuman 2021).

Origins of Tension and Paths to War

A violent power struggle and a fundamental schism in managing Ethiopia are to blame for the catastrophe. Ethiopia's multinational federation based on self-determination was created in 1995 after the TPLF and allied rebels deposed a centralising military government in 1991. As leaders of historically influential minority ethnicities, Tigrayan authorities safeguarded group rights through an ethnic federalism system that involved the devolution of power to nine newly constituted areas, or federal states, based primarily on ethnolinguistic identity. Their rivals interpreted the strategy as a divide-and-rule strategy to counter Tigrayan dominance (Nazret 2016). The framework provides the territory with its constitution, a legislative body in charge of security, and several public strategies. The system provides regions with their own constitutional and legislative bodies responsible for security and public policy. The constitution even allows for the separation of groups, even though the ruling coalition dominated by the TPLF suppresses individual and collective rights. Some people in the Prime Minister's political camp support the conflict to eliminate the TPLF as an opportunity to denationalise the federal system (Crisis Group 2021).

Ethiopian nationalists and others have been critical of the federal system from its inception, condemning it for deepening ethnic differences and blaming the TPLF for wielding excessive power inside the federal government and ruling coalition. The EPRDF, a coalition of four regional ruling parties, including the TPLF, and five governing parties from other federal states, restricts dissent, denies civil liberties and centralises policymaking to keep dissent at bay. The EPRDF faced mounting opposition after a contentious election in 2005, when government forces killed almost 200 protestors and imprisoned thousands of opponents. The TPLF was the most powerful party in the coalition. Despite considerable demographic differences, they evenly split votes among its four regional parties, with TPLF and EPRDF chair Meles Zenawi as Prime Minister from 1995 until he died in 2012. The armed forces and security services, frequently accused of human rights breaches by political opponents and human rights organisations, were dominated by Tigrayans (Crisis Group 2021). The divide between ethno-nationalist and pan-Ethiopian ideas in the country deepened due to the deep hatred between TPLF leaders and Abiy. According to the BBC (2021), after the prime minister

took office following three years of massive protests the alliance's leadership in the Oromia and Amhara regions, federal officials blamed Tigray leaders for blocking political and security reforms. For example, they refused to cooperate with an arrest warrant issued for Getachew Assefa, a former national intelligence chief and TPLF Politburo member who opposed Abiy's bid for the prime premiership. Tigrayan officials retaliated against Abiy and his allies, dubbing the EPRDF era '27 years of darkness' and accusing Tigrayan officials of human rights violations and corruption (Crisis Group 2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

Tigray's leaders were also enraged by what they viewed as the federal government's help to Amhara organisations in obstructing Tigray's entry routes and federal favour shown to their opponents like the late Asaminew Tsige, a former Amhara security commander and anti-TPLF hardliner (Crisis Group 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Abiy's 2018 reunion with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, for which Ethiopia's leader received the Nobel Peace Prize the following year, infuriated Tigray's leaders. They began to regard the rapprochement between Addis Ababa and Asmara as a predominantly anti-TPLF partnership based on Isaias' previous animosity. From 1998 until 2000, Tigray's leadership dominated Ethiopia. The two countries have fought over Eritrea's independence, economic and trade policies, and territorial disputes. Isaias' October 2020 visit to an Ethiopian military base fuelled Tigrayans' suspicions that the Eritrean leader was determined to deliver on his promise that Ethiopia would change in 2018 'game over' for the TPLF (Crisis Group 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). With no end to the fundamental issues, the prime minister's proposal to merge regional ruling parties into a single, unitary one in 2019 further strained his relationship with the TPLF.

Except for the TPLF, the Prosperity Party comprises eight of the country's ruling parties. The TPLF refused to join because they feared the merger would diminish Tigray's autonomy, but it also cost them their share of federal power. Following the TPLF's triumph in the national parliament as the country's lone opposition bloc, federal officials removed the party's remaining nominees from the central government (Crisis Group 2021). In March, the National Electoral Board's decision to postpone elections due to COVID-19, followed by the House of Federation's decision to extend the terms of all administrations until June 2020, was another progression on the escalatory path. The TPLF interpreted those moves as further incitement, claiming (together with some other Abiy commentators) that the premier's authority was restricted to shepherding the country to elections and that he should have officially included the opposition in electoral decisions once the original period had expired (Crisis Group 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). They claimed the delay was unlawful because the Prosperity Party monopolised a transition that the prime minister stated would lead to multiparty democracy (Crisis Group 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Addis Ababa argued, with some justification, that prolonging all governments was a legal procedure (Bloomberg 2020). The idea of Tigray holding its regional election became a totemic theme of self-rule for the TPLF and, clearly, many Tigrayans. Despite federal instructions, the party, already well-established in Tigray's institutions, handily won the September 9th elections. The election in Tigray was not so much about who would exercise political power that the TPLF's huge majority was never in dispute,

according to the Crisis Group (2021). The question was not whether voters agreed with the party's decision to defy the federal government. According to statistics, the TPLF received 98% of the 2.6 million Tigrayan votes cast—over half of the region's entire population, which accounted for an overwhelming majority of voting-age Tigrayans. Competing opposition parties embraced increasingly more strident Tigrayan nationalist attitudes, including proposing secession (Crisis Group 2021). Critics claim that TPLF repression, boycotts by other opposition parties, and a lack of federal and international control damaged the outcome (Crisis Group 2021).

The election had a significant impact on future hostilities. The House of Federation deemed the election fraudulent, declaring Tigray's new cabinet and legislature illegitimate in the eyes of the federal government. On the other side, Mekelle (the capital of the Tigray region) questioned Abiy's authority, claiming that the administration's original mandate had expired in early October, according to the Crisis Group (2020a, 2020b, 2020c). On the other hand, Addis Ababa continued with an arrangement that month to shift financial transfers from Tigray's executive, which the regional administration contended was a fundamental violation of the federal agreement (Crisis Group 2021). Unless Tigray's leadership took the unlikely step of rejecting the election, it had just made a big political statement by holding it, and federal authorities appeared forced to act. Before the war erupted, federal officials allegedly told the Crisis Group that their objective was to weaken Tigray by economic sanctions to force compliance. The TPLF's downfall, as well as the restitution of Amhara land, were prophesied by many. Tigray rejected Abiy's attempts to reorganise the military's Northern Command, which is based in Tigray, claiming that the federal government lacked legal authority at the time. Despite Tigrayan claims of a military build-up, regional authorities seized control of as much of the military stationed in Tigray as they could on November 3rd, working as a team with Tigrayan officers inside the national armed force, executing those who opposed Addis Ababa and capturing those who remained loyal. Abiy announced the mediation on November 3rd. On November 5th, parliament voted for a six-month state of emergency in Tigray, trailed by the disintegration of the regional government, and replaced it with an interim administration two days later. The conflict was underway (BBC 2020).

Reverberations of Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict and its Corollaries on the Horn of Africa

Ethiopia's Tigray War has incontrovertible ramifications for East Africa's peace and security, particularly for Ethiopia's neighbours. Ethiopia is widely regarded as the horn of Africa's most powerful military and economic force. Nonetheless, any significant insecurity in Ethiopia will profoundly impact neighbouring nations and the region. Although the new struggle in Ethiopia's rebellious Tigray area has only been ongoing for a few months, it has had territorial consequences, with effects felt in Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia. Indeed, the brutality worsened

when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed opted on November 4th to send federal troops into the country's western Tigray region, sending shockwaves through the Horn of Africa and beyond as the war escalated. In the Horn and East African provinces, Ethiopia, Africa's second-largest country, shares boundaries with six other African countries (Africa Center 2020).

Nonetheless, there is a lot of ongoing insecurity in the region and many pressing humanitarian needs. Regardless, the conflict's continued progression has resulted in a devastating humanitarian crisis, which has been exacerbated by indiscriminate violence. According to HOA News Editor 2020, the fighting in Tigray is already threatening to destabilise an area of Kassala state in eastern Sudan, which is currently sheltering an estimated 50,000 Tigray refugees and formerly hosted more than 100,000 Eritrean refugees. For example, in 2020, the region's harvests were devastated by record-breaking swaths of locusts, and the severity caused food supply delays (Horton 2020).

Furthermore, it has been estimated that if the fighting continues for a long time, the growing season will be delayed, possibly resulting in undeniable hunger. Similarly, estimates of internally displaced people are staggering. Furthermore, according to government official data, Tigray has 2.2 million internally displaced persons, with 45,000 individuals from western Tigray arriving in the Shire alone in January 2020. During the previous week of the conflict, Western agencies were able to access some parts of Tigray, and aid began to flow to these areas. Despite this, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) believes that approximately one million people are stuck in inaccessible areas as a result of the 'very unsafe and insecure' operational environment (CSIS 2020). According to the International Red Cross, water, medical supplies and other basics are in short supply, and UNOCHA has declared the situation 'dire'. The war's consequences are felt well beyond Tigray (Floyd 2021). According to Amelia Twitchen, roughly 60,000 refugees have shifted to overcrowded Sudanese camps since November (2020).

Given that the two largest camps are only built to hold 20,000 people each, this inflow strains limited humanitarian resources. In addition to food security and refugee flows, the Tigray conflict impacts the rest of the region. Ethiopia has been a close military ally of the United States for more than a decade, and analysts call it 'the strategic Linchpin of the unpredictable Horn of Africa'. If the Tigray war continues and turns into a long-running insurgency shortly, Ethiopia may become a source of insecurity for its neighbours. Ethiopia, for example, sends 5,000 peacekeepers to South Sudan, 4,000 soldiers to the African Union's Somalia Mission (AMISOM), and another 15,000 soldiers to Somalia on a bilateral basis (Floyd 2021).

According to Vanda Felbab-Brown, co-director of Brookings' Africa Security Initiative, the presence of Ethiopian soldiers strengthens Somali forces' commitment. When Ethiopian soldiers leave a territory, Al-Shabab attacks increase (Floyd 2021). In terms of security, the battle in Tigray has the potential to undo AMISOM's achievements. Due to security concerns, Ethiopia redeployed some of its forces from Somalia to Tigray, and the military imprisoned roughly 200 ethnic-Tigrayan service members stationed in Somalia. Such purges, according to

Felbab-Brown, impair anti-Shabaab forces' morale, cohesiveness and capacity, and this author is concerned that a reduced Ethiopian presence in Somalia will undermine the government. According to Twitchen (2020), Ethiopia redeployed forces from the disputed Al-Fashqa Triangle to Mekelle in late December, while Sudanese armed forces attacked an Ethiopian National Defense Force outpost and displaced Amhara farmers on the Sudanese–Ethiopian border. As Negatu and Hudson (2020) suggest, a prolonged war between well-armed factions inside Ethiopia could send hundreds of thousands of refugees across borders, disrupt trade routes, and force Addis Ababa to abandon its role as regional anchor state, mediator, policeman and peacekeeper. According to the UN, this would be a potentially disastrous scenario for a region unprepared to deal with extra unrest or a humanitarian disaster affecting more than nine million people. Sudan, the embodiment of precariousness, announced the closure of part of its eastern border with Ethiopia only two days after combat began. It reportedly stationed more than 6,000 of its military inside Gedaraf state, which borders Tigray. According to insider reports, the typically high volume of trade at border checkpoints was reduced as the war progressed. Tigrayan truck drivers were prevented from bringing their shipments into Sudan for fear of federal authorities' experts in Addis misinterpreting this as a strategy to support the Tigrayan conflict. According to local media, the first truckloads of Ethiopian refugees arrived in Gedaraf state during the early months of the war, where they will be accommodated in the first of what might be several new refugee camps established to accommodate individuals escaping the Tigray war. At the same time, weaponry and ammunition shipments bound for Tigrayan forces in Sudan were delayed en route, aggravating an already dangerous situation in Sudan. Tribal and militia-led violence has grown in Sudan's far eastern provinces in recent months, with Ethiopian forces clashing with them on the Ethiopian side of the border. It is here, even if Sudan has its powder keg. Sudanese Prime Minister Hamdok, who has lived in Addis for the past two decades and benefited from Ethiopian mediation on several occasions during Sudan's still-ongoing transition and the internal peace process, is said to have reached out to his Ethiopian counterpart Abiy, as well as regional TPLF leaders in Addis Ababa. A truce was also attempted but failed by Sudan's leading army commander and Transitional Sovereignty Council leader.

While none of the conflict's participants appear to be interested in official outside mediation, Sudan is well-positioned to do so if it becomes essential. Sudan's Prime Minister has some political capital to spend, riding high on the recent announcement that Sudan would be removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism and benefiting from renewed support from Gulf state actors who backed Sudan's equally recent announcement of reconciliation with Israel. Because he is the current chairman of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in the region, he is also in a position to help. The resources available to that body for mediation and peacemaking could be more varied. As a participant in ongoing negotiations over Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam and a crucial buffer in those talks between Egypt and Ethiopia, Hamdok has considerable credibility in establishing common ground on issues essential to Ethiopia's national security interests (Africa Center 2020). Somalia and South Sudan, which

have large refugee populations in Ethiopia due to their on-again, off-again civil wars, are similarly affected by the potential effects of a war between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF but are powerless to help politically. Neither country is prepared for the imminent repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians due to the country's civil conflict. Both Somalia and South Sudan have come to rely on Ethiopian peacekeepers to assist them in reducing sectarianism.

In contrast, Ethiopia has withdrawn 600 troops from Somalia's western border region (although its troop contribution to the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia has so far been unscathed). Despite reports that Ethiopian police are replacing them, a UN security report obtained by Reuters warned that 'redeployment from near the Somali border would make the region more vulnerable to Al-Shabaab incursions', an al Qaeda-linked insurgency seeking to overthrow the Somali government. As Somalia's presidential elections approach—after numerous postponements, they were scheduled for early last year—a security vacuum created by Ethiopian army withdrawals threatens to jeopardise years of international efforts to bring peace and stability to the long-fractured country (Paravicini and Endeshaw 2022). This worst-case scenario will only happen if fighting between the TPLF and Abiy's federal forces continues, and Ethiopian military forces are redeployed in more significant numbers than before. There is, however, a severe threat. Ethiopia's strong security presence among its neighbours contributes to regional stability, but its well-deserved reputation as a peacemaker and mediator is even more at risk. Ethiopia has been a stabilising power in the region.

Conclusion

The implications of Ethiopia's TPLF and Abiy's federal government are crippling the country's stability and pose subtle yet tangible transcending effects on neighbouring countries. One could quickly identify refugee displacement, shortage of food, the lack of individual security, and lack of political stability *inter alia* as the perceivable outcome of these disturbances. What is more worrying is the orchestration of these conflicts with little or no recourse to the global coronavirus pandemic (with its new delta wave variant) and its consequences. Extant data shows that the Sudanese camps hosting the Tigrayan displaced folks are full to capacity. This alone should be alarming enough to increase concerns for a ceasefire and resolution. Indeed, it would be ideal to recommend a double-edged approach to deal with the conflict. First, as an immediate and radical measure, this article recommends that since the persistence of this Tigray conflict may lead to a long-running insurgency, peacekeeping troops of either the AU or the UN should be explicitly deployed to hotspots or flashpoints like Amhara, Beninshangul-Gumuz, and Afar (Nunis 2021) to stand as a blockade and contain the atrocities adequately.

Second, following the deployment and containment of operations of both factions by peacekeeping troops, dialogue should be the next tool to be deployed. Although the Sudanese Prime Minister Hamdok had earlier attempted to broker peace through mediation, the warring factions showed no interest because they both had the means to fuel the fights. Indeed, when the peacekeeping troops have

first been deployed to counter and tame the operations of both factions, some room would arguably be given to dialogue and negotiation. This article deems this second strategy of resolution fit because the Tigrayan forces seem not to give up but continue to fight. After all, Mr Abiy and the federal government still need to meet their conditions for a ceasefire. Given the repelling consequences for Ethiopia and, by extension, neighbouring countries, this double-edged approach should be adopted for immediate resolution without delays.

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