

Ethiopia and Eritrea: National Security, militarization and normalization predicaments

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Abstract

Since May 1998, Ethiopia and Eritrea relation has been resulted in a structural national security crisis defined by two years' war, two decades of 'no war, no peace' stalemate and 'fragile normalization' since June 2018. Their security predicaments are basically results of antagonistic nation building, foreign and national security policies. The nation-building project to forge the 'Sawa based militarized single national identity' in Eritrea and the 'federalization' of the age-old unitary Ethiopian state further deepen and widen the national security dilemma of both states. The national security and militarization predicament between the two states are, therefore, the result of militarized 'social reengineering' and national security in Eritrea where Ethiopia has been made to be an 'existential threat to its Singaporization vision'. And hence, Eritrea, following its military defeat in the 1998-2000 war, opted into subversive and proxy war strategies via hosting and training Ethiopian armed insurgencies and supporting opposition parties inside Ethiopia with an ultimate goal of ousting the TPLF-EPRDF dominated government. Isaias's strategy become successful in replacing the TPLF dominated EPRDF by Oromo dominated EPRDF, aka. 'Oromara-EPRDF', when Abiy Ahmed became chairman of EPRDF and subsequently prime minister of Ethiopia. President Isaias described the 'successes of his 20 years insurgency strategy of neutralizing TPLF-EPRDF and the epoch of normalization as "game over"'. Conversely, from 2001 to March 2018 Eritrea has been branded as an "existential enemy to Ethiopia's renaissance vision and securitization of poverty". As a result, the late Prime Minister Melese Zenawi followed a policy of "deter, isolate and defeat" against Eritrea which was successful in deterring and isolating Isaias' international engagements via the UNSC sanctions but failed to oust him. Since July 2018, President Isaias and Abiy Ahmed officially declared the "end of 20 years' war" and beginning of new epoch of normalization, open border and regional integration. However, after six months of 'honeymoon' normalization, the borders of Ethiopia and Eritrea unilaterally closed by Eritrea and the prospects for reconciliation and regional security become 'fragile and elusive'. Finally, a vicious dilemma of national security, militarization and normalization gaining turn out to be a governing regime. This article, therefore, analyzes the post-2000 national security, militarization and normalization dilemma between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Keywords: national security predicament, militarization, normalization, Ethiopia, Eritrea

Theoretical discussion

The discussions over the meaning and referent object for security is not new. Security has been considered as the most valuable and ever existing reality in the history of human beings. However, it remains as an ambiguous and contentious term that defies a universal definition. Because it is possible to apply the term to a range of ideas that operate at many levels of analysis and difficult to properly locate its compatible boundary. It is also because of the changing natures and types of threats to security and responsible actors to promote it.

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Traditionally, security has been exclusively defined as state's security. State security was simply conceptualized as the ability of the state to survive and promote its national interest in the anarchic international system (Wing 2000). Furthermore, state security and national security was interchangeably used and conceptualized narrowly as the physical survival (its territory and population) of a state. State's national interest was also conceptualized as power politics specifically defined by military buildup and capabilities (Ibid; Rourke 1993). Moreover, the threats to national security were viewed to be exclusively from external to the state sovereignty and are militaristic in their nature. Hence, war never to be fought in the home soil. Therefore states were considered as unitary and ultimate units of analysis (Ibid).

The traditional state centric approaches remained as the dominant paradigm up until to the end of the cold war. Following the end of the cold war, however, the traditional narrow state centric approaches faced serious challenges due to the emergency of alternative voices (critical schools) within the security studies calling for widening and deepening of the subject (Hough 2004).

By widening, the critical schools argued for the horizontal inclusion of non-military threats and threats emerging from within the sovereign jurisdiction of the state in addition to military threats and threats originate from outside. The deepening schools, on the other hand, called for vertical reconfiguration of referents for security, i.e. transforming referent objects for security from state to non-state actors, mainly individuals (human security), and hence states to be among equals because states are not only referent and providers of security but also could be sources of insecurity.

At the center of their argument, the critical schools argued for a separate treatment of state and national security which were previously used as one and the same. Accordingly, national security is not only consist of the physical (territory and population) and institution of state as its defining components but more critically and essentially is about the very "idea of the state" (defined by a nation and its organizing ideology) that the traditional schools leap over in their analysis of national as well as state security (Buzan 1991). Hence, they contended that national security should be analyzed as "an agreed consensus among citizens" on the ideas and aspirations of the statehood (Ibid).

National security has been used as a cover-up to state and regime security which in turn weakly served the core idea of national security; i.e., "the idea of the state" (Buzan 1991, 165) defined by the nation it consists of and its organizing ideology. National security is thus a protracted and arduous idea to the nation-builders, policy makers and citizens at large. One of the major reasons of national security predicaments is the failure to cultivate and build consensus among citizens on the idea of "nation hood" and "statehood" because nation builders reduced the idea of national security simply to protection of a territory and its regime.

According to Barry Buzan (1991), national security is basically about building an integrative and inclusive agreement on the idea of the state by those who claim as

nation-builders and citizens of the state through realistically establishing an “imagined community”. The idea of the state is thus a pillar to national security supported by defensive physical base and established institutions of the state. Most states in post-colonial Africa, however, are multi-ethnic nations as opposed to the traditional conception of nation-state. Unfortunately, the post-colonial nation-builders tend to ideally frame their strategies of achieving the nation-state system without taking into account the objective realities of multi-ethnicities and trans-border ties with their neighboring states. Therefore, national security of such states has been directly related with nation building and state building.

Since the African states are creations of colonialism, they evolved to be inorganic and incompatibly transplanted over pre-colonial primordial identities. The post-independent nation-builders therefore inherited the protracted and conflictual nation-building process (Meressa 2012-13). The decolonized states thus emerged as “part-nation-states” (Buzan 1991, 74) sharing the same ethnic groups with their neighbors, and such ethnic groups remain marginalized minorities which later paved a fertile ground for secessionist-irredentist movements to challenge the nation building process and poses actual and potential national security threats.

The problem with “part-nation state” is that the same ethnic groups are living on the other side of the border and made them to be minorities in both states. The nation-builders have been thus designated strategies of reintegrating ethnic groups living on the other side of border as mobilizing instrument and eventual formation of “relevant enemy” of the national security. Such a strategy is inherently conflictual and basically based on the traditional nationally security conceptions; threats are external (siege mentality) in their origin, militaristic in their nature, and national security depends on labelling neighboring states as “existential threat”. Therefore, national security becomes vulnerable to the proliferations of secession- irredentist threats that weaken the very idea of national security.

The failure to build strong idea of nation-state and national security of the African states is further complicated by their late entrance to nation-state system and early stage of nation-building process that has been resulted in fragile legitimacy and national capability (Ayoob 2005). Besides the simultaneous and contingent nature of nation-building process also served the nation-builders to externalize their national security threats as well as engaging in mutually interventionist foreign policy.

Therefore, the national security challenges that new states facing are, on one hand, the results of externalizing and overemphasizing on externally incoming threats and hence securitization and militarization of the nation-building process internally (Bundegaard,2004). On the other hand, failure to cultivate, strengthen and build an integrative consensus of citizens on the idea of the state.

Militarism and militarization that had traditionally been interchangeably used, on the other hand, were associated with aggressive foreign policy and backed up by an unwarranted and threatening military buildup, given the capacity to exercise the use of force in resolving conflicts between states. The critical proponents of militarization were realist schools that argued for building military power under the principle of “realpolitik.” The principle of realpolitik further holds that countries should practice balance of power politics to ensure their national security through “either building up your own strength, allying

yourself with others or dividing your opponents” (Rourke 1993). Hence, militarization should aim at “increasing power, keeping power, or demonstrating power.” (Rourke 1993, 140)

According to Michael Klare (1978), militarization was a tendency of a nation’s military apparatus (which includes the armed force, intelligence, and the bureaucratic agencies) to assume ever-increasing control over the lives and behaviors of citizens, for military goals (preparation for war, acquisition of weaponry, and the development of military industries), and military values (centralization of authority, discipline and conformity, combativeness and xenophobia). Furthermore, militarization is a process of change in the state and in the relationship between state and society. It is also about the process of politico-military and economic development dynamics of building a modern nation-state. Richard Tanter (1984) identified five dimensions of militarization including expanded military force structure; military predominance in politics; a preference for a coercive solution to political problems; cultural support for organized state violence; and a degree of offensively-oriented external military alignment, alliance, or war-fighting capacity.

Methodologically, this article analyzed the securitization and militarization dynamics of the post-1998 Ethiopia and Eritrea qualitatively and the resultant ‘no war, no peace’ stalemate regime. Finally, the paper has the following specific objectives; i.e., to critically examine the history of militarization and securitization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea; to analyze the post-war legal (the Algiers Agreement and the Hague border verdict) and diplomatic (UNSC sanctions against Eritrea) battles; the ‘no war, no peace’ regime, and indefinite regional security dilemma which all “blurred” the prospect for normalization (even after the June 2018 rapprochement between president Isaias of Eritrea and prime minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia) and aggravate the proliferation of fragile states in the Horn of Africa as a result.

The Pre-1998 Trajectories of the national security dilemma between Ethiopia and Eritrea

There is no common agreement, as to the causes of the hostile relation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, though their relationship following independence, it was hoped that they would contribute to the stabilization of the conflict-prone region of the Horn and the leaders of the two countries were viewed as a “new breed of African statesmen” (Gebru 2009, 344). According to Gebru (2006, 53), the border issue was not the pivotal cause of the conflict, but the real causes have been related to the nation-building aspirations and the nature of the states. He added that the conflict was “contention between a new state too zealous to solidify its statehood and an older one too jealous to protect its sovereignty.” For Berhane (2006, 31), the conflict with Ethiopia was part of “Eritrea’s war for national unity” through conducting wars and severing the ethnic ties with all its neighbors with the ultimate goal of reengineering a new Eritrean national identity, because all ethnic groups of Eritrea have trans-border ties.

A Securitized Development: Economic Viability of Eritrea and Ethiopia’s Factor

According to Gebru Asrat (2006, 58), the former president of Tigray, the

economic issues that had led to a confrontation between the two countries began to surface immediately after the end of the Eritrean liberation war. Following the referendum, the Eritrean leadership declared the development vision to make Eritrea “self-sufficient” and the “industrial powerhouse of the Horn”, and ultimately to replicate Singapore in the region by the year of 2015 – ‘Singaporization’ (Solomon 1998, 15). The actualization of this economic vision assumed “a large and untapped Ethiopian market, and cheap migrant labor from Ethiopian hinterland for Eritrean industrialization.” (Gebru 2006: 58) In 1991, the two countries agreed to use a “common currency until Eritrea issued its own currency, Assab and Massawa would be free ports for Ethiopia, and Ethiopia in return would run and maintain the Assab oil refinery.” (Tekeste and Tronvoll 2000, 35) And, in September 1993, both countries signed the “Asmara Pact” (Gebru 2006, 58) that covered all fields of cooperation including a defense pact. In line with the stated agreement, Eritrea demanded that trade and investment should be open to resident and non-resident nationals of both countries without restriction and on equal treatment (Gebru, 2006: 58). At the heart of the grand vision was that the Eritrean intellectuals and policymakers envisaged that Eritrea would remain the heartland of the Horn with its skilled human resources and the overvalued ports which were basically considered strong bargaining instruments against Ethiopia (Tekeste 1997). The politics of Eritrean ports as part of the nation-building narratives remained part of the mainstream of the Ethiopia-Eritrea relations and became over-politicized mainly during the Dergue regime, for which “losing Eritrea would mean cutting Ethiopia’s neck” (Tekeste 1997, 174). This indeed remains as part of the post-independence Eritrean national narrative failing to take into account alternative ports that could be accessible to Ethiopia, mainly the Port of Djibouti (Tekeste 1997).

The stated vision of Eritrea began to be frustrating when Ethiopia started to tighten its economic policies and to regulate the participation of resident and non-resident nationals from Eritrea, particularly in the sphere of banking, insurance, electricity, and power supply. Such new policies created resentment on the Eritrean part as it contradicted with their long-term strategy of making Eritrea an “African Singapore” (Gebru 2006; Solomon 1998). The Eritrean government began to show frustration as such policies were aimed at ousting Eritrea out of the Ethiopian economy and declared the new Ethiopian move a “protectionist policy” (Tekeste and Tronvoll 2000, 44). Eritrea then called for the revision of the 1993 protocol to rectify the impasse and presented four demands: “free trade to ensure smooth transfer of Ethiopian products which could be re-exported, free movement of people, investment rights to Eritreans in Ethiopia on equal terms, and lastly make Nakfa a legal currency in Ethiopia on one-to one exchange with Birr.” (Gebru and Awa’alom 2005, 14-15) The deteriorated relation between the two states reached its climax when Eritrea launched Nakfa¹-as the national currency of Eritrea in November 1997. The introduction of Nakfa was believed to be the immediate cause of the war. Eritrea demanded the exchange rate between Nakfa and birr to be one-to-one and the two currencies would be freely serviceable in both countries (Gebru and Awa’alom 2005). Ethiopia rejected Eritrea’s claim for equal status between the birr and the Nakfa and it argued that “Nakfa did not have established a base within Eritrea and international trading system (Tekeste and Tronvoll 2000, 35). Ethiopia also changed the old notes to the new currency in order to prevent the uncontrolled flow of old birr from Eritrea and also instituted cross-border trade control. Hence, all these changes created anxiety in Eritrea as they had brought an

unexpected problem to their economy, and Eritrea criticized the Ethiopian policy as nothing but the “declaration of economic war” (Tekeste and Tronvoll 2000, 37).

Bereket Haileslassie (2006) argued that the economic problem was a cover-up to the Ethiopian resentment of the “loss” of Eritrea. He further argued that the problem was basically related to the bureaucratic and technocratic monopolization of the Amhara; “the Amhara monopolized most of the key positions, including the sensitive posts in finance and banking, at the key sub-ministerial, technocratic level. Eritrean negotiators on the currency harmonization policy discussion complained that there was stiff resistance by these technocrats to the requests by the Eritreans to have a fair share in the currency” (Bereket 2006, 26). Furthermore, Bereket contended that the problem with the currency was also related to the naming of the Eritrean currency after the Eritrean town, Nakfa that was a symbol of the armed resistance and triumph (Bereket 2006, 27). Ethiopians, as the result, were determined to take revenge for their military defeat at Nakfa through economic warfare, and the Eritreans, too, considered Nakfa a symbol of achievement in economic development in particular and nation-building in general, which in turn resulted in “the Nakfa syndrome” (Gebru 2009, 345).

Securitized and militarized nation-building projects

There is a common understanding that the basic sources of the conflict between the two states were related to “nation-building and governance structures” (Gebru 2006, 58) adopted by the victorious nationalists in both countries, but inflamed by the evolving economic, currency, and border disagreements. According to Gebru (2006), the border dispute was a cover-up and the culmination of the deteriorated relationship between the two states. The border issue was only raised when agreements, mainly on economic issues, failed. As a result, the government of Eritrea pushed the issue of the border “to question the genuineness of Ethiopia’s recognition of Eritrea as an independent state as long as the border remained un-demarcated”. Therefore, Gebru concluded that “the nature of the states and the historical process that created the Ethiopian and Eritrean states became important causes of the interstate conflicts” (Gebru 2006, 57-59).

Following the downfall of the Dergue regime, the victorious nationalists were preoccupied with state-making and nation-building in Eritrea and state restructuring in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, the EPRDF introduced an ethno-linguistic federal structure with the 1995 constitution that granted nations and nationalities the right to self-determination including the secession to address the historical question of nationality as stated in article 39. Eritrea, on the other hand, introduced a “unitary and centralized political system where ethnic or sub-regional identities have no place in the political space.” (The Constitution of Eritrea 1997) It was committed to neutralizing ethnicity, like in the case of post-colonial African states, in line with the principle of “one people, one heart” focusing on civic identity (Meressa 2013), though it is a state of nine ethnic groups with two major contending religions (Islam and Christianity). Eritrea, therefore, opposed the Ethiopian ethnic federal system as it feared the possible spillover effects of ethnicity and the right to self – a determination that could ultimately negatively affect the Eritrean nation-building (Henze 2001).

Nation-building in Eritrea was the continuation of war-induced mobilized nationalism as Eritrea has been a “war born state” (Bundegaard 2004). The post-war civic national identity formation was rooted in “the invincibility of the Eritrean fighters and the great achievements of the EPLF during the armed struggle.” (Bundegaard 2004) The young and small state of Eritrea thus hoped to construct a single national identity that stands on the war-induced “homogeneity, unity and determination” (Gebru 2006, 58) that negated the existential differences of Eritreans. However, there are also contending arguments that the 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia was the latest manifestation of the strained and unholy relationship between the EPLF and the TPLF during their armed struggle (Ghidey 1999). The relationship between the two parties was not based on “mutually balanced and reciprocal basis” but rather on a “senior-junior partnership” dominated by the EPLF’s “superior, paternal and arrogant” attitude towards the TPLF (Ghidey 1999, 3). The parties also had major differences on the issues of military strategies, the nature of the Soviet Union, the question of nationalities, and united fronts. With regard to the question of nationalities, the TPLF had an opposite stance to the EPLF in recognizing the rights of nations and nationalities to self-determination and secession; however, the EPLF rejected them as disastrous sub-national entities. (Young 1997) On the issues of military strategies, the TPLF also criticized the EPLF’s professional, trench-based, and Sahel-confined strategy. Instead, the TPLF proposed a mobile peasant-based military strategy for both human and material sources (Gebru 2005; Ghidey 1999). The EPLF however opposed the TPLF military strategy on the ground that the latter actor was a junior partner in all issues including military doctrine and experience, and stated the TPLF stance as “an effort to present itself as experienced and knowledgeable, [...] in giving the EPLF a lecture as regards to military operation strategies” (Eritrean Ministry of Information 2010).

Finally, given all the above differences between the two parties, the TPLF declared that “the relationship with EPLF could be ‘tactical’ – based on nothing more than a shared commitment to eliminate their common enemy: the Dergue.” (Ghidey 1999) But strategically, the TPLF concluded that the EPLF was “a strategic enemy - an enemy that would ultimately prove to be deadly but which one cooperate[s] for a time being” (Gebru 2005, 14-15). Therefore, post-war securitization and militarization were strongly framed and conditioned by the past relations of the two parties.

A securitized and militarized border: Badme as a “casus belli”

On May 12, 1998, Eritrea invaded Badme; the “casus belli” of the war. Many agreed, including the leaders of the two states, on an issue that the border was not the real cause of the war rather the culmination of the deteriorated relations between the two states. The war, however, was fought for the reason that Gebru (2009, 344) put as “the contention between a new state too zealous to solidify its statehood and an older one too jealous to protect its sovereignty.” The war also signified that the climax of Eritrea’s aspiration to fully claim its military invincibility in the Horn of Africa through “standstill” (President Isaias, quoted in Bundegaard 2004, 49) Ethiopia’s regional hegemonic stance and redefining the regional power structure. Clapham (2000,16) further added that the war initially helped Eritrea to “revive the memories of the ‘struggle’ and consolidate a sense of Eritrean nationalism that was in danger of being lost amidst the problems of peacetime administration” though he questioned the sustainability of the war-induced solidarity in peacetime.

Ethiopia, on its part, engaged in the war to defend its traditional reputation of repelling external aggression and reinstalling its regional power structure and balancer role that had been weakened by the more than two-decade-long civil war and its final cession of Eritrea in 1991 (Gebru 2009). The war was also inflamed by strong rhetorical axioms of both countries' leaders to project their invincibility and power capability against their adversaries that in turn nullified diplomatic and peaceful endeavors. President Isaias stated that "withdrawing from Badme means the sun would never rise in the east for the second time." (Gebru 2009, 345) On the Ethiopian part, General Samora Yenus denounced Eritrean trenches and fortifications not to be defensive against the Ethiopian army by stating that "the Eritreans are good at digging trenches and we are good at converting trenches into graves. They, too, know this; we know each other very well." (Gebru 2009, 345) After nine months of preparation, Ethiopia declared "Operation Sun Set"- named after President Isaias's speech, on May 12, 1999. The war marked the military defeat of Eritrea and the end of its invincibility. The war continued up to 2000 and Ethiopia not only retook its contested areas but also deeply penetrated into the Eritrean territory; finally, Eritrea accepted the OAU peace plan.

The Algiers Agreement and the EEBC² Border verdict

On December 12, 2000, the Algiers ("December") Peace Agreement was signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea to resolve their border dispute by a neutral boundary commission. The agreement was concluded by the two countries after their acceptance of the OAU Framework Agreement and the modalities for its implementation, as well as the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities.

According to the signed agreement, the EEBC was given the mandate "to delimit and demarcate the colonial treaty border based on pertinent colonial treaties (1900, 1902, and 1908) and applicable international Law." (Art. 4.2, 3) As per the agreement, both parties agreed to "the delimitation and demarcation determinations of the commission to be final and binding" (Art. 4. 15, 6). Two years later, the EEBC announced its decision regarding border delimitation. Ethiopia, via Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfine, declared that it had won all its claimed territories including the contested territories such as Badme and its surroundings, and viewed the decision "just and fair" that makes Ethiopia victorious in both "military and legal battles" (Seyoum 2002, 13).

Ethiopia anticipated that "after the reversal of the Eritrean aggression and maintenance of the status quo ante, the commission would easily ensure its legal sovereignty over the contested areas as it had administered them for decades." Indeed, "Ethiopia from the very beginning viewed both the Algiers Agreement and the EEBC, as essentially legal instruments to smooth over the results of the war and to bring lasting solution without challenging its right to hold territory that it had administered in modern times." (Clapham quoted in Medhane 2004, 81) The Ethiopian government could not have imagined that the commission would transfer the contested territories to Eritrea, if so, it would be nothing but rewarding an aggressor (Medhane, 2004).

However, after a year, the commission came up with the clarification of its ambiguities and said that Badme lied within the Eritrean claim line. The Ethiopian government expressed its regret and declared that it would not accept the ruling specifically over the awarding of Badme to Eritrea that it had historically been administered by Ethiopia. Ethiopia expressed its unhappiness over the ruling of the EEBC, especially over “the legality and fairness of the ruling, the integrity of judges and deviations from the spirit of the Algiers Agreement i.e. ensuring long-lasting peace” and it moved to outright rejection of the commission’s allocation of key areas as “unfair, unbalanced, unworkable and impossible to implement.” (Medhane 2004, 82).

In a letter written to the UN Security Council in September 2003, Prime Minister Meles condemned the commission’s decision as “unjust” and “illegal” that violated the main objectives of the Algiers Agreement, i.e. ensuring lasting peace and stability in the region. He expressed the difficulties that Ethiopia had to face to accept the decision, specifically in symbolic areas as:

It was unimaginable for the Ethiopian people to accept “a blatant miscarriage of justice” - specifically over the awarding of Badme to Eritrea. Badme was symbolically important and the casus belli for the two years’ war. The decision is thus a recipe for continued instability, and even recurring wars... nothing worthwhile can, therefore, be expected from the commission to salvage the peace process ...indeed, the commission seems to be determined to continue its disastrous stance whatever the consequence to peace in the region (Meles 2003, 10-11).

Ethiopia’s request to the EEBC and the UNSC to rectify the problem through “correction and interpretation” (Medhane 2004, 82) failed to be accepted. The decision of the commission, however, began to challenge the post-Algiers power balance. Ethiopia was militarily victorious but the new status quo did not support territorial change. Eritrea, on the other hand, was legally victorious but did not have the military power to implement the decision unilaterally and overturn the post-Algiers regime along the disputed areas, which made the decision unworkable (Medhane 2004, 82). Ethiopia criticized the EEBC for apparently confirming Eritrean sovereignty over Badme, failing to blame Eritrea for the aggression and to develop a long-term solution, and for the incapacity of the commission to rectify the anomalies on the basis that its decision is final and binding. As a result, the ‘no war, no peace’ régime began to govern the relationship between the two states, and on May 12, 2018, both states remembered the “20 years of no war, no peace anniversary”.

On November 25, 2004, Prime Minister Meles submitted a new five-point peace initiative entitled “Report on the New Ethiopia Eritrean Peace Initiative” to the House of Peoples’ Representatives. In the peace initiative, he underlined that the decision was unjust and illegal (Medhane 2004, 6-7).

The *first point* of the initiative was a call to peacefully resolve the problem through dialogue and negotiation based on the principle of give and take.” (Meles 2004, 11) It

nullified force as a means of resolving disputes and ensuring durable and sustainable peace. Cognizant of the first point, the *second point* called for addressing “the root cause of the conflict with a view to normalize relations between the two countries and peoples.” (Meles 2004, 12). The *third point* “accepts the verdict, in principle” (Meles 2004, 14), which was the major turnaround for the Ethiopian government which had once described the decision as “unacceptable” and which it still called “illegal and unjust”. Accordingly, Ethiopia, in principle, made a step forward from the earlier blanket rejection of the decision to acceptance in broad terms without going into specific details that could be hoped to be the basis for dialogue and to help the commission continue its work including the work of demarcation while discussing implementation. The third point was expected to be a response to the Eritrean accusation of Ethiopia for its unwillingness to accept the decision as well as for the international community that viewed Ethiopia as an obstacle to the realization of the decision. Lastly, the initiative called for “dialogue on implementation of the EEBC’s decision in a manner consistent with the promotion of sustainable peace and brotherly ties between the two peoples.” In this point, however, the prime minister warned that “...an attempt to implement the decision of the Commission, *as is*, might lead to a serious escalation of tension between the two countries and thereby undermine the peace process.” (Meles 2004, 17)

Eritrea, once it was assured that Badme was within its claim line, called for the immediate implementation of the decision without any precondition. It strongly declared that “any notion of dialogue regarding the border issue with Ethiopia is closed and hermetically sealed.” The commission made it “crystal clear that the case was put to rest once and for all...final means binding there is not dialogue to be carried out on the issue.” (Ogbazgy 2006, 2).

With regard to the five-point peace proposal, Eritrea’s position has been the same, i.e., nothing but the full implementation of the decision. It clearly opposed the initiative that “if there will be any dialogue it should only [come] after the demarcation of the whole border is completed and Eritrea gains full sovereignty over its territories. Ethiopia’s attempt to make an association and comparison with the border dispute of Nigeria and Cameroon is an obscured comparison.” (Ogbazgy 2006, 2) Therefore, it viewed the proposal as nothing but brinkmanship in order not to implement the rulings of the EEBC immediately.

At the core of the stalemate is that ceding the symbolic areas would have grave implications for the domestic security and regime legitimacy of both states as the war was fought in the name of those symbolic areas. After all, negotiating and ceding symbolic areas would be considered as a capitulation to their adversaries who both claimed victory. Eritrea stated its withdrawal from the contested areas as a strategic retreat, locally known as ‘Mizlak’ (Healy 2008). On the Ethiopian part, the war was fought to defend its territorial integrity from external aggression. After the war, Ethiopia has emerged as a militarily stronger actor compared with its neighbors who could deter military aggression, and as a result, it has reinstalled its traditional regional hegemonic leadership. Hence, it would be improbable, given Eritrea’s internally emerging security problems and nation-building failures, its isolation from the international community (the UNSC sanctions of 2009 and 2012), and more importantly its inability to challenge Ethiopia’s diplomatic and military muscle, to surrender the symbolic areas to the existing Isaias regime, in which both governments frequently stated that the root cause of the conflict was not the border itself.

The “no war, no peace regime”: refugee crisis and indefinite deadlock

Eritrea’s stubbornness to firmly stick to the ruling, having the law on its side, and its failure to get the sympathy of the international community to pressure Ethiopia to comply with the EEBC decision (the handover of Badme), indicated its inability to challenge Ethiopia’s diplomatic and military deterrence power. Its failure to challenge the diplomatic muscle of Ethiopia, in the eyes of the great powers, mainly America, also made Eritrea turn back to its traditional policy of isolationism (‘the North Korea syndrome’) under the principle of “self-reliance”, criminalizing the American-led world order as full of injustice.

Following the EEBC verdict and Ethiopia’s failure to implement it, the Eritrean national security threat became clear and visible. As a result, the Eritrean government indefinitely declared a state of emergency for the fear of the existential threat, mainly of regime change and re-colonization, posed by Ethiopia. The Eritrean government continued to tighten its control to sustain the controlled nation-building by declaring a state of emergency to deter Ethiopia and its ally’s potential threat to its sovereignty though it had never sent a notification to the United Nations Secretary-General (UN Human Rights Council 2016, 19). Moreover, the war dashed the hopes of political inclusion, reconciliation, and the system of multiparty politics was also challenged when the government declared national security a paramount priority. Dan Connell (2005, 2) characterized the postwar trajectory of Eritrea as similar to the “crisis of the postcolonial African state and the corruption of the political process” defined by the concentration of power in the hands of President Isaias, the closure of the parliament, the establishment of a special court to undermine the judiciary to imprison the enemies of the regime or send journalists and vocal critics including G-15² to exile, and the closure of independent media accused of being “foreign-funded” and “engaging in defamation and rumor-mongering” (UN Human Rights Council 2016, 35). According to the Freedom House Report of 2016, Eritrea still falls under the category of the ‘Worst of the Worst’ list of 11 countries as it scored 3 out of 100, while the next country, Syria has a rating of “-1” regarding the situation of the violations of political rights and civil liberties.

The Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea also declared that the Eritrean government had engaged in a “systematic and widespread” violation of rights. Furthermore, it stated that the abuses had been occurring “in the context of absences of rule of law”, that is why the commission affirmed in the final analysis that “it is not the law that rules Eritreans but fear.” (UN Human Rights Council 2016, 46) Many of the critical young generation are in the military trenches indefinitely as part of the national service, which is the basic reason for thousands to leave the country with no possibility to return in the foreseeable future. As a result of such policy, only underage and over-age people remain in Eritrea, and for this reason, Yosief Gebrehiwot, the Eritrean well-known activist, defined the situation as “generational genocide” (2017, 12), though president Isaias Afewerki repeatedly stated that the continuing migration of Eritreans had been an externally induced political conspiracy of the Western states to undermine Eritrea’s human resource base and “self-reliance” based on nation-building.

Matina Stevis and Joe Parkinson summarized the refugee crisis in the *Wall Street Journal* (2016, 2) by calling Eritrea “one of the world’s fast emptying nations [...] plays an outsize role in the biggest global migration crisis since World War II.” Furthermore, they added that “attention is focused on [...] Syrians, [...] yet by some measures, the exodus from the smaller Eritrea is more extreme. From the start of 2012 [...], one in fifty Eritreans sought asylum in Europe, nearly twice the ratio of Syrians.” (Stevis and Parkinson 2016, 2) Eritrea is often referred to as the ‘North Korea of Africa’ as the military regime is isolated and totalitarian, and also mentioned as a “second Somalia” for the reason that the state and the regime functionally “failed” and the descent of the country into civil war in the hotbed region of the Horn of Africa is imminent.

On the Ethiopian side, the Ethiopian government redefined its pre-1998 good neighborhood policy towards Eritrea and re-institutionalized the policy of building a modern army to “deter, isolate and defeat” (Ethiopia’s Foreign and National Security Policy 2002) incoming national security threats not only from Eritrea but also from other neighboring states. The Ethiopian government, under a developmental democratic state ideology (DDS) and “renaissance vision”,³ defined poverty as an existential threat to Ethiopia’s territorial integrity and security as it creates an enabling conductions for the resurrection of chauvinism, narrow-nationalism, and Islamic fundamentalism (EPRDF 2005).

By the containment policy, the Ethiopian government relegated the threats emerging from Eritrea to a secondary status which requires “passive deterrence” and counterinsurgency policy against Ethiopian insurgent forces hosted by the Eritrean government (Meles 2010). The ‘containment policy’, therefore, Ethiopia imposed the ‘no war, no peace’ regime on Eritrea to deter and isolate with ultimate goal of regime change by the Eritrean forces of change (Yosief 2017). It was basically focused on “proportional measures” for every provocation by the Eritrean government. The ‘containment policy’ of the Ethiopian government against Eritrea was successful in deterring military aggression and isolated Eritrea diplomatically from the international and regional community. However, Eritrea is still a potential threat to Ethiopia’s national security for the reason that the border has still remained undemarcated, no investment and development have been realized in the conflict areas, six refugee camps were established in the war zone due to the Eritrean refugee crisis, furthermore, Eritrea leases ports to competing Arab countries (like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE) scrambling for the Horn of Africa’s coastal zone to let them use as a military base in their fight against Yemen. The Arab countries’ struggle for the coastline and the militarization of the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb triangle have further isolated the landlocked state of Ethiopia and have militarized Eritrea with no prospect for normalization and reconciliation between the two states as the Arab countries have been hostile to Ethiopia’s national security interests since the 1960s. The problem of the failed state of Eritrea has been becoming an existential threat to northern Ethiopia given terrorism is becoming pervasive in the Middle East and around the Red Sea which all ultimately make Ethiopia surrounded by failed states.

A ‘fragile rapprochement’ and re-militarization : post-July 2018 phenomenon

After 20 years of “no war, no peace” stalemate (1998-2018) between Ethiopia and Eritrea,

in March 2018 the EPRDF (Ethiopia's ruling party since 1991) elected Abiy Ahmed as a new party chairman and consequently the prime minister of Ethiopia. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, in his inaugural speech in April 2018 made a call for normalization and to end the "no war, no peace" stalemate. On June 5, 2018 the EPRDF government, after its executive committee meeting in Addis Ababa, declared that it "will accept and implement the Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary commission ruling without any precondition".

Unlike the 20 years of stubborn and antagonistic policy towards the EPRDF government in Ethiopia, on June 20, 2018, *on the Eritrean Martyr's day held in Sawa*,⁴ president Isaias Afewerki accepted the call for rapprochement and declared that he would send his delegation team to Addis Ababa "to gauge current developments directly and in depth as well as to chart out a plan for continuous future action" (Eritrean Ministry of Information 2018) with Abiy Ahmed's EPRDF leadership (also known as "Oro-Mara EPRDF")⁵. Moreover, President Isaias proclaimed that he accepted the call for normalization from Abiy Ahmed as the era of TPLF dominated EPRDF has gone following the protracted protests since 2015. He further stated that the Ethiopian people through their protracted protests said that "enough is enough" and he famously described the change within EPRDF leadership as "Game Over" with the TPLF dominated EPRDF era (Jonathan and Meressa, 2018, 195). He underlined that the hostile relationships between Ethiopia and Eritrea was because of the misguided policies of the TPLF-EPRDF government supposedly supported by the pre-Trump American administration.

On the morning of July 8, 2018 Abiy Ahmed made a landmark visit to Asmara, the first seating prime minister to visit Eritrea after the 1998 war. The people of Asmara poured into the street to receive the Ethiopian delegate led by Prime Minister Abiy chanting slogans like "Selam at last" (Tigrigna for peace at last), "love wins", "yes peace, no war", and "game over" (Billion 2018, 13-14). The people in Asmara also extolled Abiy Ahmed as "morning sunshine" and President Isaias as "hub of patience". Moreover, the Eritreans have referred the July 8, 2018 as the "Second 24th of May" as the first 24th of May 1991 was referred as "Eritrea's Independence day" (Ibid, 16).

On the state dinner ceremony organized in the Asmara palace, president Isaias appreciated Abiy's bold initiative to end the two decades deadlock. He underlined that "in the past 25 years we were denied the opportunity to build a bright future for our peoples on the basis of common heritage, economic development and social progress. The end of the state of war and normalization of bilateral relations would be therefore instrumental for durable peace and security in the region. Hence we did not lose much and now we have gold opportunities at our hand to compensate the missed opportunities" (Eri-TV, July 9, 2018).⁶ Prime Minister Abiy on his part declared that the new era of normalization will be guided under theme: "we will demolish the wall of hate and, with love, build a bridge between the two countries" (AFP Africa 2018). On the same day, the Eritrean Ministry of Information Yemane Gebremeskel tweeted (2018) that Abiy Ahmed's visit was "a truly historic moment with memorable watershed events: brotherly embrace of the leaders". Fistum Arega, Abiy's Chief staff, also defined the demarche as "our two nations share a history and bond like no other...we can now overcome two decades of mistrust and move in a new direction" (Ibid).

On July 9, 2018 the leaders signed a "joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship" (Addis

Standard 2018) that consists of seven articles. Article—one of the agreement stated that “the state of war between the two countries has ended and a new era of peace, friendship and comprehensive cooperation has started”. The two states also agreed to “promote comprehensive cooperation in the political, security, defense, economic, trade, investment, cultural and social fields on the basis of complementarities and synergy” (Ibid). More fundamentally, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to “implement the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission decision” that has been a cause as the structure problem for a war torn relations and “no war, no peace” deadlock (Ibid).

The declaration, however, was criticised for being ‘vague’ in its content that only outlined general aspirations of both leaders on development, security and regional integration without specifying necessary resources, legal and policy details so that to transform economic, currency, port and security related predicaments .

Following the signing of the joint declaration of peace and friendship in Asmara, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres visited Addis Ababa On July 9, 2018 and he promised that the UN sanctions on Eritrea would be lifted. He further elaborated that “the sanctions were motivated by a number of events that took place, (but) it is my belief that those events will no longer exist...If the reasons that led to the sanctions will no longer exist...they will naturally become obsolete”(Fikreyesus 2018, 22). Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State, also praised that deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea in such a way that “peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea will further the cause of stability, security, and development in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea” (2018). Finally, on December 14, 2018, the UN Security Council unanimously lifted the nine years old sanctions (including army embargo, assets freeze and travel ban) on Eritrea which were imposed on claims that Eritrea supported al-Shebab militants in Somalia (BBC 2018).

As a result, Eritrea was successful in securing the nine year’s old sanctions lifted by the UN Security Council and neutralizing its 20 years negative branding as “secretive, isolated nation, Gulag in the Red Sea”(The Economist 2018). Yamane Gebremeskel (2018), Eritrea’s ministry of information, summarized Eritrea’s two decades of disengagement, after its rapprochement with Ethiopia, as “deliberate demonization but not isolation” spearheaded by Ethiopian aggression and USA led international conspiracy :

Eritrea was the victim of a deliberate smear campaign over the period that it cut ties with neighbouring Ethiopia but it was not at any point isolated. There have been attempts to isolate Eritrea but I don’t think Eritrea was isolated. I can look at development cooperation and trade relations we had with a good number of countries in Africa, Europe, and Middle East. There was a stigma and there was a demonization campaign of Eritrea. The country was portrayed in a certain light by some countries who wanted to pursue basically an agenda of regime change, that was not fair before and it cannot be relevant anymore.

The hope for normalization was further strengthened when President Isaias Afewerki visited Addis Ababa on July 14, 2018 for the first time since 1998 and warmly received by the

people of Addis Ababa. On his live TV address to the Ethiopians from the national palace in Addis Ababa president Isaias asserted that “hate, discrimination and conspiracy is now over... our focus from now on should be on developing and growing together. We are ready to move forward with you as one. No one can steal the love we have regained now. Now is the time to make up for the lost times” (Elias Meseret 2018). Furthermore, he stated that “from now onwards anyone who thinks that Ethiopia and Eritrea are two different countries is the one who fails to know the truth” (ERi-TV 2018).⁷ Such remarks of president Isaias in Addis Ababa later resulted in a shockwave on the Eritrean side fearing that he will sell-out Eritrea sovereignty and independence to Ethiopia as in the case of 1952 federal arrangement. Finally, on July 16, 2018, he reopened the Eritrean Embassy in Addis Ababa in order to officially started diplomatic relations.

As a result of their efforts for rapprochement, president Isaias and Prime Minister Abiy received the United Arab Emirate Crown Prince’s highest medal award (“The Zeyed Award”) in July 24, 2018 “in recognition of their work for peace between the two nations” (Tesfa News, 2018). The two leaders also signed the “Jeddah peace accord”, though the content of the agreement remains secret, and received Saudi Arabia’s highest medal (“the Order of King Abdul-Aziz”) in September 16, 2018 (Ibid).

A ‘political and security deal’ or ‘comprehensive peace agreement’?

Even though, the breakthrough rapprochement between the two leaders sparked a new hope for sustainable peace, the prospects for normalization and reconciliation still remain elusive. The details of the agreements are still remaining secret and known only to Prime Minister Abiy and President Isaias and their sponsors like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and UAE though citizens of both countries have been asking the disclosure of details of the agreements and get approved by relevant institutions like national parliaments, regional organizations (AU and IGAD) and International Organizations (like the UN).

As both leaders failed to be transparent about the contents of the agreements, citizens of both countries have been questioning the legitimacy of peace accord and commitment of both leaders for peace and reconciliation. Furthermore, the agreements were also defined by scholars and politicians as “political and security deal”, instead of “comprehensive peace agreement”, to “neutralize and finally clean⁸ TPLF’s federal⁹ nation building legacy in Ethiopia, political and security hegemony in the Horn of Africa through encircling¹⁰ and defeating its social base; Tigray people (Medhane, 2018)¹¹.

After Prime minister Abiy took the EPRDF chairmanship and Prime minister position, by the Oromo-Amhara tactical alliance (Oromara-EPRDF)¹², and rapprochement with President Isaias, TPLF has been labelled as a “common enemy and anti-reformist” to Isaias’s political and security aspiration in Eritrea and the Horn as well as Abiy’s “de-federalization” of Ethiopian politics; i.e. the making of Oromo dominated Ethiopia via rekindling and championing “greater Ethiopia” mantra that has been criticized for a century by the Oromo and Tigriyan nationalists as “ Chauvinist utopianism” .

The TPLF also branded as an “enemy” by the southern neighbor Amhara region elites claiming that the Amhara lost their “hundred years hegemony” of “up to Red Sea unitary Ethiopia” because of the TPLF led federalization of the ‘old Amhara empire’. Three of them argued that the “TPLF induced federal nation building in Ethiopia” is against Isaias’s ‘assimilationist nation building (*one people, one heart*) in Eritrea and aspiration to lead

the horn of Africa', Abiy's Oromization of the Ethiopia (claiming that it is their historical turn to restructure the 'Abyssinian-Semitic political culture dominated' Ethiopian state by "Kushitic- Oromo dominated) as well as the Amhara "restorationist" who are struggling to reinstall unitarist Ethiopia and retake "woleqait-tsegede and raya" territories from Tigray via dissolving the federal constitution and cleaning ethnic politics of rampant ethno-nationalists.

Therefore, the "Tripartite political and security deal" among Isaias Afewerki from North, Amhara regional state from south neighbor and Abiy's federal government of Ethiopia is viewed by TPLF and the people Tigray of as "strategic Siege and existential threat" aimed at cracking down "TPLF leadership and humiliating the people of Tigray" (Debret-sion 2018). The "strategic siege and existential threat" posed by Isaias, Abiy and Amhara leadership against Tigray and its leadership have been supported by Saudi Arabia and UAE in their 'scramble for the Horn of Africa and geopolitical position their war in Yemen' as well as Egypt in its history long strategy of containing and destabilizing Ethiopia so that Ethiopia will not build "Great Ethiopian renaissance Dam (GERD)" on the Nile river.

Furthermore, the "political and security deal" also defined as "instrument of relocating" the Ethiopian armed groups or insurgencies (e.g. OLF, ONLF, Arbognoch-Ginbot seven, Tigray people democratic movement-TPDM, etc) who were hosted and trained by Eritrea against the TPLF-led EPRDF government in Ethiopia since the 1998-2000 war. The insurgent groups were variants of secessionist, (OLF), Irredentist (ONLF), assimilationist (Arbognoch-Ginbot seven) in which their minimum program for their alliances with their Eritrean government was their struggle against the TPLF led EPRDF leadership under the realist principle of 'the enemy of my enemy'. Some of them (like Arbognoch-Ginbot seven) do not accept the independence of Eritrea; proponents of 'up to Red Sea greater Ethiopia'. The Political and security deal is, therefore, aimed at 'neutralizing' TPLF's federalist nation building and hegemony as well as 'cleaning its legacies' in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa through financial support of Saudi Arabia and UAE.

Moreover, the political deal was basically "externally induced and secret" for geopolitical goals (i.e. to control the Horn of Africa and Red Sea) by UAE and Saudi Arabia in their scramble against Iran, Qatar and Turkey. The details of deals are still remaining secret and not approved by all relevant institutions like national parliaments, regional (AU and IGAD) and International Organizations (UN) though the "Algiers agreement on Ethiopia-Eritrea war" was brokered by African Union and the UN.

The political and security deal however is short of a "comprehensive peace deal" as the latter supposed to aim at addressing the fundamental and structural causes of the war including demarcation of the contested border as per the EECB ruling, currency and custom harmonization (exchange rate between Ethiopian Birr and Eritrea Nakfa), issues of Eritrean refugees hosted in Ethiopia, termination of indefinite national conscription and overall demands reform and democratization in Eritrea. All the fundamental issues mentioned above made to be 'secondary priorities and pending agendas' which ultimately undermines the legitimacy and sustainability of the 'normalization' mantra.

Against all attempted "strategic siege" against TPLF and Tigray by Isaias of Eritrea, Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia and blockage by the Amhara regional state, Tigray remains the only relatively stable region in Ethiopia and TPLF is also remains as relatively 'co-

herent party' within the EPRDF coalition with a relatively strong popular support from nationalist in Tigray. And hence, TPLF is struggling to make Tigray as the "heartland of economic and security" in the Horn of Africa. Tigray geopolitical position is relatively ideal endowed with "strategic depth" that it is not too far from the Red sea and not directly affected by incoming scramble and militarization of regional powers of Middle East. Tigray is also defined as a "gate way" to mainland to and from Ethiopia so it can be advantageous of "transit state". Finally, Tigray is endowed defensive topography and defensive militant nationalism which could be a center for regional security and economic integration around the Red Sea.

Remilitarization and emerging national security dilemma

As the much praised rapprochement fails to address the fundamental causes of the two decades conflict including border demarcation, disarmament and demobilization, currency and custom harmonization, port politics and issues of Eritrean refugee resettlement. And a result, refugee crisis is continuing as defining agenda of the future relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Furthermore, both leaders also failed to ensure peace, security and democratization in their respective states after the rapprochement. President Isaias failed to reform his totalitarian government, end the indefinite national conscription which has been imposed since 1995, release political prisoners and decriminalize political forces struggling for freedom and democracy as in the case of Abiy Ahmed reforms. The Eritrean become more worried about the prospects for normalization as there are no signs of reform under Isaias Afeworki and even they fear that President Isaias would compromise Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity in favor of regional integration of the Horn or con-federal arrangement with Ethiopia. And hence, they continue their struggle, under the resistance theme of "Yiaker¹³ to dictator and yes for rule of law" (ATV 2019) against totalitarian leadership of president Isaias and secret agreement with Prime Minister Abiy.

On the Ethiopian side, protracted ethnic and social conflicts have become pervasive, even after it normalized its relation with Eritrea, and Ethiopia is recently branded as "failed state" characterized by "lack of control over armed forces, militias, lack of free participation in politics, lack of control over territory within national borders, Massive displacements, failure to provide public services food, health, shelter etc, high level of corruption, high numbers of refugees seeking to leave ,and no or poorly functioning economy" (Dawit 2019, 2-3).

As a result, the hope for sustainable normalization and reconciliation increasingly become fragile and volatile. Surprisingly, the Eritrean government unilaterally closed the Zalaambesa (central part) border crossing on December 28, 2018. The western (Omhajer-Humera) and eastern (Bure-Assab) parties of the Ethiopia Eritrea border crossings were finally closed on April 18 and 23, 2019 respectively. As a result it shocked Eritrean and Ethiopian people and hence a threat of regional conflict is looming which in turn, if interstate conflict again erupts, transforms the region into new wave of re-militarization and protracted regional conflict. Both Eritrea and Ethiopia are facing 'emerging existential threats' of 'state collapse' as Ethiopia is facing unprecedented extreme nationalists, militant youth movements, internal displaced persons (the first in the world in 2019 unlike its two decades branding of 'fast growing economy in Africa'), security and economic crisis, and assassinations of top military leaders (Chief staffs of the army General Saere Mokonnen

and Gezaey Abera) and leaders of Amhara regional state (Ambachew Mekonnen).

The Eritrean society is also a typical example of polarized African society into lowland and highland, Christian and Muslim that has been exacerbated by a “garrison totalitarian regime of president Isaias”, I. e it has been widely branded as “the North Korea of Africa”. And hence, it doomed the prospect for democratic transition as the Horn of Africa is slowly moving into a “failed or collapsed states” trap that has been become the ‘new normal’ in the Horn of Africa states like in Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

Conclusion

The Ethiopia-Eritrea war ended Eritrea’s military invincibility and weakened its leadership’s vision of power projection instigating instability against its neighbors. Economically, the war also ended Eritrea’s vision of ‘Singaporization’ to become the “industrial houses of the Horn of Africa”. The port-based (Massawa and Assab) national economy has lost its comparative and competitive advantage to Djibouti for the decades to come, and the policy of “self-reliance” has proved to be a structural failure of a poor war-torn state in the era of globalization. The Eritrean ports have been leased as a military base to regionally competing Middle Eastern countries, previously to Shia Iran and Qatar, and after the Yemen crisis, since 2013, the management of some Eritrean ports have been transferred to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Due to the proxy wars and the regional hegemonic competition between Shia and Sunni Arab counties, Eritrean ports are getting militarized. Eritrea is also called the ‘North Korea of Africa’, a functionally “failed” state, and on the verge of ‘Somalization’, i.e. ‘prone to civil war and state collapse’.

Following the protracted protests in Oromia and Amhara regional states since December 2015, in April 2018 a new ‘Oro-Mara’ leadership emerged within the EPRDF under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Abiy Ahmed is the first Oromo leader in modern history of Ethiopia. After he took office, he made a call for normalization of the 20 years “no war, no peace” stalemate and surprisingly he well received by president Isaias and the Eritrean people. The new rapprochement policy was equally praised by international institutions and superpowers. It was celebrated that it would transform the two decades stalemate, militarization, securitization and refugee crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea and contributes to the peace and security of the conflict prone Horn of Africa. The prospects for normalization and reconciliation, however, remain fragile and un-institutionalized as the agreements continue to be ‘secret, externally induced and failed to address the root causes of the stalemate’. After eight months of open border relationship between the states, the Ethiopia Eritrea borders again closed in April 2019. Militarization and securitization of relations thus become a structural dilemma with bigger repercussion to the security of Horn of Africa and Red Sea.

Notes

1. Nakfa was the military and political base of the EPLF during the armed struggle. It is known in the history of Eritrean liberation struggle as symbol of resistance, heroism, and determination of the Eritrean guerrilla fighters in their struggle against the Dergue regime of Ethiopia. It was the stronghold of the EPLF where they defeated the Dergue’s all-inclusive military campaign known as ‘the red star campaign’ in cooperation with the TPLF. Thus, the Eritrean national currency was named after

- the place Nakfa.
2. EPLF/PFDJ Central Committee and Politburo members who were imprisoned by President Isaias allegedly for committing crime of “sub nationalism” and “defeatism” in September 18, 2001.
 3. The late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on September 1, 2000, declared to build a “new Ethiopianism” through a renaissance project for socioeconomic transformation, where the rights of nations and nationalities to self-rule are ensured, and consensus-based national unity (federalized Ethiopianism) is achieved. He claimed that “the third Ethiopian millennium would be as good as the first millennium and not as bad as the second millennium.” The first millennium was marked by the Axumite civilization, when Ethiopia enjoyed the most prosperous period in its history, but the second millennium was remembered as an era of political-economic decline, protracted civil wars, famine (e.g., in 1985), crisis of national unity, etc.
 4. Also known as “Warsay-Yikaalo School”. Warsay refers to the post-independence Eritrean generation and Yikaalo is the liberation struggle generation. Warsay is Tigrigna for “heir” and Yikaalo is Tigrigna for “able”- a generation who able to realize the independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia. Thus Warsay- Yikaalo school is the political and military training center to integrate the two generations and ultimately support the new nation building project of the new state of Eritrea under the theme of “one people, one hear” and “United we stand”.
 5. A new coalition of Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO) and Amhara Nation Democratic movement (ANDM) emerged within the EPRDF following the protests since December 2015 in Oromia and Amhara regions. It was to challenge the post1989 EPRDF establishment that was dominated by the TPLF. It is an alliance of the two largest ethnic (Oromo and Amhara) groups to counter the TPLF (Tigriyan) ethnic groups in Ethiopia. The new Abiy Ahmed EPRDF Leadership is also popularly known as “Oromara-EPRDF” that replaced “TPLF-EPRDF” era in post-1991 Ethiopia.
 6. Author own translation from Tigrigna, “ERi-TV, Eritrea: Speeches by President Isaias Afwerki & PM Abiy Ahmed during State Dinner in Asmara”. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAvZpSYjy8w>
 7. Author own translation from Amharic, “ERi-TV, Eritrea: Ethiopia Welcomes President Isaias Afwerki, July 14, 2018 - Part III”. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExTYKWrVAn0>
 8. President Isaias designed as a strategy branded as “poletikawi hitsibo ab Kerni africa” (Tigrigna for political cleaning in the Horn of Africa), personal interview with TPLF politburo member, April 23, 2019, Mekelle.
 9. TPLF–EPRDF introduced “multicultural federalism” based nation building in Ethiopia by the1995 Federal constitution. Article 39 of the constitution grants the Ethiopian nations and nationalities the “right to self-determination up to and including secession” which make the constitution “unique and most contested” in Ethiopia political history. Ethiopia federalism is a diametric opposite to president Isaias unitarist nation building policy in Eritrea based on “one people, one heart”.

Prime minister Abiy's new narrative of "Ethiopianism" also feared to undermine the 27 years federal establishment and he has been supported by assimilationist Ethiopianist articulately from Amhara Regional state, a neighbouring regional state to Tigray. Hence, the rapprochement ('political deal') was basically 'Tripartite political deal' between president Isaias (Eritrea), prime minister Abiy (federal government of Ethiopia) and Amhara regional state (Amhara) to clean TPLF legacies of federalism, democratic developmental state ideology and revolutionary democracy, to replace current federal arrangement by unitarism through the newly established "administrative boundaries and identity issues commission", and finally dissolve the self-governing regional state of Tigray.

10. 'Tripartite political deal' between president Isaias (Eritrea- from north), Prime Minister Abiy (federal government of Ethiopia) and Amhara regional state (Amhara- from south) to "encircle" and imposed economic and security blockage with an ultimate objective of defeating TPLF and Tigray (personal interview with TPLF politburo member Mekelle, December 20, 2018).
11. Professor Medhane Tadesse, author of several books on Ethiopia and Eritrea security and politics, interviewed in Mekelle on December 25, 2018, Ethiopia.
12. The "Oromara-EPRDF" (Oromo and Amhara dominated EPRDF) is a designation since March 2018 that replaced "TPLF-EPRDF" rule that was in place since May 1991.
13. Tigrigna for "Enough"

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