
New Perspectives on The Tigray War

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ABSTRACT: Ethiopia's location is in the horn of Africa. It is Africa's oldest independent country and the second-largest country in terms of population in the continent. Ethiopia was historically called Abyssinia which was derived from the Arabic form of the Ethiosemitic name. And although former President Abiy-Ahmed remains the first and only Ethiopian Head of State to have won the Nobel peace prize in 2019 for bringing an end to the over one decade-long conflict with Eritrea. More importantly, he has been subject to numerous criticisms and scrutiny due to the occurrence of several mass protests, incarcerations of political figures and opponents as well as the censorship of the internet, journalists which ultimately led to the resurgence of ethnic and tribal divisions between Ethiopians. This can be termed as the cause for open conflict in the Northern region of Tigray.

This paper will investigate and establish new perspectives of the Tigray war through the backdrop of historical occurrences and how the metamorphosis of these occurrences have helped define and shape the state of affairs in Tigray

KEYWORDS: Tigray, Ethiopia, War, New, Perspectives.

THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Sequel to the end of the Ethiopian Civil war in 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front was grounded in an ethnic-nationalist consciousness generated by the cumulative grievances of Tigrayans against consecutive federal governments in Ethiopia (Berhe, 2004).

The most prominent figure of the Tigray People's Liberation front was Meles Zenawi who served as both chairmen of the TPLF and Prime Minister of Ethiopia until he died in 2012. The latter period of Meles' life were dissimilarities over notions and ideological leadership patterns which was marked by a steep contest over power. This involved struggles over power between Meles and a dozen of his colleagues, between elements broadly associated with state organs and those associated with the party apparatus, and between Tigray-based TPLF officials and those around the Prime Minister (Medhane, Tadesse, Young, 2003).

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn as Ethiopian prime minister on the 15th day of February 2018; he also turned in his resignation as chairman of the Ethiopian people's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) on the same day. This was due to over two decades of repression and growing discontent within the public. Shortly after, the closed-door election was held to decide who would chair the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front. An election resulted in the victory of the then OPDO Chairman in defiance of the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front). TPLF officials were thus ousted from the Federal Government. The reaction to this was the TPLF officials to migrate to the Tigray region. In 1952, Ethiopia was federated with Eritrea, a pact that was merely designed to last for a decade according to Haile Semere's article title "The Origins and Demise of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation" he gives succinct details about the federation of both nations. On 25 April 1952, the commissioner submitted the final drafting of the federal act and the Eritrean constitution to the Ethiopian Government for approval. The British military administration was well informed to prepare the Eritrean populace for the plebiscite of their representatives for the ratification of the Eritrean Constitution. Sequel to the end of March 1952, a series of indirect elections were adopted for the selection of the Eritrean assembly across all of Eritrea, excluding the cities of Asmara, Massawa, where direct elections were organized by the British. The result was a 68-member Eritrean Assembly: thirty-four Christians and thirty-four moslems. Gross irregularities were exhibited by the British authorities when they set the guidelines for the elections in Eritrea under proclamation 121. After all these endeavors, 34 seats were assigned to the Unionist party who were ideologically pro-Ethiopia while 15 seats were delegated to the Moslem league of the western province who were also pro-British; The Eritrean Democratic Front and Independents controlled only 19 Seats. Not surprisingly, Tedla Bairu, the Secretary-General of the unionist party, was elected President of the Eritrean Assembly and Ali Mohammed Mussa Radai, the leader of the Moslem League (of the western province) was made the assembly's

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Vice President. As expected, the pro-British and the pro-Ethiopian supporters immediately formed a two-thirds majority and adopted the draft constitution without substantial revisions. The two basic documents of the autonomous unit, the Federal act, and the Eritrean Constitution were approved by the Eritrean Assembly on 10 July 1952, and by the commissioner on 6 August. The Eritrean Constitution was endorsed by Emperor Haile Selassie on August 11 as well as the federal act, the principal core of the United Nations Resolution 390 - A(V). On 11 September, the Federation of Eritrea and Ethiopia became effective on 15 September 1952. The Ethiopian Government declared that it would scrupulously respect the provisions of the federal act and the autonomy of Eritrea drawn up by the General Assembly, which constituted the Charter of the Federation (Haile, 1987).

Within the constitutional context of this issue, the 1995 Constitution of Ethiopia states in article 39.1, every Ethiopian citizen possesses the unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession. In a relatively recent event, there has been huge restriction in Ethiopia as regards the regulation of non-governmental organizations, the anti-terrorist proclamation, and freedom of expression, assembly and association. Liberties established by the promulgation of the charities and societies proclamation in 2009 have been increasingly restricted in Ethiopia. The ripple effect of these laws vis-a-vis the incessant harassment of human right activists, academics and journalists who investigate and comment on sensitive issues or express views critical of government policy, has been severe (Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia, 2013).

THE CAUSE AND COURSE OF THE CONFLICT

The Tigrayan people are an ethnic group that lives in the north of Ethiopia. As of 2021, the number of deaths and casualties experienced by the Tigrayan people is estimated to be around 50,000 which is more than any conflict in the world today. Before midnight on the third of November 2020, the Tigray Special Forces and its allied local militia carried out simultaneous attacks on the Northern Command headquarters of the Ethiopian National defense main office in Mekelle, Dansha's fifth battalion Barracks and numerous command posts in the North. The Ethiopian National Defense force in retaliation, declared a state of emergency right after an Ethiopian offensive was launched on the 4th of November. This was followed by the creation of an interim government for Tigray. Many scholars believe that following Abiy Ahmed's receipt of the Peace Nobel Prize, he failed to uphold the very conduct and principles that earned him the prestigious award in the first place. According to discoveries made by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, the people welcomed Abiy Ahmed with open arms, particularly youth who were pivotal in the 2018 protests. Due to widespread contentment on the parts of the populace at the time, numerous amendments were made that led to the release of various political hostages whilst advocating for the creation of opposition parties and entities. In addition to this, he gave a speech calling for national unity in a country saturated with multi-ethnic pluralism. These hopes were however quickly dispelled as political unrest returned, assassinations became a norm in the country amidst continuous anti-government protests. These said protests soon came to border on rebellion, with the Oromia region being affected the most, to which Ahmed himself belongs. Furthermore, the death toll of the Oromia protests erupted in July 2020 over the killing of a popular folk artist. The government is said to have persecuted well over 4,000 people, including elderly Oromo leaders as well as opposition leaders. By the provisions of the federal constitution, one of the large ethnic groups in the South, the Sidama, submitted a request to the Federal Government in July 2018 which was mainly a request to hold a referendum for their secession from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR) and the formation of a new region of its own.

However, this was the first of its kind in Ethiopia. Despite the success of the referendum in 2019, many problems remained unresolved, such as the city of Awassa which is the region's capital as well as the borders of the region, which threatened a conflict with the SNNPR region. At the national level, amidst the crisis, Ethiopia has been affected by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and has suffered from major economic, social, and political repercussions (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies 2007).

Multi-ethnic federalism in Ethiopia has greatly impacted the trajectory of the Tigray and the Tigray Crisis (Habtu, 2005).

Another pivotal occurrence amidst the Tigray crisis is the Makelle offensive. On the 17th of November, the TPLF was accused by the Ethiopian government of blowing up four major bridges leading to Makelle, an accusation to which the Tigray government denied. From the period of November 17 to 19, the districts of Raya, as well as the towns of Alamata, Adwa, Axum, and Shire. On the 23rd of November, Ethiopian forces encircled the regional capital of Mekelle and encircled it. The Ethiopian military spokesperson, Colonel Dejene Tsegaye stated that Mekelle would be shelled and warned Tigray civilians to flee the city as Ethiopian forces intend to show no mercy. It cannot be categorically said that the current dilemma of the Tigray crisis is caused by intense ethnic conflict. Acute tribal cleansing is often promoted by Xenophobia. Often, threatening and cumbersome predicaments may arise which contain with them the potential for tremendous violence. The lack of factual Data and misinterpretations, problems of reliable devotion take hold, people groups set off and become anxious; the nation is incapacitated as conflict becomes inevitable (Lake, Rothchild, 1996)

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MIGRATION CONSEQUENCES OF THE TIGRAYAN CRISIS

On the issue of migration, it is pivotal to understand the degree of the humanitarian crisis of the Tigray War. It has protracted potentially deteriorating situations with regional dimensions. Though Ethiopia's federal government claimed the War in the Country's Tigray region was over in November, fighting continues - at a great cost to a stricken population trapped in a multi-sided conflict. The ousting of the Tigrayan region's Leadership seems to have amalgamated its posture in the localities within the region as its resistance is fueled by a Tigrayan populace that assays the region's self-determination. Prime minister Abiy Ahmed's enlistment from Eritrea as well as Ethiopia's Amhara region, is an expression of the Federal government's numerous war efforts. This move added to Tigrayan's sense of injustice and broadened backing for the rebellion (International Crisis Group, 2021).

As regards my perspective, the migration consequences of the Tigrayan crisis have caused immense spillover. The pre-existing vulnerabilities of the war. Many Tigrayan residents have hastily established camps at Um Rakuba which is just 70 kilometers from the border and in the Tunaybah area of Gedaref state. The high levels of migration is also due to the lack of minority protection in Ethiopia, the challenges posed by the Tigrayan Crisis makes this all the more cumbersome to address, and although federalism has been increasingly promoted and utilized in multi-ethnic countries as a means to guarantee minority rights and safeguard the harmony and integrity of the polity and state. Yet, due to the infeasibility of achieving a perfect overlap between ethnic and territorial boundaries, every ethnic-based territory will always contain ethnic minority groups (Van der Beken, 2015).

PEACE AND MEDIATION PROPOSALS

Several groups involved in the war have been involved in numerous peace talks in an attempt to not only de-escalate the war but bring it to an end. In November 2020, Debretsion requested the African Union to end the war and draft peace negotiations. A request that former Ethiopian President Abiy Ahmed and his representatives declined. Subsequently, an emergency Intergovernmental Authority of Development Summit of East African heads of government and state met on 20 December 2020 in Djibouti. According to Leenco Lata, one must understand that for peace to be attained, the actors involved must accept that democracy and versus authoritarianism cannot play a significant role in fomenting conflict between the neighboring states. On the other hand, the conflict's causes could fester out of public view to suddenly result in violent exchanges exactly because of the absence of openness and democratic accountability amongst all entities involved (Leenco Lata, 2003).

As it stands, the major actor for the peace process in the Tigray war is the African Union. First off, I believe that the African Union should have refrained from any form of mediation process without defining a declaration of principles that will guide the process of attaining full political settlement. The bone of contention is hinged on the reality of the fact that both governments (Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray Regional Government) don't recognize each other, which has made the peace process so much more cumbersome if not outrightly unattainable. Sequel to the general elections held in June 2021, Olusegun Obasanjo, head of the AU Observer Mission, declared that the election had been held credibly and thus its outcomes are legitimate. If a definite peace agreement is not reached soon enough, the war in Northern Ethiopia will grind on as it's likely to worsen (International Crisis Group, 2017).

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE TIGRAY WAR

As the ongoing conflict continues to intensify, the Ethiopian Federal Government currently claims to have recaptured the Tigrayan City from rebels. Alamata was back under the control of the Ethiopian government, as the Tigrayan rebel withdrawal forces announced their withdrawal from Amhara towards the latter part of December 2021. Although the fighting continues, the Ethiopian Federal Government insists that it will not cease-fire against the Tigrayan region until the other side accepts defeat. The question is will the Tigrayan region result in coercion in an attempt to fill up their ranks. In the article "Membership Matters: Coerced Recruits and Rebel Allegiance", Gates explains that in the case of an inability to attract enough voluntary recruits, many rebel groups rely on coercion to fill up the loopholes from within their ranks, as such, the monopoly of the use of force is adopted in order to impel persons of all age groups, irrespective of their views, beliefs or position on the conflict. Because a lack of membership threatens the ability to sustain a course, vision, or agenda (Gates, 2017).

CONCLUSION

For well over twelve months, the devastating war in Ethiopia's Tigray region has consumed Africa's second most populous nation. The United Nations continues to call for peace and access to humanitarian aid. Due to the war, already an estimated one million people are living in famine-like conditions. As the war unfolds, it is evident that the only tenable perspective is peace. If the war continues, it could further threaten the fabric of the Ethiopian Society in the nearest future as issues such as ethnicity, nepotism, and tribalism come to dictate the political stratosphere of not only the Tigrayan region but the whole of Ethiopia.

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