The HORN Bulletin is a bi-monthly publication by the HORN Institute. It contains thematic articles mainly on issues affecting the Horn of Africa region.

INSIDE

About the HORN Institute

The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies is a non-profit, applied research, and policy think-do tank based in Nairobi, Kenya. Its mission is to contribute to informed, objective, definitive research and analytical inquiry that positively informs policies of governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Its vision is a progressive Horn of Africa served by informed, evidence-based and problem-solving policy research and analysis.

Counting on Friends in Tigray: Internal and Regional Considerations in the Ongoing Crisis

Aleksi Ylönen, Ph.D.

Abstract

Historically, state-making has been a violent process. Charles Tilly argued that state strength and cohesion relate to homogeneity which is achieved through centuries of warfare and elimination of internal rivals. However, today the use of coercive violence in state-making is widely condemned. This presents a paradox for those state elites seeking cohesion by the elimination of rivals. This article examines the internal and regional dimensions of the Tigray crisis in Ethiopia. It shows, as contended by Tilly, how the consolidation of the central government is seen to be conditioned by the elimination of internal rivals. The article argues that the operation in Tigray against the senior leadership of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) is an example of an effort at state consolidation and an attempt to move away from the longstanding and divisive ethno-nationalism-driven political reality that the TPLF leaders are seen to represent. Having emerged as the main approach of doing politics in contemporary Ethiopia in response to decades of oppressive centralist order, ethno-nationalist political culture, buttressed by the institutional structure of ethnic federalism, has resulted in deep-seated ethno-political identity divisions. Transforming this reality by implementing *Medemer* (coming together) can only be a gradual process filled with uncertainty, turbulence, and significant political strife.

A group of women and children walk next to members of the Amhara Special Forces in Humera street in the Tigray region, Ethiopia (Photo Credit: Eduardo Soteras/AFP)

Introduction

In early 2018, faced with years of incessant protests, Ethiopia's governing coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in which power rested mainly on the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), found itself in a dilemma. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, representing minority groups in the country, abruptly resigned and had to be replaced. In these circumstances, a former intelligence officer and an Oromo politician, Abiy Ahmed, seen to represent the restive Oromo majority was appointed to replace Desalegn in April 2018. In the months and years that followed, the new Prime Minister engaged in a flurry of reforms and changes especially in state institutions, and led to a significant reorientation of Ethiopia's regional relations (Ylönen, 2019). Significantly, in the process, senior TPLF leaders, seen to buttress ethno-nationalist interests over national gain and therefore forming an obstacle to the political and economic transformation of the country, were removed from their longstanding key positions in the federal state and related institutions.

On October 11, 2019, The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize to Prime Minister Abiy "for his efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation, and in particular for his decisive initiative to resolve the border conflict with neighboring Eritrea"

(The Nobel Committee, 2019). More than a year later, on November 4, the Ethiopian federal government commenced a massive "law enforcement operation" (Ethiopian News Agency, 2020a) in its northern Tigray regional state bordering Eritrea to the north and Sudan to the east. The campaign, aimed against the senior leaders of Ethiopia's former governing party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which was in power in the region, was said to have come in response to a "series of provocations", including arming militias and parading military strength, and obstructing the central government and operations of the Ethiopian army's Northern Command (Wight, 2020).

After almost four weeks of the operation, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali declared victory following the army's capture of Mekelle, Tigray's capital (Reuters, 2020), and the removal of the TPLF from power in the region. The humanitarian consequences of the operation were significant as it resulted in mass internal displacement and tens of thousands seeking refuge in neighboring Sudan. Insecurity also endured with the government forces and their allies seeking to consolidate their territorial gains, while humanitarian agencies sought unrestricted access to the region, and the TPLF held territory and continued waging guerrilla resistance.

Soon after the beginning of the operation, many observers questioned the government's actions (Anna, 2020a; Baker, 2020; Deutsche Welle, 2020; Peralta, 2020; Pilling & Schipani, 2020). Others, including regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU), and a few neighboring states, motivated by seeking a constructive approach aimed at conflict resolution and preventing regional repercussions, rushed in to offer their good offices to mediate. But due to the nature of the confrontation, involving significant power competition among the parties involved, this was not deemed possible. Thus, the Prime Minister rejected the mediation requests explaining that the military engagement was Ethiopia's internal affair and that the law enforcement operation would be completed to restore constitutional order (Getachew, 2020).

Despite condemnation by various external actors and observers, the operation in Tigray received support from some of the Ethiopian government's strongest allies. Among these parties, there had been a realization that the situation in Tigray was unsustainable and could not be separated from the changing configuration and dynamics of political power within the country and the government's efforts to continue with significant reforms.

This article discusses some of the domestic and regional dimensions of the Tigray operation. While arguing that the situation in Tigray is rooted in the dynamics of the ongoing restructuring of political and economic power in Ethiopia since 2018, it points out that the confrontation was inevitable due to the new administration's attempt to consolidate its power over its main internal rival, the TPLF. In the process, partly due to TPLF's strength, the federal leadership has felt obliged to seek alliances with TPLF's internal and external rivals. As a result, the Tigray crisis demonstrates how Ethiopia's internal political realities implicate and impact neighboring states and how the relations among internal actors in combination with the interests and involvement of external parties influence the reconfiguration of political and economic power in Ethiopia.

The article shows how the current operation is an expression of the current leadership's attempt to transform Ethiopian political reality by doing away with the deep-seated and institutionalized ethnonationalist politics. It argues that this can only come as a result of an unescapably gradual, uncertain, and turbulent process involving significant political strife.

On State Making and Ethiopia

Historian Charles Tilly, among others, once argued that eliminating internal rivals is an essential part of state-making (Tilly, 1990). This assertion leads to another powerful argument that over time the state's ability to monopolize violence and political power generates homogeneity in terms of national identity. These elements are often associated with the nation-state's success as a form of a polity. Nation-state's strength and internal cohesion can therefore be associated with centuries of warfare and elimination of internal rivals to create such homogeneity (Tilly, 1985; Herbst, 1996, 2000).

In the greater Horn of Africa, states are largely heterogeneous. Their multi-ethnic and multi-national character have often contrasted drastically with the concentration of political and economic power, and control of related institutions and resources, on narrow elites and ruling cliques. In most cases, this disparity has served as a fertile ground for the politicization of ethnic identities, with political entrepreneurs aiming to change political and economic power configuration by employing ethnonationalism and tribalism to create differentiation, division, and polarization. This in turn has fed opposition to the incumbent regimes, including protest, revolutionary activity, claims for self-determination, and separatism, resulting in political instability and societal conflict of various degrees.

Ethiopia occupies a central position in the Horn of Africa. Due to this centrality, manifested both in historical and contemporary affairs in the sub-region, Ethiopian political and societal dynamics affect the neighboring states. However, the actions of the neighboring states and cross-border communities and communication also influence the political reality in Ethiopia. In this sense, the Tigray conflict has not been different. Since the fall of the communist Derg regime in 1991 and the triumph of ethnonationalist opposition forces, the Ethiopian

> Ethiopia occupies a central position in the Horn of Africa. Due to this centrality, manifested both in historical and contemporary affairs in the sub-region, Ethiopian political and societal dynamics affect the neighboring states

political system has been characterized by the tension between centralization and devolution of power and the related question of self-determination. The legal division of the country into ethnic regions, all with the right to secession according to Article 39 of the Constitution, institutionalized and consolidated ethnic nations as the core groups of its political landscape. This buttressed the deep-seated ethnonationalist political culture further and resulted in an inherent long-term tension between the concentration of political and economic power to the TPLF at the center of the political system and other ethnonationalist movements in the ethnic regions. This tension, in turn, generated political conflict of variable intensity and frequency related to political space and freedom, recognition and self-determination, and territory, land, and resources. Ethnonationalism channeled through the EPRDF members and its satellite parties, became central to organizing and doing politics. Most violent manifestations of political conflicts in Ethiopia, therefore, have a strong regional ethnonationalist association.

It is important to view the "law enforcement operation" in Tigray in the context of the prevailing ethnonationalist politics. Rather than an isolated incident, it should be considered as part of the shifting center of political power away from the TPLF and the changing political reality in Ethiopia. Here understanding the change of state leadership in 2018, which initiated the process of moving from almost three decades of TPLF domination, and its effort of consolidation of new political order is essential. Prime Minister Abiy's ascent to power marked the beginning of the process of undoing TPLF senior leaders' monopolization of political, military, and economic power at the center of the federal system, which, given the structure of the political system and the salience of ethnonationalist political culture, was not going to happen without at least some measure of political strife.

In February 2018 the sudden resignation of the former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in response to the regime's inability to address the incessant protests especially among the country's Oromo majority, and a lesser degree in the Amhara regional state, set the stage for the long-awaited political change in the country. Less than two months later Desalegn stepped aside and was replaced by Abiy, a former intelligence officer and politician in the Oromo Democratic Party belonging to the TPLF-led EPRDF governing coalition. Of partly Oromo and partly Amhara origin, during his early political career, Abiy was an active proponent of, especially Oromo land rights. This, in part, convinced the TPLF-led government to appoint him as the Prime Minister in a move that was thought to help quell the incessant protests.

Abiy's early reforms, ground-breaking in the context of the tightly TPLF-controlled political and economic system of the developmental state, were widely seen as trailblazing. The new Prime Minister sought to consolidate his position by new appointments and co-optation of opposition. Many diaspora and armed opposition leaders were welcomed back to Ethiopia while political prisoners were released and various seemingly independent figures were appointed to head state administrations and bodies (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Encouraging political and economic opening attracted wide international attention, but following through with such transformation was not expected to be straightforward.

In fact, from the outset, the new leadership faced resistance. This owes largely to the institutional structures and established practices of political conduct linked with authoritarianism as well as deep societal divisions. With the opening of new political space, inter-group, and particularly ethnic cleavages and underlying animosities fed by political agitation, became increasingly exposed. The extent of politicization and instrumentalization of ethnic and sectional identities, feeding on the ethnic federal structure of the state, was revealed by protests and violent incidents. Among the Oromo, a sentiment grew that the new Prime Minister was not doing enough for the majority group in Ethiopia, and some Oromo leaders took advantage of this sentiment to push their agenda. Following the riots related to the murder of prominent Oromo signer and activist Hachalu Hundessa

Disinformation is a made-up story with a malicious intent to deceive, cause harm, and manipulate public perception. Misinformation, on the other hand, is the spread of misleading or false information inadvertently without the intent to deceive

in July 2020, the government reduced space for protest by arresting and charging opposition leaders considered to be behind the unrest (BBC, 2020a).

However, more significantly, the reforms since 2018, and the consolidation of the new administration, have required dismantling the well-established and institutionalized TPLF "old guard" senior leaders' dominant position in the Ethiopian security apparatus and the political and economic system. This, along with seeking approval among those who have not immediately benefited or have been adversely affected by the change, has been the main challenge during the early reform process. While the steps to sideline TPLF members from prominent positions in state institutions were largely taken by retirements and replacements, this did not prevent the senior TPLF leaders from maintaining their ethnonationalist constituencies in Tigray where they continued to command wide support. As the reforms progressed, the senior TPLF leaders saw their dominant role in state institutions and economy wither away and commenced a systematic resistance against the political and economic transformation.

From mid-2018 onwards, when it had become obvious that transformation in Ethiopia meant driving down their power, the TPLF senior leaders increasingly prepared for a showdown with the new administration. Many TPLF leaders returned to the geostrategically significant Tigray, covering an important part of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, where they had a regionally dominant position from which they could aspire to maintain a level of influence in national politics. The TPLF senior leaders benefited from their long reign in power through which they had gained national and international influence, including through well-placed individuals in domestic institutions, international organizations, foreign missions, business, and the (social) media. The TPLF had also attracted sympathizers among foreign policymakers, intellectuals, scholars, and academics. This has proportioned the organization a significant national and international voice that at some fora has equaled that of the Ethiopian state. In addition, over the years, the TPLF had trained and assembled a formidable regional militia force in Tigray, which it was able to legitimize as a regional security force through its dominant role in the regional government. The force and the regional government's security apparatus benefited from the experience of TPLF officers, accumulated weapons stockpiles, including short-range missiles through army supplies and other sources, and to an extent from relief and humanitarian

Since its establishment, the Prosperity Party has managed to absorb most legal pre-existing political formations representing ethnic communities and in that sense inherited the EPRDF's overwhelming control of the Ethiopian parliament

aid channeled largely through the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT).

Meanwhile, the new state leadership's implementation of its stated objective of democratization and unity, while seeking to drive down the deeply entrenched ethnonationalist politics, has faced important challenges. In response to the divisive federal-state system under the TPLF-led EPRDF, which had emphasized ethnicity as a source of political identity, the Abiy administration has sought to implement his philosophy of *Medemer* (coming together) in an attempt to transcend ethnic cleavages. The practical measures taken to promote ethnic harmony and national unity have faced stiff resistance among leaders who bank on ethnonationalist politics for their political power. However, progress has been made in the search for an ethnic balance of representation in the public institutions and through the establishment of the Prosperity Party in December 2019 to seek unity beyond ethnopolitical boundaries. While the EPRDF system was centered on the TPLF-dominated coalition of parties based on Ethiopia's three largest nationalities, and largely excluded for example pastoral peoples, the Prosperity Party, which has faced some opposition (Sileshi, 2019), has been created as a seemingly all-encompassing political formation. Since its establishment, the Prosperity Party has managed to absorb most legal pre-existing political formations representing ethnic communities and in that sense inherited the EPRDF's overwhelming control of the Ethiopian parliament. However, unlike with the case of EPRDF, the current state leadership aspires to depart from the developmental state model and generating conditions for national unity and increased well-being by implementing a democratic order with a fully capitalist system. In the long run, this is expected to eradicate the culture of divisive ethnic identity politics. It is apparent that the Abiy administration seeks to achieve this by consolidating power over its main ethnonationalist rivals

and only then promote significantly more open political space and increasingly liberal economic order.

However, some critics have pointed out that forcing the national project over the long-established and well-institutionalized federal system faces crucial challenges that hinder its chances of success. Such voices point to challenges mainly with the deeply ingrained ethnic identity politics which have continued to drive the political reality and warn that the imposition of centralization, which some see as erroneously nostalgic repeating of the mistakes of the imperial regime, could lead to the fragmentation of the country (Allo, 2019; Halakle, 2020). Yet, historically, the fear of disintegration has accompanied the Ethiopian state irrespective of the type of its political system and was arguably made worse during the TPLF-era by the contradiction and incessant tension between centralization and devolution of power. Due to these protracted tensions of the constitutional order which are inherently linked to ethnonationalist strife, the Abiy administration's reform agenda has increasingly brought to light the issue of political organization and system of the state as well as the question of the future of political culture in Ethiopia.

The TPLF, rather expectedly, opposed the dismantling of the EPRDF and has boycotted the Prosperity Party, which drove it towards increasing confrontation with the Abiy administration. The TPLF reportedly sought to build a pro-federalist alliance among ethnonationalist forces against the federal authorities (Borkena, 2019) in an apparent attempt to fight back what its leadership seems to consider an orchestrated centralization of power favoring the Amhara at expense of Tigray. Following the government's announcement that it would postpone the August 2020 general election until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which automatically meant an extension of the appointed Prime Minister's tenure, the TPLF, along with some other opposition forces, ceased to recognize the federal administration as legitimate. Then, on September 9, 2020, despite the postponement of the general election, the TPLF went ahead with a regional election in Tigray and tightened its grip of the regional administration further by expected repeating of its 2015 electoral success. At the federal level, the Tigray regional election was ruled unconstitutional and the Prime Minister consequently characterized it as illegal (Paravicini, 2020).

Ethiopians who fled fighting in Tigray, Ethiopia, gathered in a bordering Sudanese village in November 2020 as refugees flowed into the area (Photo Credit: Ebrahim Hamid/Getty Images)

Counting on Friends in Tigray

The process of political transformation following Abiy Ahmed's ascent to power enabled the new administration to reorient Ethiopia's foreign policy and improve its external relations in the region. While the relationship with Ethiopia's great power backers, the United States of America (the US) and China, remained largely unchanged, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, with the US lead, played an important role in facilitating the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. While the US was interested in mending fences with Eritrea seemingly to find alternatives for its military base in Chinese-dominated Djibouti, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, driven in part with longstanding affinity with Eritrea, seek greater influence in the Horn of Africa through strategic investment. The rapprochement paved way for a tripartite alliance among the leaders of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia and cemented cooperation among the three states. It led to Ethiopia attempting to mediate between the Somali federal administration and Somaliland. Prime Minister Abiy also sought a mediating role in the protracted conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan.

Within Ethiopia, the new administration's efforts for change and the TPLF's attempts to counter them and maintain influence at the national level led to an increasing confrontation. The Prime Minister's close relationship with Amhara leaders, some of whom expressed grievances for the almost three decades of TPLF rule that to them had favored Tigrayans over the Amhara. As the tension between the two federal regions grew, the TPLF-held Tigray became increasingly geographically isolated, sandwiched between the federal government allies Amhara and Eritrea, both with long-held animosity towards the TPLF.

The military operation commenced on November 4, 2020, as an immediate response to a TPLF militia attack and seizure of an army command center near Tigray's capital, Mekelle (BBC, 2020b). According to government sources, the confrontation came as a result of a "series of provocations", including the arming of militias, parading military strength in Mekelle, and obstructing the new leadership and operations of the army's Northern Command (Wight, 2020). According to the Prime Minister's office, the military campaign had three objectives. First, the TPLF administration in Tigray was to be disarmed because it was "plotting its [sic] way back to power in Addis Ababa through unlawful means", including encouraging violence and conflicts around the country, building a significant military force, and attacking

> By removing TPLF from the leadership of the Tigray region, the operation has delivered a significant blow to its capacity to influence national politics and cause instability at the federal level

the federal army in Tigray (Ethiopian News Agency, 2020b). Part of the concern was the EFFORT, alleged to have been used by the TPLF to fund ethnic violence and terrorism in Ethiopia, which led to the freezing of bank accounts of 34 companies linked to it (Linge, 2020). Another related preoccupation involved short-range missiles in TPLF's possession which could be used to target neighboring areas, including Addis Ababa.

Second, the military operation sought to neutralize the defiant TPLF administration in Tigray and return the region under federal government influence. This would be done by installing a new friendly and cooperative regional administration that is capable of enforcing "public order and peace within the State" (Ethiopian News Agency, 2020b). Consequently, less than two weeks into the campaign, the Prime Minister announced the new leader for the Tigray region, Mulu Nega, to replace Debretsion Gebremichael (Aljazeera, 2020), a senior TPLF leader who had been the acting regional president since January 2018. The interim regional administration is to govern the region until the mid-2021 general election in which a new regional assembly will be elected. By removing TPLF from the leadership of the Tigray region, the operation has delivered a significant blow to its capacity to influence national politics and cause instability at the federal level.

Third, the federal government attempted to bring the TPLF "old guard" leaders to justice for alleged crimes and for working against the constitution. The government charged 64 TPLF leaders and 32 military officers with treason, and among other measures forced the African Union to fire its security chief, Gebre-egziabher Mebratu Melese (Mutambo, 2020), accused the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, for supporting TPLF (Schemm, 2020), and removed Tigrayan officers and soldiers from its peacekeeping contingents in Somalia and Sudan (Lynch and Gramer, 2020). On November 8, 2020, Prime Minister

A Tigrayan refugee woman waits for treatment at a clinic in Umm Rakouba refugee camp in Qadarif, Sudan. (Photo Credit: Nariman El-Mofty/AP)

Abiy stated that the TPLF leadership had made "the country ungovernable by instigating clashes along ethnic and religious lines" (Anna, 2020b). The government has also called TPLF leaders to be made accountable for atrocities against civilians, while Amnesty International reported mass killings in the town of Mai Kadra (Amnesty International, 2020). News sources documented accusations of both sides, including Amhara militias (Dahir, 2020) and Eritrean troops (*The Guardian*, 2020), for committing atrocities against civilians (Burke & Salih, 2020), while shelling of urban areas in the course of the campaign was also reported (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

The challenge to the new administration mounted by the TPLF leadership forced it to increasingly rely on allies within and outside Ethiopia. However, the alarmist analyses pointing to the inability of the federal government to face the TPLF militarily and attain territorial control in Tigray (de Waal, 2020) or the country succumbing to an all-out civil war possibly leading to a state collapse (Baldwin & Schmidt, 2020) failed to an extent to appreciate the new administration's ability to use its domestic, regional, and international leverage to build a coalition of active allies and silent backers.

Internally, this meant that due to the deep-seated ethnonationalist character of Ethiopian politics the state leadership was obliged to ally with ethnonationalist actors. The most natural alliance was with the Amhara

due to Abiy's maternal linkage to the group and because of their proximity and widely held grievances towards the TPLF. The Amhara, especially prominent in the imperial past, are the second largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and more unified than the majority Oromo. Some Amhara leaders have appeared keen to resuscitate Amhara dominance in the country. The Amhara regional special forces and militias have been an important ally for the government in the Tigray operation while reclaiming territory which according to them had been annexed to Tigray during the TPLF rule in the country.

The Tigray operation appears to have been under consideration since 2018. Linked to the understanding of the need to pursue stronger relations with the Red Sea littoral states, the main gatekeepers of landlocked Ethiopia's sea access, the operation formed part of a strategy to demote the TPLF, occupying a strategic territory between Ethiopia and Eritrea, from an influential national actor to one regional player within Tigray. After Prime Minister Abiy's rise to power and the removal of senior TPLF leaders from federal state positions, many such leaders withdrew to Tigray. During 2018, the groundwork for the Tigray operation was laid with the apparent realization that the TPLF could be weakened but not easily eradicated. However, the interest to remove the TPLF as a significant player in Ethiopian politics united the new administration with the Eritrean leadership (Fröhlich, 2020; Plaut, 2020) and was one of the

main factors of the successful rapprochement between the two states.

Abiy's efforts in the region, improving inter-state relations in the Horn of Africa, especially with Eritrea and Somalia, and mediating in the intra-state crises in South Sudan and Sudan, earned him international appreciation. In this context, it appears that the leadership of federal Somalia was made aware of the plan to isolate the TPLF early on. Despite denial by the Ethiopian and Somali authorities, there have been allegations of Somali federal troops sent for training in Eritrea, instead of Qatar, having participated and suffered heavy losses in the operation in Tigray (*Somali Guardian*, 2021; Barise, 2021; France24, 2021). In November 2020 the Somali leadership endorsed the Ethiopian federal government's effort in Tigray (Garowe, 2020) and, if correct, as some analysis suggests (Plaut, 2021), the alleged participation of Somali troops may have resulted from the 2018-2020 trilateral meetings among the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Somalian leaders in which deepening cooperation among the three leaders and their respective states was discussed. In December 2020 Prime Minister Abiy visited Kenya and received assurances from Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta of securing Ethiopia's southern border where Oromo armed opposition factions have been active. This shows how, from the outset, the Abiy administration has engaged in a significant, and largely successful, effort of obtaining support from its neighbors and other allies to strengthen itself and defeat its internal rivals.

The Tigray operation has revealed the extent of the federal government's international support. Despite the outcry of international organizations, humanitarian agencies, and human rights bodies, the great and regional powers, including the US, China, and Middle Eastern states, most of which back the Ethiopian government, appear to have given a silent approval to the operation. This was despite TPLF's efforts to internationalize the conflict through missile strikes to the Amhara region and Eritrea, information war in the media and academia, and by seeking external mediation.

During the conflict, Sudan has served as the only lifeline for fleeing Tigrayans, and the Sudan-Ethiopia relations have become increasingly tense due to the intensified clashes around al-Fashaga and elsewhere in the mutual border region. Sudan's concern is about the longstanding Ethiopian claims on what it considers Sudanese territory and apprehension about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). In mid-February 2021, both Ethiopia and Sudan welcomed South Sudan's offer to mediate in the

dispute but amid ongoing tension, Khartoum withdrew its ambassador from Addis Ababa while Ethiopia accused the Sudanese military of the escalation and Egypt of an attempt to undermine it (Addis Standard, 2021).

Egypt, on the other hand, in a diplomatic dispute with Ethiopia over the allocation of Nile waters following the construction of the GERD, has actively continued to woo Ethiopia's neighboring states, especially Sudan but also South Sudan and Somaliland, on its side. However, while South Sudan is largely consumed with continuing political strife and a crumbling economy, and Somaliland is focused on peace, security, and a widening spectrum of partnerships as part of its journey towards international recognition. Neither appears interested to side strongly with Egypt. Despite Egypt not being well-positioned to use the situation to apply pressure on Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government has accused it of seeking to do so particularly through Sudan. As a result, in the current regional scenario, relations with Egypt on the allocation of the Nile waters are among the Ethiopian administration's greatest foreign policy challenges, although Egypt's position remains weak despite its wide range of international partners. In part, Egypt's power and leverage to push Sudan to pressure Ethiopia are limited by the most significant external actors' interest in Ethiopia's stability.

Conclusion: Containment or Escalation?

The Ethiopian federal administration's operation in Tigray is a logical continuation of its effort of consolidation relative to internal rivals in the federal regions. The senior leaders of the most powerful of these rivals, the TPLF, have commanded an important degree of coercive force, controlled a significant part of the country's economic activity, and maintained wide domestic and international influence. As a result, substantial weakening of the TPLF has become crucial for the relative consolidation of the new federal government, but this has been vehemently resisted by the TPLF senior leadership. It has sought to defy the federal administration's sweeping reforms

After Prime Minister Abiy's rise to power and the removal of senior TPLF leaders from federal state positions, many such leaders withdrew to Tigray

which necessarily remove it from the center of the state's political and economic system. The TPLF's efforts to fight back the new administration and consolidate itself as an autonomous force with significant territorial control in northern Ethiopia brought it on a collision course with the federal leadership and its close ally and TPLF's archrival, Eritrea. As a result, and due to TPLF's significant military strength, the federal administration's "law enforcement operation" to address an internal issue of restoring constitutional order in Tigray, was undertaken in close cooperation with Eritrea as well as with domestic, mainly Amhara, allies.

Despite the stated end of the operation in November 2020, the fighting has endured. There have been fears that the confrontation will drag on, convert into a wider conflict, and possibly extend to other regions in Ethiopia or the territories of the neighboring states. Among such areas of feared escalation are Benishangul-Gumuz with a considerable Amhara minority and southern Ethiopia where armed Oromo factions have continued to cause instability, as well as the Sudan and South Sudan border region. However, in the current circumstances, the fears of further escalation and extension of armed conflict appear somewhat exaggerated because the Ethiopian government has been relatively successful in containing violence and preventing deterioration through partnerships, diplomacy, and other conflict mitigation measures. After all, political instability and armed conflict in the state periphery have been an intractably endemic long-term condition of the Ethiopian political system.

In the current circumstances, a key question remains: To what extent the state leadership is eventually conditioned and swayed by the ethno-nationalist and external partners' interests, and to what extent this might contribute to instability and further deterioration of the overall situation? In the end, if the objective is to create unity and enable a more harmonious and peaceful state, the proposed *Medemer* (coming together) should be homegrown and not compromised by divisive ethnic nationalism. Yet, due to the deep-seated nature of ethno-nationalism in Ethiopian politics, creating such unity will be a gradual, arduous, and uncertain process.

References

Addis Standard. (2021, February 19). News: Ethiopia says conflict trumpeted by Sudanese army could only serve "a third party"; Sudan summons its envoy from Addis Abeba. Retrieved from https://addisstandard.com/news-ethiopia-says-conflict-trumpeted-by-sudanese-army-could-only-serve-a-third-party-sudan-summons-its-envoy-from-addis-abeba/

Aljazeera. (2020, November 13). Ethiopia appoints new Tigray leader, Amnesty reports 'massacre'. *Al Jazeera.* Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/13/scores-of-civilians-massacred-in-ethiopias-tigray-amnesty

Allo, A. (2019, December 5). Why Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party could be bad news for Ethiopia. *Aljazeera.* https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/12/5/why-abiy-ahmeds-prosperity-party-could-be-bad-news-for-ethiopia/

Amnesty International. (2020, November 12). Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state. *Amnesty.* Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/ethiopia-investigation-reveals-evidence-that-scores-of-civilians-were-killed-in-massacre-in-tigray-state/

Anna, C. (2020a, November 17). Peace was swift in Ethiopia under Abiy. War was, too. *Associated Press.* Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-eritrea-abiy-ahmed-ethiopia-nobel prizescddcfc03a1b234fc3702cfc4486b0e74

Anna, C. (2020b, November 8). *Ethiopia reshuffles top officials as Tigray conflict grows.* Associated Press. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/abiy-ahmed- africa-ethiopia-kenya-civil-wars-d8d6d6d2fdc993f5 452b705ace378ff4

Baker, A. (2020, November 19). How Abiy Ahmed, Nobel Prize Laureate, lost control of Ethiopia's peace. *Time*. Retrieved from https://time.com/5910962/abiy-ahmed-   ethiopia-conflict/

Baldwin, F., & Schmidt, H. I. (2020, November 9). Ethiopia's troubled history provides clues to why an all-out civil war is possible. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/ethiopias-troubled-history-provides-clues-to-why-an-all-out-civil-war-is-possible-149648

Barise, H. (2021, January 22). In Somalia, mothers fear sons were sent to Ethiopia conflict. *Associated Press*. https://apnews.com/article/eritrea-abiy-ahmed-africa ethiopia-somalia6f0f97e18bef1d6e4a20a1cde75d0ac b#:~:text=They%20fear%20their%20 children%20have,destabilize%20the%20Horn%20of%20Africa.

BBC. (2020a, September 19). Ethiopia charges opposition figures with terrorism. *BBC*. Retrieved from https://www. bbc.com/news/world-africa-54219925

BBC. (2020b, November 27). Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: fears of a march into guerrilla warfare. *BBC*. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55065229

Borkena. (2019, August 26). *Tigray organized a conference to save 'constitution and the federal system'*. Retrieved from https://borkena.com/2019/08/26/tigray-organized-a-conference-to-save-constitution-and-the-federal-system/

Burke. J., & Salih Z. M. (2020, November 13). Both sides in Ethiopian conflict are killing civilians, refugees say. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/13/civilians-knife-massacre-ethiopia-say-reports

Dahir, A. L. (2020, December 9). Fleeing Ethiopians tell of ethnic massacres in Tigray war. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/09/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-sudan.html

de Waal, A. (2020, November 15) Tigray Crisis Viewpoint: Why Ethiopia is Spiralling out of Control. *BBC*. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54932333

Deutsche Welle. (2020, December 3). Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed: from peace laureate to man of war? *Deutsche Welle*. Retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopias-abiy-ahmed-from-peace-laureate-to-man-of-war/av-55811355

Ethiopian News Agency. (2020a, November 15). *Law enforcement operation in Tigray progressing well: PM Abiy*. Retrieved from https://www.ena.et/en/?p=18583

Ethiopian News Agency. (2020b, November 14). *The ongoing law enforcement operations in Tigray: Causes and objectives*. https://www.ena.et/en/?p=18555

France24. (2021, January 27). Parents of Somali soldiers fear sons fighting in Ethiopia. *France24*. Retrieved from https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210127-parents-of-somali-soldiers-fear-sons-fighting-in-ethiopia

Fröhlich, S. (2020, November 29). Once enemies, Ethiopia and Eritrea ally against Tigray. *Deutsche Welle*. Retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/once-enemies-ethiopia-and-eritrea-ally-against-tigray/a-55763490

Garowe. (2020, November 24). Somalia supports Ethiopia's military actions in Tigray days after FM sacked. *Garowe Online*. Retrieved from https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-supports-ethiopias-military-actions-in-tigray-days-after-fm-sacked

Getachew, A. (2020, November 25). Ethiopia's PM urges non-interference in Tigray conflict. *Anadolu Agency*. Retrieved from https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/ethiopia-s-pm-urges-non-interference-in-tigray-conflict/2055693

Halakle, A. B. (2020, December 7). Abiy's efforts to unify Ethiopia could lead to its disintegration. *Aljazeera*. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/12/7/abiys-efforts-to-unify-ethiopia-could-lead-to-its-disintegration/

Herbst, J. (1996). Responding to state failure in Africa. *International Security*, 21(3), 120–144. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.2307/2539275

Herbst, J. (2000). *States and power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control*. Princeton University Press.

Human Rights Watch. (2019, April 7). *Ethiopia: Abiy's first year as prime minister, review of democratic institutions and political space*. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/07/ethiopia-abiys-first-year-prime-minister-review-democratic-institutions-and

Human Rights Watch (2021, February 11). *Ethiopia: Unlawful shelling of Tigray urban areas*. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/11/ethiopia-unlawful-shelling-tigray-urban-areas

Linge, I. (2020, November 18). *Ethiopia: Govt freezes funds intended for Tigray*. Ecofin Agency. Retrieved from https://www.ecofinagency.com/public-management/1811-42077-ethiopia-govt-freezes-funds-intended-for-tigray

Lynch, C., & Gramer, R. (2020, November 23). U.N. fears Ethiopia purging ethnic Tigrayan officers from its peacekeeping missions. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/23/un-ethiopia-purging-tigrayan-officers-peacekeeping-missions/

Mutambo, A. (2020, November 13). AU fires security chief after Ethiopia accuses him of undermining Addis Ababa. *The East African*. Retrieved from https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/rest-of-africa/au-fires-security-chief-after-ethiopia-accuses-him-of-undermining-addis-ababa-3020530

Paravicini, G. (2020, September 9). Ethiopia's Tigray holds regional election in defiance of federal government. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics/ethiopias-tigray-holds-regional-election-in-defiance-of-federal-government-idUSKBN25Z35S

Peralta, E. (2020) Nobel Peace Prize winner to belligerent warmaker: Ethiopia under Abiy Ahmed. *NPR*. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2020/11/29/939902460/nobel-peace-prize-winner-to-belligerent-warmaker-ethiopia-under-abiy-ahmed

Pilling. D., & Schipani, A. (2020, November 6). How Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed went from man of peace to a leader at war. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from https://www.ft.com/content/c1261aea-5217-454a-b266-a3d231231211

Plaut, M. (2020, December 8). The Tigray war. *Review of African Political Economy*. Retrieved from https://roape.net/2020/12/08/the-tigray-war/

Plaut, M. (2021, January 23). What are the war aims of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia in Tigray? *Eritrea Hub*. Retrieved from https://eritreahub.org/what-are-the-war- aims-of-ethiopia-eritrea-and-somalia-in-tigray

Reuters. (2020, November 30). Ethiopia's PM savours victory, Tigrayan leader says war not finished. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-leader/ethiopias-pm-savours-victory-tigrayan-leader-says-war-unfinished-idUSKBN28A0PV

Schemm, A. (2020, November 19). Ethiopia's military chief calls WHO head Tedros a criminal supporting a rebel region. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/11/19/ethiopia-who-tedros-criminal-military-tigray/

Sileshi, E. (2019, November 29). Updated: Lemma Megerssa dismisses Medemer, Prosperity Party (Translation of the full interview). *Addis Standard*. Retrieved from https://addisstandard.com/news-alert-lemma-megerssa-dismisses-medemer-prosperity-party/

Somali Guardian. (2021, January 16). Exclusive: Hundreds of Somali troops used as a cannon fodder in Ethiopia's Tigray war. *Somali Guardian*. Retrieved fromhttps://somaliguardian.com/exclusive-hundreds-of-somali-troops-used-as-cannon-fodder-in-ethiopias-tigray-war/

The Guardian. (2020, December 21). 'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/dec/21/slaughtered-like-chickens-eritrea-heavily-involved-in-tigray-conflict-say-eyewitnesses

The Nobel Peace Prize. (2019, October 11). *Press release.* Retrieved from www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2019/press-release/

Tilly, C. (1985). War making and state making as organized crime. In B. P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, & T. Skocpol (Eds.). *Bringing the state back in* (pp.169-191).   Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, C. (1990). *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990.* Blackwell.

Wight, P. (2020, December 2). *Ethiopia's civil war: competing visions on the nature of the state.* ACCORD. Retrieved from https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/ethiopias-civil-war-competing-visions-on-the-nature-of-the-state/

Ylönen, A. (2019). Is the Horn of Africa's 'Cold War' over? Abiy Ahmed's early reforms and the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. *African Security Review*, 27(3-4), 245–252. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2019.1569079

The Darfur 'Experiment' and the Limits of International Law: The Uneasy Confluence of Genocide and the Subsequent Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

By Pallavi Chatterjee

Abstract

In a global context where violent conflicts inspire military intervention, mere remonstrations urging the cessation of hostilities, or are completely ignored due to the influence of regional powers – how useful are established but inconsistently applied normative standards such as the responsibility to protect or the formal recognition of the genocide in structuring an appropriate international responses? The repressive administration of Sudan's former President Omar al-Bashir might have been ousted in 2019, but the long-term impact of the Darfur genocide and the subsequent ill-planned and poorly targeted economic sanctions on part of the US continue to beleaguer the Sudanese. With the abrupt withdrawal of the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) forces without a protective structure, the ongoing series of conflicts within Darfur represent one example of such conflicts, reflecting an international response conditional upon the convenience of circumstance and with a questionable commitment to any espoused ideals of peace, justice and security.

Introduction

Since 2003, an ongoing legacy of war, ethnic cleansing, systemic oppression of indigenous populations, and violence reaching genocidal levels of impact have ravaged Sudan's western Darfur region. The Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel groups accused the Sudanese state of enacting systems of oppression and exclusion of Darfuri non-Arabs. In response, state authorities set in place widespread regimes of ethnic cleansing against this very population, culminating in a level of violence so unprecedented that it has been labeled as '…the first genocide of the 21st Century.' Amongst civilian deaths numbering in the hundreds to thousands, ousted Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir now stands accused before the International Criminal Court for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

The subsequent international response begs the question of whether simply labeling ongoing series of conflicts as genocide is sufficient, and what impact the formal recognition has when it occurs without substantive, appropriate, well-planned interventions focusing on undermining the political authority engendering human rights violations. When considering the precipitating factors leading to the outbreak of such violence, it is important to note the relatively conservative use of the term 'genocide' within international law at present. Ethnic tensions, limited resources, and state-sanctioned policies of discrimination characterize the experiences of indigenous and minority populations on a global scale – from the atrocities of the Myanmar military against the Rohingya Muslim population, to China's seven decade-long repressions and the regime of abuse, torture, and denial of self-determination of ethnic Tibetans, to the plight of Palestinians under Israeli militarized occupation. While Aung San Suu Kyi now stands accused of aiding and abetting such genocidal actions before the International Court of Justice, she represents a notable exception; the same cannot be said of leaders of better-positioned regional powers such as the United States, India, or even China, who have carried out equally reprehensible actions against their native ethnic minorities, and continue to do so with relative impunity.

The Bush administration's bait-and-switch response to the labeling of the war in Darfur as a 'genocide' is one

United Nations and African Union peacekeeping mission at a protest against the mission's withdrawal in South Darfur in late 2020.

such example of the political machinations underlying such recognition, and reflecting the prioritization of strategic geopolitical interests over affirming the right to restitution, recompense, and rebuilding that constitute the entitlements of survivors. Indigenous and ethnic minority populations have historically faced the brunt of such oppressive regimes and state-sanctioned violence, discriminatory practices, and a systematic denial of their fundamental and human rights, and the present lack of recognition on a global scale does not bode well for the future.

To Intervene, not to Intervene, – and How?

A prevailing criticism within the genocide literature pertains to scholars, policy and lawmakers, state authorities, and the general population tends to view any kind of armed conflict as a 'genocide' only to the extent that it approximates the Holocaust. The historical underpinnings of the normative concept of genocide itself draw from the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime against a vast and heterogeneous population of 'undesirables' not limited to Jewish communities, but also including other ethnic, religious, and national minorities.

This could contribute to a certain reluctance in providing recognition as such since Article 1 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UNCG) itself obliges all signatory states to recognize it as a '…crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.'

It has been argued that this is the reasoning that informed the Clinton administration's hesitation to term the Rwandan genocide as such, as a military intervention at the time was not a viable option. Failed armed excursions in Somalia earlier caused officials to caution against once more deploying troops in a similar situation. UN officials thought so similarly regarding their peacekeeping personnel. Since the US is legally bound by the UNCG, having ratified it in 1988, this would oblige them to take military action upon formal recognition that genocide was occurring. As such, despite overwhelming evidence, the only recognition provided was for 'acts of genocide' and not genocide itself, since the latter might compel a far more extensive and forceful response. The UN Security Council (UNSC) was all too ready to accede to the subsequent US-led coalition against intervention, collectively agreeing that the widespread violence, bloodshed, and systematic targeting of individuals on

the basis of their ethnicity in a small, densely-populated central African nation was '…not a threat to world, or even regional security.'

However, for Darfur, initially, in 2004, former US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, provided a resounding condemnation of the depredations of the state-supported Janjaweed militia, which resulted in nearly 480,000 people killed and over two million displaced, and affirmed to the state committee on foreign affairs that the review of evidence indicated that genocide had been carried out, with the Sudanese state and non-state armed militias responsible (Al Jazeera, 2013). A consistent and widespread pattern of atrocities was identified, including the systematic destruction of Darfuri land, natural resources, and property, as well as the indiscriminate murder, rape, and torture of non-Arab civilians on the basis of their ethnic origin. Importantly, Powell refers to their actions as a "…coordinated effort, not just random violence," and that the UN Security Council would initiate investigations into all violations of international humanitarian law and human rights occurring within Darfur "…with a view to ensuring accountability."

The specific time of occurrence of such ethnic violence is also notable. 2003 marked the coming to an end of Sudan's two-decade-long Second Civil War, also between the Arab-dominated northern regions and the African-dominated southern territories. Darfur rebel groups, including the SLM and JEM, were arguably at least partly motivated by demands for a bigger share of the peace agreement stipulations dividing oil reserves in South Sudan between northern and southern elites. Existing local and tribal clashes engendered as a result of land encroachment of Arab herders on the lands of African farmers added an appropriate ethnic flair to claims thereafter, as well as the military dictatorship in Khartoum which outright called for repression of rebel movements through deploying the Janjaweed – all factors consistent with normative definitions of 'genocide' as per the UNCG, and underlying the passing of resolutions by

> " 2003 marked the coming to an end of Sudan's two-decade-long Second Civil War, also between the Arab-dominated northern regions and the African-dominated southern territories

both houses of the US Congress in 2004 condemning the genocide in Darfur.

But why break from established precedent as followed earlier in Rwanda? While initially reluctant to overtly criticize the disproportionate violence occurring from the violent anti-rebel crackdowns on part of Khartoum due to fear that this might derail the fragile North-South peace deal, the Bush administration would go on to lead UNSC operations by declaring that the abuses occurring in Darfur at the time constituted genocide in its entirety, even pushing for military intervention and considering the end of the Sudanese Civil War among its most important foreign policy interventions in 2001 and 2002. A constellation of factors underlays this change in foreign policy. 2004 also marked a decade since the Rwandan genocide, as well as the year of escalating violence within Darfur, which increased media representation and pressure upon the Bush administration. The argument has also been convincingly raised that these declarations arose from a desire to appease an unlikely alliance of human rights activists and journalists, and conservative and religious right-wing groups (which formed a significant majority of President Bush's voter base); the latter had long campaigned against al-Bashir's Islamist regime and legacy of gross and widespread violations of the human rights of non-Muslim south Darfuris. Amongst pressure from bipartisan US Congressmen calling for sanctions emerged formal recognition.

The United States is unfortunately hardly the only state engaging in opportunistic applications of policy reversals, though it provides one of the more egregious examples of the same. Less than a year after Powell's research was conducted within Chadian refugee camps, Assistant Secretary of State, Robert B. Zoellick refrained from referring to the Darfur conflict as such. The Sudanese state had managed to strike a cooperative arrangement with CIA operatives to assist the Bush administration in the 'war on terror' having hosted al Qaida operations and Osama bin-Laden himself in the 1990s. The ensuing reported death toll figures were markedly lower than what were previously provided by Powell, numbering between 60 and160,000 and soundly criticized by sociologists Hagan, Rymond-Richmond, and Parker (2005) who believe them to be deliberately engineered to discard data collected by the Sudanese Ministry of Health pertaining to deaths from violence, as opposed to deaths from starvation and disease within refugee camps. The researchers interviewed a large number of survivors in Chadian refugee camps,

Existing local and tribal clashes engendered as a result of land encroachment of Arab herders on the lands of African farmers added an appropriate ethnic flair to claims thereafter as well as the military dictatorship in Khartoum which outright called for repression of rebel movements through deploying the Janjaweed

specifically regarding deaths from their experience of violence and displacement, and emerged at a figure of 390,000, which was a far closer approximation to other estimations. The Bush administration continued to insist on the lower figures, with little rationale provided, and – along with the UN and other global powers – continued to strategically prioritize their new ally in the protection of their geopolitical interests.

Even a UN inquiry in 2005 even came to the bizarre conclusion that genocide had, in fact, *not* taken place – massive US military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of 'protecting democracy' at the time had possibly influenced Washington's decision to refrain from 'nation-building' and 'humanitarian intervention' within another war-torn region, and reflecting the UNSC's tendency to turn to the US for forging a path ahead. The Iraq war faced near-universal condemnation during the period of its occurrence and had proceeded even without a UN mandate; the subsequent publicizing of widespread and systematic abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib threatened the US's position as a global leader in military matters. Al-Bashir would go on to use the incriminating images as invalidating any claims made by the US supposedly in defense of Darfuri non-Arabs, insisting that US actions against Sudan reflected a global attack against Islam and Arabs.

In 2007, amidst growing visibility of the conflict and counter-insurgencies occurring in real-time through enhanced satellite imagery from Google Earth, President Bush was compelled to once again confirm that the violence in Darfur was formally recognized as genocide and that the US Department of Treasury – and other US allies – would be imposing economic sanctions on Sudan, as well as enacting another UNSC resolution. Sudan had been included within the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism in 1993 and as of 2018, even after the lifting of the economic sanctions, continued to remain so. It was only in 2020 that they were removed from the same by the Trump administration on the condition that Sudan pays

USD 335 million as compensation to the victims of the 1998 US Embassy bombings. The specific circumstances of the affected Sudanese population did not seem to figure into any such estimations of compensation.

The influence of such underlying political interests highlights, in this regard, the fundamental missing link between the formal and substantive aspects of recognition and intervention, and the collusion of global superpowers in contributing to a bystander effect while egregious human rights violations and widespread abuses continue unabated.

The Aftermath of Recognition and Intervention

The oft-criticized intergovernmental and legal doctrine pertaining to the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) is sometimes considered synonymous with humanitarian and military interventions. R2P as a normative standard itself emerged as a result of deliberations within the UN which resulted in the World Summit Outcome Document in 2005, reflecting a commitment to the global principle meant to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Such principles emerged as a result of global acknowledgment of their failure to intervene in Rwanda, which provided free rein to authoritarian leaders to commit mass atrocities and widespread human rights violations. It similarly highlights the desire to at least establish early warning systems and collective action which could potentially structure a more coordinated and consensus-based response, given the universally denigrated military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq at the time. Supporters continue to laud the doctrine for its supposed intention to codify and consolidate the moral and legal obligations of international powers to intervene when national powers take actions gravely threatening the life, rights and security of their populations – initially through non-military means (such as via trade and arms embargos), but also through lethal force if required.

Sudan's former President Omar Al Bashir at a rally in Khartoum in 2009 after he was indicted by the ICC on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur (Photo Credit: Lynsey Addario/New York Times)

The responsibility to protect is also spoken of in tandem with third pillar obligations pertaining to the 'timely and decisive response' on part of the international community (referred to as the constituent elements of the 'responsibility to react'). The first and second pillars instead pertain to establishing national responsibility towards protecting one's own citizens, and thereafter the responsibility of the international community to assist in capacity-building efforts within the state and providing the support required to improve the operationalizing of human rights standards. One of the most successful examples in this regard was Kofi Annan's mediation in the Kenya conflict which resulted in its power-sharing government. This importantly corroborates the oft-neglected constituents of the responsibility to protect – that is, to prevent, and to rebuild – and once more reflects the underlying assumption within the international community that such conflicts are supposedly inevitable and must simply be responded to in some manner reflecting only cosmetic commitment to standards of peace, justice and security, and conditional upon the convenience of circumstances.

The al-Bashir regime has spanned nearly 30 years till the present day; despite US economic sanctions being lifted in 2018, the state continues to languish amongst soaring inflation, massive fuel and food shortages, unemployment, and a former head of state who blames all these on the US while refusing all accountability. Less than a year after the lifting of the sanctions, al-Bashir dissolved the Sudanese government and severely reduced budgeting for nearly a third of his ministries. As of 2018, Sudan's inflation rate was at 60 per cent, with a formal banking system viewed as having been effectively replaced by the black market, and massive economic difficulties from the secession of oil-rich South Sudan in 2011 as well as cross-border smuggling of precious metals, which were once its major exports. Despite the lifting of US sanctions, foreign investors are reluctant to engage due to the state only recently having been removed from being designated as a state-sponsor of terrorism on the same level as Iran, North Korea, and Syria, and the associated challenges of domestic pressures "…far (outweighing) the benefits of the end of sanctions". Such incriminating labels also disqualify Sudan from applying for debt-relief and recourse to emergency funding from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, but according to local journalists, even a sense of donor fatigue begins to set in; aid organizations have not been allowed within Sudan for many years, and even when, are compelled to follow stringent rules. Local Sudanese were even hesitating to put money into banks due to restrictions on how much cash could be made available within them – all measures ostensibly meant to curb inflation and address the impending economic crisis that has caused widespread protests against the repressive al-Bashir administration, which was finally ousted in April 2019.

Dashing hopes for what could have been a hopeful avenue for future rebuilding, restoration, and rehabilitation of the hundreds of thousands of survivors, refugees, and internally displaced peoples resulting from years of conflict, the African Union-United Nations hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) abruptly withdrew in December 2020 as a result of UN Resolution 2559. The resulting power vacuum is a grave cause for concern, given the fragile political climate and questionable efficacy of the present transitional government. Despite the October 2020 peace deal between the Sudanese state and some rebel groups (with the notable exception of the widely-supported SLM), violence on ethnic and tribal grounds is still occasionally reported. The UNAMID peacekeeping mission was meant to prevent further conflict and assist the Sudanese state towards peacebuilding. Its history is, however, characterized by significant downsizing and budget cuts since 2017, which caused the gradual transfer of more and more functions to the state due to a lack of effectively-trained personnel, amongst numerous allegations of misconduct, irregular reporting of the human rights situation of the region, and in some cases, failure to effectively prevent violence. UNAMID has, however, also been lauded for ending, for the better part, the mass killings, establishing a modicum of stability in the region and enabling access to humanitarian aid for millions of affected Sudanese.

Such a withdrawal was unanimously agreed to within the UNSC, particularly due to years of pressure by the erstwhile al-Bashir administration as well as budgetary priorities on part of Western governments. In what could be a hopeful step, the current Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok, has called for renewed efforts focusing on peacebuilding rather than peacekeeping, and that any UN-supported mission covers the entirety of Sudan; however, Darfuri citizens have little-reported confidence in governmental forces, in particular the Janjaweed militia-dominated Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who are the same state-backed troops having committed mass atrocities against them – and in many cases have continued to do so, particularly under the al-Bashir regime which aimed to quell all protests in ways violating international humanitarian law, such as by targeting civilians, humanitarian aid workers, and medical personnel. UNAMID forces will only fully withdraw by June 2021, but even the news of their withdrawal has inspired a new spate of violent attacks which have led to the displacement of over 80,000 and deaths nearing the hundreds.

> Despite the October 2020 peace deal between the Sudanese state and some rebel groups (with the notable exception of the widely-supported SLM), violence on ethnic and tribal grounds is still occasionally reported

What implications do such actions have for international responsibilities towards preventing and rebuilding a society fractured from decades of conflict and existing ethnic tensions that have not been adequately resolved? Darfur continues to remain a volatile and precarious region bereft of a strong political structure and an economy lambasted with inflation, rates of unemployment has increased even after the lifting of sanctions, and shortages of essential items such as food, cash, gas, and medicines; refugees within camps have reportedly "…lost all hope for the future", and access to the humanitarian aid so desperately required would thus hinge upon a new administration they have little trust in.

Omar al-Bashir's own political history was engendered from similar such circumstances. As a former military commander within the Sudanese Civil Wars, he used the existing fear of disintegrating national unity, economic stagnation, and threats to territorial integrity to consolidate his power. 30 years later, the same problems persist, now worsened due to the impact of US sanctions and the general devastation of the global economy characterizing the COVID-19 pandemic. Even upon the lifting of these sanctions, 70 per cent of the budget was allocated by the al-Bashir administration towards defence against armed groups fighting his regime and each other, leading to widespread doubts with regards to the effective management of state functions and underlying the cry of protestors in Khartoum in 2011, somewhat mirroring the 'Arab Spring' revolutions in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt.

Ironically, it is exactly the future actions of the international community via armed military intervention in Libya, Syria, and Yemen that underscored the claims of supporters of the al-Bashir administration. None of these interventions taken under loosely defined commitments towards global peace, justice, and security were able to prevent the devolution of these very national governments into failed states full of bloodshed, chaos, and rebel groups

Global rhetoric following the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent 'war on terror' exploited the experiences of women and other vulnerable populations living within repressive regimes in order to garner public support

fighting the state and each other. The essential components of global responsibility to protect hinge specifically upon the protection of civilians – a commitment left conveniently forgotten in favor of entrenched geopolitical interests, or perhaps simply due to the responsibility to 'react' without actually involving oneself within the peace process or any subsequent changes within the regime.

An Experiment in Inconsistency

Human rights language is increasingly being strategically deployed to provide moral legitimacy and authority to intervention efforts on part of development oraid organizations within third countries, as well as states. Described as a '…thin veil for neoliberal pro-war policies", Ware argues that women's rights are especially vulnerable to such instrumentalization, used as a pretext to justify armed military intervention in states responsible for their oppression and experience of abuse and violence, and which ironically contributes to further marginalization and turning invisible the claims of the very same women intended to be protected and supported. Global rhetoric following the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent 'war on terror' exploited the experiences of women and other vulnerable populations living within repressive regimes in order to garner public support, and contributed to a fundamentally damaging conception of women and children of the Middle East and Africa as helpless, dependent victims of Islamic patriarchy, lacking all agency and bereft of a voice.

Were such efforts to be underlain with some degree of consistency, a number of existing conflicts that have also resulted in similar levels of atrocities committed and suffering experienced by such vulnerable populations should also necessarily be condemned as such, and which remain wanting. Not even two years after Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for successfully brokering a peace deal with Eritrea, was ethnically diverse Ethiopia beset with civil war and a massive humanitarian crisis within one of the most geopolitically-fragile of African regions. This occurred amidst accusations that the ostensibly progressive Ahmed administration had deliberately engaged in incriminatory rhetoric and discriminatory policies against the powerful Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), which bled into the same treatment of ethnic Tigrayans themselves. The subsequent conflict has spilled over into Sudan which is currently hosting the largest number of Ethiopian refugees, and both Somalia and Djibouti support the conflict. The latter has even praised the repressive and disproportionate violence of the Abiy administration and declared that diplomatic negotiations would only lead to national disintegration.

From other major global powers – including the US – have emerged only relatively weak remonstrations urging the Ethiopian state to refrain from committing such violence and protect the rights of civilians; the only condemnation of the violence here arises from Poland, and that too with a particular emphasis on attacks on places of worship. Other such 'hot' conflicts occurring within the late 2010s, such as in Nagorno-Karabakh which resulted in the annexation of extensive Armenian territory by Azerbaijani military forces, have received little international recognition or support due to the presence of regional heavyweights such as Russia and Turkey playing the role of geopolitical 'brokers', though with a questionable commitment to any long-term solutions for peace, justice or security. Even US President Biden has condemned the 'humanitarian and strategic catastrophe' of the Yemen war and declared an end to all support for offensive operations in Yemen – while continuing to sell defensive arms to Saudi Arabia, which is the leader of the coalition of powers standing accused of over 100,000 civilian casualties and numerous civilian rights violations.

Darfur represents an unfortunate 'experiment' of sorts, where global powers withheld from intervening via military means, but instead chose to impose a series of ill-planned, insufficiently-targeted and gravely damaging economic sanctions instead, which should have been focused on undermining the political authority responsible for the atrocities against the civilian population. Instead, the long-term impact of such unsustainable sanctions

has worsened the economic, political, and humanitarian situation for Darfuri civilians as a whole, and reflects the relatively weak prioritization of any commitment to their actual protection or wellbeing.

Such inconsistent applications of international normative standards regarding peace, justice, and security reflect glaring limitations of the present international legal regime as a whole – in particular its tendency to be influenced by existing political, geopolitical, and strategic economic interests, the irregular balance between state consent to be voluntarily bound by such laws and issues of national sovereignty, and the utter lack of tangible enforcement or accountability mechanisms that could ensure at least some degree of commitment to espoused claims. The present global context is now where one conflict warrants a disproportionate and ill-planned military intervention or economic sanctions that worsen existing deprivation, while yet another remains unacknowledged and unrecognized, highlighting the grave implications this might have for vulnerable populations the world over currently being subjected to systematic violations of their

human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for whom visibility via social media and increased media attention has grown into a lifeline.

While such international conventions such as the UNCG and legal doctrines such as R2P certainly hinge upon political consensus and will to enact the commitments codified within them, they are also underlain with commitments towards the centring and protection of human dignity, justice, equality, and freedom all the same. The UNCG specifically calls for 'international cooperation' and details a litany of activities constituting what could be identified as genocide or related as such – but importantly does not mention any commitment towards the protection of civilians. At the same time, existing non-derogable standards within international law continue to oblige a response centered upon their needs, specifically those pertaining to non-discrimination, the prohibition of torture, and the UNCG specification that '…complicity in genocide' is a crime punishable by international law.

The vision of a future conducive to the protection of human rights standards as expressed in the Universal

Sudanese militia, the Janjaweed, pictured in Sudan in 2019 (Photo Credit: Nyamile)

Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 specifically describes the universality and interdependence of all generations of human rights, and the fundamentality of human dignity as the foundation of '…freedom, justice and peace in the world.' If commitment to such ideals has any value to the states obliged to uphold its stipulations, let these have uniformity of application not contingent on entrenched interests, the convenience of circumstances, nor the instrumentalizing of such ideals for personal gain.

References

Al Jazeera. (2013, November 14). UN: 460,000 displaced in Darfur this year. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/11/14/un-460000-displaced-in-darfur-this-year

Ali, H. (2013). Estimate of the Economic Cost of Armed Conflict: A Case Study from Darfur, *Defence and Peace Economics*, 10.1080/10242694.2012.723154, 24, 6, (503-519).

Al-Jazeera. (2018). Darfur: The forgotten war [Audio blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2018/11/16/darfurs-forgotten-war

Banwell, S. (2016). Gender and the Violence(s) of War and Armed Conflict: More Dangerous to Be a Woman? Retrieved from https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/doi/10.1108/9781787691155

Barnett, M. (1997). The UN Security Council, Indifference, and Genocide in Rwanda. *Cultural Anthropology, 12*(4), 551-578. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/656636

BBC News. (2010). Darfur warrant for Sudan's Bashir: ICC adds genocide. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/10603559

Burawoy, Michael. (2005). For Public Sociology. American Sociological Review. 70. 4-28. 10.1177/000312240507000102.

De Waal, A. (2005). Defining Genocide. *Index on Censorship*, *34*(1), 6–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/03064220512331339391

Degomme, O., Guha-Sapir, D. (2010). Patterns of mortality rates in Darfur conflict, *The Lancet*, 10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61967-X, 375, 9711, (294-300).

Dinkela, I. (2021, January 31). The Darfur Peacekeeping Mission ends. Retrieved from https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/the-darfur-peacekeeping-mission-ends

Goldberg, M. (2020). A Ceasefire, But No Peace for Nagorno-Karabakh [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://www.globaldispatchespodcast.com/a-ceasefire-but-no- peace-for-nagorno-karabakh/

Global Dispatches. (2019). Ethiopia is on the Brink of Civil Wa

Hagan, J., Rymond-Richmond, W., and Parker, P. (2005). The Criminology of Genocide: The Death and Rape of Darfur. *Criminology*, 43: 525-562. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0011-1348.2005.00016.x

Hagan, J., Rymond-Richmond, W. (2008). The Collective Dynamics of Racial Dehumanization and Genocidal Victimization in Darfur, *American Sociological   Review*, 10.1177/000312240807300601, 73, 6, (875-902),

Heinze, E. (2007). The Rhetoric of Genocide in U.S. Foreign Policy: Rwanda and Darfur Compared. *Political Science Quarterly, 122*(3), 359-383. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20202884

Human Rights Watch. (2020, October 28). Sudan: Government Commits 'Ethnic Cleansing' in Darfur. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/05/07/sudan-government-commits-ethnic-cleansing-darfur

Human Rights Watch. (2020, October 28). Sudan's Human Rights Record and US Sanctions. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/04/sudans-human-rights-record-and-us-sanctions

Karstedt, S. (2013). Contextualizing Mass Atrocity Crimes: Moving Toward a Relational Approach, *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-102612-134016, *9, 1, (*383-404).

Kleinstuber, R., (2015). Genocide: Social and Economic Aspects, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.45060-9, (15-21).

Knecht, E., & Abdelaziz, K. (2018, September 17). A year after U.S. sanctions ended, Sudan's economy unravels. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-economy-idUSKCN1LX0J4

Murphy, L. (2015). The New Slave Narrative and the Illegibility of Modern Slavery, *Slavery & Abolition*, 36:2, 382-405

Powell, C. (2004). The Crisis in Darfur. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/36042.htm

Pruitt, W. (2014). Testing Hagan and Rymond-Richmond's collective action theory of genocide, *Global Crime*, 10.1080/17440572.2014.956167, 16, 1, (1-18).

Rieff, D. (2011, November 07). R2P, R.I.P. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/08/opinion/r2p-rip.html

Reyna, S. (2011). Assessing Bias: The Qualitative in the Quantitative, Darfuri War Fatalities and the Morality of War, *Sociology Mind*, 10.4236/sm.2011.13013, 01, 03, (105-113).

Rymond-Richmond, W. (2014). Genocide, *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 10.1007/978-1-4614-5690-2, (1924-1933).

Straus, S. (2005). Darfur and the Genocide Debate. *Foreign Affairs, 84*(1), 123-133. doi:10.2307/20034212

Tsai, A., Eisa, M., Crosby, S., Sirkin, S., Heisler, M., Leaning, J., Iacopino, V. (2012). Medical   Evidence of Human Rights Violations against Non-Arabic-Speaking Civilians in Darfur: A Cross-Sectional Study, *PLoS Medicine*, 10.1371/journal.pmed.1001198, 9, 4, (e1001198).

Al Shabab's Response to COVID-19 in Somalia

By Abdullahi Abdille Shahow

Abstract

When the COVID-19 pandemic was reported in Somalia in March 2020, al Shabab, al Qaida's powerful affiliate in Somalia, responded to the pandemic in a manner similar to that of other jihadist groups across the globe. The group, in the initial phase, belittled the threat, did not acknowledge the severity of the disease, and attempted to use the crisis to win new recruits and peddle misinformation. It made little effort to implement containment measures in the vast areas under its control and the millions of people it governs. Instead, it has ridiculed containment measures by the federal government in Mogadishu. This article explores al Shabab's response to COVID-19 in Somalia as one of the major actors that govern large populations. It examines the group's lackluster response and also discusses attempts by the federal government to combat the virus. Accurate statistics of the extent of the pandemic in its territory remains elusive, but it's likely COVID-19 directly affected and even killed some of al Shabab members.

Introduction

Al Shabab, the al Qaida affiliate in Somalia, has been fighting to topple the internationally-backed but weak and fragile government in Mogadishu for more than a decade, and establish its own variant of Islamic government based on its strict interpretation of Sharia law. At its zenith in 2009 and 2010, the group controlled the entire south central Somalia, including large sections of Mogadishu. While still a powerful player in Somalia today, it was deposed from several cities and major towns in successive offensives by African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somalia-allied forces between 2011 and 2015.

However, the group still controls large swathes of territory in rural Somalia including several major town centers. It also controls major access and supply routes to liberated cities and towns where it is able to effectively isolate AMISOM and government-controlled pockets. Its constant, almost daily attacks target Somalia security forces, AMISOM, government officials, and civilians. In Mogadishu, it frequently carries out bombings and gun attacks on military and civilian targets, including hotels popular with government officials, intersections, and checkpoints.

This article begins by assessing Somalia's healthcare system, as well as its response to the pandemic. It then explains how al Shabab's initial response to the pandemic, its propaganda as well as other activities, after which it discusses the change of tact to win over the hearts and minds in the areas it controls.

Somalia's Healthcare System and COVID-19 Response

Somalia's Healthcare System

Somalia is a low-income country with an estimated population of 15.44 million. Decimated by three decades of civil war, Somalia has one of the world's weakest health systems (Global Health Security Index [GHS Index], 2019). Some of the pressing issues in the healthcare system are communicable diseases, respiratory infections, and challenges relating to nutrition and maternal and child health morbidities. The average life expectancy is 57.07 years, and only 25 per cent of Somalis have access to essential health services. According to the International Health Regulations Index, only six per cent of Somalis are protected from health emergencies and infectious hazards. The country's healthcare system ranks 194 out of 195 on the Global Health Security Index, behind North Korea and in front of Equatorial Guinea (GHS Index, 2019). Somalia lacks sufficient and accessible healthcare facilities and crucial equipment, making it unprepared

A Somali doctor and a nurse prepare a ward for COVID-19 patients at the Martini Hospital in Mogadishu, Somalia on March 18, 2020 (Photo Credit: Feisal Omar/Reuters)

to treat and handle outbreaks of diseases including pandemics.

While the global standard for healthcare workers is 25 per 100,000 people, Somalia has only two healthcare workers per 100,000 people. With only 15 ICU beds for a population of more than 15 million, it is listed among the least-prepared countries in the world to detect and report epidemics, or to execute a rapid response that might mitigate further spread of disease (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). In 2019, the Somalia government, in collaboration with WHO finalized the Universal Health Care (UHC) Roadmap for the 2019-2023 period with the key objective of "ensuring that all Somali people can access the health services they need – without facing financial hardship – is key to improving the well-being of Somali people" (Universal Health Care Partnership, 2021). Somalia is a beneficiary of the critical foundation as articulated in this strategic plan, which included a roadmap to prepare for responding to health emergencies in line with International Health Regulations (2005). With WHO's support, Somalia government used this plan to respond to COVID-19 pandemic especially "in areas such as surveillance and case investigation, case management, infection prevention and control including strengthening laboratory capacities" (Universal Health Care Partnership, 2021).

However, despite these plans, the healthcare conditions are worse in the rural areas of south- central Somalia where al Shabab is the governing authority than in other parts of the country. During its territorial 'Golden Age' (2009-2010) when it controlled the entire south-central Somalia, the group took healthcare more seriously. It appointed regional health coordinators to manage hospitals in major cities and towns that it controlled (Hockey & Jones, 2020). However, as it lost territory a few years later and pushed into rural hinterlands, the group has focused more on fighting rather than quality governance. Nevertheless, COVID-19 threat level is the least in its areas, as people in its territory are dispersed in villages and small towns.

Somalia's COVID-19 Response

When COVID-19 arrived in Somalia in March 2020, the country was grappling with two other serious threats: floods and locusts. The pandemic made it a "triple threat" (WHO, 2020). The pandemic has negatively affected livelihoods, slowed down economic activities and deepened poverty. The World Bank, in its Somalia Economic Update in June 2020, predicted that "the pandemic is projected to push the economy into contraction, increase fiscal pressures, and deepen

poverty in 2020. The economy is projected to contract by 2.5 per cent in 2020" (World Bank, 2020).

Perhaps another factor that complicated the management of the pandemic in Somalia is that the country is under multiple authorities; essentially divided into several areas of influence where different actors are in charge. The internationally recognized Federal Government of Somalia is majorly in charge of Mogadishu and immediate environs. The rest of the country is in the hands of nascent Federal Member States (FMS). Al Shabab is in charge of most of the hinterlands in south-central Somalia, including major supply routes. Some of the States, especially, Puntland and Jubaland, do not get along with Mogadishu and are constantly in political conflict with the center. In the north, there is the self-declared Republic of Somaliland that self-governs but remains unrecognized by the international community.

When COVID-19 arrived in Somalia, coordination was a major challenge. Humanitarian aid organizations including UN agencies were in the forefront, preparing and putting in place measures to monitor and curb the spread of the virus. They assisted the government in Mogadishu, the regional authorities, and Somaliland to procure diagnostic kits and other medical supplies and equipment. They put up messages on radios, billboards with COVID-19 preventive messages in Mogadishu and elsewhere. They also trained doctors, and health workers and conduct contact tracing. Even as they carried out these activities, these humanitarian organizations were sensitive to political realities. In the first few weeks, samples from around the country were being transported to Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) in Nairobi for testing, as WHO began building local testing capacity (WHO, 2020). Eventually, three molecular testing labs were set up across the country by WHO in Mogadishu, Garowe, and Hargeisa.

Levels of adherence to public health measures in Somalia have been low. Many people simply disregarded health advice probably due to cultural reasons or because they saw the whole COVID-19 threat as just a fairy tale (Guled & Nor, 2020). Because of its lack of institutional enforcement capacity, religious sensitivities, and probably also to avoid backlash, the government in Mogadishu could not fully enforce much of the guidelines it set. For instance, it was difficult to stop the faithful from congregating for prayers in mosques during the holy month of Ramadan. Social distancing disappeared almost immediately as the government announced them. Markets, mosques, and other public spaces remained open and even football

tournaments, where stadiums were filled to the brim, were being held in Mogadishu.

The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Somalia have been higher than has been reported as a result of limited testing (Sperber, 2020; WHO, 2020). As of February 25, 2020, fewer than 27,000 tests for the virus have been conducted in Somalia, a country of more than 15 million people, with one of the lowest testing rates in the world. Fewer than 6,549 cases have been confirmed, including at least 218 deaths. Many cases go undetected, even as many Somalis complain of flu like symptoms (Hujale, 2020). Nevertheless, the situation in Somalia is similar to that of the rest of Africa where death rates have been low despite several antibody surveys suggesting far more Africans have been infected with the virus (Nordling, 2020).

It is also important to note that al Shabab-controlled areas were highly inaccessible for humanitarian and UN organizations in the forefront in providing support in the response to combat COVID-19. The group banned international aid organizations in its territory. Humanitarian agencies have also struggled to work in al Shabab-held territories because of arbitrary taxation, strict surveillance, and threats of expulsion (Aynte & Jackson, 2013).

Al Shabab's Initial Response to the Pandemic

It was always going to be difficult for a country like Somalia with a weak government, ravaged by decades of civil war to adequately contain the spread of the virus which was first reported in Somalia in March 2020. With the many actors in Somalia, the response has been disjointed and largely led by humanitarian aid organizations including UN agencies. Every entity, whether federal, state, or even

> "When COVID-19 arrived in Somalia, coordination was a major challenge. Humanitarian aid organizations including UN agencies were in the forefront, preparing and putting in place measures to monitor and curb the spread of the virus

In the beginning, when the disease was ravaging the world and governments around the globe were struggling to contain the virus, al Qaida and ISIS attempted to use the crisis to spread propaganda and win new recruits

al Shabab worked to respond in their own ways. Somalia is a country of divided control and areas of influence. The weak federal government in Mogadishu essentially controls only Mogadishu and its immediate environs, and its edicts barely reach beyond the capital. Thus, it was not able to effectively mobilize necessary resources and coordinate.

Al Shabab's response to COVID-19 was similar to that of other jihadist movements across the globe, in particular, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al Qaida. In the beginning, when the disease was ravaging the world and governments around the globe were struggling to contain the virus, al Qaida and ISIS attempted to use the crisis to spread propaganda and win new recruits. In a statement targeted at western audiences released on the coronavirus titled, *The Way Forward: A Word of Advice on the Coronavirus Pandemic*, al Qaida's senior leadership called out men and women in the West to convert to Islam in order to escape from their economic problems (Joscelyn, 2020). It said an "invisible soldier" has supposedly exposed the inherent weakness of the West's materialistic ways. Al Qaida also portrayed the virus as a punishment from the "Lord of the Worlds" against the West for the "injustice and oppression" against Muslim societies. The communication read in part, "O' people of the Western World! You have seen with your own eyes the power and might of Allah have exhibited in this weak, invisible soldier. This is a God-gifted opportunity for you to reflect on the wisdom hidden in the havoc wrecked by a weak intruder. Your governments and armies are helpless, utterly confused in the face of this weak creature" ("The Way Forward: A Word of Advice" 2020, p. 4). The six-page statement was calculatedly intended for the Western audience, as English and Arabic versions were released at the same time.

ISIS, on the other hand, in a series of articles in its weekly Arabic newsletter, *Al-Naba*, the former caliphate called on its followers to attack western targets. It asked its fighters to use the opportunity, laxity and the distraction of western security agencies to execute new attacks against western capitals (Joscelyn, 2020). Like al Qaida,

ISIS too was pleased with the economic damage that COVID-19 was causing in the western world claiming that the "Crusaders" are on the verge of "economic calamity" (Joscelyn, 2020).

In Somalia, al Shabab did not recognize nor acknowledge the severity of the COVID-19 in the first two months. Conversely, it was in denial and contributed towards distortion about the pandemic as well as the spread of misinformation (Shahow, 2020), using it as a recruitment strategy. In their speeches and sermons, its leaders and clerics dismissed the virus as a health hazard and instead, labeling it a punishment and threat to non-Muslims (Africa CDC, 2020). In one misleading statement, its senior leadership accused foreigners, especially AMISOM, of importing into and spreading the virus in Somalia, "international Crusaders" are responsible for bringing the pandemic to Somalia, "At the beginning of April, they warned Muslims to beware of infectious diseases such as coronavirus when they said the diseases are spread by the crusaders who have invaded Somalia and the infidel allies who support them" (BRAVE, 2020, p. 4). This was in line with the group's constant rhetoric against the presence and the "occupation" of foreigners (Calamada, 2020).

From the outset, the group belittled the threat. Its leaders mocked early containment measures undertaken by the government in Mogadishu to curb the spread. At the group level, it made little effort to implement containment measures in the vast areas and the large populations under its control, especially in south-central Somalia. Instead, it ridiculed the federal government in Mogadishu for closing schools, madrasas, and koranic schools. It also constantly criticized the federal government for discouraging the faithful from congregating in crowded mosques. Aula writes, "Al Shabab militants control much of the countryside as well as several towns in southern and central Somalia, including some areas close to the capital, but surprisingly the group's leaders have made little effort to implement containment measures including social distancing. The terror group has borrowed from ISIS, who had made a rallying call to its supporters to take

A toll-free call center set up by the Government of Somalia with the support of the UN as an initiative to stop the spread of COVID-19 (Photo Credit: UN)

advantage of the distraction of international actors and policymakers to radicalize and recruit more followers" (BRAVE, 2020, p. 4). In its territories, it did not close any public spaces, mosques were not shut down, social distancing was not enforced and the vast networks of Islamic schools and madrasas it runs remained open.

In sermons, and consistent with other global terrorist movements, its leading clerics portrayed the pandemic as a divine punishment from Allah, against non-believers across the world for their "evil deeds" against Muslims and jihadists. They framed the disease primarily as a European and American problem (and Chinese too). One al Shabab leading ideologue, Sheekh Fu'aad Mohamed Khalaf, also known as "Shongole", in a sermon in early April 2020, said that the virus is "a punishment from Allah to the infidels for their evil, and for standing against *sharia* implementation in Muslim lands" (Somalimemo, 2020). Another cleric, Sheikh Nuur Maalim Abdirahman, in March 2020, blamed the virus on the "increase in human sins" and for the rampant "evil" in the world. He added that the disease affected only the enemies of Islam, specifically referencing China, and its persecution of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang Province (Somalimemo, 2020).

The group's official spokesperson, Sheikh Ali Mahamud Rage a.k.a. Ali Dhere, was late in responding to the virus

and addressed the subject for the first time in late April 2020 through an audio message that was posted on al Shabab online news sites. Dhere echoed the rhetoric. He stated the disease had afflicted "infidels" due to their oppression of Muslims and repeated the claims that it was spread in Somalia through the soldiers of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other foreign actors that support the federal government (Somalimemo, 2020). He criticized the actions undertaken by the federal government in containing COVID-19, stating that it was following the example of disbelievers and putting pressure on Somali citizens by closing mosques and schools, and restricting people's movement. He urged Somalis to "be cautious" of medical assistance from non-Muslims and to instead turn to Allah (Hockey & Jones, 2020). Ali Dhere also argued that Muslims should celebrate because Allah is justly punishing the 'disbelievers' for their treatment of Muslims (Hockey & Jones, 2020)

Al Shabab Volte-Face on COVID-19 Response

However, in mid-May 2020, al Shabab's stance on the pandemic appeared to shift. About this time, COVID-19 was real and ravaging Somalia. A large number of Somalis were dying from the effects of the virus. Both mainstream media and social media were awash with Somalis being

infected, hospitalized, and many dying (Burke & Mumin, 2020). COVID-19-related deaths in Somalia were rising very fast, especially in the capital Mogadishu, where medical personnel, funeral workers, and grave diggers reported an unprecedented surge in the number of deaths.

Realizing the grave reality of the worsening situation and their quest to save face and protect self-image, the Islamist group changed tact. This shift was also necessitated by the need to portray itself as a legitimate and responsible governing authority. If it did not, it risked backlash and the spread of COVID-19 in its territories. There's a precedence for its inaction. In 2011, amid one of Somalia's worst famines (which it mismanaged), it attracted local and international condemnation over its move to block humanitarian access. Referring to al Shabab's role during this crisis, Seal and Bailey (2013) state, "In Somalia, humanitarian access has been challenged for decades. Humanitarian aid has formed a critical part of the economy and political power has been built upon it and used to control access to it. In south-central Somalia, access was denied to a number of key agencies by al Shabab" (Seal & Bailey, 2013, p. 2). Close to 300,000 Somalis died of starvation and disease (Aynte & Jackson, 2013).

In May 2020, al Shabab announced and publicized its first course of action to fight the virus. The group announced the creation of a committee, made up of doctors, religious scholars, and intellectuals, tasked with creating solutions to curb the spread of the virus in areas it controlled. A COVID-19 "prevention and treatment center" was immediately set up in Jilib, its headquarters in the Middle Juba region, about 380 kilometers south of Mogadishu. Later, an al Shabab official told the Associated Press that they got all the necessary equipment in the facility to isolate and treat patients (Guled, 2020). Despite the establishment of the treatment center, the group did not announce any containment measures that it was undertaking in its areas. Neither did it report on any COVID-19 infections in its territory. It is believed that the terror group had started taking the disease seriously because some of their members were affected (Maruf, 2020).

Despite the ravages of the disease and a clear understanding of its impact in the longer-term, the group did not accept the ceasefire call from the United Nations Secretary General (UN, 2020). Instead, it continued

conducting multiple attacks across Somalia. Aula notes:

Al Shabab took advantage of unfortunate situation of COVID-19 to antagonize innocent civilians besides targeting security forces. For instance, the team detonated VBIEDs outside Barawe airport and a UPDF military base on Friday, April 24, 2020. AU Mission in Somalia claimed that the attack was thwarted by its forces which prevented a more devastating impact on its personnel. Besides the Friday raid, the militants also attacked Somali National Army (SNA) in Lower Shebelle the following Monday, killing six soldiers on the spot while several others sustained serious wounds. Other attacks against the security forces were reported in Lower Jubba and central parts of the Somalia. Elsewhere, the militants were repulsed in Lower Jubba by a contingent of Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) troops. These escalating offensive operations come even after UN Chief Antonio Guterres asked armed groups across the world to embrace ceasefire. (Aula, 2020, p. 4)

However, even though it did not officially announce a ceasefire or reduction in its activities, attacks decreased in April, May, and June 2020 (Maruf, 2020). The few attacks that stood out in this period included the killing of five people, including the governor of Puntland's Mudug region, in a suicide bombing in Galkayo city, and the attack against Barawe airport in April. The reduction in its attacks in those three months could be attributed to the initial uncertainties around COVID-19, when many activities, including economic activities, and general population movements slowed down across Somalia. Ostensibly, COVID-19 too may have inadvertently slowed down the group's activities including its attacks. US airstrikes too decreased in number but continued targeting the group's rank and file. The intensity of the attacks nevertheless increased in July and August 2020, carrying out major attacks targeting a hotel in Mogadishu, and in September 2020, attacked Mogadishu's central prison and a military camp manned by Somali and US

> Despite the ravages of the disease and a clear understanding of its impact in the longer-term, the group did not accept the ceasefire call from the United Nations Secretary General

forces where it killed four Somali soldiers and injured US soldier.

Despite public proclamations and chest-thumping about its management of COVID-19, there is no publicly available information on how exactly the group is responding to COVID-19 in its areas. Also, the severity and lethality of the virus in its territories have not been forthcoming. The group has not been providing reporting on what it is that it is doing and the measures it has put in place to treat the affected. All indications are that the group does not have testing, and equipment needed, despite announcing the existence of the COVID-19 treatment center in Jilib. And if it did, it did not showcase them.

In the facility it claimed it has equipped, it is not clear how it acquired the resources and equipment. There is a possibility that it engaged some of the local aid organizations that are partnering with international aid organizations and UN agencies. So far, there is no evidence it is doing this. Another plausible explanation is the diversion of resources from its military campaigns. In any event, financial resources may not be a limiting factor

for the terror group which is believed to be generating "more than enough revenues to sustain its insurgency", according to a report by the UN Monitoring Group (UNMG) on Somalia and Eritrea in 2018. In October 2020, Hiraal Institute reported that "The militants collect at least USD 15m (£11m) a month, with more than half the amount coming from the capital, Mogadishu" (BBC, 2020) through "taxation" from all aspects of the Somali economy even in areas that it does not physically control (UNMG, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Somalia in March 2020, the response was disjointed. The country remains politically divided, with weak institutions ravaged by decades of civil war and total state collapse. The response has largely been led by humanitarian aid organizations including UN agencies who are providing support to the COVID-19-related health response.

Cases have been widespread in Somalia affecting many, despite the official low numbers. The low numbers are

Security forces inspecting the wreckage at the scene of a militant attack outside the Elite Hotel in Mogadishu, Somalia in August 2020 (Photo Credit: Farah Abdi Warsameh/Associated Press)

likely to be a result of scarce testing. Many cases have (and still) gone undetected. Somalia, a country of more than 15 million people, has one of the lowest testing rates in the world. The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Somalia are likely much higher than official government numbers. Early in the pandemic, the Somalia government in Mogadishu did attempt some measures to limit the spread. However, levels of adherence to public health measures have been low and health advice has largely been ignored. The government could not do much because it lacks institutional enforcement capacity.

The extent of the virus spread in rural Somalia, where al Shabab is the main governing authority, has not been forthcoming. Al Shabab did not take the pandemic seriously. In its territories, it made no effort to implement and encourage containment measures. It belittled the threat. Its leaders mocked early containment measures undertaken by the government in Mogadishu. Its leadership and clerics used the pandemic as a form of recruitment tactic.

In May 2020, however, after witnessing the veracity of the disease and the large number of Somalis that were dying as a result, the group changed tune. It announced the establishment of a "prevention and treatment" facility in Jilib, its headquarters. Despite the announcement of the treatment facility, the group does not provide any data on the COVID-19 situation in its territories. Also unknown is the severity and lethality of the virus in its territories. It does not report on any infections, containment measures it is undertaking, and death. Its areas remain inaccessible for humanitarian aid organizations, which are unable to provide assistance. The group has banned international aid organizations from operating in its territory. All indications are that the group does not have the testing capacity and equipment needed to combat the virus.

References

Africa CDC (2020, July 27). The Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Governance, Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa. *Africa CDC, Regional Brief*. Retrieved from https://au.int/en/documents/20200727/impact-covid-19-outbreak-governance-peace-and-security-horn-africa

Aula, R. (2020). *BRAVE Insight: COVID-19 Pandemic and Al Shabab's Operations*. Retrieved from https://horninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BRAVE-Insights.pdf

Burke, J. and Mumin, A. (2020, May 2). Somali medics report rapid rise in deaths as Covid-19 fears grow. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/02/somali-medics-report-rapid-rise-in-deaths-as-covid-19-fears-grow

Guled A., & Nor, M. (2020, March 19). In Somalia, coronavirus goes from fairy tale to nightmare. *Associated Press*. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/b23baf8f62dfda03b6ef73777175e8d9

Guled, A. (2020, June 12). Extremist group al-Shabab sets up COVID-19 center in Somalia. *Associated Press.* Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/fc7930ffdf0202de626a8fe043c7fb9b

Hockey, C. and Jones, M. (2020). "The Limits of 'Shabaab-CARE': Militant Governance amid COVID-19. *CTC Sentinel, Vol 13,* Issue 6. Retrieved from https://ctc.usma.edu/the-limits-of-shabaab-care-militant-governance-amid-covid-19/

Hockey, C., and Jones, M. (2020). *The Limits of 'Shabaab-CARE': Militant Governance amid COVID-19*. Retrieved from https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CTC-SENTINEL-062020.pdf

https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34239

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/world/africa/africa-coronavirus-ventilators.html

Hujale, M. (2020, April 22). Ramadan in Somalia: fears coronavirus cases will climb as gatherings continue. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/22/ramadan-in-somalia-fears-coronavirus-cases-will-climb-as-gatherings-continue

Jackson, A. and Aynte, A. (2013). Al Shabaab Engagement with Aid Agencies. *Humanitarian Policy   Group*, Policy Brief 53, 2013. Retrieved from https://www.odi.org/publications/8060-al-shabaab-engagement-aid-agencies

Joscelyn, T. (2020, April 6). How Jihadists Are Reacting to the Coronavirus

Maclean, R., & Marks, S. (2020, May 17). 10 African Countries Have No Ventilators. That's Only Part of the Problem. *New York Times*. Retrieved from

Marsh, K., & Alobo, M. (2020, October 7). COVID-19: examining theories for Africa's low death rates. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/covid-19-examining-theories-for-africas-low-death-rates-147393

Maruf, H. (2020, September 18). Lecture, Westminster Institute on *Al-Shabaab Update and Strategic Plan*. Retrieved from https://westminster-institute.org/events/al-shabaab-update-and-strategic-plan/

Nordling, L. (2020, August 11). The pandemic appears to have spared Africa so far. Scientists are struggling to explain why. *Science Magazine*. Retrieved from https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/08/pandemic-appears-have-spared-africa-   so-far-scientists-are-struggling-explain-why

Pandemic. *Long War Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/04/06/how-jihadists-are-reacting-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic/

Seal, A., & Bailey, R. (2013). The 2011 Famine in Somalia: lessons learnt from a failed response?. *Conflict and health*, *7*(1), 1-5.

Shahow, A. (2020, May 1). "Al-Shabab's Territory in Somalia Is a COVID-19 Powder Keg", *World Political Review*. Retrieved from https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28726/in-al-shabab-s-territory-in-east-africa-pandemic-could-spread-like-wildfire

Sperber, A. (2020, April 28). Somalia struggles with coronavirus as infections go undetected. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/28/somalia-struggles-with-coronavirus-as-infections-go-undetected

United Nations. (2020). Statements and Messages: "Secretary-General Calls for Global Ceasefire, Citing War-Ravaged Health Systems, Populations Most Vulnerable to Novel   Coronavirus." SG/SM/20018. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20018.doc.htm

UNMG (2018, November 9). Report of the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009). *UN Monitoring Group - /2018/1002*. Retrieved from https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2F2018%2F1002&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop

Universal Health Care Partnership (2021). *Health for all is Somalia's answer to COVID-19 and future threats to health*. Retrieved from https://www.uhcpartnership.net/story-somalia/

WHO. (2020, June 23). COVID-19, locusts, flooding: WHO and triple threat in Somalia. WHO. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/covid-19-locusts-flooding-who-and-triple-threat-in-somalia

WHO. (2021, January 12). Health for all is Somalia's answer to COVID-19 and future threats to health. *World Health Organization*. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/news- room/feature-stories/detail/health-for-all-is-somalia-s-answer-to-covid-19-and-future-threats-to-health

World Bank (2018). GDP and Population

World Bank. (2020). Somalia Economic Update, June 2020: Impact of COVID-19 - Policies to Manage the Crisis and Strengthen Economic Recovery. *World Bank*. Retrieved from

The Tigray Conflict and Abiy Ahmed's Struggle Against Identity Politics in Ethiopia

By Mesenbet Assefa, Ph.D.

Abstract

The conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia has attracted the attention of the international community in recent months. The dire humanitarian situation in the region and the potential ripple effect of the conflict on peace and security in the Horn of Africa has created unease and concern. But there is also something profound that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is trying to initiate in Ethiopia's political discourse. For decades, the fundamental driving force behind almost every political mobilization in Ethiopia has been ethnic identity. The philosophy of ethnic federalism that formed the fundamental ideology of Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has reached a breaking point. Ethnic and religious divisions in the country which were the result of this divisive political arrangement are no longer sustainable. Abiy Ahmed is initiating a new political dispensation in Ethiopia by containing simmering ethnic sentiments and nurturing national unity rather than a competitive federal arrangement. However, significant challenges abound.

Introduction

Ethiopia is undergoing a tectonic political transformation. The coming into power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018 ushered in a new political dispensation and a major ideological shift in the country. His political ascendency came as a result of popular protests against the then governing party, Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Until then, powerful political elites in the minority, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dominated EPRDF. TPLF, as a political force, governed Ethiopia with an iron fist for close to three decades (Vaughan, 2003).

Several factors precipitated the downfall of EPRDF, and its godfather the TPLF, as a major political force in Ethiopia. The death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the party's ideologue and uncompromising leader in 2012, left the party in a muddle. None of his peers could match Meles' determined political leadership and his ideological clarity that had remained unchallenged for decades. The endemic corruption of political elites and the control of the economic and political power by a few ethnic Tigrayans, left many Ethiopians increasingly frustrated.

Perhaps a major ideological factor that led to the confrontation of TPLF with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's administration is ethnic federalism. TPLF was the patron of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism, an ethnicized state structure that many observers have termed unsustainable. The system of ethnic federalism, while providing a level of self-governance to the constituent states, has become increasingly divisive with simmering hyper sectarian sentiments, threatening the foundation of the Ethiopian state. Prime Minister Abiy pointed to the unsustainable nature of this sectarian political structure in Ethiopia. He dismantled the governing party, the EPRDF, and replaced it with a new party, the Prosperity Party. Abiy is keen on taking Ethiopia out of this political system in favor of national unity. While his ideology of *Medemer* (synergy) appears to be a powerful galvanizing and unifying ideology, there are equally formidable forces opposed to his plan. The advent of new political forces such as the National Movement of the Amhara (NaMA) and some opposition from his Oromia base continue to create problems for Abiy's administration and his political vision to take Ethiopia out of identity politics.

The Fall of Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF)

The coming into power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018 marked a significant milestone in Ethiopia's political history. His ascendency into power was the result

A funeral procession during Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Addis Ababa on September 2, 2012 (Photo Credit: AFP)

of the relentless struggle of Ethiopians (the majority of them young people) for better political and economic governance, and a demand for respect for human rights. TPLF that had dominated the ethnic federal arrangement that formed the fundamental ideological basis of the governing party, the EPRDF, lost its ideological relevance and efficacy, leading to its ultimate demise. There are a number of factors that explain the fall of TPLF and the capitulation of its fierce and unchallenged political control in Ethiopia for close to three decades.

The first folly of the party was its deep authoritarian stance that became unsustainable in a country of more than 100 million where there are complex and diverse political, social, ethnic, and religious demands. Since the early days of its foundation in the 1970s, the TPLF had an ultra-leftist Leninist-Marxist ideological stance (Berhe, 2008). In fact, one could argue that the ethnic federal arrangement that became the core constitutional structure of the current Constitution of Ethiopia, is a by-product of this communist understanding of protecting ethnic minorities. It was a political experiment that was taken from the political experience in Stalin's Soviet Russia. The driving ideology of the party, revolutionary democracy, and later, the developmental state ideology was premised on authoritarian control of society that gave a deaf ear to democratic principles and respect for human rights (Bach, 2011).

The second factor was the fact that the economy was controlled by a small clique that became increasingly corrupt and dominated the entire economic landscape. TPLF represented a minority group of political elites that had difficulty reconciling with the ambition and expectations of millions of Ethiopians that were left out of the economic and political life in Ethiopia. While it is true that the structure of ethnic federalism had provided some measure of self-governance and the protection of minorities, the political, military, and economic power was controlled by a few members of the TPLF and their political allies. This began to create significant political challenges as a growing number of the people began to make serious political demands for socio-economic equality.

The third and most significant aspect, but which is often overlooked is the unsustainability of ethnic federal arrangement. Historically, the political forces in Ethiopia, most of whom trace their political struggle in the 1970s in some sense or another were ethnically mobilized. The downfall of the last Ethiopian monarchy in 1974 left the country in unchartered waters. The military coup by Mengistu Hailemariam that toppled Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 led a brutal 17 years of military dictatorship that massacred hundreds of thousands in what many considered "political genocide". The ethnic political movements that proliferated to overthrow the

Derg used ethnic mobilization as the sole basis for their ideological and political stances. These ethnic movements also considered the Amhara elite as their political enemy. Similarly, TPLF's political mobilization was driven by Tigrayan nationalism and a deep animosity to what they considered as Amhara-dominated political realities in Ethiopia. Although Tigray has historically been the epicenter of Ethiopian political power for centuries, these historical realities did not abet the deeply ethnic-oriented nature of the TPLF even after taking over political power in 1991 in Ethiopia. This created a growing resentment by many Ethiopians that considered themselves left out by its divisive and highly sectarian political orientation. It can be recalled that the TPLF manifesto itself explicitly stated that fighting Amhara domination was one of its objectives. These sentiments continued to sow seeds of discord, creating animosity among communities and fracturing national unity. It created a growing resentment and opposition against the TPLF-led government and its ultimate demise. The conflict in Tigray and TPLF's ultimate downfall was at its core its unwillingness to move Ethiopia out of the crumbling ethnic federal arrangement and its inability to adapt to the new ideological changes taking place in Ethiopia

The Rift between TPLF and Abiy Ahmed

The tactical alliance between Abiy's political constituency, the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), and the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) created a difficult political position for TPLF. The political calculation of the governing elites of TPLF has always been to antagonize both groups to ensure that they remain the power brokers that can mediate the political balance in Ethiopia. But there was also something more profound that made the inner circle of the TPLF worried about Abiy's political ambitions in Ethiopia. EPRDF was was struggling in terms of relevance and continuity, but lacked the political will to make any significant political reorientation. Although the party made some effort to make change under the rubric of "deep reform," it was only a face-saving political experiment that lacked any serious political commitment to address the deeper political problems in the country and make any meaningful ideological changes. Thus, the most significant aspect of the political rift between Abiy and TPLF became apparent because of their irreconcilable ideological differences.

The interim reign of the then Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn maintained the *status quo,* without making any serious political changes that the country desperately

needed at the time. Coming from a smaller political constituency and without any clear political ambition to project his own political vision, he was unable to make any meaningful political change in the country. His recent admission that TPLF and Abiy's administration are not morally equivalent is a vivid confession of his moral judgement on the perceived 'political decadence' of TPLF and its inability to adapt and make any meaningful political changes in the country (Hailemariam, 2020). Thus, the most problematic aspect of TPLF's stance was its inability to change. The party was unable to generate new ideological tools to mobilize society and to entrench democratic principles in the larger society.

An army veteran and an Ethiopian nationalist, Abiy Ahmed rose to the occasion and made significant political reforms and founded a new party – *The Prosperity Party*. The foundational reason for the formation of Prosperity Party was an attempt to reconcile the long-held ethnic sentiments with the desire for national unity of Ethiopia. In an opinion piece published by the *Project Syndicate*, Abiy Ahmed argues that his Party is the first entity to be established without any ethnic base (Ahmed, 2021). This demonstrates Abiy's attempt to address ethnic sentiments and consolidate Ethiopia national unity. The most dominant group in the TPLF inner circle wanted to continue with the ethnic federal arrangement that was becoming increasingly unsustainable. Before EPRDF endorsed Abiy Ahmed as the Chairman of the party, the debate leading to his election clearly showed that the TPLF leadership tried desperately to vote him out. However, with support from the ADP, Abiy rose to the helm of the party and became the Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 2018. The subsequent establishment of the Prosperity Party sent shockwaves within the TPLF leadership, which saw the foundation of the party more than anything as a threat to their ideology of ethnic federalism. When invited to be a member of the coalition of parties that formed the Prosperity Party, TPLF refused and began

> " The foundational reason for the formation of Prosperity Party was an attempt to reconcile the long-held ethnic sentiments with the desire for national unity of Ethiopia.

consolidating its power and military preparation in Tigray region.

Abiy saw the fault lines of the ethnic federal structure that needed to be mended. One of which was the lack of political balance between ethnic minority demands and the collective consciousness of Ethiopians that was built over centuries of anti-colonial struggle and patriotism. His idea of *Medemer*, while it sounds simplistic, is a powerful ideological tool that Ethiopia needs in order to consolidate and project its political future. This ideological stance focuses on nurturing cooperation rather than separation, diversity rather than division, national unity, and cooperation rather than exclusion. Despite the existing fault lines of the Ethiopian state, his unwavering commitment to Ethiopia's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the collective destiny of its constituent tribes and ethnic groups galvanized a huge support-base in the Ethiopian public.

TPLF's Narrative of Victimization: A Precursor to the Conflict

Tigray has been the historical and cultural center of Ethiopia for centuries. Since the ancient civilization of Axum that paralleled Roman and Greek civilizations, Tigray has served as the powerhouse of Ethiopian kingdoms. The historical city of Axum hosts the Church of Mary of Zion, the most significant religious site for the majority Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Similarly, the ancient mosque of *Al Nejashi*, one of the earliest mosques in Islamic history is also located in the city of Negash, in Tigray region. Despite the significant sectarian discourse that TPLF advocated for since the 1970s, the attempt by TPLF to demonstrate a history of victimization in order to galvanize its political support base in Tigray has been unsustainable. Throughout history, Tigrayans have also demonstrated a history of bravery in defending Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The successive military victory of Ras Alula (commonly known as Alula Aba Nega), one of the most adored historical heroes in Ethiopia was from *Hawzen*

region, the home of a strong Pan-Ethiopian nationalist base in Tigray.

Thus, in many respects, narratives of victimization that the TPLF sought to nurture in order to galvanize the political support base in Tigray became contradictory to Tigray's own political history. Moreover, the first *Woyane* rebellion that began in the 1940s, and which is considered as a precursor to the emergence of TPLF, had significant roots of class struggle. The roots of the rebellion in Tigray at the time were against the feudal system of Haile Selassie and the demand for land ownership by peasantry at the time. Contrary to this, TPLF's political struggle increasingly became sectarian by nurturing Tigrayan nationalism and rejecting what they perceived as an Amhara-dominated politics in Ethiopia. Even after taking power in 1991, the fundamental design and structure of the political order in Ethiopia was articulated along ethnic lines. While tentative attempts were made to nurture national unity, it lacked any real political commitment. What ensued from the ethnic federal constitutional arrangement was the increased polarization and simmering ethnic tensions that have become no longer sustainable.

But still, TPLF insisted on victimization in the wake of the appointment of Abiy Ahmed by the EPRDF Executive Council in 2018. Knowing that Abiy was set to make significant political changes in the country and possibly even prosecute some of the members of the TPLF for grave crimes of corruption and gross violations of human rights, the TPLF leadership retreated to Mekelle, the capital of Tigray Regional State. Indeed, some of the key political figures of TPLF, including the intelligence chief Getachew Assefa and senior military officials were charged with these crimes. Given the fact that most of the leadership of TPLF had been adversely implicated in corruption and human rights abuse in the country, the prosecutions of some of these individuals were inevitable. But admittedly many also argue that other members of EPRDF including Abiy's former Oromo base, ODP, were equally responsible for the corruption and human rights abuse. Thus, most argue that Abiy

The subsequent establishment of the Prosperity Party sent shockwaves within the TPLF leadership, which saw the foundation of the party more than anything as a threat to their ideology of ethnic federalism

People walk next to an abandoned tank belonging to Tigrayan forces in Mehon on December 11, 2020 (Photo Credit: AFP)

could have had a better political strategy. Instead of antagonizing all of TPLF's inner circle, he could have been more strategic in handling those who were initially inclined to support his reform agenda. This also reflects the difficulty of managing political change in states like Ethiopia which are in political transition. Unless there is slow and careful management of the political forces in a country, it always creates further complications and it can endanger democratic political changes in states with the fragile political climate. Because of this, TPLF used incessant propaganda to demonstrate that ethnic Tigrayans have been singled out and targeted by Prime Minister Abiy's administration. This helped them regain their political legitimacy in Tigray, which was initially significantly compromised.

Abiy's Political Predicaments

After the TPLF retreated to Tigray, it continued to mobilize militarily and in the process, creating a significant political obstacle for Abiy. While it is hard to verify, many believe that the complex and carefully planned political sabotage against his rule were supported by TPLF. In the course of the three-year period since Abiy came into power, Ethiopia witnessed internal displacements reaching a shocking figure of three million. The ethnic divisions that were nurtured through the divisive ethnic federal system facilitated ethnic-based attacks in many regions in the country, but mostly Oromia and Benishangul regions. TPLF also increased its vigilance of opposition to Abiy's rule by rejecting the postponement of the national election in January 2020. Even if the election was postponed in a constitutional process, because of the COVID-19 situation, the TPLF made it clear that they will not recognize his administration. They conducted a regional election on September 9, 2020, in Tigray in which TPLF won almost 100 per cent of the seats of the regional council. This escalation went a notch higher when they refused to cooperate in surrendering individuals in which Ethiopia's Attorney General issued an arrest warrant. Moreover, when a senior military commander, General Belay Seyoum was appointed as the Deputy Head of the Northern Command, which is the most significant Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, TPLF rejected his appointment by embarrassingly returning the General back to Addis Ababa.

Finally, the TPLF planned a military takeover of power by attacking the northern base and preparing for an all-out war with the federal government. It is difficult to contemplate the factors that may have triggered what many consider a desperate military action.

Some observers argued that given the fact that the northern base is the most fortified base with the most sophisticated military arsenal, they could easily control it and use that as leverage to negotiate with the federal government. Others argue that they had a genuine belief, and perhaps in gross miscalculation, that they could control the entire country militarily. This miscalculation resulted in a quick military defeat for TPLF. Federal forces were able to capture the capital, Mekelle, within three weeks of the military confrontation. Most senior officials of TPLF are currently apprehended except a few who are still at large.

But Abiy's political predicament in Tigray's crisis remains one of his biggest political challenges. It was clear from the outset that the TPLF was mobilizing Tigrayan youth for a military confrontation. The question many in Abiy's administration grappled with is how to manage and neutralize a political adversary such as TPLF without antagonizing the larger Tigrayan public which has the same developmental and democratic ambitions as the rest of the Ethiopians. On that measure, many argue that if Abiy had acted much earlier and sought support from

some members of the inner circle of TPLF, it could have provided the platform to mitigate the political fallout. This lack of decisiveness in neutralizing and controlling the party structure of TPLF, ultimately dragged Abiy into the conflict in Tigray. The resulting humanitarian crisis in Tigray and the ensuing international pressure continue to pose diplomatic challenges with the West.

Another major political problem of Abiy Ahmed's administration emanates from his Oromia base. While he still maintains significant support, his fallout with Jawar Mohamed, an activist who became a pain in his administration, continues to create problems for his administration. Jawar's fiery rhetoric became an obstacle to his reconciliation with Abiy and the latter's attempt to deescalate tensions in Ethiopia and mend divisions in Ethiopia. Because of this, there is some element of grievance from those that support Jawar's militant stance in Ethiopian politics. It remains to be seen how Abiy manages the political elites in Oromia in nurturing Ethiopia's political future (Morris Kiruga, 2020).

The third and most significant aspect of Prime Minister Abiy's political predicament is the rising ethnic

PM Abiy Ahmed looks on at the House of Peoples Representatives in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on November 30, 2020 (Photo Credit: Amanuel Sileshl/AFP via Getty Images)

> Some observers argued that given the fact that the northern base is the most fortified bases with the most sophisticated military arsenal, they could easily control it and use that as leverage to negotiate with the federal government

sentiments in Amhara region spearheaded by NaMA (the National Movement for the Amhara). This new political force has attracted attention among a growing number of Amharas who feel outraged by the incessant ethnic-based killings of Amharas in many regions of the country. They also argue that the current ethnic federal arrangement by its nature is anti-Amhara and that there should be a fundamental constitutional restructuring. The increasing Amhara nationalist sentiments have shocked the Ethiopian political landscape. This unprecedented ethnic Amhara mobilization came as a response to a relentless attack against the Amhara in the recent history of Ethiopia. Ethnically targeted killings in Oromia and Benishangul regions gave additional ideological impetus to the formation of NaMA. This further complicates the path towards national unity and the creation of a cooperative federal arrangement in Ethiopia. It should be recalled that the coming to power of Abiy Ahmed was made possible by the tactical alliance of Amhara and Oromo elites. But the deep divisions that ethnic mobilization naturally brings to unfold are testing the administration of Abiy Ahmed, as he tries to reconcile Amhara and Oromia political forces.

Externally, Abiy also faces regional security challenges with Sudan and Egypt the Nile conflict. The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and the potential impact that this may have in the water flow of the Nile has created a diplomatic rift between the three countries. Despite Ethiopia's assurance that the GERD will not create any significant harm for the two downstream countries, the disagreement and the potential for conflict continue to pose major foreign policy challenges for Prime Minister Abiy's administration. The recent military incursion of Sudanese forces into the Al-Fashka area of Ethiopia's territory makes the security situation between Ethiopia and Sudan very delicate. Ethiopia has accused Sudan of serving a "third party interest," referring to

Egypt's keen interest and influence over Sudan. Moreover, the involvement of the US during Trump's administration in the negotiation process complicated any plausible settlement on the GERD dispute. Biden's foreign policy acumen and his more conservative and more nuanced approach and understanding of foreign policy could help to reinvigorate the impetus for a peaceful settlement to the GERD dispute.

Despite these political predicaments, however, the current administration has an opportunity to draft and steer a more progressive political reform agenda. Indeed, following the death of Meles Zenawi, there was no political leader that could articulate TPLF's wider ideological relevance and maintain the party discipline that it had long-established. While Meles was an autocrat, he was also an astute politician that effectively managed the different political interests in the country. His death left a huge political vacuum that could not be replicated by any of his peers.

Prospects for Political Stability

Abiy Ahmed's government is attempting a new constitutional dispensation by taking Ethiopia out of 'toxic' ethnic federalism. Many observers note that the 30 years of ethnic federal experiment has sowed ethnic divisions, derailed Ethiopia's democratic and developmental ambitions by inflaming mistrust and conflict among communities, and depriving Ethiopians any sense of collective consciousness. Ethiopia's remarkable history of independence from colonialism and its long-standing religious tolerance makes it one of the few civilizations that were able to nurture their unique socio-economic and political systems for centuries (Huntington, 1993). This remarkable history of resilience to colonialism and foreign domination has been the hallmark of Ethiopia's political identity. The country's recent marking of the Victory of Adwa on March 4 in which Ethiopia defeated an invading colonial army in 1886, it is another reminder that despite its recent setbacks and simmering ethnic divisions in the country, Ethiopians have always risen to the occasion when it mattered and fixed their problems, reassuring their common destiny and national unity.

With the national election scheduled for June 2021, there are still significant socio-political problems the country needs to address. There are also many who are skeptical about Abiy's political determination in moving Ethiopia out of its identity politics. However questionable his political position on this issue, Ethiopia's political path cannot be nurtured by the politics of division, hatred,

and animosity. From a political science perspective, organizing a political society on ethnicity will ultimately lead to bleak political outcomes with a possibility of state collapse (Sen, 2007). Interestingly, Ethiopia may be the only country in the world where ethnicity has been endorsed as the key political organizing principle of any constitutional democracy. Identity politics seriously undermines reasoned discourse and the ability of states to address deeper socioeconomic and political problems.

It should also not be lost that as much as identity can be used to divide and ignite animosity and violence, it can also be used to nurture national unity, common understanding, and a path to democratic citizenship. As the renowned political theorist Francis Fukuyama notes "identity can be used to divide, but it can and has also been used to integrate. That, in the end, will be the remedy for the populist politics of the present" (Fukuyama, 2018). Ethiopia's identity-based ethnic politics has been used to sow division and animosity instead of nurturing common understanding and forging national unity. It has deprived Ethiopians of their ability to nurture the collective

> It should also not be lost that as much as identity can be used to divide and ignite animosity and violence, it can also be used to nurture national unity, common understanding, and a path to democratic citizenship

consciousness they developed for centuries. It is high time to find the right path to nurture common understanding, tolerance, diversity, national unity, and reconciliation in projecting Ethiopia's political future. That in the end is what Ethiopia's political trajectory requires to ensure sustainable peace, development, and national unity. Like any political society, Ethiopia's political prospects rest in its ability to nurture democratic political dispensation, strengthen its democratic institutions, entrench the rule of law and sustain its economic development.

References

Ahmed, A. (2021). Towards a peaceful order in the Horn of Africa,. *Project Syndicate*.

Bach, J. (2011). Abyotawi Democracy: Neither Revolutionary nor Democratic, a Critical Review of EPRDF's Conception of Revolutionary Democracy in Post-1991 Ethiopia *Journal of Eastern African Studies*.

Berhe, A. (2008). A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991): Revolt, Ideology and Mobilization.

Desalegn, H. (2020). Ethiopia's Government and the TPLF Leadership are not Morally Equivalent. *Foreign Policy*.

Fukuyama, F. (2018). *Identity: The demand for dignity and the politics of resentment.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Huntington, S.P. (1993). The Clash of Civilizations? *Foreign Affairs*.

Kiruga, M. (2020). The Four Great Political Challenges of Abiy Ahmed. *The African Report*.

Sen, A. (2007). *Identity and violence: The illusion of destiny*. Penguin Books India.

Vaughan, S. (2003). *Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia*.

Vaughan, S. (2011). Revolutionary Democratic State Building: Party, State and people in the EPRDF's Ethiopia., *Journal of Eastern African Studies*.

About the Authors

Aleksi Ylönen, Ph.D.

Dr Aleksi Ylönen is a Research Fellow at the Centre for International Studies, University Institute of Lisbon, and a member of the African Studies Group of the Autonomous University of Madrid. He holds a doctorate degree in International Relations and African Studies from the Autonomous University of Madrid, a Master of Arts in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies from the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace, Jaume I University, and a Bachelor of Arts in History from the College of Charleston. Dr Ylönen's main research areas include peace, conflict and development issues in relation to states, politics and international relations in the greater Horn of Africa. His work has appeared as scholarly articles, books, and chapters in edited volumes as well as in newspapers, other media outlets, magazines and online.

He can be reached at aleksi.ylonen@gmail.com

Pallavi Chatterjee

Pallavi Chatterjee has a Master of Arts in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India and she is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Human Rights at the University of Vienna. Her academic background also includes a foundation of psychology and social work, and her professional commitments and research interests center around intersectional approaches to gender-based violence, human rights education, and the importance of economic, social and cultural rights in inspiring collective action. She is presently a research consultant at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Fundamental and Human Rights in Vienna, Austria, as well as a member of Women in Development Europe (WIDE). She has also written extensively on topics such as disability rights and the deprivation of liberty, regional geopolitics, conflict and peace, indigenous and environmental rights, and the prohibition of torture. At present, she is working on her thesis on human rights-based approaches to development and the litigation efforts of self-employed women's movements within her native India.

She can be reached at pallavichatterjee92@gmail.com

Abdullahi Abdille Shahow

Abdille is a researcher with over seven years' experience on security, governance, democracy, and development issues in the Horn of Africa, especially Kenya and Somalia. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, United States International University (USIU-Africa) (Kenya). From 2014 to 2019, he served as a Horn of Africa researcher for the International Crisis Group (ICG,) Nairobi office, where he wrote policy-geared reports on the political and security issues affecting the region, including the al Shabab threat in East Africa. His work has been published by International Crisis Group, African Arguments, Think Africa Press, and World Politics Review. His areas of interest include security, governance, democracy and development.

He can be reached at aabdille2005@gmail.com

Mesenbet Assefa Tadeg, Ph.D.

Mesenbet is an Assistant Professor of Law at Addis Ababa University School of Law (Ethiopia). He holds a Doctor of Philosophy from National University of Ireland, Galway (United Kingdom); a Master of Laws (LL.M.) in Human Rights and Democratization in Africa from University of Pretoria (South Africa); and a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B, with Distinction) from Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar (Ethiopia). He has experience working with governmental and non-governmental organizations including the United Nations, the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD)-ICEPCVE, and many other organizations. He is a member of the National Legal Reform Council of Ethiopia. His principal areas of expertise include human rights, security (CVE), international law, freedom of expression and media, development, democracy, and governance issues as well as a broader grasp of national and international legal and political issues.

He can be reached at tsehay2000@gmail.com

Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

We are excited to release our eigteenth bi-monthly issue of *The HORN Bulletin* (Vol. IV, Iss. II, 2020). We bring to you well-researched articles and analysis of topical issues and developments affecting the Horn of Africa. We welcome contributions from readers who wish to have their articles included in the HORN Bulletin. At HORN, we believe ideas are the currency of progress. Feel free to contact the Editor-in-Chief for more details at communications@horninstitute.org.

Hassan Khannenje, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief, The HORN Bulletin

Editorial Team

Editor-in-Chief: Hassan Khannenje, Ph.D. | **Managing Editor:** Daniel Iberi | **Member:** Fauzia Hussein
Senior Editor: Roselyne Omondi | **Designer:** Evans Ombisa
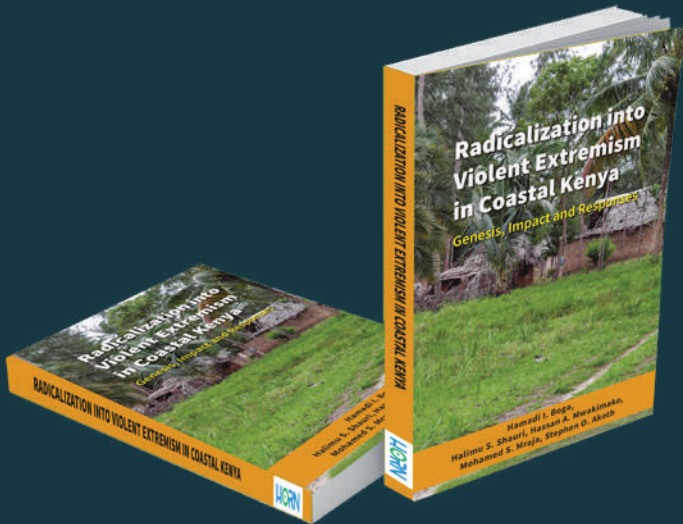
Note:
The views expressed in this Bulletin are those of the authors and they do not necessarily reflect the position of the HORN Institute.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Radicalization into Violent Extremism in Coastal Kenya:
Genesis, Impact and Responses

TAKING STOCK OF DEVOLUTION IN KENYA
From the 2010 Constitution, Through Two Election Cycles, to the BBI Process

Terrorism and violent extremism in Kenya, mainly from al Shabab, have affected millions, sparing no facet of human endeavor. Thousands have lost their lives while others have been injured and or displaced. Livelihoods have been destroyed and security concerns increased significantly, causing instability and immense suffering. In April, 2021, The HORN Institute will launch a book titled *Radicalization into Violent Extremism in Coastal Kenya: Genesis, Impact and Responses,* co-authored by Boga, Hamadi Iddi, Ph.D.; Shauri, Halimu Suleiman, Ph.D.; Mwakimako, Hassan Abdulrahman, Ph.D.; Mraja, Mohamed Suleiman, Ph.D.; and Ouma, Stephen Akoth, Ph.D.
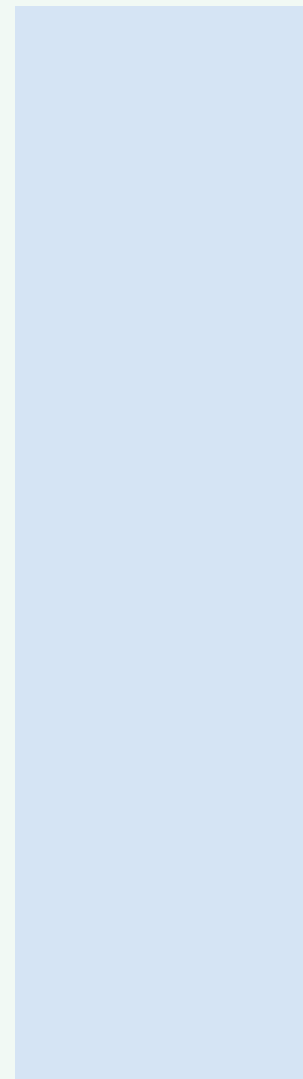
In this publication, the authors explore the dynamics of terrorism in Kenya with a specific focus on the coastal region of Kenya. They seek to answer key questions including the cause of violent extremism on the Kenyan coast and the motivations behind the increasing number of killings in Kwale County. *Radicalization into Violent Extremism in Coastal Kenya: Genesis, Impact and Responses* also seek to provide solutions to the perpetual cycle of violence through the prism of returnees; a review of Kenya's amnesty program; radicalization of female victims; and collaboration between the county and national government in tackling violent extremism.
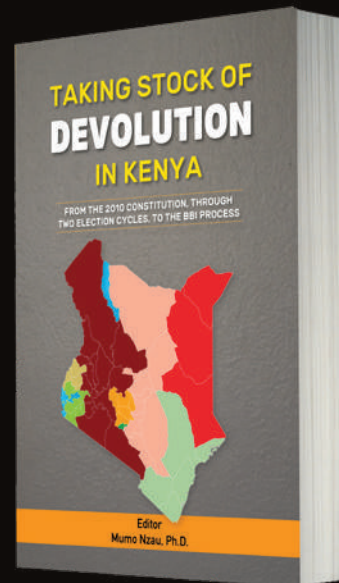
In April 2020, the HORN Institute will launch its second book in 2021 titled *Taking Stock of Devolution in Kenya: From the 2010 Constitution, Through Two Election Cycles, to the BBI Process.* This book volume takes stock of devolution in Kenya with specific reference to theoretical, legal, constitutional and policy, leadership, governance, and development debates as well as experiences in the 47 counties. Its scope falls within the 2010 Constitution, through two election cycles in 2013 and again in 2017, up to the transformative change proposals presented by the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) and the ramifications that all these issues, events and processes portend for the future of devolved governance in Kenya.

HORN

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES