

The Impact of the Ethiopia Conflict on the Horn of Africa: The Case of Somalia

Introduction

As Ethiopia implodes with the conflict between the federal government and the Tigray region there will be a negative impact both at the regional and internal levels. On the one hand, since the reign of the late Males Zenawi's (1995-2012) Ethiopia has gained a great space in the international and regional stage with economic and infrastructural growth, presence in international forums, and pledge in peacekeeping operations. Ethiopia with its large population, ancient history, territorial size, and location has merged out a regional hegemon. On the other hand, the country has achieved political stability with its ethnic federalism constitution that managed most internal strife that plagued the country for many years. The current conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia stands to lose its regional hegemonic status and internal political stability that is achieved. More importantly, the conflict will engulf the whole region including Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and most of all Somalia where the country is involved militarily both unilaterally and part of the AMISOM forces. What and how will this ensuing conflict impact the internal and regional politics of Ethiopia?

The foreign policy of Ethiopia is shaped by its domestic political and economic considerations. In particular, the Ethiopians worry that their efforts at state-building will be undermined by regional instability as Ethiopia sits at the center of a rough neighborhood. The over three-decade conflict in Somalia has been a destabilizing factor in the Horn of Africa region. Ethiopia's foreign policy toward Somalia under successive regimes consistently aimed at keeping Somalia weak. This article addresses specifically the impact of the Ethiopia conflict on Somalia. The article will be divided into three parts; The first part will give an overview of the current Tigray region conflict and its implication within Ethiopia. The second part provides a background of the Ethio-Somali relationship and Ethiopia's intervention since 1991. The third part discusses the impact of the current Ethiopia internal conflict on the Horn countries. The article will conclude with recommendations and a way forward.

Overview of the Tigray Conflict

Although Tigray represent 6% of Ethiopia's population, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) for nearly three decades (1991 - 2018) dominated the ruling coalition, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). When compared with other Ethiopian provinces, Tigray has experienced disproportionate economic development since TPLF took power in 1991. When Prime Minister Meles Zenawi died suddenly in 2012, his successor, Hailemariam Desalegn, could not manage mounting pressure. In 2015-2018 Ethiopia witnessed widespread violent protests mainly from two biggest ethnic groups (Oromia and Amhara) who have long complained that they have been marginalised by the TPLF dominated EPRDF and they were excluded from the country's political process and the economic development.¹ This led resignation of Hailemariam Desalegn. Discontent Oromo and Amhara eventually joined forces to out manoeuvre the TPLF within the ruling coalition to get Abiy Ahmed appointed as prime minister in 2018, who is of mixed Oromo-Amharic parentage.

The TPLF power waned soon after Mr Abiy took office. Abiy moved swiftly. Top TPLF officials were sacked from key security posts, generals were arrested on graft charges, and changes were introduced to counter the Tigrayan dominance of the armed forces. Political prisoners were freed from secret prisons, exiled dissidents were welcomed home, cumbersome state enterprises were earmarked for privatization, and restrictions on the media were eased. TPLF felt the loss of power, especially after senior military and security officers were either purged or arrested.

The extent of this purge undermined confidence amongst Tigrayans that their interests would continue to be protected at the federal level specially when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed disbanded the ruling coalition EPRDF on 1st of December 2019 and replaced it with the new Prosperity Party which centralized on himself as a leader. TPLF saw Mr Abiy as a threat to the "ethnic federalism" that it had helped introduce in Ethiopia. The collapse of the EPRDF meant the demise of the TPLF's dominant role in Ethiopian politics. Then TPLF political leadership withdrew to Tigray region and maintained that it is committed to oppose what it calls Mr. Abiy's attempt to build a strong "unitary" state".

Abiy Ahmed and TPLF simmering tension started early on when TPLF was sidelined about the normalization of Ethiopia relations with Eritrea. The war between the two countries (1998-2000) was over territorial claims, in particular the Tigray administered border town of Badme in the Tigray Region. Peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea is practically impossible without the cooperation of TPLF. So, Abiy Ahmed must first solve the TPLF. On the other hand, Eritrea is bitterly opposed to the TPLF leadership of the Tigray province and its dominance of Ethiopia federal politics. Both Addis Ababa and Asmara stand hostile to the TPLF, albeit for different reasons.

The crisis between the TPLF and Abiy's government escalated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Abiy's government postponed national elections that were originally scheduled for August 2020. Defying the federal government, Tigray held its own state elections in September 2020, which prompted Ethiopia government to cut funds to the TPLF while parliament authorized Abiy to use force against the "traitorous" state. TPLF officials issued calls for Abiy to step down and signaled their preparedness to fight.

TPLF feared the federal government would use the Tigray-based Northern Command of the Ethiopia National Defense Forces (ENDF) to forcefully take over the region from within the territory, while the federal authorities were worried that the heavy armament in possession of the Northern Command could be used by the TPLF to launch an attack not only within the regional state but even on the center. In other words, the Northern Command was seen as a crucial element that could tip the balance of

¹[www.bbc.com > news > world-africa](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa) > What is behind Ethiopia's wave of protests? - BBC News

force in the power struggle between Abiy Ahmed and TPLF and the war was inevitable. In late October 2020, the TPLF refused to allow newly appointed ENDF commanders to take up their posts before TPLF taking over the Northern Command which prompted Abiy Ahmed to launch airstrikes in Tigray region on November 4.²

While Abiy Ahmed calls the Tigray region conflict as ‘law enforcement operation’ and declared victory in Tigray on November 29 2020, the fighting between TPLF and Ethiopia government forces has all hallmarks of a civil war with significant implications for other parts of Ethiopia. The defeat of TPLF does not necessarily mean the end of the Ethiopia internal conflict. Ethiopia is a nation facing a silent crisis.

The Root Causes of the Tigray Crises and Its Implication within Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has a population of more than 108m and over 90 ethnic groups with a history of independent states stretching back three millennia. Beside the battle for control of the state, the current conflict in Ethiopia is a manifestation of two inter-twined dimensions;

- (1) The two opposing visions for the country’s state building project - a strong central government vis a federal system.³
- (2) Ethnic-Based Territorial Conflicts.

State building project

Amharas, the second most populous ethnic group in Ethiopia, dominated Ethiopian national affairs between 1889 and 1991 adopting an ‘assimilationist’ policy.⁴ Emperor Menelik of Abyssinia, the architect of the Ethiopian Empire, saw himself as part and parcel of the scramble for Africa. His territorial expansion and creation of the modern empire-state was completed in 1898. His rule resulted in the Amhara culture and language dominating the empire for more than a century. From 1930 Haile Selassie’s maintained the imperial system he inherited by instituting centralization. Under Emperors Menelik and Haile Selassie, no attempt was made to differentiate the private domain of the rulers from that of the state. The Oromos, Somalis, Sidamas and Eritreans never gave up their quest for freedom. As centralization gathered momentum, even sectors of Abyssinia repeatedly rose against his rule. The military regime that came to power in 1974 instead of trying to bargain with the struggling communities it exploited the revolutionary sentiment that brought down the imperial order by adopting a totalitarian system. The end of the military regime occasioned Eritrean independence and the take over of the rest of the empire by the TPLF. What happened at this historical juncture is a testimony to the failure of the unitary state of the imperial (1930–1974) and the Derge (1974–1991) national state-building project.⁵

In Tigray, there had long been resentment at the power of the centralised Ethiopian state. The TPLF played a pivotal role in the drafting of the current constitution that gives ethnic groups the right to self-determination. Despite acting as a guardian of multinational federalism, what is practiced is highly centralized and abusive—thus restricting regional government’s actual room to maneuver. On the other hand, the federal design has created winners and losers. Ethiopia is currently divided into 9 ethnically

² Ethiopia's PM says airstrikes launched against targets in ...www.theguardian.com Nov 5, 2020

² Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1964–1968, Volume Xxiv, Africa, Washington, March 21, 1964

³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/12/18/the-war-in-tigray-is-a-fight-over-ethiopias-past-and-future>

⁴ Abbay, Alemseged. (2004). Diversity and State-Building in Ethiopia. African Affairs. 103. 10.1093/afraf/adh043.

⁵ Gemtessa, Daniel (2014). Abyssinia/Ethiopia: State Formation and National State-Building Project Comparative Approach. University of Oslo.

defined regions/states, each with their own distinct language, culture and history. Each region is administered by an ethnic political party. The Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and the southern region are administered by parties that were members of the defunct EPRDF ruling coalition. The other five regions are made up mostly of minorities and are economically undeveloped. They are administered by ethnic parties that were not part of the ruling coalition. As a result, Ethiopia's federal design has relegated most minority regions that aren't directly administered by the ruling coalition into second class regions. Ethiopia's constitution guarantees all ethnic groups the right to vote on forming a new regional state if their leaders request one, as the Sidama did on July 18, 2018.

In Ethiopia, despite continued economic growth and promised democratization, ethnic federalism has failed to resolve their "national question". For almost 30 years, some ethnic groups were kept out of the decision-making process, while authoritarian practices left many without a voice. For instance, the Amhara elites believe that the ethnic federalism has negatively affected them. After year of marginalization, Amhara helped Abiy Ahmed with the Tigray war to demolish Tigrayan power in order to dominate the empire. There is little doubt that the TPLF's losses mean gains for others. Following the defeat of TPLF, Amhara elites now claim that they are the rightful group to shape Ethiopia today in their own image – an ethno-nationalist position, a stance that disturbs other Ethiopians specially Oromos.

Throughout Ethiopia's history, no other tribal population has been more oppressed and marginalized than the Oromo. Since the 1960s the Oromo political actors have opted for the secessionist route. Oromos, the largest ethno-national group in Ethiopia constituting more than one-third of the population, view Amharas as tribal dictators of Ethiopia and oppressors of the Oromo and other ethnicities.⁶ Oromo effort to end the past power imbalance worries Amhara nationalists that a new imbalance of power is looming. As a result, ethnic strife has resulted between the Amhara and Oromo. Abiy Ahmed is himself an Oromo but he was raised by his Amhara mother. Abiy Ahmed used his affiliation with the Oromo people to come to power. He promised to address issues such as the right to self-determination, political and cultural freedoms, making the Oromo language a federal language, and enabling the Oromo to repossess their lands. However, Oromo community is divided and in dilemma between supporting Abiy Ahmed's centralist Party and their legitimate concern about regional autonomy and the future of multinational federalism.

Parts of Oromia are almost a war zone since the demonstrations that erupted in the region following Oromo protest. The Oromo Liberation Army (OLM) refused to disarm. It has been in conflict with the Ethiopian army in the Oromia region for more than a year. This has led to the killing of local administrative officials, mayors of towns, and government security officers. The latest spurt of ethnic clashes was triggered by the murder in late June of Hachalu Hundessa in Addis Ababa. He was a 34-year old Ethiopian singer and activist for the rights of the Oromo. Ethnic violence ensued around the capital and the regional state of Oromia. At least 239 citizens and security personnel have been killed.⁷ The government arrested powerful activist Oromo Jawar Mohammed and other political leaders. It accused them of using the tragic death of Hundessa to incite ethnic violence. The government raided the Oromia Media Network—which was founded by Jawar Mohammed—and detained some journalists.

The dissolution of EPRDF and other regional parties to create Prosperity Party (PP), which effectively means appointments of key regional posts are made by Abiy Ahmed, weakens the autonomy of state governments. On the other hand, key demands of ethno-national groups for genuine federalism granting regions significant autonomy are unresolved. Indeed, it was a popular demand for democratic federalism that brought Abiy Ahmed to power, not for a shift to centralised federalism.

⁶ Matthew J. McCracken, *Abusing Self-Determination and Democracy: How the TPLF Is Looting Ethiopia*, 36 Case W. Res. J. Int'l L. 183 (2004)

⁷<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/ethiopias-week-of-unrest-sees-239-dead-3500-arrested.html> 8 Jul 2020

Ahmed's government faces a difficult dilemma trying to reconcile the voices in support of the country's federal arrangement versus those who perceive it as a threat to their group, and the nation. Abiy's use of the Prosperity Party to centralise political power under his leadership has led to Abiy's critics characterising his government as a modern version of the authoritarian.

Ethnic-Based Conflicts

Ethiopia has witnessed a surge in violent conflicts for much of the past two years. The incidents are not confined to a specific region, but are spread almost all over the country. Although Ethiopia is not new to ethnic-based conflicts, their scale and intensity in the short time since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali's rise to power has been alarming.

Since the onset of Tigray fighting on November 4, some residents in the Tigray region have been clamouring for change. Activists and politicians accuse the TPLF of annexing land historically administered by ethnic Amharas e.g. Raya and western Tigray, where Abiy is relying on Amhara special forces to provide security now.⁸ Between 9-10 November, 2020 a massacre took place in Mai Kadre in western Tigray in which at least 700 men, women and children were brutally executed. It is alleged that the massacre was perpetrated by government-affiliated vigilante Amhara group called Fano with loose connection to the Amhara state.⁹ Using the Abiy government and the Ethiopian army, the Amhara elites want to recover from Tigray the land they claim belongs to them.

Benishangul-Gumuz in western Ethiopia along the border with Sudan recently become the latest of a series of ethnically driven massacres in Ethiopia. Gunmen kill more than 100 in attack in Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz region. on 13 January, 2021 at least 80 people were killed when gunmen stormed through a village in Benishangul-Gumuz region.¹⁰ An attack in the Benishangul-Gumuz region in early October 2020 killed at least 14 civilians. Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz region is home to five major ethnic groups and some Amhara leaders are now saying that some of the land in the region - especially in the Metekel zone - rightfully belongs to them, claims that have angered Gumuz people.

Another flashpoint has been Somali Region, whose tyrannical chief administrator, Abdi Mohamed Omar, was backed by TPLF elements and who was a major protagonist in serious ongoing conflict in the Oromia-Somali borderlands. Abiy ordered the military to remove Abdi, in a move many classed as unconstitutional. Somali Region's new leader is an activist, Mustafa Muhamud Omer, which is an indicator of Abiy's bold and breezy strategy for consolidating his power.

Given Ethiopia high level of ethnic polarization inter-clan conflicts over grazing lands were transformed into clashes between ethnic groups. Ethiopia's Tigray conflict revived bitter disputes over land and it is not clear what Abiy Ahmed long-term plans are for the contested territory.

Relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia 1960-present

Ethiopia and Somalia have endured a complex and difficult relationship since Somalia's independence in 1960. Political tension has primarily revolved around Somalia's irredentist agenda that would swallow up one-fifth of Ethiopia's territory and Ethiopia's determination to ward off this threat. Frequent border clashes during 1960s exemplified their tense relationship.¹¹ Efforts of the Ethiopian imperial regime – up to its military overthrow by the Derg in 1974 – to contain the threat of Somali irredentism focused on trying to bring pro-Ethiopian groups and individuals to power in Mogadishu.

⁸ AFP. Ethiopia Tigray conflict revives bitter disputes over land. Dec 30, 2020

⁹ <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/ethiopia-accused-war-crimes-mai-kadra-massacre>.

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/13/world/africa/ethiopia-ethnic-killings.html>

Derg military (1974 – 1991)

The dynamic of the Ethio–Somalia relationship had dramatically changed after the Ogaden war in 1977. The memory of this near-defeat has informed Ethiopian foreign policy since then and Ethiopian foreign policy shifted from “containment” to “destabilization”. This initiative was based upon precautionary plans first laid down under the imperial administration of Haile Selassie. The Amhara-led Derg military regime implemented policies aimed at destabilization of Somalia by using clandestine operations tried to permanently eliminate the threat posed by Somalia. The defeat of the Somalia army in the Ogaden war in 1978 heralded the beginnings of the collapse of the Somali state. In early 1980s Ethiopia created and supported clan-based opposition groups against the regime of Siad Barre. Ethiopia first created the Somali National Movement (SNM) in the north. SNM aim was to seek succession from the Somalia Republic. Ethiopia then created further three factions in the south; Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), United Somalia Congress (USC) and the Somali Patriotic Front (SPF).

Somalia on its part harbored Ethiopian dissident groups and personalities, and publicly sympathized with the causes of freedom fighters in Eritrea and Tigray. Ethno-nationalism has always been a driving force of Ethiopia’s politics. It was the leading mobilization factor against the Derg with the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) becoming a coalition of the country’s four main ethnic groups: The Eritrean Peoples’ Liberation Front (EPLF), Tigrayan Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF). All engaged the Derg militarily contributing immensely to domestic instability. However, Somalia support to these groups become insignificant after Somalia lost the Ogaden war.

Ethiopian active support to the rebel groups significantly contributed to the final fall of the Somali Government in January 1991, but Ethiopia's own internal rebellions had finally defeated the Derg as well in May 1991. There were hopes that the collapse of the bloody and violent military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia, and of the similarly despotic rule of Siad Barre in Somalia, both in the same year, would provide for a real change. Somalia, however, proved intractable from the start, partly because the collapse of the state proceeded the actual fall of Siad Barre by several years and failure of the international community intervention. The regime of Siad Barre was toppled by self-aggrandizing tribal militias who senselessly murdered, raped, robbed, and pillaged and failed to establish a unified and functioning national government. It was also the inaction of the international community including the then OAU during the critical early phases (1988–91) of the Somali crisis that further aggravated the humanitarian crisis and the deterioration of security in Somalia. In the same token, the subsequent 1992–95 humanitarian interventions in Somalia also fared so poorly mainly due to the “naïveté” of the international community.

TPLF Dominated Government (1991-2012)

After the overthrow of Derg Mengistu in 1991, the TPLF dominated government has radically reformed Ethiopia’s political system creating ethnic-based regional states and established stability, and achieved considerable economic progress. Since 1995, the party’s power was consolidated and sustained on the basis of its accelerated economic growth, coercion and a fragile ethno-federal architecture. For nearly 30 years, the country of 108 million people and more than 90 ethnic groups experienced tensions and impulses toward fragmentation that were contained by the single-party regime of the EPRDF.¹² Unfortunately, after the fall of Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia instead faced total state collapse characterized by famine and endless factional fighting. TPLF has taken advantage of the disintegration of Somalia and monopolized Somalia’s political and security sectors for almost two decades. TPLF fuelled tug-of-war among Somali actors which was not only hampered political progress but also led to increased

12 Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia ... - Gov.uk assets.publishing.service.gov.uk › Somalia_case_study

¹² <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/relevance-beyond-the-crisis-ethiopia-under-strain-again,defense,3203.html>

factionalism. The Arta conference in Djibouti in 2000 was a milestone for Somalia as it marked start of rebuilding Somalia statehood. Arta peace talks created a Transitional National Government (TNG) mandated to serve for a three-year interim period as the recognized national authority. Ethiopia rejected TNG and sponsored an opposing group - Somali Reconciliation and Reconstruction Council (SRRC) - made up warlords that control well over half of southern Somalia.¹³

To bring TNG and opposing groups together, IGAD-led peace talks took place in Mbagathi (Kenya) in 2002-2004. Ethiopia ended up playing a decisive role at Mbagathi and eventually succeeded to shape the outcome of the talks were it's main goals realized – a federal Somalia and selection of a pro-Ethiopian government. Clan federalism was accepted as governance model and pro-Ethiopia candidate Abdullahi Yusuf won the presidency. The TFG had almost no control over any territory and could not even set foot in the capital. In 2004 The TFG was forced to relocate to Baidoa - Ethiopian controlled town in southern Somalia. Ethiopia has continued to support president Abdullahi Yusuf's government and conquered Mogadishu in 2006, providing the security that the TFG needed to return to the capital. Ethiopia and other external actors helped to broker a deal in late 2008 that replaced Abdullahi Yusuf with the former head of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, who returned from exile in Eritrea to lead the TFG.¹⁴

In August 2012 marked the end of Somalia TNG and the beginning of the post-transitional Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). In the same month Ethiopia's Meles's passed away replaced by Hailemariam Desalegn. Hailemariam Desalegn was considered as being weak and lacking in leadership¹⁵ and there was speculation that there's a chance Ethiopia's political parties could struggle for power which could lead to instability in the region. Hailemariam Desalegn who previously served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Prime Minister Meles Zenawi from 2010 to 2012 has continued century old Ethiopia foreign policy toward Somalia.

Hailemariam Desalegn 2012-2018

The introduction of federalism as a system of government in Somalia allowed the different clans to set up their own administrative units through an ad hoc process rather than constitutional implementation, sub-national polities have come to the fore, exacerbating clan-related cleavages and perpetuating the country's fragility. In 2013, via its strong role in IGAD, Ethiopia become the guarantor of the Jubbaland Compromise Agreement between Ahmed Madobe and President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud cementing the official creation of Jubbaland.¹⁶ Ethiopia plays kingmaker in the southwest of Somalia - In 2014 TPLF installed former parliament speaker, Sharif Hassan Aden, as president of the newly created Southwest state amid violent demonstrations. Tedros Adhanom who was Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs attended Aden's swearing ceremony. TPLF also created and armed Ahlu Sunna Wa Jama in Galmudug which was the key obstacle of Galmudug state building process. Ethiopia also supports and has consulate in Somaliland, which broke away from Mogadishu in 1991.

Ethiopia under Abiy Ahmed (2018 – present)

In 2018 Abiy Ahmed becomes the first prime minister from the Oromo ethnic group and the first Muslim head of state of Ethiopia. The change of government in Ethiopia looked set to usher in a new era of peace, democracy, and prosperity. Unlike his predecessors, Abiy initially took a soft diplomacy approach toward Somalia with the aim of solidifying his domestic position

¹³ Wars in the Horn of Africa and the dismantling of the Somali State, Patrick Gilkes 2002

¹⁴ Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia_case_study K Menkhaus · 2018

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43073285>

¹⁶ Moallim, Abdi. (2013, September 3). Somalia: Jubbaland Compromise Agreement Presents Challenges, Opportunities.

through TPLF purging campaign in the Horn, reversing federalism process and initiating regional integration to enhance Ethiopia regional hegemon aspiration.

Abiy's purging of TPLF was not only confined in Ethiopia - he extended it to Somalia. Among the first orders of business was to get rid of General Gebre and his longtime colleague General Samora Younis as part of Abiy's surging campaign of TPLF senior military and security officers. TPLF engagement in Somalia is signified by Colonel Gebregziabher, widely known as "General Gebre", who become a household name in Somali politics, renowned primarily for his stint in charge of the Ethiopian armed forces in Somalia, and the subsequent decade he spent meddling in Somali political affairs as IGAD Senior Political Advisor on Somalia. Gebre's highly publicized dismissal from IGAD¹⁷ was a big relief for Somalis at large and many viewing his presence in Somalia as a destabilizing factor.

During the 2017 election, Farmajo's popularity stemmed from his calls for an end to overt Ethiopian meddling in Somali affairs which won him the seat as an anti-Ethiopian candidate. When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed for the first time visited Somalia in June 2018 President Farmajo addressed the nation pledging that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had taken a policy of non-interference in Somalia, unlike the previous regime. The two struck a deal to bring the peoples of Ethiopia and Somalia socially and economically closer than ever before and relations between Addis Ababa and Mogadishu have started to improve significantly. They exchanged numerous visits but none of these visits were institutionalized. Very little details about their agreement and to date no agreement brought to their respective cabinet or parliament for endorsement. This means these agreements are as good as long they are in power. Their tendency to build a strong "unitary" state and address their vulnerabilities may explain their secrecy and informal visits. One major positive economic development is the resumption of Ethiopian Airlines flights to Mogadishu on November 2, 2018, the first in four decades. Ethiopia also offered hundreds of scholarships to Somali students.

Abiy's desire to recentralize Ethiopian politics has significant implication to Somalia. Abiy Ahmed forged a personal relationship with President Farmajo in which has been able to leverage it in strengthening his position domestically. Both inherited federal systems in Somalia and Ethiopia and they both have centralist tendencies. Since coming into office, President Farmajo has moved to assert the central government's control over semi-autonomous federal member states. Before that he ousted parliament speaker and replaced the auditor general, accountant general and supreme court judge and continually reshuffles heads of security institutions. Abiy reversed Ethiopia's support for various sub-national administrative units in Somalia traditionally supported by TPLF. Beginning with the election process in the South West State of Somalia in late 2018, Abiy Ahmed forced out TPLF installed SW president Sharif Hassan Aden and arrested front runner candidate Mukhtar Robow paving the way for Farmajo's candidate, Abdiiaziz Laftagareen, to ascend to the top seat under sham election on 19 December 2018.¹⁸ Widespread demonstration erupted in Baidoa following Robow's arrest, to quell protesters AMISOM Ethiopian soldiers using lethal force killed 15 people and detained approximately 300 demonstrators including children. When the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Somalia, Nicholas Haysom, raised concerns about these incidents, Farmajo's administration expelled him.¹⁹

Farmajo also tried unsuccessfully to influence the August 2019 elections in Jubaland. Abiy appears to be reversing Ethiopia's previous position on Jubaland who was closely linked to the TPLF. However, the presence of Ethiopian forces was critical to wrest the control of Gedo region from Ahmed Madobe. Now, the Gedo become a contentious election issue - Jubaland state objected to holding polls in the contested Gedo region. The frictions in Gedo reflect political fault lines that cut from national

¹⁷ https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2018/Jun/158742/general_gabre_dismissed_from_igad.aspx

¹⁸ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/somali-region-gets-new-president-after-deadly-election-campaign>

¹⁹ www.bbc.com › Somalia expels UN envoy Nicholas Haysom

politics down to local clan tensions and constitute a major source of instability for Somalia. During 2019 Farmajo extended his administration's influence over the election processes in Galmudug after Ethiopia pressured Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a for integration of its militia into the Somalia national forces.²⁰

Contrary to what Abiy's said he wants to achieve in Somalia, the risks of Ethiopia's intervention and political interferences were manifold. Ethiopia is alienated a huge constituency and inflamed anti-Ethiopian sentiments. Many Somalis now resent how brazenly Ethiopia has not only interfered in Somali politics but now dictating Somalia domestic and foreign policy. For example, Somalia Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmed Awad become the first casualty of the Tigray conflict. He was dismissed on 19 November after the Foreign Affairs Ministry issued an official statement on the situation in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, calling for dialogue to end the deadly fighting.

Whilst the rise of Abiy Ahmed is hailed as improving peace in Somalia, it has notably contributed to the already existing divisions among Somalis. With national election in Somalia is delayed and gridlocked, Farmajo lacking coercive power need more than ever Abiy's support for re-election. The current election stand-off is merely a repeat of the 2016 debacle and to overcome Somalia's election impasse to some extent dependent on the behaviour of Ethiopia and key international partners.

Ethiopian Military Intervention

Ethiopia and Somalia have been rivals throughout their history, and Ethiopian military interventions in Somalia have been common in the past that have caused many wars. Ethiopia has long been accused of creating instability in Somalia. Under "War on Terror" Ethiopia continues to receive unparalleled political, military, and financial support from the West, in particular the U.S which gave Ethiopia carte blanche to drive its agenda in Somalia.²¹ In 1996 Ethiopian forces entered Somalia to defeat Islamist fighters in the town of Luuq and since then Ethiopia had troops in Somalia's north-western Gedo region, setting up a buffer zone several hundred miles long to prevent infiltration. In December 2006 Ethiopia backed by the United States, invaded Somalia, capturing the capital Mogadishu and drove out the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). Ethiopia pulled out its troops in 2009 and unilaterally re-entered Somalia in small numbers in late 2011, and then in force from early 2012, driving al-Shabaab from Baidoa and other towns in the Bay and Bakool regions along the border. Ethiopia deployed a large number of non-AMISOM Forces around 15,000 soldiers unilaterally in many parts of Somalia.²² The Ethiopia occupation, between Luuq and Belatwein to Baidoa, consolidated its presence and completed Addis Ababa extended "buffer zone". Additionally, Ethiopian troops are still present in Galguduud Central Somalia.²³

Beside its regular national forces, Ethiopia also maintains nearly 5000 operatives regional special police - Liyu Police²⁴ which operates regional checkpoints and patrols the Ethiopia-Somalia border. Members of the Liyu Police are mostly members of the Ogaden Somalis clan. They are rapidly becoming a destabilizing force not only in Ethiopia but in Somalia too. A 2015 United Nations Security Monitoring Report noted that the Liyu police's abuses have even crossed international borders. The group

²⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The Problem with Militias in Somalia: Almost Everyone Wants Them Despite Their Dangers," in *Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-conflict Transitions*, ed. Adam Day (New York: United Nations University, 2020).

²¹ <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/ethiopia-must-let-somalia-determine-its-own-fate>

²² [www.reuters.com › ethiopia-conflict-somalia-exclusive](https://www.reuters.com/ethiopia-conflict-somalia-exclusive)

²³ Osman, Jamal. (2017, September 27). Ethiopia must let Somalia determine its own fate. TRT World. <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/ethiopia-must-let-somalia-determine-its-own-fate-10633>

²⁴ The Liyu Police²⁴ were formed in April 2007 as a counter-insurgency force to counter the ONLF. Over the years, the Liyu Police's mandate has expanded far beyond fighting ONLF.

reportedly carried out killings of civilians in July 2015 in Somalia's Bay and Bakool regions. Hiran region Mayor recently alleged Ethiopia Liyu Police to have created border tension after abducting several people.²⁵ Amnesty International called the Ethiopian government to immediately disband the Liyu police.²⁶

Ethiopian forces officially joined AMISOM in 2014 with an approved force of around 4500 troops under Sector III of AMISOM headquartered in Baidoa. Ethiopian troops are arguably the least popular of the Amisom peacekeepers in Somalia, yet Somalia relies on a substantial Ethiopian forces presence to help fight Al-Shabab. Thus, Ethiopia plays both instigators of instability and regional enforcer in Somalia. In some circles the Ethiopia's unilateral occupation of part of Somalia along the Ethiopia-Somalia border is tantamount to annexation. In May 2020 Ethiopian forces in Somalia have admitted to shooting down a cargo airplane in Berdaale town that was delivering humanitarian supplies for the fight against the coronavirus killing 6 people.²⁷ The incident not only has deterred further humanitarian delivery to the region amid the Al-Shabaab blockade but reinforced the acceptance that Ethiopia also controls the air space of that part of Somalia. Many Somalis believe Ethiopia undermines the sovereignty of Somalia and wants to keep the country weak and divided. It has created an atmosphere of fear.

The current security situation in Ethiopia resembles that of late 2016 when the Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency to contain the widespread protests by Oromo and Amhara people. To help restore order at home Ethiopia withdraw around 12,000 unilaterally deployed forces from Somalia, particularly border regions of Bakool, Hiran, and Galgaduud. Unfortunately, Alshabab forces recaptured the area immediately.²⁸ In November 2020 Ethiopia has withdrawn 3000 troops from Somalia and disarmed around 300 Tigrayans soldiers serving in Somalia including deputy commander AMISOM Sector III.²⁹ If the ethnic tensions continues and requires a greater drawdown of Ethiopian troops in Somalia, then Al Shabab will surely take advantage of vacuum created by AMISOM drawdown and Ethiopia re-deployments and seize much of the "liberated" territories, which would make the upcoming election very difficult.

Regional impact

On the regional level, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed pushed for regional peace and security and economic integration initiative in the Horn of Africa region in particular Eritrea and Somalia. Sixteen years ago the government of Ethiopia adopted the 2002 Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy, which emphasized 'economic diplomacy' as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. A central component of the strategy has been regional integration with Ethiopia's neighbours in the Horn and Eastern Africa.³⁰ Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia signed a Tripartite Agreement in September 2018 to promote regional cooperation but lacked specifics. Ethiopia is the largest landlocked country in the world by population and bordering with Eritrea and Somalia with the longest coastline with easy access to the Red Sea and Indian ocean for access to imports and exports implies it has much to gain through regional integration progress. To the shocking surprise of Somalis, Abiy announced that Ethiopia would invest in four Somali port projects. Details of which ports were not mentioned. Exactly what else was agreed to might not be known. Abiy's desire to build four naval bases in Somalia³¹ and his reference of Somalia and Ethiopia as one country³² and Ethiopia

²⁵ <https://www.jowhar.com/news/guddoomiyaha-gobolka-hiiraan-oo-eedeeyay-ciidanka-liyuu-boolis.html>

²⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/ethiopia-abusive-police-unit-must-be-stopped/>

²⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/9/ethiopia-admits-shooting-down-kenya-aid-aircraft-in-somalia>

²⁸ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ethiopian-troop-withdrawals-somalia-raise-concern-al-shabab-resurgence>

²⁹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-13/ethiopia-withdraws-thousands-of-troops-from-neighboring-somalia>

³⁰ www.oxfordhandbooks.com › view › oxfordhdb › Ethiopia's 'Economic Diplomacy' and Regional Integration

³¹ a statement by an Ethiopia top military man General Berhanu Jula

³² Changing Relations between Somalia and Ethiopia: Potential Risks on the Horizon, Abdinasir H Muhumed January 2018

Foreign Ministry website showing a map of Africa incorporated Somalia within Ethiopia borders³³ raised eyebrows as Somalis have traditionally viewed Ethiopia as an expansionist colonial power. The 2020 integration project is similar to the regional federation of the 1950s that Emperor Haile Selassie called for.³⁴ The proposed Horn of Africa Cooperation and President Farmajo's friendship and the political alliances he formed with two authoritarian leaders — the Prime Minister of Ethiopia Abiy Ahmed and President of Eritrea Isaias Afwerki alienated the other countries in the East African region (notably Kenya and Egypt).

For regional powerhouse Kenya, closer cooperation between the three neighbors could result in diminished influence in the region on top of the already strained Somalia–Kenya relations are over the maritime issue and Jubaland elections where Ethiopia's support the FGS and Kenya Government supports the incumbent, Ahmed Madobe. Tensions in Jubaland led Farmajo to sever diplomatic relationship with Kenya.

Similarly, Djibouti was displeased for being sidelined for the bloc initiated by Abiy. Djibouti port is Ethiopia's only access to the sea which accounts for 95% of Ethiopia's imports and exports generating significant revenue for Djibouti.³⁵ Therefore, transport links through Eritrea or Somalia could undermine Djibouti's position as an economic and logistical hub. Moreover, Djibouti is home to the IGAD. President Farmajo's cozying up to Eritrea is viewed as forsaking Djibouti in favor of Eritrea. President Omar Guelleh earlier lambasted Farmajo's calling for the lifting of sanctions against Eritrea. Djibouti said it was yet to settle its disputes with its neighbor Eritrea over the Dumeira Island and Dumeira Mountain.

Eritrea is already involved in the Tigray conflict and TPLF accused Eritrea of siding with Abiy to attack Tigray to settle old scores. Afwerki is the main beneficiary of the changes in the Horn. Following the announcement of a peace agreement with Ethiopia that allowed a settlement of the long-standing border dispute between the two countries and with the lifting of the UN sanctions and joining the Human Rights Council, Eritrea is now returning to the international community as a full and equal member. Eritrea's role in the region is often underestimated particularly its contribution to the instability in Somalia. Eritrea reportedly training secretly large Somali force which has raised concern among lawmakers and politicians in the country, some of whom have accused President Farmajo to use these troops in Tigray war as 'cannon fodder'.³⁶

Egypt has critical interests at stake in the Horn of Africa and has historically considered the African Red Sea coast to be within its sphere of influence. Despite Egypt and Somalia have a long history of cultural, religious, economic, and political ties, currently, both countries relationship is almost at its lowest. Somalia's support of Ethiopia on two Arab League resolutions on the issue of the Renaissance Dam made Egypt furious and further strained their relationship. Egypt may be gloating about what is happening in Ethiopia, because of the GERD crisis and it has recently intensified its engagement in Somalia.

Sudan is most affected by the Tigray conflict as it received more than 50,000 refugees in just over a month and renewed border dispute with Ethiopia over the fertile land of Fashqa when several Sudanese soldiers were killed on 19 December 2020. A military confrontation between Sudan and Ethiopia along their border has become imminent amid rising tensions. The Ethiopians who inhabit Fashaga are ethnic Amhara. After the TPLF was removed from power in Ethiopia in 2018, ethnic Amhara leaders condemned the 2008 deal between the two governments and said they had not been properly consulted. The Sudanese army drove back the Ethiopians and forced the villagers to evacuate. Fashqa is an issue for Amhara and if Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed were to concede, he would lose the expansive support of Amhara nor he can afford to go war with Sudan.

³³ Ethiopia apologises for map that erases Somalia - BBC News May 27, 2019

³⁴ https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/ispi_report_africas_thorny_horn_2020

³⁵ <https://theconversation.com/how-an-ethiopia-backed-port-is-changing-power-dynamics-in-the-horn-of-africa>.

³⁶ <https://muqdisho.online/in-somalia-mothers-fear-sons-were-sent-to-ethiopia-conflict/>

Conclusion and Way Forward

A deepening of Ethiopia's political, security and humanitarian continues it could lead to an eruption of ethnic conflicts and ethno-nationalist movements resorting to armed violence. For the last three decades, Ethiopia's political culture has been one focused on ethnicity. Back in 2009, the Crises Group warned of the possibility of a violent eruption that would destabilize the country and region and called the international community to take Ethiopia's governance problems much more seriously.³⁷ This carries far-reaching consequences for security in the Horn of Africa and more profoundly Somalia.

Ethiopia is still paying a heavy price for its "destabilization" strategy in Somalia. Ethiopia is one of the primary outside actors influencing the federalism process in Somalia. The direct influence of Ethiopia on the political outcome of the FMS has been significantly influenced by the presence of its troops on the ground. The AMISOM-led operation has created a political environment in which federalism has remained the dominant political process. However, as discussed above, under the current AMISOM mandate, the inclusion of troops from neighboring countries within AMISOM concerning implementing federalism are limiting factors. Overall, as federalism continues to develop the protracted federalism crisis in Somalia is set to occur over and over again in part due to Ethiopian influence in internal Somali politics at the village level and lack of foresight on behalf of the international community.

More importantly, the AMISOM mission is due to end in 2021, but Somalia is unprepared for the security transition. AMISOM's end could set off al-Shabab's onslaught, major security, and humanitarian disaster, which will necessitate the extension of the AMISOM mandate. The presence of Ethiopian deployment remains a major factor in AMISOM extension. The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) is at a critical juncture. Throughout the last decades, the country's strong and well-trained army was a stabilization factor both internally and regionally. It functioned in a close cooperation with the political elite. However, repressing dissent in 2015, the internal divisions in the force along ethnic and generational lines and the 2019 coup attempt all have undermined the military's position. This weakness is particularly relevant when deteriorating regional stability is a cause of concern.

Additionally, U.S. President Donald Trump has ordered pulling out hundreds of U.S. troops³⁸ without achieving decisive strategic victory against al-Shabaab. The US's war on terror strategy has overshadowed US efforts to resolve conflicts and promote good governance in Somalia.³⁹ In addition to that, given the fragility of the Ethiopian political system and simmering ethnic tension Ethiopia can no longer be a regional police anymore. It is now high time for US policymakers to think about the Somalia problem locally and seek a local solution. In the long run it is the Somalia's own army that is best placed to provide protection for its citizens but many local communities deeply distrust and resent the SNA.⁴⁰ Despite the existence of a formally agreed Somali national security infrastructure framework, FMS 'special' forces are a favored tool against al-Shabaab as FMS also want to guard their autonomy.

³⁷ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/ethiopia-ethnic-federalism-and-its-discontents>

³⁸ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/12/04/politics/trump-somalia-troop-withdrawal>, CNN December 4, 2020

³⁹ Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen (2007)

⁴⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The Problem with Militias in Somalia: Almost Everyone Wants Them Despite Their Dangers," in *Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-conflict Transitions*, ed. Adam Day (New York: United Nations University, 2020).

Way Forward

1. To avoid violence around Somalia national elections, the international community to delay the elections and facilitate consensual political negotiations among Somali leaders.
2. Stabilizing Ethiopia is vital for Somalia. The international community should not let Ethiopia to disintegrate and should take Ethiopia's governance problems much more seriously.
3. To materialize its long held dream of regional integration and access to sea ports, Ethiopia policy makers should rethink their foreign policy toward Somalia not as threat but as potential partner for peace and stability in the Horn.
4. The international community to review the mandate of AMISOM with the intention of removing neighbouring countries from troop contributing countries (TCC).
5. US policy should recognize that the external actors responsible for instability in Somalia are primarily US partners. The new US administration must rethink its policy toward Somalia specially it's war on terror approach. The US policy makers should focus on more supporting FMS security forces to combat local grown terrorism.