

**Ethiopia's Security Predicaments:  
The Interplay of Domestic and External Vulnerabilities and  
Threats**

**Doctoral Dissertation**

**By**

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**Institute for Peace and Security Studies**

**Addis Ababa University**

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**Ethiopia's Security Predicaments:  
The Interplay of Domestic and External Vulnerabilities and  
Threats**

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A Dissertation Submitted to

the Institute for Peace and Security Studies

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Peace and Security Studies

Addis Ababa University  
School of Graduate Studies  
Institute for Peace and Security Studies

**Candidate's Declaration**

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Ethiopia's Security Predicaments: The Interplay of Domestic and External Vulnerabilities and Threats**, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Peace and Security Studies and submitted to the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) of Addis Ababa University is a result of my original work. I conducted the research under the supervision of Dr. Asnake Kefale, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or to any other university.

Yonas Tariku

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

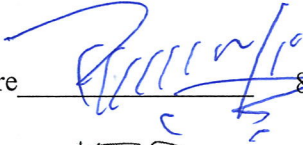
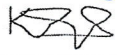
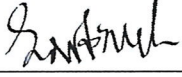
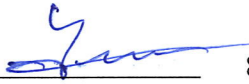


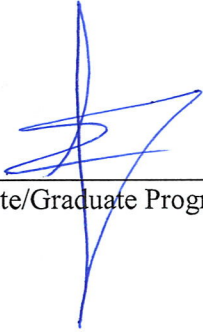
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## Abstract

*The literature on the national security of states that are commonly known as developing, Third World, fragile, or weak states asserts that their security concerns are domestically generated. And, where they are located next to each other in a region, there is little or no security dynamics as they lack the capacity to threaten one another. Due to this reason, their national security is confined to the domestic dimension and the external/regional security dynamics is generally dull. Building on this body of knowledge but challenging its claims about the external dimension, this dissertation unravels the question that if the domestic dimension of (in)security trumps the external, as the available literature indicates, what are the major sources Ethiopia's security predicament as defined, framed, and addressed by the state/regime? Based on this, the dissertation, anchored on Subaltern Realism complemented by Regional Security Complex Theory, finds that: (a) Ethiopia's security predicament is generated by the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and political legitimacy accompanied by recurrent internal political violence, and hence, domestic insecurity dilemma; (b) despite the above, the external dimension of (in)security has also been important, and the domestic insecurity dilemma does not always trump the external, and (c) the above create a pattern of interplay between the domestic and external dimensions of (in)security inextricably linking Ethiopia's national security with that of the stability and security of its neighbours in particular and the region in general. Adopting a constructivist research paradigm and qualitative case study design, data for this dissertation is generated/collected through primary and secondary sources including key informant interviews, the use of newspapers as open-archives, document reviews, and published and unpublished materials.*

**Keywords:** National Security, Weak States, Regional Security, Ethiopia, Horn of Africa

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Until the end of the Cold War era, the prevailing understanding of security, particularly national security, had been dominated by the mainstream theories of International Relations, especially neorealism (or structural realism). From the neorealist perspective, anarchy (the structure of the international system) is the major factor that determines the security of states. Since there is no world government that provides security states are perpetually exposed to potential external military threats from other states. In this context, their ultimate goal is to ensure their *survival* and pursue their own *interest*. In doing so, they develop their own means of survival, i.e. *self-help*. They strive to maximize their security by accumulating power and strengthening their defensive and/or offensive capabilities (Mearsheimer, 2002; Waltz, 1979; 2001). As such, states are “functionally undifferentiated” and they tend to duplicate one another and behave in a uniform manner. Hence, states are *unitary actors* whose internal makeup is deemed irrelevant to understand their security concerns (Mearsheimer, 2001; 2002; Taliaferro, 2001; Waltz, 1979).<sup>1</sup>

Two of the multiple critiques levelled against neorealism pertain to its view of the *state as a unitary actor* and *security as externally generated and military-oriented*. Firstly, the view that states are unitary actors has been rejected due to differences among states in their internal makeup and perception of their environment. Buzan (1991) contends that states are “exceedingly dissimilar” as objects of security. They face diverse sets of actual and perceived security problems and “...the nature of security as a problem necessarily differs substantially from state to state” (p. 65). As

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<sup>1</sup> See also Deudney, 2000; and Herbut and Kunert-Milcarz, 2017.

such, the main difference stems from the strengths/weaknesses of three component parts that make up a state, namely: (a) *the idea of the state*; (b) *the physical base of the state*; and (c) *the institutional expression of the state* (p. 44). While the physical base "...simply exists, and has to be dealt with because of the fact", the remaining two are amorphous. However, the *idea of the state* is the most amorphous because "...the notion of purpose is what distinguishes the idea of the state from its physical base and its institutions" (p. 44).

Thus, states can be classified as weak and strong. The weaker the *idea* and *institutions* of the state, the weaker the state *qua* state. Conversely, the stronger the *idea* and *institutions* of a state, the stronger the state *qua* state (p. 66). However, state weakness or state strength is neither absolute nor fixed. It is a matter of degree and subject to change over time and depending on certain conditions (Buzan, 1991; Sorensen, 2007). An important caveat is in order here: state strength or weakness "... neither depends on, nor correlates with, power". Rather than power, there are certain factors that explain the strength or weakness of a state, such as the levels of sociopolitical cohesion, legitimacy, the level of political violence and institutional capacity (Buzan, 1991, p. 66).

The second critique pertains to the neorealist view of security as externally generated and military-oriented. The most powerful critique against this has been made by Mohammed Ayooob's works (Ayooob, 1995; 1997; 2002). Ayooob's (1997) subaltern realist perspective of security contends that the security challenges of weak (or so-called Third World) states stem from their domestic fragility and unfinished state-building processes. Hence, the neorealist view of security does not reflect the security predicament of a large majority of the world's states that are less integrated nationally, impoverished economically, and continuously suffer from high levels of internal political violence. Here, the external dimension becomes relevant primarily due to the spill over effects of the domestic dimension.

The foregoing critiques do not only expose the limitations of the neorealist perspective, but also affirm the diversity among states and their security concerns. The neorealist view of the state and security is too narrow and Eurocentric in its epistemology. States are far from unitary and their security concerns are multidimensional. Understanding this helps us appreciate that states' concerns of their security is shaped not only by their external environment (anarchy and its multiple consequences) but also their domestic conditions (i.e., the strength or weakness of the state). Such understanding of national security has been developing since the 1980s as exemplified by the works of Ayoob (1995/1997), Azar and Moon (1988), Job (1992), Miller (2005/2007).

However, the limitation of the foregoing critiques of neorealism is that while duly emphasizing the domestic, they, in turn, gave little attention to the external dimension of weak states' national security concerns and the interplay thereof. If one agrees with Buzan that states are "exceedingly dissimilar", then there is no reason to assume that that dissimilarity does not exist among the weak states as well. Hence, in addition to their domestic condition, the security concerns of weak states may also vary depending on historical and geopolitical conditions and the patterns of interstate relations in their respective regions. Based on the above backdrop, therefore, this dissertation sets out to examine and understand Ethiopia's security predicaments in the context of the Horn of African security complex.

The patterns of interstate relations and domestic security conditions of states in the Horn of Africa have almost always been problematic. Unlike other African regions, the Horn of Africa manifests an intense pattern of interstate hostilities and shifting alliances. The region's states are interlocked in very dynamic security interactions that stem from within and outside their borders. As scholarly studies (Bereketeab 2013; Healy, 2014; Sharamo and Berouk, 2011; Woodward, 2002) clearly show, since the 1960s, the region has seen full-scale interstate wars, protracted civil wars and low-

key insurgencies, mutual subversions and interference, state collapse, and secessions. In addition, the region has been affected by terrorists (i.e., Al Ittihad Al Islamiya and Al Shabaab) and an Islamist regime (Sudan) with propensities of destabilisation during the 1990s (Healy, 2011; Woodward, 2013). In this context, the boundary between domestic and interstate conflicts are often blurred (Berouk, 2011; Cliffe, 1999). The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)—the organization that was meant to promote peace, security and integration in the region and security governance norms thereof—has been crippled primarily by the interstate rivalries (Asnake, 2015; Healy, 2011). Therefore, the Horn of Africa is an example of what Buzan called a regional security complex, a region where we have security interdependence among proximate states (Berouk, 2011).

As a state located at the centre of the Horn of Africa and close to the geostrategic Middle East, Ethiopia has been facing multiple security challenges stemming from within and outside its borders. Domestically, it is a perpetually troubled entity due to ethnic and religious cleavages compounded by authoritarianism, economic/social malaise, and recurrent political violence. Although it has presented itself as a stable and economically advancing state from 1991 to 2018, its foundational legitimacy has been contested by numerous ethno-nationalist factions at least since the 1960s. Therefore, over the last three decades—like the preceding periods save the civil wars—it has been a weak and essentially contested state amidst various sociopolitical and economic experiments aimed at overcoming its perennial problems.

One of the contentious moves that have been taken to overcome the domestic problem—the so-called “national question” and demands for “self-determination” by ethnic groups—is the restructuring of the state into an ethnic-based federation. This purportedly recognized and accommodated the demands of the diverse ethnic groups (Assefa, 2012). Meanwhile, the former

regime, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which held power from 1991 to 2018, endeavoured to democratize the political system, though the sincerity of these efforts has been heavily scrutinized by critics and observers (Abbink, 2006; Pausewang, Tronvoll, & Aalen, 2002). The federalization of the state, the democratization of politics, and the experimentation with various development models (from Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization to the developmental state) were meant to overcome domestic challenges and reduce vulnerabilities.<sup>2</sup> However, as indicated by leading global indices, Ethiopia continues to be a fragile state, grappling with persistent domestic insecurity. For instance, according to the one-off 2008 Weak States Index of the Brookings Institution, Ethiopia is one of the top 20 weak states out of 141 (see Ethiopia's global rankings in various indices below).

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<sup>2</sup> In the 2002 Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy, the government explicitly stated that to ensure the national survival of Ethiopia, democratization and development have to be realized.

	HDI Rank <sup>3</sup>	FWI Rank <sup>4</sup>	GPI Rank <sup>5</sup>	FSI Rank <sup>6</sup>	WSI Rank <sup>7</sup>
1991	141/160	Not Free	--	--	--
1993	138/160	Partly Free	--	--	--
1994	151/173	Not Free	--	--	--
1995	169/174	Partly Free	--	--	--
1996	171/173	Partly Free	--	--	--
1997	142/146	Partly Free	--	--	--
1998	171/173	Partly Free	--	--	--
1999	171/173	Partly Free	--	--	--
2000	171/174	Partly Free	--	--	--
2001	158/162	Partly Free	--	--	--
2002	168/173	Partly Free	--	--	--
2003	169/175	Partly Free	--	--	--
2004	170/177	Partly Free	--	--	--
2005	170/177	Partly Free	--	26/147	--
2006	170/177	Partly Free	--	18/177	--
2007	169/177	Partly Free	121/140	16/177	--
2008	169/177	Partly Free	121/140	16/177	19/141
2009	171/177	Partly Free	128/144	16/177	--
2010	157/169	Partly Free	127/149	20/177	--
2011	174/187	Not Free	131/153	17/177	--
2012	173/187	Not Free	137/158	19/177	--

\* Table 1: *Ethiopia's global rank according to multiple indices. Since the scope of the research is delimited between 1991 and 2012, the table shows only the periods covered in the research.*

\*\* *Collated by the researcher from the respective agencies' openly available database.*

<sup>3</sup> Human Development Index is produced annually by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In HDI ranking, the highest the rank, the lowest the value of a country's human development (see <http://hdr.undp.org/en/global-reports>).

<sup>4</sup> Freedom in the World Index is an annual report by the Freedom House. It classifies countries into three categories, namely: free, partly free, and not free based mainly on their performance in civil and political rights (see <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world>).

<sup>5</sup> Since Global Peace Index produces annual reports only since 2007, the years before that are left blank. The report ranks countries in terms of their peacefulness. The higher the rank, the lower the value (see <http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/global-peace-index/>).

<sup>6</sup> FSI, first known as Failed States Index and later renamed as Fragile States Index produced reports annually since 2005. The lower the rank, the lower the value (<https://fragilestatesindex.org/>).

<sup>7</sup> Weak States Index is a one-off report produced by The Brookings Institution. Ethiopia is in the bottom quintile (ranking among the "141 weakest states"), major gaps in political, security, social welfare, and GNI per capita. The lower the rank, the lower the value (<https://www.brookings.edu/research/index-of-state-weakness-in-the-developing-world/>).

Added to its domestic challenges is the difficult external environment which Ethiopia has to live with. Since the 1990s, it saw a low-key conflict with Sudan, full-scale and proxy war with Eritrea, and military interventions in Somalia amidst domestic insecurities. Moreover, Ethiopia's longstanding dispute with Egypt over the Nile River intensified after the commencement of Ethiopia's mammoth hydropower project in 2011, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), as noted by Nasr & Neef (2016). In fact, from the perspective of both states's national security, this longstanding dispute has made Egypt a country *of*, though not *in*, the Horn of Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, this dissertation examines Ethiopia's security predicaments stemming from both domestic and external vulnerabilities and threats. In doing so, it also examines the interplay of the domestic and external sources of insecurity. As such, while the Horn of African security complex constitutes the external dimension, Ethiopia's internal order constitutes the domestic dimension of its insecurities. Regarding the domestic dimension, the dissertation examines the politics of national liberation and the challenges of building a non-partisan professional national army in Ethiopia as case studies. In terms of the external dimension, it extensively explores the dynamics of Ethiopia's engagement with its near neighbours—Eritrea and Somalia—and the politics of the Nile which involves Egypt and Sudan.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

This dissertation examines the national security predicaments of Ethiopia in the context of the post-1991 internal political order and the Horn of Africa's security complex. In doing so, it investigates the domestic and external dimensions of Ethiopia's (in) security as well as the interplay thereof anchored on the concept and phenomenon of weak state (or state fragility) and

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<sup>8</sup> This can be elaborated by the multiple cases of conflict and conflict management initiatives such as dozens of the Somali peace processes in which Egypt invited itself and became a contending player vis-à-vis Ethiopia (see the chapter on the near neighbours and the politics of the Nile).

its implications on national and regional security. As such, the dissertation is situated at the intersection of national and regional security on the one hand, and domestic and foreign policies on the other.

The related literature on weak states and their security predicaments primarily focuses on the oft-cited challenges facing them, namely: low level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration; lack or low levels of legitimacy of the state and its institutions; and lack of capacity (Ayoob, 1997; Azar and Moon, 1988; Buzan, 1991, Jackson and Sorensen, 2013).<sup>9</sup> These are considered to have dual effects on the security dynamics of weak states and regions where such states are densely and contiguously located, namely: (a) internal security dilemma (or insecurity dilemma)—i.e., security as a primarily domestic rather than external concern; and (b) a non-threatening regional security environment because such weak states are engulfed in their own domestic insecurities (Feraru, 2017; Kelly, 2007). As such, if the external (or regional) dimension is considered to be an important element, it is primarily because of the spillover effect of domestic insecurities such as the diverse effects of a civil war on neighbouring states (Ayoob, 1995; Feraru, 2017; Kelly, 2007).

Thus, as a result of the predominant focus on the domestic dimension and due to the view that the internal security (insecurity) dilemma trumps the external, the foregoing body of literature gives little attention to the external dimension and its interplay with the domestic. Consequently, other dynamics like regional power competitions (or efforts at power projection) and the threats a neighbouring state poses to another's territorial integrity, political independence, and/or critical interests have garnered little interest<sup>10</sup> By taking Ethiopia's national security predicaments as a

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<sup>9</sup> See also related works by Sorensen, 2007; Kelley, 2007; and Miller, 2005; 2007.

<sup>10</sup> An important exception to this, perhaps, is Ayoob's 1995 book, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System*. However, in his 1997 seminal work, *Subaltern Realism*, he emphasized the primacy of the domestic dimension in analyzing security in the weak (Third World) states.

case study—in the context of the Horn of Africa—this dissertation examines how/whether the domestic dimension necessarily trumps the external. Furthermore, the dissertation examines the interplay of the domestic and external dimensions.

As a multi-ethnic and multireligious country located at the heart of the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia has been faced with multiple and complex security challenges. These challenges stem from both internal and external vulnerabilities and threats. Regardless, there is little scholarly work that examines the domestic and external sources of Ethiopia's national security predicaments. This is really surprising considering the plethora of articles and books on federalism, identity (ethnic/religious) politics, and conflict. The available related literature takes the Ethiopian state for granted and rather focuses on issues such as a human security critique of the 2002 FANSPS (Ethiopia's national security white paper) (Alemayehu, 2009; Belachew, 2014b); the implication of Ethiopia's landlockedness on its politico-military and economic security (Yohannes, 2017); Ethiopia's growing regional influence in the Horn of Africa (Medhane, 2015; Mehari, 2017; Le Gouriellec, 2018; Záhořík, 2014); and the implication of extra-regional actors' military presence in the Horn of Africa (Gashaw and Zelalem, 2016).

Centring on Ethiopia's national security dilemmas and grounded in the scholarly discourse concerning the security challenges of weak states found in fragile and conflict prone regions like the Horn of Africa, this dissertation diverges from the extant corpus of knowledge in two distinct aspects. Firstly, while recognizing the importance of internal security challenges, the study delves into the realm of external insecurity and the interplay between these two spheres. . Secondly, the study views Ethiopia as a persistently fragile state and examines its national security by evaluating its inherent weaknesses—such as limited sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, legitimacy, and capacity, along with the high frequency of internal political violence—and

contrasts these with external (regional) security threats and vulnerabilities. Based on these, the dissertation examines the interplay of the domestic and external dimensions of Ethiopia's (in)security.

The interplay of the domestic and external dimensions of insecurity is operationalized in terms of dual processes. On the one hand, the interplay is analysed from the point of view of Ethiopia's domestic vulnerabilities and/or threats and the external/regional actors' meddling. As mentioned above, the threats and vulnerabilities stem from the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, legitimacy, capacity and the recurring political violence. The manifestation of this, therefore, is examined in terms of the external/regional actors' provision of safe havens for insurgent groups, using insurgents as instruments or proxies of power projection, and destabilization. For this purpose, the Oromo Liberation Front's (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front's (ONLF) politics of national liberation and insurgency were examined as case studies. In addition, the paradoxes embedded in the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) is systematically investigated as it evinces the challenges of building state institutions in a weak state. On the other hand, the interplay is also viewed as manifestation of (in)security in terms of threats posed by external actors, the domestic considerations (sources) of Ethiopia's actual regional security approaches/activism and its consequences. This includes the dynamics of Ethiopia's engagement with and policies/actions toward its neighbours such as military and non-military interventions in Somalia, military actions and diplomatic campaigns against Eritrea, and counterhegemonic posturing and action toward the issue of the Nile.

Hence, while the first process is further elaborated by examining how external/regional actors exploit Ethiopia's vulnerabilities and Ethiopia's responses thereof, the latter pertains to Ethiopia's pre-emptive and/or reactive approaches and actions in the region. Put differently, the second

process stems primarily from the external dimension (or interstate rivalry) but linked to domestic considerations in certain ways. As such, the dissertation demonstrates the imperative of examining the dynamics of Ethiopia's relations with its near (Eritrea and Somalia) and distant (Egypt and Sudan) neighbours'. This is examined not only in terms of rivalry for regional influence but also the continuous exploitation of Ethiopia's domestic conditions.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, Ethiopia's insecurities are operationalized in terms of vulnerabilities and threats that stem both from within and outside. This includes, as mentioned above, the vulnerabilities and threats that are typical to weak states on the one hand and the military and non-military threats posed by Ethiopia's neighbours on the other. As such, the interplay of the domestic and the external is not viewed as a unidirectional but rather a bidirectional process, i.e. both from inside out and from outside in.<sup>12</sup>

In doing so, Mohammed Ayoob's (1997) *Subaltern Realism* is complemented by Buzan and Waever's (2003) *Regional Security Complex Theory* (RSCT) as a theoretical framework. While Subaltern Realism serves the purpose of analysing the domestic dimension, complementing it by RSCT helps us analyse the external dimension and the interplay thereof. Using RSCT to analyse security in the Horn of Africa is not new. It has been used by some authors (see Berouk, 2011; Mercy, 2017; Yohannes, 2017; Yonas, 2019) to analyse the specific questions they sought to address. This includes whether RSCT explains the security dynamics in the Horn of Africa (Berouk, 2011); as a framework of explaining the pastoral relations (conflict and security) in the Karamoja Cluster (Mercy, 2017); to explain the implications of landlockedness on Ethiopia's politico-military and economic security (Yohannes, 2017); and to analyse the nexus between state

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<sup>11</sup> Near and distant, for the purpose of this research, does not just reflect geographic proximity but the socio-cultural similarities and/or shared historical past among the neighboring communities across international borders.

<sup>12</sup> The interplays can, therefore, be viewed as examples of the internationalization (or regionalization, to be specific) of the local (i.e. domestic) and the localization of the international (i.e. external) and vice versa.

fragility and conflict in the Horn of Africa (Yonas, 2019). With the exception of Yohannes's PhD dissertation, the rest are not national security analyses *per se*. As such, the application of RSCT in this dissertation research differs from the aforementioned works for the following reasons: (a) in this dissertation, RSCT complements Subaltern Realism to highlight on the importance of giving adequate attention to the domestic dimension, and (b) RSCT is used to analyse national security—i.e., the interplay of Ethiopia's domestic and external (in)securities in the context of the Horn of Africa's security complex.

In all, this dissertation attempts to unravel the question that if the domestic dimension of (in)security trumps the external, as the available literature indicates, why is then Ethiopia's national security inextricably tied to the patterns of interstate amity and enmity in the region? Based on this observation, the dissertation is anchored on the following propositions: (a) Ethiopia's security predicament is generated by the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and political legitimacy accompanied by recurrent internal political violence, and hence, domestic insecurity dilemma; (b) despite the above, the external dimension of (in)security has also been important, and the domestic insecurity dilemma does not always trump the external, and (c) the combination of (a) and (b) creates a pattern of interplays between the domestic and external dimensions of (in)security. This inextricably links Ethiopia's national security with that of the stability and security of its neighbours in particular and the region in general.

### **1.3. Objectives**

The overarching objective of this dissertation is to examine the national security predicaments of Ethiopia—as a weak state—in the context of the Horn of Africa's security complex. In so doing, it specifically aimed to identify the major domestic and external vulnerabilities of and threats to

Ethiopia's security as defined, framed, and dealt with by the state/regime. Specifically, the research seeks:

- 1.3.1. To identify the major domestic and external vulnerabilities of and threats to Ethiopia's security;
- 1.3.2. To analyse the interplay of domestic and external security vulnerabilities and threats, and;
- 1.3.3. To examine the efficacy of the Ethiopian state's responses to major security threats and vulnerabilities.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

The overarching question this dissertation address is: What are the major sources Ethiopia's security predicament as defined, framed, and addressed by the state/regime? And, why is its national security inextricably tied to the patterns of interstate amity and enmity in the region? In doing so, the dissertation addresses the following specific questions:

- 1.4.1. What are the major domestic and external security threats to and vulnerabilities of Ethiopia?
- 1.4.2. How has the interplay of internal and external security threats and vulnerabilities affected Ethiopia's national security?
- 1.4.3. How has the state responded to the corresponding security threats and vulnerabilities? Are there observable patterns associated with the state's responses and what is the efficacy of the state's response actions?

## 1.5. Scope and Limitations

The temporal scope of this dissertation's case studies is delimited to the period between 1991 and 2012. The selection of these two decades is rather deliberate. While 1991 marks a departure from a particular form of organization of the state (from unitary to federal) and government (from military and presidential to civilian (and parliamentary)), the year 2012 represents the beginning of the end of a seemingly formidable regime following the death of its most prominent leader, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. In many respects, the death of Meles Zenawi was a watershed that paved the way to the "transition" or "reforms" and the political violence and civil war that ensued in the post-2018 context. Hence, the research will not delve into the "post-Meles" period.

This study is about Ethiopia's national security. However, Ethiopia's national security cannot be understood in isolation from the regional context. Therefore, while remaining focused on Ethiopia, the dissertation, in one way or another, examines the Horn of Africa's security complex from the perspective of Ethiopia's central place in it. In doing so, the dissertation primarily focuses on Ethiopia's interactions with Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan.<sup>13</sup> The reason for selecting these states is that Ethiopia has intense (positive and negative) security interactions with them. Apart from these, interactions with other states of the region such as Kenya, Djibouti, South Sudan as well as the extra-regional actors are mentioned only when it has significant bearings either on Ethiopia's national security or on the Horn of Africa's security complex. An exception to this is Egypt, a country that is tied to Ethiopia's and the region's security via the perennial dispute over the Nile River.

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<sup>13</sup> Ethiopia's relation with Djibouti is also very relevant. However, since Ethiopia's engagement with Djibouti is limited to the former's limited access to the sea and this has been extensively studied (see Yohannes, 2017), it is not to be examined as a case study here.

In terms of thematic focus, the research is delimited to the politico-military sphere. While remaining cognizant of the post-Cold War obsession with the non-traditional security issues including human security, this dissertation does not investigate these security issues. This delimitation of the scope should not be construed to mean that non-traditional security issues including human security are irrelevant. It simply means that non-traditional security issues including human security are beyond the scope of the research. As such, the politico-military security spheres are understood in this dissertation as interlinked issues. As Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde argued, “although the political and military sectors are conceptually distinct, the partial interchangeability of force and consent in the process of government links them together” (1998, p. 50). However, it is also important to note their definitional distinction. That is, from the perspective of political security, “...existential threats are traditionally defined in terms of the constituting principle—sovereignty, but sometimes also ideology—of the state. Sovereignty can be existentially threatened by anything that questions recognition, legitimacy, or governing authority” (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998, p. 22). On the hand, military security “...revolves largely around the ability of the governments to maintain themselves against internal and external military threats, but can also involve the use of military power to defend states or governments against non-military threats to their existence, such as migrants or rival ideologies” (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998, p. 50). Therefore, this dissertation is thematically/conceptually delimited to the political and military security threats/vulnerabilities Ethiopia has been facing during the study period.

As is the case with any research, this dissertation research has faced certain limitations. The researcher anticipated limitations that may stem from the concepts, conceptual framework, and methodology employed. Limitation stemming from the lack of access to archives including memos

and minutes as well as key informants for interviews were also anticipated. What was not anticipated was the global outbreak of Covid-19 and its local effects and the degeneration of Ethiopia's domestic security into a full-scale civil war since 2020. These developments essentially stalled the progress of the research and made collecting data from relevant sources literally impossible. For instance, Covid-19 and the ensued lockdown prevented the researcher from having access to unpublished materials and potential interviewees. The political violence and civil war made access to archives, if any, and interviews on subjects related to security impractical. Potential interviewees who were privy to major policy decisions and actions between the study periods were divided along the two sides of the civil war and it was impossible to have a contact with them. Hence, the researcher had to revise and improvise the methodology.

Therefore, in place of closed state archives, which are not accessible, the dissertation relied on Ethiopia's daily newspaper—*Addis Zemen*—as an open-archive. In addition to *Addis Zemen*, other relevant official/non-official documents, policy documents, open source materials as well as grey literature were used (see the methodology chapter for details). There are limitations associated with relying on open sources or archives such as selection bias, reporter/interpreter bias, and bias embedded in the structure within which the sources/archives are produced. To compensate for the limitations associated with this, the dissertation corroborated them with purposefully selected key-informant interviewees and secondary sources. Doing so, the data generated/collected through open-sources/archives are triangulated and verified to the extent possible.

## **1.6. Significance of the Study**

This dissertation has at least four major contributions: theoretical/conceptual, methodological, empirical, and policy/practical. Theoretically/conceptually, the dissertation engages with the existing body of knowledge on weak states, national security, and regional security in a weak state-

dense region (Buzan, 1991; Jones and Jenne, 2015; Kelly, 2007; Feraru, 2017; and Wehyee, 2017). This means that by studying Ethiopia's security predicaments in the context of the Horn of Africa, the dissertation adds some insights on the scholarly debate about the national security of weak states and the security dynamics in weak state-dense regions. It also contributes to the body of knowledge on regional security that is particularly concerned with weak state-dense regions that have certain commonalities with the Horn of Africa—such as the Great Lakes region.

Methodologically, its systematic use of open-source data, particularly the process of generating original data from *Addis Zemen* as an open-archive, can be taken as relatively unique but replicable. The experience and process of generating data from *Addis Zemen*, as discussed in detail in the methodology chapter, was daunting. But, in the end, it proved to be worthwhile and rewarding. As an open-archive, *Addis Zemen* can be used as a data source and site not only for security studies but also several other disciplines as it publishes policies, speeches, interviews, etc. By replicating the process discussed in the methodology chapter, researchers may generate relevant data that is either unavailable or inaccessible elsewhere.

Empirically, the systematic and rigorous examination of Ethiopia's national security predicaments would be a valuable addition to the scant literature on the national security of the Ethiopian state (Belachew, 2014b; Berouk, 2012; Medhane, 2015; Mehari, 2017; Le Gouriellec, 2018; and Záhorkík, 2014). It also adds some insights into the extant empirical literature on security in Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular. Moreover, since most of the data presented in this dissertation is generated from Amharic data sources, it can be taken as original contribution to the English speaking community of the field.

In terms of policy contribution, one of the most relevant questions is whether weak states should adopt an entirely/predominantly inward-looking national security policy that gives little regard to

the external/regional dimension. This dissertation research's finding deviates a little from the dominant view that the domestic dimension trumps the external. While the research, as it is the case in the extant literature, confirms the importance of the domestic dimension, Ethiopia's experience shows that the external dimension cannot be taken for granted. The inward-looking national security policy has to be complemented by a policy that gives due attention to the external.

### **1.7. Organization**

This dissertation is organized into nine chapters including the introduction and conclusion. Chapter one serves as the introduction, outlining the broader topic, problem statement, research objectives, questions, scope, and significance of the study. The second chapter is allotted for a detailed review of the related literature focusing on state weakness, national security, and regional security. It also presents the knowledge gap this dissertation aims to fill and the theoretical framework that guides the analysis. Chapter three discusses the methodology adopted by this dissertation. It discusses the study design, sources of data and methods of data collection, method of data analysis and interpretation. Moreover, this chapter makes a case for using newspaper data and exploring newspapers as open-archives by discussing in detail the process and experience of generating data from *Addis Zemen*. The fourth chapter briefly reviews the empirical literature on the national security of Ethiopia focusing on discourses that expound historic and contemporary Ethiopia.

From chapter five through chapter eight, the dissertation presents the findings and analysis. Chapter five discusses the politics of national liberation as a manifestation of the Ethiopian state's inherent weakness and perennial insecurity. In doing so, it uses the OLF and ONLF's challenges to the Ethiopian state/EPRDF's regime and the efficacy or lack thereof of the regimes' responses to the politics of national liberation. The focus of chapter six is on the building of the ENDF as a

national army and the legal-political and the legitimacy-capacity paradoxes embedded in it as a state institution. Doing so, the chapter shows the challenge of building a non-partisan and professional state institution that is capable and legitimate. Chapter seven discusses in detail the dynamics of Ethiopia's engagement and policy towards Eritrea and Somalia. This chapter shows the patterns of interstate relations—involving Ethiopia and its most proximate neighbours—that shaped both national and regional security in the Horn of Africa. The eighth chapter focuses on the politics of the Nile and beyond. It discusses the dynamics of Ethiopia's engagement and policy vis-à-vis Egypt and Sudan focusing on the hydro-hegemony of Egypt and Sudan's bandwagoning as well as Ethiopia's counterhegemonic posturing and endeavours.

The last chapter, chapter nine, presents the synthesis and conclusion. In doing so, the chapter discusses and synthesizes the findings of the dissertation with the extant literature and the theoretical framework. It also summarizes the findings and analyses based on the framework and points out their implications. Finally, the chapter concludes the dissertation by restating the implications of the findings and pointing out areas that require further investigation.

## Chapter Two

### National Security, Weak States and Weak State-Dense Regions

#### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the relevant literature on the national security challenges of weak states and delves into the security issues prevalent in fragile regions predominantly composed of such weak states. In doing so, the chapter is organized into four sections. The first section is this introduction. Section two focuses on the literature on weak states vis-à-vis their national security predicaments. Section three briefly outlines—based on the literature—the distinction between state weakness/strength and state power. The fourth section reviews the broader literature on regional security vis-à-vis weak state-dense regions. Finally, section five discusses the framework of analysis inspired by the literature reviewed in the preceding sections.

#### 2.2. Weak States' Security Predicaments

The literature on weak states (or state weakness) and their security predicaments can be traced back to the early 1980s, influential works being, in chronological order; Jackson and Rosberg (1982), Buzan (1983), Ayoob (1983/84), Azar and Moon (1988), Migdal (1988), and Caroline Thomas (1989). Since the end of the Cold War, more studies have been published (partly due to the shift of focus from the global to regional security and intrastate conflicts/insecurities) including Buzan (1991), Jobs (1992), Adibe (1994), Ayoob (1995/1997), Pettiford (1996), Eizenstat, Porter, and Weinstein (2005), Miller (2005/2007), Sorensen (2007), Paul (2010), Jones and Jenne (2015), Feraru (2017), and Wehyee (2017). Since the September 11, 2001 attack on the U.S and the subsequent global war on terrorism, more works have also been published about weak states, mainly taking them as the sources of and conducive environments to terrorists/terrorist

organizations. Examples of this works include Rotberg (2003), Österdahl (2004), Tikuisis (2009), and Patrick (2011).

A cursory look at these works indicates that the literature has been abuzz with multiple terminologies/concepts that are used interchangeably. During the Cold War, and in some instances even now, the term “Third World states” has been widely used to categorise weak states (Ayoob, 1995; Azar and Moon, 1988). In the academic fields of conflict, peace, and security studies, the terms “Third World states”, “fragile states”, and “weak states” are frequently encountered. (see, for instance, Ayoob, 1997; Azar and Moon, 1988; Buzan, 1983; 1991; Buzan and Waever, 2003; Miller, 2007; Jackson and Sorensen, 2013; Wehyee, 2017). Recent works such as that of Buzan and Waever (2003), Miller (2007), Sorenson 2007; and Jackson and Sorensen (2013) use the term weak states. Divergent usages aside, one can decipher that these terms refer to a particular type of states which share certain common attributes, i.e. most of them emerged out of colonial domination, suffer from multidimensional socioeconomic and political problems, grapple with incomplete processes of state-building, and experience violent conflicts (Ayoob, 1997; Azar and Moon, 1988; Buzan, 1983/1991).<sup>14</sup> Therefore, what is referred to as weak state in this dissertation is largely similar to the so-called Third World States, fragile states, etc. that manifest the attributes already mentioned.

The neorealist tradition that dominated international relations and security studies until recent decades tends to view states as *unitary* and *functionally undifferentiated* actors (Waltz, 1979/2000). As such, a state is viewed by neorealists as a *black box* whose internal workings are considered to be irrelevant to understand its national security concerns. Since they consider the

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<sup>14</sup> See also related works such as Buzan and Waever, 2003; Miller, 2007; Jackson and Sorensen, 2013.

external security environment—the anarchic nature of the international system—more important in terms of determining the state’s security and survival, the domestic dimension is taken for granted (Waltz, 1979; 2001; Mearsheimer, 2001; 2002). However, this view has been criticized by proponents of liberalism (such as democratic peace theorists), constructivism (e.g., “anarchy is what states make of it”) (Wendt, 1992), and critical and emancipatory theories (that seek to move away from state-centricity) (Booth, 1991; 2007; Krause and Michael, 1997), to mention but a few.

Departing from the neorealist assertion, Barry Buzan (1991), in his seminal work *Peoples, States, and Fear*, argues that as objects of security states are “exceedingly dissimilar.” And, due to the dissimilarity between and among them, “...the nature of security as a problem necessarily differs substantially from state to state” (p.65). One major difference Buzan cites pertains to the *idea* and *institutions of a state* which are important components along with a state’s *territorial base* (p.65). In line with this, he makes a distinction between states: weak and strong states. In doing so, he asserts that “... [w]hen the idea and institutions of a state are both weak, then the state is in a real sense less of a state than one in which the ideas and institutions are strong” (p.65). That is, the weaker the idea and institutions of a state, the weaker the state *qua* state. Conversely, the stronger the idea and institutions of a state, the stronger the state *qua* state. Therefore, state weakness/strength is a matter of degree, i.e. a state can grow weaker/stronger over time. However, Buzan cautions us that “[s]trength as a state neither depends on, nor correlates with, power”; rather than power, there are certain factors that explain the strength and weakness of a state such as its sociopolitical cohesion and legitimacy (p. 66).

According to him, strong states reflect “a long historical process of state development and maturity” (e.g. Britain and France) and/or “... may benefit from a good fit with a well-developed nation” (e.g. Japan). On the contrary, “... weak states may have inherited, or had thrust upon them,

boundaries which include a diversity of nations, like [the former Republic of Yugoslavia], Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Iraq” (p.66). As such, weak states normally “... find themselves trapped by historical patterns of economic development and political power which leave them underdeveloped and politically penetrated, and therefore unable to muster the economic and political resources necessary to build a stronger state” (p.66). Therefore, from the perspective of Buzan, regardless of why weak states exist, “the distinction between weak and strong states is vital to any analysis of national security” (p.66). As can be understood from his later works, especially the one he co-authored with Ole Waever (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, he re-asserted the relevance of this distinction not only to analyse national security but also regional security.

Therefore, how do scholars, including Buzan, expounded state weakness? To start with Buzan and Waever (2003, p.492), weak states are “... those having low levels of sociopolitical cohesion and generally high levels of internal political violence.”<sup>15</sup> We can dissect this into two broad elements. The first pertains to the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion which corresponds to what Azar and Moon (1988) called, in their seminal work *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats*, the “software” side of national security, particularly national *integration*.<sup>16</sup> It also corresponds to what Miller (2005; 2007) calls “state-to-nation balance” and/or “state-to-nation congruence.” This is particularly apparent in multi-ethnic and religiously diverse states that have competing ethnic and religious nationalisms and cleavages where a group or

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<sup>15</sup> Conversely, according to Buzan and Waever (2003, p. 492), strong states are, “... those having high levels of sociopolitical cohesion and low levels of internal political violence”.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, Azar and Moon listed three important elements of the “software” side, namely, political legitimacy, integration, and overall policy capacity (p.8).

multiple groups feel/display little attachment to the very state to which they are citizens (Sorensen, 2007).

The second element pertains to the recurring problem that defines and explains the majority of weak states, i.e. high levels of internal political violence. As both qualitative and quantitative studies (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Stewart, 2008) and databases (Pettersson, Högladh, & Öberg, 2019; UCDP, 2019) indicate, most of the violent internal political conflicts do occur in weak states. The prevalence of internal political violence stems from several factors including resource scarcity/abundance (Collier and Hoefler, 2004); social, economic, political, cultural inequalities (Stewart, 2008); demands for self-determination/secession (Weller, 2009), etc. As the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2019) indicates, most of the intrastate conflicts take place in what can be considered, from the perspective of this dissertation research, as weak states.

However, weak states are defined not only by the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and high levels of internal political violence but also by the lack of legitimacy and lack of capacity (see, for instance, Ayoob, 1995; Feraru, 2017; Wehyee, 2017).<sup>17</sup> Combined, these correspond to another two elements of Azar and Moon's "software" side of weak states' national security threats: lack of *political legitimacy* and *overall policy capacity* (p.8). The lack of overall capacity also relates to what Jackson and Rosberg (1982) called lack of "empirical statehood" in their seminal article, *Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood*. That is, most weak states lack capacity, especially in terms of effective control of their territories and provision of social services, to carry out the activities expected from a state. Although Jackson and Rosberg's article appears too old, it is one of the oft-cited works for its

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<sup>17</sup> See also Glenn, 1997.

significant contribution to understanding weak states and why/how they survived despite a myriad of challenges they faced. Central to their argument is the distinction they made between what they called “empirical” versus “juridical” statehood. While the former denotes the effective control of the state, the latter refers to the legal condition that safeguards the continuous existence of weak states regardless of their inability to fully function as a state.<sup>18</sup>

Relatively recent works by other scholars, such as Sorenson (2007); Miller (2005/2007), Paul (2010) and most recent works, such as Jones and Jenne (2016) and Feraru (2017), which build on earlier works have also attempted to understand and explain weak states from the perspective of security/insecurity. For instance, based on his assessment of the sub-Saharan African states, Sorensen (2007) identified three major characteristics of weak states, namely, (a) defective economy, (b) lack of coherent national community, and (c) absence of effective and responsive state institutions. In terms of the economy, Sorensen states that “... there is a lack of coherent national economy, capable of sustaining a basic level of welfare for the population and of providing the resources for running an effective state” (p.363). Due to the defectiveness of their economies, therefore, weak states “...often depend crucially on the world market because they are mono-economies based on the export of one or a few primary goods” (p. 363). With regard to the lack of coherent “national community”, Sorensen argues that weak states “...do not make up a coherent national community” because of physical, cultural, and infrastructural limitations. Hence, the “national community of citizens” created, in many states at independence, is limited by the aforementioned factors. In reality, this “national community of citizens” is mostly limited only to the formal process of “...providing citizens with identity cards and passports” (p. 363)

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<sup>18</sup> The legal conditions that underpin the “juridical statehood” include the sovereignty, non-interference, and respect for the territorial integrity of the states concerned. In addition, in the context of Africa, the principle of *uti possidetis* engendered the inviolability of colonial boundaries and hence preventing territorial expansion and consolidation.

Sorensen does not deny that there have been “scattered attempts to launch nation-building projects” so as to develop a “common idea of the state” (p. 364). But he contends that these states do not provide the legal, political, and social rights which are “the real substances of citizenship” on a major scale. The consequence of this is that due to the absence or limited delivery of the state, “people turn elsewhere for the satisfaction of material and non-material needs” (p.364). In many of the sub-Saharan African states, therefore, people turn to their ethnic communities. Finally, in terms of the absence of effective and responsive state institutions, Sorensen pointed to the lack of weak states’ leaders’ willingness and ability to create effective and responsive state institutions. He attributes this partly to the leaders’ fear that strong institutions “... represent a potential threat to their firm grip on state power” (p. 364). Sorensen’s argument particularly reflects an element of what Brian Job (1992) called the insecurity dilemma of weak states’ leaders—the “domestic threat to and from the regime that holds power” (Job, 1992).

A slightly different argument from the studies reviewed above is made by Benjamin Miller. Miller’s works (2005; 2007) primarily assess weak states from the perspective of explaining variations in the dynamics of regional security. In doing so, Miller mainly directs our attention toward the state-to-nation balance/congruence or lack thereof as well as the institutional capacity or lack thereof in differentiating and understanding states. His concern, as already indicated, is explaining security in regions populated by such states. For Miller, state weakness is a manifestation of lack of “... effective institutions and resources to implement their policies and fulfil key state functions” (p. 54). Accordingly, he argues that, on the one hand, weak states may manifest state-to-nation balance but lack institutional capacity (which he called *congruent weak*

states), and on the other, they may manifest both state-to-nation imbalance and lack of institutional capacity (i.e., *incongruent weak states*).<sup>19</sup>

State-to-nation balance (lack thereof), thus, refers to "... the extent of congruence or compatibility between political boundaries and national identifications ..." (Miller, 2007, p. 54). In this sense, Miller, unlike the works reviewed in the preceding paragraphs, views state weakness from the perspective of institutional capacity of the state alone and he considered state-to-nation balance/imbalance mainly as a separate and additional factor to explain regional security.<sup>20</sup> In other words, for Miller, the degree of state strength or weakness relates to the extent of success in state-building. Hence, it can be understood that state strength or weakness is a function of institutional capacity, not just sociopolitical cohesion/national integration. Put differently, Miller (2007), states that:

*The strength of states is determined by the institutions and resources available to them for governing the polity. Weak states lack effective institutions and resources to implement their policies and fulfil key state functions. Most notably, they lack effective control over the means of violence in their territory and an effective law-enforcement system. Weak states thus face difficulties maintaining law and order and providing security in their territory. This hobbles the economic activity in these states, making it difficult for them to raise sufficient revenues, to collect taxes, and to maintain an effective bureaucracy and provide vital, or even rudimentary, services to the population ... (p.54).*<sup>21</sup>

While the degree of institutional capacity reflects the extent of success in state-building (strength or weakness of a state), the degree of state-to-nation congruence, according to Miller, reflects the

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<sup>19</sup> The opposite of this would be congruent strong state and incongruent strong state, which are manifestations of variations both institutional capacity and state-to-nation congruence.

<sup>20</sup> According to him, state weakness determines not only the security within but also between states in a region where they are closely located.

<sup>21</sup> Miller relates this to the extent of success in state-building.

extent of success in nation-building (p. 54). State-to-nation congruence, in turn, is determined by whether there is some sort of balance between two important factors: *the existing geopolitical boundaries* and *the national aspirations and identities of the peoples* within boundaries (p. 55). In other words, it is a result of the extent to which the status quo of existing states, in terms of its societal and territorial division, reflects “the national affiliations of the main groups in the region and their aspirations to establish states and/or to revise existing boundaries” (p. 55). Therefore, for Miller, high congruence denotes that states that administer a given territory reflect the aspirations of the peoples—within them—to live together “as national communities”. This, in other words, means that the people have “strong identification” with the state within which they do live. Nonetheless, Miller cautions that such identification with the state and acceptance of its boundaries “must not be based on ethnic homogeneity...but [it] can also be based on civic nationalism” in multi-ethnic states as in the case of North America, Western Europe, and Oceania (pp. 55-56).<sup>22</sup>

Miller’s conception of weak state/state weakness is different from other works such as Azar and Moon, Ayooob, Buzan, and Jackson and Sorensen. Unlike them, he treats state weakness from the perspective of a single factor, that is, institutional capacity, while treating “congruence”—which is more or less similar to cohesion/integration—as a separate factor that can be an attribute of both strong and weak states. Miller opted for this conceptualization, perhaps, because his goal was explaining regional security from the perspective of state-to-nation congruence/incongruence and how this leads to conflict or peace, not from the perspective of state weakness as conceptualized by the aforementioned scholars. Nevertheless, even in that case, the conceptualization of state weakness as a function of lack of capacity is partly relevant.

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<sup>22</sup> Miller implicitly draws a line between state-building and nation-building. While the goal of the first is to overcome state weakness, the latter aims at achieving lack of congruence.

Regardless of the merits of Miller's framing, this research employs the concept of weak state as conceptualized by the other scholars for two reasons. Firstly, the objective of Miller's single factor conceptualization is inadequate for the purpose of this dissertation research. Secondly, unlike Miller, most of the writers included the level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration—which is an important aspect of conceptualizing weak state/state weakness and the insecurities thereof in this dissertation. This conceptualization enables us, the researcher contends, to address the research question in a better and comprehensive manner. This is not to say that Miller's conception is wrong, but rather it is too narrow to help us understand the security implication of state weakness since the singular emphasis on institutional capacity leads us to wrongly assume that capacity alone would solve the insecurity of the state. Without sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and mechanisms to prevent or reduce political violence, capacity alone would have limited contribution to the state's overall strength, as understood in this dissertation. Therefore, in this dissertation views weak state/state weakness and the resultant security predicament as a function of the low level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, high levels of internal political violence, and low levels of political legitimacy and capacity.

### **2.3. Weak/Strong States versus Weak/Strong Powers**

Another important but not much-debated issue in the literature is the distinction between weak/strong states and weak/strong powers. There is a danger of confusing these different notions. In addressing this, Barry Buzan (1983; 1991) noted that the distinction between weak and strong states should not be confused with weak and strong powers. While the distinction between the former refers to "...the status of the units concerned as a member of a class of states", the distinction between the latter refers to "...the traditional distinction among states in respect to their military and economic capability in relation to each other" (p.66-67). Therefore, "[t]he principal distinguishing feature of weak states is their high level of concern with domestically generated

threats...” to their security or the security of the regime in power. This means that, according to Buzan, “... weak states either do not have, or have failed to create, a domestic political and social consensus of sufficient strength to eliminate the large-scale use of force as a major and continuing element in the domestic political life of the nation” (p.67).

With regard to the preceding observation, Jackson and Sorensen (2013) agree with Buzan. They also made a distinction between strong/weak states and strong/weak power. Their basis of differentiation concurs with that of Buzan and they use examples to illustrate the distinction. According to them, we can, arguably, consider Russia as a weak state but strong power, while Sweden can be considered as a strong state but weak power. In the same token, while many African and Asian states could be regarded as both weak states and weak powers, few states in the world such as the United States, France, or Britain could be considered as strong states and strong powers (Jackson and Sorensen, 2013, p.25).

**Table 2: Weak/Strong State—Weak/Strong Power Matrix**

	Weak Power	Strong Power
Weak State	Low sociopolitical cohesion Low political legitimacy Low institutional capacity Low military capability Defective economy	Low sociopolitical cohesion Low political legitimacy Low/modest institutional capacity <i>High military capability</i> <i>Developing/Developed economy</i>
Strong State	High sociopolitical cohesion High legitimacy High/modest institutional capacity Low/modest military capability Developed economy	High sociopolitical cohesion High legitimacy High institutional capacity <i>Advanced military capability</i> <i>Advanced economy</i>

**Source:** The Table is based on own review of the related literature and partly inspired by Jackson and Sorensen (2013).

As the above matrix shows, therefore, the distinction can be made based on the defining elements of each category/class of the state. Nevertheless, this distinction should not be viewed as fixed or permanent. State strength/weakness is a matter of degree and state power is relative/relational (Buzan, 1991; Buzan and Waever, 2003; and Sorensen, 2007). Therefore, both are dynamic and change over time: what is weak today could become strong in the future, and what is strong today could decline and become weak.

Apart from the distinction and the factors contributing to state weakness, the most important thing this section attempted to demonstrate is how almost all the related literature reviewed asserted, over and over again, that security threats to weak states are domestically generated. This is considered to be the case whether it is about the threat to or vulnerability of the state (i.e. due to the low level of sociopolitical cohesion) or a threat to the incumbent regime (i.e., political legitimacy) or lack of stability (i.e. political violence) or inability to project power/influence both within and outside the state boundaries and provide basic socioeconomic services, etc. (i.e. lack of overall capacity). Therefore, almost all the authors whose works are reviewed above argue that the security predicaments of weak states are essentially different from strong states. That is, their insecurities—threats and vulnerabilities—stem dominantly from within, not from the outside.

In all, Brian L. Job aptly summarized the security predicaments of weak states as *insecurity dilemma*, which differs from the traditional security dilemma in four ways; that is,

... (a) *the sense of threat that dominates is domestic threat to and from the regime that holds power; (b) the state lacks effective capacities for providing internal peace and order; (c) popular support for the regime is lacking; the existence and security interests of the regime are not considered legitimate, and (d) primary identification is with communal groups contending for their own security* (Job, 1992, p. 365).

Unlike the insecurity dilemma, the concept of security dilemma is primarily related to two dimensions of national security: *military threats* that are *externally generated*. It pertains to threat *perception* and *reaction* in which one's effort to maximize its own security induces a perception of insecurity on the other, leading to an arms race and more insecurity (Herz, 1950; Tang, 2009).

In sum, the crux of the debate in the related literature pertaining to the national security predicaments of weak states is that unlike strong states, weak states' security problems stem from domestically generated threats and vulnerabilities. This dissertation builds on this powerful argument. However, one important lacuna in this body of literature is that although it may be true that weak states share most or all the attributes and sources of insecurities, little attention has been given to contextual variations, e.g. based on regions/sub-regions, geopolitical features, history, and patterns of relationships between and among weak states, etc. Ayoob (1995), Buzan (2003), Lemeke (2004), Miller (2007) attempted to address this gap but gave little or no attention to the Horn of Africa since their primary focus was on South Asia, South East and East Asia, and the Middle East.

The assumption here is that despite the shared traits, each weak state differs from the rest in some or many respects.<sup>23</sup> While it is true that the security predicaments of weak states are domestically generated, it does not necessarily lead us to conclude that they are not externally (including militarily) threatened or their vulnerabilities are not exploited by other states (weak or strong) from near or afar. This is where this dissertation engages with the literature on weak states' security predicaments by taking Ethiopia as a case study (see chapter four for historical and contemporary

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<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is important to note that Ethiopia, as weak state, is different from Somalia, Eritrea, or Sudan and the way it views itself and viewed by others also differs significantly.

background on the Ethiopian state). Hence, having the foregoing section in mind, it is important to assess the related literature on regional security, which is the task undertaken in the next section.

#### **2.4. Security in Weak State-Dense Regions**

The purpose of this section is to review the related literature on regional security with a focus on how the nature and dynamics of security in weak state-dense regions are understood and explained. The phrase weak state-dense region is used based on what Robert Kelly (2007) called a “weak state-dense environment”. Kelly used the phrase “weak state-dense environment” to refer to a region that is composed of or populated by weak states. Rephrased as a weak state-dense region, this phrase is used throughout this dissertation research to referring to any region that is made up of weak states or where weak states constitute a majority of the states. Examples of such regions can be almost all or most regions on the African continent, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, etc.

The literature on regional security in the post-Cold War era focuses on major developments such as the emergence of regions as important level of analysis due to the end of global bipolarity, the diversity in regions in terms of the degree of political/economic integration, the degree of (attractiveness to) penetration by the superpower (United States) and great powers, regional integration and regional organizations as means for promoting peace/security, etc. (Buzan and Waever, 2003; Katzenstein, 2005; Kelley, 2007; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier, 2012).<sup>24</sup> The common feature shared by the literature on regional security, regardless of methodological and theoretical differences, is the effort to find a place for the regional level in International Relations—a discipline the focus of which has been shaped and dominated by the global dynamics (Kelly, 2007).

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<sup>24</sup> See also related works by Ayoob, 1995; Lemeke, 2004; Lake and Morgan, 1997; Miller, 2005; 2007.

In terms of overall trajectories, the literature addresses three main features of regional security that could develop and have developed out of the dynamics of the regions of the world. That is, while very few of them have developed into being *regional security communities*, others have evolved into *regional security regimes*, and some others lack both and may have been *regional conflict formations*. The difference between these lies in the extent to which relations between states in a given region are characterized by conflict, cooperation and/or interdependence, how disputes/conflicts are regionally viewed and addressed, and how/whether a reasonable level of cooperation or integration is attained. The above three—security communities, security regimes, and conflict formations—correspond to what Buzan and Waever called “Wendtian [Alexander Wendt] idea of social structures of anarchy” i.e. Kantian, Lockean, and Hobbesian respectively (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 50-53).

In the case of regional security communities, war/violent conflict among states of the region is almost unthinkable due to shared values and institutions that are characteristic of interdependent relations. Europe and North America are best examples of a regional security community where the possibility of violent conflict between the states of the region has become unlikely (Adler and Barnett, 1998; Bellamy, 2004). When we come to regional security regimes, although the possibility of war or violent conflict cannot be ruled out, states of the region are considered to have managed to establish a regional framework that can be relied upon in case of disputes/conflicts. Today’s ASEAN region is an example of a regional security regime—or as Acharya argued, *nascent security community*—where norms and institutions have been gradually taking roots (Acharya 2009). There are also regions, however, that are neither security communities nor security regimes. These regions are characterized mainly by what Vayrynen (1984), in his seminal

article, called *conflict formations* or what Wallensteen (2010) called *conflict complexes*<sup>25</sup>; regions where relationships are defined by enmity instead of amity. Examples of such regions are the Middle East, South Asia, and the Horn of Africa (Buzan and Waever 2003; Vayrynen, 1984; and Wallensteen, 2010).

As most of the works on regional security seek to, in the words of Robert Kelly (2007), “downscale” IR’s focus to the regional level, variables/elements that are used in mainstream theories—such as anarchy, distribution of power, international organizations, norms/institutions, etc.—are used in analysing security in the regions.<sup>26</sup> This is done, nonetheless, by taking geographic proximity as one of the very important factors. That is, most of those who wrote on the topic agree on two things: *threats are not equally distributed*, and *states worry more about their neighbours* than those that are geographically distant (Buzan and Waver 2003; Kelly 2007; Miller 2005; 2007).

Robert Kelly noted that the “downscaling” of IR to the regional level could not—as has been the case in mainstream IR theories—properly apply to weak state-dense regions in the analysis of such regions. In the light of the Westphalian view of the state and international relations, such regions and the states making them up appeared anomalous (Kelly, 2007). This mainly pertains to the particular security problems weak states face as discussed in the preceding section. For instance, Kelly noted that deductively applying IR theories resulted in “awkward findings”. By this, he is referring to Douglas Lemke’s survey of various regions in which his statistical test ended up finding what he called “African peace” due mainly to the rarity of interstate war on the continent

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<sup>25</sup> Wallensteen’s conflict complexes are similar to Buzan’s (1991) security complexes.

<sup>26</sup> See also the works of Katzenstein 2005; Kelley 2007; Lake and Morgan 1997; Lemeke 2004; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012.

(Lemke, 2004, p. 162-171). Obviously, this “African peace” does not reflect the major challenges facing the continent, particularly the instability and violent (intrastate) conflicts that beset a significant portion of Africa. Findings such as this can, then, be taken as symptomatic of the limitation of trying to study every region deductively.

It is not surprising, thus, the critique against deductive approaches came from scholars such as Mohammed Ayoob (1995) and Edmond Keller (1997) who argued for inductively studying the so-called the Third World regions including those in Africa and even some of those in the former “Second World”. The main reason for this, according to them, is that unlike strong states the challenge in a region populated by weak states is a “shared internal security dilemma” or what Brian Job (1992) called insecurity dilemma (also noted by Kelly, 2007; and Sorensen, 2007). The consequence of this is that the shared insecurity dilemma in a weak state-dense region—or a weak state-dominated regional security complex — “trumps the external one”. In this situation, regional organizations are allowed to exist not to promote integration that requires the states to cede certain aspects of their sovereign power (Feraru, 2017; and Kelly, 2007). But rather, the organizations are used “... to repress shared centrifugal threats through pooled rather than ceded sovereignty” (Kelly 2007, p. 197).

Put differently, the shared insecurity dilemma forces weak states to focus on their internal vulnerabilities and regional cooperation initiatives (i.e., the organizations they created) are reduced into guarding their “juridical sovereignty” while jointly repressing internal dissent (Feraru, 2017; and Kelly, 2007). This resonates with Jackson and Rosberg (1982), Jackson (1990), Jackson and Sorensen (2013) and several others, including the African studies specialist Clapham's (1996) argument that most African states’ sovereignty is juridical than empirical. For instance, Robert

Jackson (1990, p. 29) stated that weak states lack *positive sovereignty* which, according to him, “...is not a legal, but a political attribute ... the sociological, economic, technological, psychological, and similar wherewithal to declare, implement, and enforce public policy both domestically and internationally”. Thus, weak states compensate for their weakness by resorting to regional organizations that are created to directly or indirectly defend their juridical sovereignty.

In all, it seems that there is a broader consensus among most scholars of regional security—some of whom (such as Buzan and Waeber, 2003 and Kelly, 2007) do not even belong to area studies—that internal security dilemma defines regional security if it is a weak state-dense region. At least, the view that the internal dimension trumps up the external one appears to have been accepted by many (Ayoob, 1995; Clapham, 1996; Miller, 2005; 2007; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier, 2012). Thus, state weakness is an important variable that determines the dynamics of regional security (Kelly, 2007). This applies to many of the regions of the African continent as indicated in the works of Hentz (2014), Keller (1997), and Spears (2014).<sup>27</sup>

Based on the above review, therefore, it is important to note that the literature on regional security can be divided at least into two broad categories: The first pertains to those that tried to apply IR theories deductively and found *anomalous* regions (e.g., Lemeke, 2004). The second relates to those few studies that investigated regions inductively and found out notable differences between regions (e.g., Ayoob, 1995; 1997; and Miller, 2005; 2007). The former demonstrated the serious limitations of uncritically applying systemic level concepts such as anarchy, balance/distribution of power, international organizations, norms/institutions, etc. The latter, on the other hand,

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<sup>27</sup> It is important to state here that most of the literature on regional security treats Africa as a region (see Keller, 1997 for instance). However, Africa is viewed a continent of many regions that have separate and interacting security dynamics.

ascertained that there is a need for reconsidering existing approaches/theories in applying such concepts to the regional level because each region is different on its own and in relation to the others. Buzan and Waever's (2003), *Regions and Powers*, can perhaps be viewed as the third category as it attempts to keep using the aforementioned concepts critically and consciously, for instance, by explicitly recognizing the distinction between and among states and its effects on regional security dynamics. Broadly, this means that from the perspective of security studies—or even new regionalism in general—weak state-dense regions are different from regions that are populated by strong states (e.g. Western Europe or North America). Hence, the distinction between weak and strong states discussed elsewhere is relevant to understanding not only the divergent sources of states' security concerns but also the distinction between regions of the world in regard to their security dynamics.

However, the second category of the literature has also its own limitations. Its obsession with the internal security dilemma or the insecurity dilemma is both its strength and its weakness. That is, while the argument that regional security in a weak state-dense region is dominated by the shared internal security dilemma is convincing, the claim that this *trumps the external* dimension (Kelly, 2007) seems quite problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it falls into the problematic argument of those that deductively applied mainstream IR theories and claimed that what we call weak state-dense regions in this dissertation research demonstrate little or no regional security dynamics, thus not worthy of security analysis at the regional level. And, secondly, it unduly generalizes and ignores variations among weak state-dense regions which justified the need for systematically and inductively studying differences between regions in the first place. It is, therefore, here that this dissertation research intervenes by engaging with the literature on regional security. That is, by taking Ethiopia as a case study, it investigates why and how the external dimension of Ethiopia's

insecurity (both threats and vulnerabilities) is inextricably linked to the Horn of Africa despite the fact that the Horn of Africa is a weak state-dense region.

## 2.5. Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The proposed research uses Mohamed Ayoob's (1997) Subaltern Realism complemented by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever's (2003) Regional Security Complex Theory (hereafter RSCT) as a framework. Subaltern realism is used because it helps us analyse the domestic dimension. On the other hand, the reason for using RSCT is its contribution to analyse and understand not only the patterns of interstate amity and enmity at the regional level but also the interplay of the domestic and external dimensions. As the available literature on security and conflict in the Horn of Africa (Berouk, 2011; Cliffe, 1999; Mercy, 2017; Yonas, 2019) suggests, the insecurity of and conflict in one state is often closely linked with insecurity and conflict in other states of the region—regardless of whether the major protagonists are states or non-state actors. In other words, in the context of the Horn of Africa, one's (in)security cannot be sufficiently understood in isolation from the (in)security of the rest and the dynamics of security in the region. Therefore, while Ayoob's Subaltern Realism helps us analyse primarily the domestic dimension of Ethiopia's (in)security, RSCT is useful to analyse the external dimension and its interplay with the domestic.<sup>28</sup>

The Subaltern Realist perspective of security contends that the source of insecurity/vulnerability of weak states is domestically generated (Ayoob, 1997). Put differently, the Subaltern Realist argument is that weak states "... major security preoccupations are primarily internal in character"

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<sup>28</sup> RSTC is primarily a framework to analyse regional security. However, in this dissertation research it is used in the attempt to analyse national security in the context of a regional security complex. Even if one may question the merit of doing so, the main argument for this is that national security analysis in the context of a regional complex cannot be understood in isolation. The interplay of the domestic and the external dimensions—not only the pattern of interstate relations—actually defines the region's security. Put differently, as much as there are domestic and external sources of national (in)security, so are there the same sources for regional security.

which are attributable to the incomplete state-building processes (p.121). That is, the challenge of building an effective state imposes a dual pressure on such states: (a) domestic resistance to elite's (regimes') initiatives of state-building, and (b) international pressures to hasten/complete state building while simultaneously expecting them to respect human rights. This, therefore, provides "... a substantial part of the explanation for the high degree of domestic violence and insecurity plaguing most Third World states" (p.123).

The strength of Subaltern Realism is that it managed to overcome one of the major limitations of mainstream theories—particularly neorealism—which neglected the domestic dimension of security. This dimension is quite important to understand the security challenges of a majority of states in the world (Ayoob, 1995; 2002). Its weakness, some argue, is that it is state-centric and remains within the political arena (Krause, 1998). It is also criticized for ignoring the plight of the subaltern within the subaltern, i.e. the underprivileged or oppressed groups within weak states (Omeje, 2010). Regardless of these critiques, one can argue that Ayoob's Subaltern Realism is a powerful analytical perspective to understand the fundamental—though not the whole—dimension of weak states' national security predicaments. Therefore, remaining cognizant of the limitations pointed out by the aforementioned scholars, this dissertation uses Subaltern Realism as an analytical framework to examine the domestic dimension of Ethiopia's national (in)security.

As mentioned above, Subaltern Realism is complemented by RSCT so as to compensate for the limitation stemming from Subaltern Realism's little attention to the external (regional) dimension and its interplay with the domestic. As discussed in the previous section, one major limitation pointed out and examined by area studies scholars regarding the literature on regional security—as it has been the case in mainstream IR theories—is that it failed to take note of the peculiarity of weak states. Mainstream IR theories also care little about domestic factors. The cumulative effect

of these is that weak states and the nature and patterns of relations among them in a given region, such as the Horn of Africa, are generally given inadequate attention in mainstream IR and security studies literature. This is primarily due to the view that such states lack the power/capacity to project their influence within, let alone beyond, their own borders. Therefore, weak states (most of which are found in Africa and Asia) are viewed as trapped in their own domestic security predicaments (Feraru, 2017; and Kelly, 2007).

An important work that included a chapter assessing the various regions of the African continent and pointed out the difference between them is the seminal work of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Their work is not about Africa, but rather it is a survey of almost *all* regions of the world based on Buzan's concept of *regional security complexes*.<sup>29</sup> The relevance of this work for this dissertation is threefold: (a) it acknowledges that weak states face security problems that differ from strong ones; (b) it explicitly recognizes and differentiates that Africa has multiple regional security complexes in which the Horn of Africa is viewed as a proto-complex; and (c) if complemented by Ayoob's Subaltern Realism, it lends us a better theoretical framework to analyse the domestic and external dimensions and the interplay thereof.

Buzan and Waever's main argument is that once the overbearing power of the Cold War was gone, the security dynamics in various regions have attracted scholarly attention as most states, with the exception of the superpower with a global orientation, are primarily concerned with their immediate neighbourhoods. *Geographic proximity, regional structure* (anarchy/hierarchy),

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<sup>29</sup> Lake and Morgan (1997) have also used the concept of regional security complex based on Buzan's earlier (1983; 1991) works, albeit with a different conception of regions from the one defined by Buzan and Waever (2003). Edmond Keller's chapter in the same book called for examining the internal challenges in order to understand regional security in Africa.

*distribution of power*, and historical *patterns of amity and enmity* are all considered as important factors that affect regional security. The thrust of their argument is that generally “states fear their immediate neighbours rather than those that are physically far from them”. Accordingly, Buzan and Waever developed a theoretical/analytical framework that would help researchers analyse the dynamics of security in the regions across the world. *Regional Security Complex Theory*, so named, combines certain aspects of neorealism (i.e., structure and distribution of power) with that of constructivism (partly based on the Copenhagen School) (Buzan and Waever, 2003).

The concept regional security complex was originally defined by Buzan, in his earlier work, as “...a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that *their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another*” (Buzan 1983/91, 106) (emphasis added). This definition was later reformulated for two reasons: (a) to accommodate analysis at different levels; and (b) in recognition of the need for widening the concept of security which hitherto used to refer only to the politico-military domain. Hence, regional security complex is redefined as “...a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that *their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another*” (Buzan and Waever 2003, 201) (emphasis added).

Securitization, as the constructivist aspect of RSCT, is the main “theoretical tool” that would help identify and understand what constitutes a threat and who/what should be the referent object.<sup>30</sup> It is important to mention here that security, as conceived by the Copenhagen School, is not necessarily objectively defined and also not necessarily limited to politico-military security. In

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<sup>30</sup> Buzan and Waever 2003 said that “...the concept of securitization is a main theoretical tool for mapping regional variation. An objectivist theory of security uses its own view of things and thus fits regional events more easily into its general theory of what drives the behavior of actors. A securitization-based theory will accept that the security agenda is about different things in different regions: the actors differ, as does the relative importance of different sectors. It avoids prejudices about how people ‘should’ react.” (p.85).

other words, “security is what actors make it”; and hence the “widening” of the concept into other “sectors” especially societal, economic and environmental security (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 48). Furthermore, “successful securitization”—the acceptance of something as a security matter—hinges on a successful “speech act”, an act that needs to be accepted by a given audience. This is important in terms of widening the meaning of security to other sectors (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998; Buzan and Waever 2003).

One crucial challenge, however, is that the endorsement (or the acceptance by the audience) of a speech act implicitly presupposes deliberative processes that are integral parts of a democratic system (Acharya 2007). This means that whether and how we can know the success or otherwise of securitization practices in undemocratic/authoritarian systems remains a serious analytical challenge. Hence, as much as RSCT is an important theoretical/analytical framework to analyse security, overcoming this challenge so that it can be effectively utilized in the context of this research was necessary.<sup>31</sup> As the empirical chapters of this dissertation show, in an authoritarian state, the acceptance or otherwise of the speech act is not a necessary condition to elevate an issue to the level of a security agenda (securitization) or to remove it thereof (desecuritization).

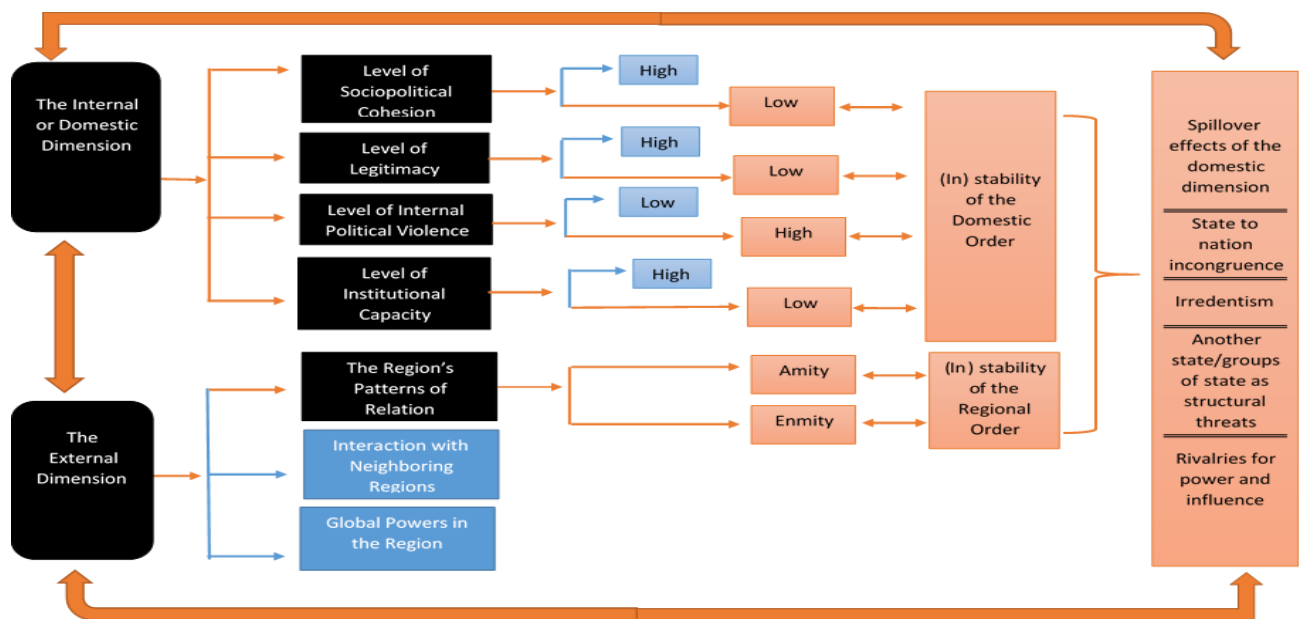
From the perspective of this dissertation, a very important aspect of RSCT, however, is that in analysing security in a regional security complex, it directs our attention toward the following four levels: (a) domestic/internal conditions of states (i.e., domestically generated vulnerabilities); (b) state-to-state relations; (c) interaction with neighbouring regions; and (d) the role of global powers in the region. The central idea, though, is that while the domestic/internal conditions of states and state-to-state relations are particularly important in understanding and explaining the security

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<sup>31</sup> One plausible argument that can be made is that in an authoritarian state, the acceptance of the “speech act” is not a necessary condition to elevate an issue to the level of a security agenda.

dynamics in a region, interactions with extra-regional actors are generally scene as additional elements. Hence, security is expected to be more intense within the region than with extra-regional actors (Buzan and Waever 2003, 50-52).<sup>32</sup>

In all, from an analytical point of view, this dissertation uses RSCT in the context of state weakness but with a limited range of the security agenda, i.e. the political and military sectors. This means that the dissertation contributes to the study of not only national security but also to the study of regional security by shifting the focus from the external to the domestic dimension (and the interplay thereof), an angle that has been given little attention, i.e., national security in a weak state-dense region. Therefore, Subaltern Realism complemented by RSCT, as a framework of analysis, will be used as shown below:



\* Figure 1: Framework of Analysis: National Security as a Function of the Interplay of the Internal/Domestic and the External/Regional Dimensions (based on Ayoob, 1995; 1997; and Buzan, 1991; Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998; and Buzan and Waever, 2003)

<sup>32</sup> This is very relevant to understand and analyse the interplay of the internal and external dynamics of security in the region.

In sum, as Buzan and Waever stated, “[t]he specific vulnerability of a state defines the kind of security fears it has...” (2003, p. 50). Hence, while state weakness (low level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, high level of internal political violence, low level of legitimacy and capacity) defines the domestic dimension and the patterns of interstate relations (amity/enmity) define the external/regional. As such, the domestic dimension, on the one hand, and its interplay with the external dimension, on the other, generate the national security predicaments of Ethiopia in the context of the Horn of Africa’s security complex. Therefore, based on the above backdrop and in line with Ayoob’s Subaltern Realist conceptualization, security/insecurity is defined in this dissertation from the perspective of domestic/external vulnerabilities and threats. That is, as Ayoob succinctly puts it, “...security-insecurity is defined in relation to vulnerabilities—*both internal and external*—that threaten or have the potential to bring down or weaken the state structures, both territorial and institutional, and governing regimes” (Ayoob, 1995, p.9).

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses in detail the methodology adopted by this dissertation. Conducting research on security affairs, especially national security matters, necessitates the capability and access to overcome blockades and sanctions to reach pertinent and sensitive archives and informants. . In a restricted political environment such as Ethiopia's, successful research depends not only on one's ability and effort but also on the opportunity and luck to gain access to archives and informants. The experience drawn from conducting the research for the purpose of this dissertation confirms the above as the process required flexibility, revision of the original research plan and approaches, and knowing or identifying individuals who are willing to facilitate access to potential informants.

This chapter presents both the methodology of the dissertation and the experience drawn from applying the chosen methodology. The chapter is organized into six sections. The first is this introduction. Section two briefly describes the study design and the justification thereof. The third section discusses the sources of data and the method of data collection/generation including the sampling technique and size. Section four provides a detailed explanation on using newspaper—*Addis Zemen*—as an open-archive including its strengths and limitations. The fifth section discusses the method of data analysis and interpretation. Finally, the sixth section briefly describes the ethical principles taken into consideration while conducting the research and reporting its findings.

#### 3.2. Study Design

This dissertation adopts qualitative case study approach. Qualitative approach is selected because, as John Creswell argues, it is the best approach when the issue we want to examine is complex

that requires detailed understating and in-depth investigation (Creswell, 2007, p.40). Such complexity, as is the case with the topic covered in this dissertation, requires understanding the thoughts, perceptions, expectations, and apprehensions of individuals and/or groups and the context under which these are unfolding. This, in turn, entails two alternative or complementary courses of action That is, as researchers, we have to directly talk to the people (e.g. decision-makers, politicians, experts at respective governmental and non-governmental organizations) who know the issues very well and have perhaps been directly involved in dealing with them in a given social, political, economic and cultural context. Or, we should examine archival sources or documents in which their thoughts, perceptions, expectations and apprehensions are recorded. As such, the researcher adopts a constructivist paradigm because the data generated through interviews and/or archives are based on the informants' insider perspectives, lived experiences, understandings and labelling of the issues (Creswell, 2009). These are not merely objective realities but constantly negotiated, intersubjectively vetted, and/or socially constructed realities based on real and perceived experiences (Pouliot, 2007).

Therefore, as this dissertation research seeks to examine the why and how of national security vis-à-vis state weakness in the context of the Horn of Africa—a complex and volatile region, the qualitative approach is suitable. In so doing, a qualitative case study design is adopted. Given the complexity of the topic, case studies are very helpful to elucidate the contexts, details, patterns, processes, and mechanisms (Yin, 2009) which pertain to domestic and external insecurities that stem from domestic/external vulnerabilities and threats. For the purpose of this dissertation, thus, the sources and dynamics of Ethiopia's domestic and external national security predicaments are examined taking its domestic condition (the levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, political violence, legitimacy, and capacity) as a starting point. Furthermore, the

dissertation examines the dynamics and patterns of Ethiopia's relations with its neighbours and the threats they posed and the vulnerabilities they exploited/manipulated—as defined, framed, and dealt with by the state/regime—are examined as the most important aspects of the external dimension.

In so doing, the research relies on two categories of case studies—having, in turn, two specific case studies within each category—to demonstrate the two dimensions of insecurity and the interconnection and interplay between them. The first category of case studies focuses on the domestic dimension. Accordingly, the politics of national liberation as exemplified by the cases of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) is investigated in detail from the perspective of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, political violence, and legitimacy. In addition, the paradoxes embedded in the building of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (hereafter the ENDF) as a national army is examined from the perspective of the same criteria but particularly focusing on legitimacy and capacity. The case of the ENDF exemplifies the challenge of building state institutions that are legitimate and capable.

The second category of case studies focuses on the external dimension. On the one hand, Ethiopia's relations with two of its neighbours (Eritrea and Somalia) is systematically examined as the most proximate sources of security threats and violent interactions. This is done from the perspective of patterns of amity and enmity, regional power projection, and armed intervention/conflict. The issue of the Nile and Ethiopia's relations with the Sudan and Egypt constitutes the second element in the second category of case studies. This case is also examined from the perspective of the same criteria but mainly focusing on the dynamics of hegemony and counter-hegemony surrounding the utilization of the waters of the Nile River. The two categories of case studies are analysed in such

a way that, first, the domestic and the external dimensions are properly identified, and second, the interplay of the domestic and the external dimensions are clearly demonstrated.

The selection of the two case studies, as briefly mentioned in the scope of the study is not arbitrary. They are selected based on three criteria. The first is their recurrence in events, actions, and policies broadly related to Ethiopia's security and stability—i.e., disputes, political crises, violent conflicts, etc. The second is their recurrent appearance in public statements by public officials including the Prime Minister, Ministers, and other senior figures, policy/national documents, press releases/briefings, news reports, the relevant literature, etc. The third is directly asking key informants to assess and/or determine whether they agree with the list of security issues identified through the first and the second criteria. For instance, a former intelligence officer was asked whether he agrees that the politics of national liberation is one of the fundamental challenges that the state/regime faces and addresses in its effort to maintain the security of Ethiopia. The response was positive. In fact, the informant stressed that although the issue of development/poverty was eventually and rhetorically placed at the top of threats to the survival of the state, addressing the “question of nationalities” has been considered a matter of survival and stability.

Although not a criteria for case selection, the researcher had attempted to find out if there had been a practice of threat ranking and, if so, to identify the criteria used by the government. Unfortunately, this happened to be very difficult as both the documents (including the FANSPS, the *Red Book*, and the defence doctrine) and key informant interviews reveal little to nothing. What one gathers from both sources, particularly from the key informant mentioned above, is that there had indeed been practices of threat ranking. The “domestic sphere” or dimension was the major preoccupation of the government and at the top of the security agenda. However, since the mid to late-1990s, the question of which threat should be at the top of the agenda had been a very complex

matter as the “external sphere” or dimension—such as the situation in Somalia, the Islamist regime in Sudan, and the war with Eritrea, the dispute over the Nile River—also become important.

Although the domestic dimension had always been—both in rhetoric and policy—at the top of the agenda, the external dimension and its interconnection with domestic considerations had also been part of both the policy and practice of the state. Therefore, in addition to the abovementioned criteria, this justifies the selection of the four case studies for the purpose of this dissertation. However, this should not be construed to mean that issues relating the economy or social affairs (i.e., elements of human security) or relations pertaining to Djibouti, Kenya or South Sudan or even extra-regional actors were not on the security agenda. Rather, as mentioned in chapter one, they are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

### **3.3. Sources of Data, Method of Data Collection/Generation, and Sampling**

This dissertation relied on two types of sources of data: The most important primary source is data generated through systematic extraction of decades of information from Ethiopia’s daily newspaper—*Addis Zemen*. This will be discussed in the next section in greater detail. The other important primary sources are individuals (e.g. decision-makers, politicians, and experts) who have direct knowledge and expertise about the issues covered in this dissertation. In addition, official and unofficial (or classified) documents are reviewed/analysed. From the outset and given the sensitivity of the topic and the nature of the political culture/system in Ethiopia, the researcher had anticipates that access to these sources would be extremely limited. It was mainly to overcome this challenge, the researcher had proposed to use open-source materials, particularly newspapers—mainly *Addis Zemen*, relevant documents or U.S. Embassy cables leaked by WikiLeaks, etc.

Publications of *Addis Zemen* were examined thoroughly and systematically to generate data on Ethiopia's *leaders' perceptions* of domestic and external insecurities and their *responses* to them in terms of *articulation* and *mobilization*. In doing so, four important periods were given particular attention: (a) 1991-1994 (a post-civil war period purportedly dominated by domestic affairs); (b) 1995-2000 (a changing pattern of interstate relations amidst domestic preoccupations. Shifts of alliances due to threats posed first by Sudan and later by Eritrea); (c) 2001-2005 (the return to the domestic amidst stalemate with Eritrea and improving relations with Sudan, while having split within the Ethiopian leadership, defence reform, etc); and (d) 2006-2012 (regional activism including intervention in Somalia, deployment of peacekeepers in Sudan, South Sudan, between Sudan and South Sudan (Abyei), proxy war with and diplomatic offense against Eritrea amidst occasional domestic instability, worsening repression, projection of an image of economic success story, etc.).

Given the fact that *Addis Zemen* is published on a daily basis, generating data from two decades of publications was obviously cumbersome and at times less plausible. Therefore, it warranted a systematic approach that excludes some issues and focuses on others. The criteria for doing so was mainly the occurrence of a particular incidence that has security implications either domestically or externally. This, in turn, required adequate knowledge of major incidences between 1991 and 2012. Here, both key informants and secondary sources of data such as books, peer-reviewed publications, biographies, etc. played important role in determining which year/month to include or exclude. Hence, secondary sources of data were also used to generate data and substantiate arguments.

In all, to generate data, *Addis Zemen* as an open-source archive and key informant interviews as both sources of data and corroboration/triangulation of some contested issues/events were used

extensively. The in-depth (key informant) interviews were important particularly to address the limitations of generating data through newspapers (for the discussion on limitations of newspaper data, see the next section). Furthermore, the views, lived experiences and learned expertise of the key informants were very relevant in terms of answering the key research questions of the dissertation. However, the extent of access to key informants was not as desired and/or planned by the researcher. Access was impeded by two major events that affected Ethiopia as a state.

The first was the outbreak of Covid-19 and the resultant lockdown that lasted for about seven months. This severely limited mobility and hence the opportunity to establish access to key informants. The second relates to the outbreak of the war in Northern Ethiopia and the sensitivity and willingness to talk about issues of security and conflict. Most importantly, potential key informants (decision-makers, security officers/experts, politicians, etc.) were siding with each of the warring parties and it was virtually impossible to conduct interviews for two years. As a result, most of the key informant interviews were conducted between September 2022 and August 2023 (for the interviewee details, see the appended list of key informants). Regardless, it was impossible to contact and interview former senior (political and security) officials who have been on the TPLF's side during the two-year civil war. As such, some were simply inaccessible, while others—such as former minister of Foreign Affairs Seyoum Mesfin—were killed in the course of the civil war. Nevertheless, Seyoum Mesfin's public statements and interviews published on *Addis Zemen* are extensively cited where relevant and necessary. In addition, senior diplomats—including those at the ministerial and directorial levels—who served during and after his tenure were interviewed. In terms of sampling technique, the key questions this research sought to answer was addressed, in addition to the open-archive and relevant documents, by contacting individuals who are both knowledgeable and have the lived experience during the research period. Three types of key

informants were approached for in-depth/key-informant interview. These are former officials or officers who worked in the security sector, former officials/diplomats who worked in foreign/especially neighbouring states' affairs, and opposition/insurgent movement/front leaders. This entailed a specific sampling technique which is non-probability sampling, especially, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. Therefore, it was not just enough to purposively select informants, but also the researcher had to solicit the support of the informants who were interviewed to help identify and contact additional interviewees for further interviews and triangulations. Snowballing was a very useful technique, especially, when interviewing senior diplomats and opposition leaders. Not only did they help identify the potential interviewee but also shared contact details in some occasions.

In terms of sample size, this dissertation followed the common practice in small-N qualitative research. Thus, the researcher endeavoured to generate/collect qualitative data until the saturation point was reached, which was a subjective decision. This meant that rather than the number of informants, it was the quality and repetitiveness of information gathered that determine whether enough data was collected and data collection should be stopped (Saunders *et al.*, 2017). Following this practice, therefore, the researcher generated/collected data until that data reached a saturation point. Hence, from *Addis Zemen*, thousands of pages (of 21 years and three months daily publications) were browsed and/or read and several thousand clippings were extracted and systematically analysed (see the next section for specific details). Furthermore, a total of 19 key informants were interviewed between September 2022 and August 2023. The composition of the interviewees include 5 former and active senior diplomats including a former minister ; 6 senior military officers and one civilian staff of the ENDF/the Ministry of Defence; two former officers

of National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISS); and 5 former and active senior opposition leaders including chairpersons of the OLF, the ONLF and the OFC.

### **3.4. Addis Zemen as an Open-Archive: A Case for Newspaper Data**

Based on the experience in generating/collecting data for this dissertation, this section makes a case for using *Addis Zemen* as an open-archive. In Ethiopia's closed political system where there is limited or no access to national archives and decision-makers for in-depth interviews, the state-owned daily newspaper can serve as an alternative source of primary data to study the state's national security. Therefore, this section discusses the type of data one should expect, how to generate them, and the strengths and limitations. It also highlights the implications of using newspaper data for studying national security in similar contexts.

Researching national security in any setting—open or closed—is an intimidating task as it involves complex and inaccessible terrains sensitive to both the researcher and the researched. This is mainly because security and/or national security issues are dominated by “secrecy and obfuscation”. The data are not openly available and accessible, and if accessible, they are ridiculously redacted (De Goede, Bosma, & Pallister-Wilkins, 2019). These challenges get worse as one moves on the spectrum from an open political system to a closed one where freedom of access to information is formally and/or informally restricted and a system of publicly availing relevant national archives does not exist.<sup>33</sup>

Ethiopia fits this latter category of a closed political system where access to national archives on security affairs is non-existent. Hence, it is quite common to rely on key informant interviews,

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<sup>33</sup> Global indices such as the Freedom in the World Index indicate that access to information is more restricted in closed/authoritarian states than democracies (see Freedom House, *Freedom in the world, 2022*). Some of these states have legal provisions guaranteeing this right but most fail to implement them (see Neuman and Calland, 2007).

which itself requires a well-established network with and access to officials who are in charge of administering government affairs and documents. Without access to these officials, a researcher is left with literally no access to information and hence no data to rely on. This explains the near absence of publications on the national security of Ethiopia. Therefore, as mentioned above, this dissertation significantly relied on a less conventional approach to overcome these roadblocks to researching national security. That is, systematically generating data from an often neglected open-source, i.e. the state-owned daily—*Addis Zemen*.

*Addis Zemen*, which translates to “new era” in Amharic, is Ethiopia’s longest-running newspaper, first published on 7 June 1941. Its inception by Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-1974) marked the end of the five-year Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941. . Its first edition covered the ceremony of the emperor’s return from exile and the speech he made to the public. The name *Addis Zemen*, a phrase taken from the emperor’s victory speech, declared the end of an unpleasant era with a new and promising one. Although it was launched as a weekly newspaper and continued to be so for fifteen years, *Addis Zemen*, for most of its history, is known as the largest daily newspaper in Ethiopia (Meseret, 2013). As such, no other newspaper has chronicled the Ethiopian state and/or successive regimes like *Addis Zemen*.

It publishes not only news and views, but also extensive interviews and speeches of senior leaders such as prime ministers, ministers, and relevant authorities on a particular issue of interest, and statements by the government and the ruling party. For this reason, *Addis Zemen* is indeed an excellent source for tracing events, policies, actions, and responses relating to the Ethiopian state. This does not, however, mean that we should ignore the potential limitations of relying on *Addis Zemen*.

Using newspapers as sources of data is not new in the social sciences. Their utility has been appreciated since the 1970s and is now in a relatively wider usage albeit with unsettled and recurrent debate over issues of validity and reliability (Barranco & Wisler, 1999; and Ortiz et al, 2005). The debate primarily focuses on perceived and real limitations (i.e., selection bias, description bias, and researcher's bias) as well as the nature of media structure and outlet which is "...an embedded component of the larger social structure" (Ortiz et al, 2005, p. 400).

#### **3.4.1. Methodological Implications of Theoretical Debates in Security Studies**

The methodological issues of national security research cannot be understood without comprehending the major theoretical debates within security studies as a field of study. As discussed in chapter two, security studies and/or research has been through a series of paradigmatic, epistemological, and methodological debates over the past decades due to shifts from an almost exclusive focus on the state as a referent object to those below and above the level of the state (Burgess 2014, ; Salter and Mutlu, 2013; and Shepherd, 2013). The debate, however, is not limited to the referent objects but also efforts to limit/widen the security agenda. Hence, since the early 1990s security is no longer analysed from the "materialist/rationalist"—such as the neorealist—perspective alone. It is also studied from the critical and constructivist perspectives. One of these latter contributions is made by *Subaltern Realism* (see Ayoob, 1995/1997) and the Copenhagen School's securitization theory which successfully bridged the gap between the desire to expand the concept and the effort to maintain its conceptual coherence and utility (see Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998).

The theoretical debates have methodological implications on security research in general and national security research in particular (Taylor, 2012). For instance, subscribing to the Copenhagen School entails primarily relying on a constructivist paradigm whereas the *Subaltern Realist*

perspective entails a pragmatic combination of the materialist/rationalist, the constructivist and the critical (post-colonial) research paradigms. From a methodological perspective, both constructivist and critical paradigms entail collecting or generating data that reflects the views and values of individuals and institutions operating within a given social environment (Salter and Mutlu, 2013; and Shepherd, 2013). The data are normally obtained through archives, interviews, focus group discussions, published or unpublished policy documents, etc. Nevertheless, such data or data sources are not readily available to researchers and they often happen to be off-limits due to “secrecy and obfuscation”—and the lack of freedom of access to public records especially in closed/authoritarian systems (Darch and Underwood, 2009; De Goede, Bosma, & Pallister-Wilkins, 2019).

The challenges of having access to data sources or archives on security-related issues, however, are not unique only to closed/authoritarian political systems. It is rather a matter of degree: from the presumably most open political systems like Western Europe and the US to the most closed ones such as North Korea and Iran, secrecy is the rule and access is the exception (De Goede, Bosma, & Pallister-Wilkins, 2019; see Heide & Villeneuve, 2021). There are several explanations for why secrecy remains an obstacle to research. David Gibbs (1995, pp. 214-222), for instance, identified three explanations as to why governments resort to secrecy and stand in the way of accessing information.

The first is the *external threat explanation* which suggests that “government secrecy is designed to protect sensitive information from external enemies”. The second is the *bureaucratic politics explanation* which “views secrecy as a relatively unsystematic process that results from the (collectively) irrational features in any government bureaucracy”. Finally, the *internal threat explanation* suggests that “officials use secrecy to mislead the populations of their own countries”

(Gibbs, 1995, p. 214). The three explanations prove one thing: secrecy and institutional control over information/data are not arbitrary. It is a real problem for security research and it has to be approached systematically and pragmatically depending on the social and political context within which research is conducted (De Goede, Bosma, & Pallister-Wilkins, 2019).

Regardless of the pervasiveness of secrecy and complaints about lack of access, however, those researching security in the context of open political systems have better and to a significant extent reliable access to national security archives. Moreover, access to officials is markedly better in open political systems than in closed or authoritarian ones. Information control and the inaccessibility encountered by researchers in closed political systems can be more aptly attributed to internal and external threat perspectives rather than to explanations based on bureaucratic politics. This is chiefly because closed political systems are more concerned about internal subversion and external meddling than open political systems (Janenova, 2019; Komil-Burley, 2021). However, this does not mean that bureaucratic politics is not an issue. In fact, bureaucratic rigidity and lack of transparent access to archives could also be a problem in weak states.

### **3.4.2. Implications for Researching Ethiopia's National Security**

The insights of both the Copenhagen School and Subaltern Realism are relevant to examining and understanding Ethiopia's national security, albeit with certain qualifications. The Copenhagen School's securitization theory operationalizes security via *speech act*. This entails an *intersubjective* process in which the speech act—labelling a given issue as a security issue by authorities—needs to be *accepted* by the *audience* to be successfully *securitized* (Buzan, Waeber, and de Wilde, 1998). As discussed above, the theoretical perspectives have their bearings on researchers' choice of methodology. The research on Ethiopia's national security primarily based on constructivist paradigm but it pragmatically combines it with the critical and

materialist/rationalist paradigms of Subaltern Realism.

Thus, the data need for the research primarily relates to how the Ethiopian state/government defines, frames, and responds to threats and vulnerabilities. Put differently, the aim is to examine and understand how the government frames security threats/vulnerabilities and mobilizes resources and institutions in response to the sources of threats and vulnerabilities (perceived or real). This requires knowing what decision-makers think and do in a given social context, not a single objectively verifiable reality or truth.

One way of doing this is examining security policies and decisions as well as memos, minutes, letters, etc. from the state's archives. Another way is interviewing concerned authorities extensively to understand how they view the security environment and what they have been doing about it. The first entails knowing the policies and hence reading, dissecting and deciphering the policy documents. This is relatively easy as the official national security policy and strategy document of Ethiopia has been publicly available (FANSPS, 2002). However, the rest—i.e., memos, minutes, letters, etc.—are inaccessible and/or publicly unavailable. Since the political and institutional culture is quite closed, invoking the right to access information in Ethiopia will not produce anything and the authorities in charge are not amenable to such pressure. This is the case regardless of the fact that Articles 12 of the Ethiopian Constitution and Articles 11 to 39 of Proclamation 590/2008 (i.e., the Mass Media and Freedom of Access to Information) which provide for freedom of access to information. The proclamation even requires authorities to publish public records except issues specifically exempted by the proclamation. However, like any authoritarian state Ethiopia fails to respect citizen's right to access public data. So, what can be done under such circumstances? If there is no or limited access to the archives and officials, what else can one rely on? Here is where the use of newspapers as open archives could be considered.

### 3.4.3. Newspapers as Open-Archives: Insights from the Literature

A review of a list of references or bibliographies of dozens of relevant articles that focus on national security also yields very little (examples include Anwar, Rongting, Dong, & Asmi, 2018; Blanchette, 2021; Dalley et al, 2012; Dorman & Kaufman, 2014; Kuol & Amegboh, 2021; Mansted, 2021; Sussex, Clarke, & Medcalf, 2017). Furthermore, a thorough review of the literature on the national security of four purposively sampled African and Asian states was made to examine the method of data collection employed by the respective authors (Ali & Patman, 2019; Anwar & Rafique, 2012; Ezirim, 2018; Hilali, 2001; Ibagere, 2010; Malik, 1993; and Salau, 2019).<sup>34</sup> The four states are Nigeria, South Africa, India, and Pakistan. Only one article on Pakistan's national security explicitly states that it used newspapers (Ali & Patman, 2019). The authors stated that they extracted some interviews published in Pakistani newspapers in their evaluation of Pakistan's national security to complement the data they collected through other methods.

A broader review of the literature on the use of newspapers as data sources, however, shows that it has been fairly in use across disciplines. It indicates that newspapers are used as primary, secondary, and archival sources (Ortiz, et al, 2005, pp. 397-419). They are used in the fields of history (Allen & Sieczkiewicz, 2010; Bowie, 2019), politics (Baumgarten & Grauel, 2009; Oliver, Pamela, & Maney, 2000), social movements (Earl et al, 2004), communications (Schoenbach, De Waal, & Lauf, 2005), and even public health (Berchiolla et al, 2012). The common view advanced in these researches is that newspapers can indeed serve as data sources. Moreover, they can be used in qualitative, quantitative, or mixed designs (Mügge, 2016). They can also be used as the

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<sup>34</sup> The countries were selected based on three criteria (a) all are found in regions that are identified by Buzan and Waever as security complexes; (b) like Ethiopia, they also face both domestic and external insecurities that are related to what Ayoob called *Third World Security*; and (c) they are important actors—like Ethiopia—in their respective regions.

primary data to triangulate information collected through other methods (Earl et al, 2004).

Newspapers can be unique sources of data for research as they sometimes contain information that is unavailable elsewhere. For instance, those interested in event tracing and analysis consider newspapers as the most reliable data sources since they normally cover news of events (Earl et al, 2004). Historians, political scientists, and other researchers in the fields of social sciences frequently turn to newspaper data to examine events that took place at a particular time and place (Barranco & Wisler, 1999; Feeney, 2017; Oliver & Maney, 2000). These are enough reasons to consider newspapers as alternative archives regardless of the limitation one could point out. After all, all kinds of sources have their own strengths and limitations. Particularly, regarding interviews and statements, one should ask whether informants (e.g. government officials) would divulge information that was not given to state-owned media.

Nevertheless, like other data sources, newspaper data has also some limitations. Researchers identified three potential limitations: *selection*, *description*, and *researcher biases* (Earl et al, 2004; Oliver & Maney, 2000; Oritz, et al, 2005). Underlying these biases is the fact that the collection and coding of data available in newspapers are controlled not by the researcher but by someone else with a different agenda. The data itself is collected for purposes other than that of the researcher. Hence, when the researcher gathers, organizes, and finally codes newspaper data, she/he is “recoding” data already coded by a writer/reporter. This is where the abovementioned limitations require attention (Earl et al, 2004).

*Selection bias* is the most common form of bias most media outlets routinely apply. It mainly refers to a journalist’s or media organization’s tendency to pick a story or an issue, and decide to report or not to report it based on implicit and explicit justifications. *Description bias*, on the other hand,

goes beyond the question of whether an issue is reported and rather focuses on how it was selected, framed, and reported. An issue might get positive or negative coverage regardless of whether it is particularly bad or good. Hence, the concern is not whether the issue is reported, but how it was reported and to what effect. A *researcher's bias*, on the other hand, relates to a researcher's subjectivity that may be influenced by the above biases plus her/his subjectivity (Earl et al, 2004).

The aforementioned limitations are by no means unique to newspaper data. Other sources, including archives, also have similar potential limitations as they can also be controlled, curated and designed for a different agenda. A researcher's bias is not also particularly limited to newspaper data. In the social sciences, data collection, interpretation and analysis processes are susceptible to a researcher's bias unless stringent mechanisms are put in place. Even where there are mechanisms, a researcher may not help it having certain biases—consciously or subconsciously. In other instances, bias may not be seen as a problem *per se* so far as the researcher clearly states her/his positionality and endeavours to control its effect on both the data and the analysis. This is particularly the case in some fields of the social sciences and humanities (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

#### **3.4.4. Generating Data from Addis Zemen: Techniques and Processes**

For the purpose of this dissertation, deciding which alternative source helps generate the best and most coherent as well as chronologically and thematically meaningful data was not an easy task. Once decided, whether that could be a source of valid and reliable data also causes a dilemma. Therefore, the decision can only be very systematic and pragmatic, not an ideal one. Under ideal circumstances (i.e. open and accessible systems), a researcher would have sought the permission of relevant authorities in charge of (national security) archives, and if access is denied, she/he would have invoked relevant legal instruments guaranteeing freedom of access to information.

However, this is not the case in Ethiopia. Inaccessibility happens to be a *de facto* norm fiercely guarded by government agencies.

Access to *Addis Zemen*'s archives was not also easy and automatic since its back editions are not digitally available. Anyone who wants to access back editions has to physically go to a library where it is archived chronologically and in an accessible manner. Only two libraries, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) of Addis Ababa University and the National Archives and Library Agency (NALA) happened to have a relatively well-kept and complete collection of the newspaper. Therefore, both the NALA and IES libraries were important sites in terms of securing uninterrupted access to the newspaper's back editions.

As the temporal scope of the dissertation is between 1991 and 2012, physically locating the publications was relatively easier than having enough time to do the daunting task of browsing each page and each column of the newspaper. Browsing 21 years and three months of daily publication mean 256 months, 1108 weeks, and 7665 days of publication. On average, each day's paper has a total of 12 pages. Sometimes the total pages of the day's publication (e.g. Sunday) were between 16 and 20. Therefore, the author browsed a total of about 91,989 pages and collected a total of 5,338 clippings—news, editorials, interviews, press releases, reportages, and opinion pieces. These, however, are not evenly distributed each year; there is variation in terms of the number of clips collected per year. The largest number of clips are collected in a year when there were major domestic incidents (such as elections, protests, and violence) and external/regional engagements (such as the Ethio-Eritrean war or Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia).

Table 3: Generating data from *Addis Zemen* (1991-2012)

Objectives	Completed		Remarks
Browse <i>Addis Zemen</i> 's June 1991 to August 2012 publications	Relevant data generated from 5,338 clippings		Internal and external security issues covered primarily from the government's perspective
Systematically collect qualitative data about Ethiopia's national security.	Year in Eth.(European) Calendars	Clippings	1992-94: conflict between the transitional government and the Oromo Liberation Front and Ogaden National Liberation Front.
	1983 E.C. (1991G.C)	78	
Broadly focus on domestic and external dimensions but limited to specific variables: socio-political cohesion, political violence, and political legitimacy.	1984 (1991/92)	166	1994/95: New Constitution.  1998-2000: Ethio-Eritrea War
	1985 (1992/93)	304	
	1986 (1993/94)	192	
	1987 (1994/95)	279	
	1988 (1995/96)	267	
	1989 (1996/97)	168	
	1990 (1997/98)	261	
	1991 (1998/99)	233	
	1992 (1999/00)	271	
	1993 (2000/01)	288	
Focus on specific cases involving insurgencies and elections (domestic) and Eritrea, Somalia, Nile (Sudan, and Egypt) (external/regional).	1994 (2001/02)	268	2006-2007: intervention in Somalia
	1995 (2002/03)	200	
	1996 (2003/04)	213	
	1997 (2004/05)	402	
	1998 (2005/06)	368	
	1999 (2006/07)	403	
	2000 (2007/08)	247	
	2001 (2008/09)	230	
	2002 (2009/10)	197	
	2003 (2010/11)	181	
	2004 (2011/12)	122	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,338</b>	

Source: Author's Own Compilation

The newspaper clips were collected at two separate times. The first was between early February and mid-March 2020 from NALA archives. This was suddenly interrupted due to the first case of Covid-19 in Ethiopia and the resultant temporary termination of services. Then, when the NALA and IES libraries resume services, the second round of collection took about four months between August and November 2020 due to shorter service hours and limited workstations within the

libraries. Afterwards, between December 2020 and July 2021, the author focused on translating, systematically organizing and coding the data generated from these clips into issues, themes, and important events using Microsoft Excel. This proved to be yet another daunting task given the need to simultaneously translate (from Amharic to English), code, and manually insert the data into Excel Sheets.

Once the data were coded and inserted into the Excel Sheets, the author examined each column and row looking for patterns, gaps, and missing pieces. The data generated from *Addis Zemen*, in fact, proved to be more relevant and usable than anticipated at the early stage of the research. As mentioned frequently, the aim was to find out how the Ethiopian state/government defined, framed, and responded to security threats and vulnerabilities between 1991 and 2012. As a state-owned media mostly operated by the Ministry of Information's Press and Information Department (and later by the Ethiopian Press Agency (ENA)), *Addis Zemen* has been a site where the government, the ruling party, and their affiliates often came forward to explain issues, communicate policies, mobilize responses, and galvanize support.

Hence, systematic analysis of the data indeed reveals pertinent information relating to the government's articulation and mobilization against threats to the Ethiopian state and regime. However, this does not mean that there were no matters that were silenced or kept confidential by not publishing them. Some of the published matters might also be manipulated by the government. Here, it should be noted that the aim was not to determine whether what the government said vis-à-vis the sources of security threats are true and objectively verifiable. Rather, it was to understand how the government defined and responded to the threats and whether that attenuated or aggravated the state's (in)security. In the absence of access to archives and informants, there was no better way for a researcher to collect data about these security measures. Therefore,

systematically collecting, dissecting, and deciphering officials' public statements and actions within a given context is a pragmatic solution.

The first category of data pertains to domestic (in)security, particularly those relating to two main insurgencies of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the government's response thereof. In addition, data related the building, reform, and activities of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) were explored. Both cases were covered in the newspaper primarily from the government's perspective. The second category of data was related to external (in)security. This particularly includes threats from Ethiopia's near and distant neighbours (particularly Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and Egypt) and how the government responded to them.

#### **3.4.5. Types of Information**

*Addis Zemen* provides four types of information concerning domestic and external security issues: news, views or opinions, interviews, and press statements. The three types—the news, interviews, and press statements— were particularly relevant to this dissertation.

##### ***News Stories***

News articles are important sources of following up on important events as they unfolded and progressed. Major events normally get covered until they get saturated. Beyond being rituals of the front page, they help us grasp which or what issue dominates the government's attention in a particular period. Normally, the most important news story covered on the front page is reinforced by the editorials, Op-eds, interviews, or press statements. For instance, the 1998 incursion of the Eritrean army was first a news on 14 May 1998. Later it became a subject of press statements, editorials, and interviews with senior officials until the war ended with the signing of the Algiers Agreement on 12 December 2000. The culmination of its coverage was on 14 December 2000 in

which Prime Minister Meles was quoted saying, "...this is the highest state of the effort to make peace...the signing of the agreement will enable the Ethiopian government to shift its attention to development and tackle poverty which is its main adversary" (*Addis Zemen*, 12 December 2000).<sup>35</sup>

### ***Press Statements***

The press statements are also important sources of information as they directly relate to the policies and actions of the government. In addition to the Ministry of Information's weekly statements, statements by various institutions of the government as well as the ruling party are indispensable sources of information. The statements are indicative of threat assessments and responses. A thorough examination of these statements, therefore, reveals the government's apprehensions and misgivings vis-à-vis threats and vulnerabilities. As carefully formulated pieces, press statements could also be indicative of the target and ultimate audience of the government and the ruling party. For example, a press statement by the Executive Council of the EPRDF before or after a major incident could indicate how the senior leadership perceives, understands, and aims to respond to it.

### ***Interviews***

The interviews published in *Addis Zemen* are the most important sources of information of all. This is mainly because interviews are published verbatim and the interviewees, more often than not, are either very senior (e.g. the prime minister or the minister of defence) or very knowledgeable (e.g. experts). This does not mean, however, that all those interviewed by *Addis Zemen* are senior and knowledgeable. It is to stress that when the newspaper publishes interviews extensively, sometimes in several sequels, that person would most probably be the prime minister,

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<sup>35</sup> "Ethiopia and Eritrea Signed the Peace Agreement at the Heads of State Level", *Addis Zemen*, December 12, 2000.

the minister of defence, foreign affairs, etc. A case in point is the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's interviews since the transitional period of the early 1990s. It is an excellent starting point if one wishes to exclusively focus on and systematically analyse the evolution of Meles's view regarding the security of Ethiopia and its neighbourhood.<sup>36</sup> To understand how the government defined and responded to security threats and vulnerabilities, these interviews do not have any match from among newspapers published in Ethiopia or elsewhere.

In all, the systematic collection, organization, and analysis of data from *Addis Zemen* pays off significantly considering the lack of access to data from conventional sources. *Addis Zemen*, regardless of its potential limitations, is both the chronicler and mouthpiece of the Ethiopian state and successive regimes. It has recorded not just their exclusive self-serving interests, but also their apprehensions, misgivings, and possibly genuine efforts. As such, the use of a state-owned newspaper as a primary source of data for security research should not be ruled out at face value. Rather, it should be embraced as an untapped source that requires systematic examination.

#### **3.4.6. Strengths and Limitation of Addis Zemen as an Open-Archives**

*Addis Zemen* provides unique data that is not easily accessible elsewhere. One may argue that the same data could be gathered from other types of media such as the radio or television or even the private press. That is possible but it is important to consider, for instance, the unrelenting obstacles to accessing audio-visual archives of radio and television stations. One also has to ask whether the radio and television stations air the same topic covered by the newspaper. The response to the latter is both affirmative and negative. As state-owned media outlets, they sometimes jointly interview the same official, for instance, the late Prime Minister Meles. Sometimes, *Addis Zemen* publishes

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<sup>36</sup> The author of the present article seriously wonders whether the Prime Minister would give him information that is precluded from *Addis Zemen* had he had the opportunity to interview him.

interviews aired by the Ethiopian Television. Even in this case, the interviews published on *Addis Zemen* are more accessible than that of Ethiopian Television.<sup>37</sup>

The argument that data generated from newspapers have multiple benefits including serving as standalone primary data or data to triangulate already collected data through other methods applies to *Addis Zemen* as well. Firstly, the data generated from *Addis Zemen* can serve as primary data in and of itself. Secondly, it can also be used as data to triangulate other data collected through interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, or even other newspapers. In fact, if one seeks to investigate a particular policy issue from the government's perspective, *Addis Zemen* can be used as a reliable source of data.

One may, however, argue that *Addis Zemen* is the mouthpiece of the government and publishes propaganda. Both claims are true. The argument here is not that the newspaper does not publish pieces that aim to promote the views of the government—regardless of whether their contents are true or not. The fact that the newspaper is the mouthpiece of the government is one of the reasons why it should be selected as a data source. This essentially makes it an open archive from which relevant data about the government's positions, interests, views, and decisions can systematically be generated. It does not mean that every piece of information obtained from *Addis Zemen* is objectively verifiable or the ultimate truth. Instead, the information should be considered as publicized versions of the government's policies, perspectives, and responses. Important pieces of information that are not published or not elaborated on can then be considered either as something the government wanted to silence, keep confidential, or deemed irrelevant. The difficulty here is knowing which one is the case if an issue is left unpublished or unexplained.

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<sup>37</sup> The advent of YouTube and other platforms is changing this since television stations have recently started to upload contents online.

In addition, it is important to note that *Addis Zemen* is not accessible to all audiences and researchers. As Ethiopia's oldest and largest newspaper, *Addis Zemen* accumulates a wealth of data regarding Ethiopia's state of affairs from the era of Emperor Haile Selassie (1940s) and the Derg through the EPRDF (the present). This data is, however, available only to those who understand Amharic—the working language of the federal government. This means that a work that is based on the data generated from *Addis Zemen* is likely to contribute new or additional empirical data vis-à-vis what a given researcher manages to collect in another language. This may mean new content and perspective to the research area.

Another benefit of the data generated from *Addis Zemen* is the fact that it reflects the views, news, and opinions in the context of a particular moment/period of interest. Like closed archives, save the confidential ones, the data tells us a version of a story as it unfolded. The same can hardly be said about other data sources, say interviews. For instance, if an official (let us say the then Chief-of-Staff of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces) is interviewed about the Ethiopia-Eritrean war of 1998-2000 in 2024 would he tell us the same way he told *Addis Zemen* in 1998? Is it not highly likely that the information he would share be shaped by lessons and interests that developed over several years after the event? As such, the data generated may even be better than those collected through interviews if not closed archives.

When it comes to the limitations of using *Addis Zemen*, the question is not whether it is free from the biases discussed in the preceding section. It is rather whether we are aware of them and how we approach them. For instance, the data available on *Addis Zemen* for researchers seeking to examine how the government defines and responds to threats is quite useful. The newspaper covers issues mainly from the perspective of leaders or policymakers. Therefore, as a state-owned media

in a closed political system, *Addis Zemen* operates in and reflects the context of the Ethiopian state. Can it, then, be selective of—both in terms of what and how to report—facts?

The response to the above question is both yes and no. Yes, because it does not have the space to publish everything that the government produces and it has to prioritize. No, because it cannot ignore what the government deems a publishable priority so that the public at large knows its decisions and policies. Similarly, it cannot describe the policies and decisions contrary to the government's characterization. But it often ignores—deliberately and systematically—alternative perspectives coming from the government's opponents. And, if opposition views get covered, it may just be to spice it up, and not necessarily to bring in a different perspective that challenges the government. There are two exceptions observed in *Addis Zemen* when this happened not to be the case. The first was the early years of the transitional period between 1991 and 1994. And, the second was the months leading up to the 2005 election. In both instances, opposition views had got relatively fair coverage, while that of the government remain dominant. Except for these two instances, the government's views, decisions, and policies dominate the front, inside, and back pages.

In all, from the perspective of the research on Ethiopia's national security where the objective was to understand government policies and actions, the selection bias is not entirely a bad thing. It is actually a blessing in disguise for two reasons. Firstly, this means that—in the absence of access to national archives and informants—*Addis Zemen* can serve as the alternative yet publicly available open archive. Secondly, this archive chronicles and publishes almost every major security issue—unless perhaps the government deemed it a secret—consistently and uninterrupted. Based on this, one can trace the changes and continuities in the definitions and responses to security threats over time and across issues. One cannot be expected to uncover secrets or find

some classified information from the newspaper, as may be the case from memos, internal reports, etc. This is the most obvious limitation of *Addis Zemen* as a source. But one can find important insights and evidence of why and how things unfolded. A systematic exploration, extraction, and organization of information from *Addis Zemen* helps generate such relevant data—perhaps unavailable elsewhere for many researchers.

### **3.5. Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Once the data were collected/generated and the researcher decides that a saturation point was reached, the data were carefully transcribed and categorized according to themes and patterns. Then, the themes and patterns identified were analysed based on the framework of analysis discussed in chapter two. Simultaneously, chapters of the dissertation were written by synthesizing findings with theoretical and empirical insights. However, this, as is the case in any qualitative research, was not a rigid and straightforwardly linear process. It was reiterative and there was a need to return to the sources to collect/generate additional data. Therefore, the researcher was mindful of the need for flexibility—or reiteration—throughout the process of data collection/generation, analysis and writing up.

### **3.6. Ethical Considerations**

The ethical issues in qualitative research are numerous and specific considerations are dependent on the topic and nature of the research. In general, however, the most important ethical requirements pertain to ensuring informed consent and the anonymity of informants as well as accurately reporting their views without misrepresentation and manipulation (Lune and Berg, 2017). To ensure the safety of informants and up on the request of many of the informants, no attribution has been made to them. Their anonymity has been kept throughout the dissertation. To avoid misrepresentation of information, the researcher transcribed and interpreted informants'

views without any prejudice and manipulation. The researcher upheld this from the beginning until the final submission of the dissertation.

In addition, due attention was be given to ensuring safe disposal of the data obtained through informants once the final/defended version dissertation is written and submitted. Lune and Berg (2017), suggest that notes, tapes and other records should be safely kept or discarded once the research report is written. The researcher made sure that this ethical consideration is observed during and after all the requirements for submission. It will continue to do so during defence and resubmission of the dissertation.

## Chapter Four

### The Ethiopian State and Its National (In)security: Historical Background and Contemporary Discourses

#### 4.1. Introduction

Based on the relevant empirical literature, the main objective of this chapter providing a brief overview of the discourses on the Ethiopian state and its national security predicaments from historical and contemporary perspectives. In so doing, the chapter discusses both the historical background and contemporary discourses pertaining to the national security of the Ethiopian state in the context of the Horn of Africa's security complex. The chapter first briefly assess how the Ethiopian state *qua* state has been understood and discussed in the extant literature. Then, it proceeds to assess the literature that particularly focuses on the security of the Ethiopian state in the post-1991 domestic and regional context.

#### 4.2. Competing Discourses on the Ethiopian State

Broadly, the literature, and by extension the political discourse, on the Ethiopian state can be divided into three broad categories: (a) Ethiopia as an ancient and longest surviving independent African state (Teshale, 1996); (b) Ethiopia as a creation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through territorial expansion and conquest (Merera, 2006); and (c) Ethiopia as a product of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century scramble for Africa and hence a colonial empire yet to be decolonized (Asafa, 2001; Mekuria, 2000; and Mohammed, 2000). Implicitly and/or explicitly, each attributes the contemporary problems of the Ethiopian state to certain factors that trace back to its past.

A review of the empirical literature on the Ethiopian state should, at least normatively, begin with Teshale Tibebu's 1996 article, *Ethiopia: The "Anomaly" and "Paradox" of Africa*. In this article, Teshale lays out how the Western *Ethiopianist* scholarship projected contradictory images of the

state that vary over time and depending on circumstances.<sup>38</sup> Based on his assessment of the works written by Western scholars since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, he identified nine images of Ethiopia, namely: *the isolation image; the romantic image; the civilization image; the “Adwa complex” image; the barbarism image; the black colonialism image; the arrogance image; the pity image; and the pan-African image* which are somehow self-explanatory (Teshale, 1996). From these images, we can pick at least two important arguments that are relevant to understand the debate on the Ethiopian state.

Firstly, central to Teshale’s argument is that “Ethiopia is a historically antique polity. It is one of the very few places that managed to sustain an unbroken chain of historical civilization free of foreign “corruption”” (p.414).<sup>39</sup> According to him, unlike other civilizations such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India, “Ethiopia maintained its brand of African civilization intact” (p.414). However, driven by the puzzle how Ethiopia maintained its independent statehood, *Ethiopianist* writers have vigorously and systematically tried to de-Africanize Ethiopia and saw it as “outlandish in Africa”.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, acknowledging that it is the oldest state in Africa, Western discourse considered it “...in many respects *in* rather than *of* Africa” (p.414). The survival of the state is largely attributed to geographic rather than institutional, demographic or leadership factors. That is, the Red Sea, the lowland desert, and the highland plateau are portrayed as the natural fortresses (the isolation image) that enabled Ethiopia to maintain its independence. When it defeated Italy at the Battle of Adwa on 1 March 1896, the defeat was attributed to the “hostile Ethiopian terrain” than “...centuries of independent statehood, intensely proud nationalism,

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<sup>38</sup> In fact, Teshale’s article reviews not only works about the Ethiopian state but also that refer indirectly to the “Ethiopian people”.

<sup>39</sup> See also Sven Rubenson’s (1961) explanation as to how Ethiopia survived as an independent state while its surrounding fall under European colonialism one after the other.

<sup>40</sup> For more discussion on the de-Africanization and the debate on the “Semitic” and “Africanist” paradigms, see Paulos Milkias (2011, pp. 32-37).

fighting skills, numerical superiority, and close matching firepower of Ethiopians with that of Italians...” (p.415).

Secondly, apart from the de-Africanizing effort and geographic determinism, Teshale states that the Western Ethiopianist scholarship projected a “Black colonialism image” by promoting the view that “Ethiopia had effectively participated in the European scramble for Africa”. However, Teshale concedes that this view is popular not only within the Western scholarship but also within “...the various nationalist movements in the Horn of Africa, including Greater Somalia nationalism” (p.421).<sup>41</sup> This is propounded particularly because of Emperor Menelik’s territorial expansion to what is now the southern, south eastern and western Ethiopia between 1872 and 1898, which overlaps with the period of the European scramble for Africa. Teshale counters this view by arguing that “[t]he so-called “Black colonialism” or “participation in the scramble for Africa” ascribed to Ethiopia is based on an amazing ignorance of or deliberate indifference to the history of state formation in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Africa” (p.421). Hence, he cites various instances of state formation through territorial expansion in Africa that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as follows:

*...Africans throughout the continent were forming states through territorial expansion and political centralization so as to face head on the gathering storm of the “White man’s burden.” Menelik’s expansion was part of the larger African scene. Like the Fulani empire of Sokoto, the Zulu state of Chaka, Samori Toure’s fragile empire, the Kabakas of Buganda, and so on, Menelik’s Ethiopia was expanding and centralizing in the midst of growing European pounding on Africa...If, indeed, what makes Menelik a Black colonialist is the fact that he more than doubled the territory and population under his rule, then, obviously Shaka should be 50 times more colonialist than Menelik because he expanded the territory and people subject to his rule by a factor of more than 100 (pp.421-422).*

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<sup>41</sup> This is in fact one of the arguments that ethnonationalist movements advance. As this dissertation’s chapter on the politics of national liberation shows, it is one of the reasons that Ethiopia remained internally insecure since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In light of the above and the de-Africanization of Ethiopia aside, we can identify two distinct views that are relevant to understanding the Ethiopian state from Teshale's article. The first pertains to Teshale's own view that "Ethiopia is a historically antique polity" (p.414). The second relates to the "Black colonialist" view ascribed to Ethiopia by Western scholars as well as scholars and nationalists (ethno-nationalists) in the Horn of Africa (particularly Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Somalis) which Teshale attempted to debunk by historicizing state formation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Africa. Both views have their own exponents both in the academic literature and the political discourse. In between the two views, however, we have those who recognize the changes and continuities but want to transform Ethiopia from a state that is built on "national oppression" into a "multinational federation" based on the principle of self-determination. Let's call the third view, following Merera (2006), the "national oppression" thesis—and this is the view that dominated the post-1991 political order and the restructuring of the Ethiopian state or what Jon Abbink (2009) called "the second republic".

In sum, the above three views correspond to what Merera Gudina (2006) described as the "contradictory interpretations of Ethiopian history" and by corollary the three theses about the Ethiopian state: the *nation-building thesis*; the *national oppression thesis*; and the *colonial thesis*. These theses also, in a way, correspond to the structural analysis of John Markakis (2011) and Christopher Clapham (2017b) in which the Ethiopian state—and by extension, the Horn of Africa (see Clapham, 2017)—is understood from the perspective of centre-periphery relations, and hence the *highland core*, the *highland periphery*, and the *lowland periphery*.<sup>42</sup> However, these should

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<sup>42</sup> There is contradiction in Christopher Clapham's work both in the aforementioned book and his article on Ethiopia's developmental state. On the one hand, he extensively writes about the problematic nature of Ethiopia's statehood, as an extension of the Abyssinian core which imposes itself on other areas of modern Ethiopia, which is "...responsible for much of the conflict from which the country has suffered". On the other, he states that Ethiopia has "...created an idea of the state, spread much more widely through the society" (Clapham, 2017a, p.2). Apparently, his aim is making a case for the developmental state in Ethiopia. However, the evidence he used to back

not be viewed as mere reflections of academic debates as they have profound effects on the contemporary political discourses and policy orientations. In fact, in certain instances, the academic debate itself is a reflection of the fault lines in the political discourses and interactions. Hence, the low level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, high levels of political violence as well as low level of legitimacy. In all, combined, these contradictions constitute the fundamental sources of the weakness and, in part, insecurity of the Ethiopian state.

### **4.3. Ethiopia's National Security since 1991**

It is remarkable that there is little published scholarly work that directly focuses on Ethiopia's national security in the context of the post-1991 order. In most cases, the available literature only indirectly, and often superficially, addresses issues of Ethiopia's national security. A systematic search on major search engines and journal portals on the topic yields very little. This is despite the fact that Ethiopia has been considered by keen observers (such as Medhane, 2015; Le Gouriellec, 2018; Verhoven, 2015) as an important security actor regionally, fragile internally, and projecting an image of a growing regional power internationally.<sup>43</sup> Considering the plethora of publications on federalism and identity-based (i.e. ethnic and religious) politics and conflicts that have direct and indirect bearings on national security, it is indeed puzzling that the Ethiopian state is not adequately studied from the perspective of national security.<sup>44</sup> Regardless, this section attempts to critically review the scant literature available on the topic.

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his argument that the "idea of the state" that spread widely is taken from researches conducted in Northern Shewa, which is considered as part of the Abyssinian core. Whether this represents what he and Markakis call the highland periphery and the lowland periphery is seriously contestable.

<sup>43</sup> Ethiopian leaders in fact managed to project the image of a growing and prospering strong state, despite the internal fragilities of the state and the ever-increasing repression that had been awaiting a tumultuous breakdown of law and order.

<sup>44</sup> The inadequacy of the available studies can be seen from, for instance, theoretical, and conceptual perspectives. Regardless of whether one is convinced by the limitation and/or inapplicability of the concept of national security, the writer of the present research would like to argue that analysis of Ethiopia's national security is warranted for

Depending on their primary focus, the available literature on Ethiopia’s national security can be grouped into the following broad categories: (a) a *human security critique* on the national security policy of Ethiopia (Alemayehu, 2009; and Belachew, 2014b); (b) the national security *implications of Ethiopia’s landlockedness* (Yohannes, 2017); (c) Ethiopia as a *regional power* (some use the word “hegemon”) and its increasing influence on the Horn of Africa’s security and stability (Belachew, 2014a; Berouk, 2012; Medhane, 2015; Mehari, 2017; Le Gouriellec, 2018; Záhorský, 2014); and (d) the *threats stemming from extra-regional actors*, particularly foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa (Gashaw and Zelalem, 2016).

The above grouping is by no means exhaustive, and hence one would not claim that there are no other relevant works. Rather, it is because the other works do not directly focus on national security, although the issues studied may be relevant to understand Ethiopia’s national security. Examples of such works include Borchgrevink’s (2016) study on variations in state presence along Ethiopia’s borderlands; Steves’ (2003) analysis of the domestic sources and Tronvoll’s (2009) analysis of the domestic effects of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war; legalist (Awol, 2010; and Zeray, 2007) and political (Ingiriis (2018)) analyses of Ethiopia’s intervention in Somalia, etc. Therefore, the review in this section primarily focuses on the relevant literature that focuses on and investigates security in relation to the Ethiopian state.

#### **4.3.1. A Human Security Critique of Ethiopia’s Security Policy**

Alemayehu Woldemariam (2009) and Belachew Gebrewold (2014b) mainly focus on assessing Ethiopia’s national security white paper—the Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy (hereafter FANSPS, 2002)—and other related policies (particularly the Growth and

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two reasons: to understand the internal and external security environment of Ethiopia and to assess the appropriateness of various national security tools used by the state. The proposed research primarily focuses on the first.

Transformation Plan) from the perspective of human security.<sup>45</sup> Alemayehu (2009), citing the FANSPS's assertion that "the alpha and omega of security is the ensuring of national survival" and that all other national goals depend on the attainment of this, argues that the focus of Ethiopia's security policy is on "...potential and actual threats to its territorial integrity ...and non-military aspects of security are relegated to secondary place" (p.1). While admitting that "one of the striking features of the FANSPS...is its emphasis on democratization and development", Alemayehu contends that this is simply "a change in discourse" and contradicts with the government's actual practices (p.2). The thrust of his argument is that, therefore, human security—the security of the people—should constitute the basis of the FANSPS" (p.2).<sup>46</sup> In short, his argument is that there should be a paradigm change from state-centric to human security-oriented security.

Similarly, Belachew (2014b) argues that there is a dilemma between state security and human security in the policy and praxis of Ethiopia (p.1). According to him, the contradiction between state security and human security in Ethiopia's government policies and practices stem from what he calls complex insecurities, namely: *geopolitical complex insecurity* and *sectoral complex insecurity*. From his perspective, while the former refers to systemic interconnectedness of national, regional and global insecurities, the latter pertains to a vicious circle of interconnected insecurities, for example; "...how insecurity in environmental policy results in food insecurity" and vice versa (p.17).

As such, the thrust of Belachew's argument is that although Ethiopia's policy appears to be *prima facie*, in favour of both state security and human security, the practice tends to be in favour of state

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<sup>45</sup> The FANSP has been under revision since 2018 and the draft is reportedly awaiting approval by the FDRE Council of Ministers.

<sup>46</sup> For this he cites Ethiopia's frequent intervention in Somalia particularly since 2006, and the growing size of the army since the Ethiopian-Eritrean War of 1998-2000.

security. For instance, Belachew cites the emphasis of the FANSPS and the Growth and Transformation Plan (hereafter GTP) on development and democracy which have bearings on human security. But, since the focus is on ensuring national survival, these goals—development and democracy—have not only been subordinated to the ultimate goal of national survival, but they are also viewed as instrumental to the materialization of this goal (p.6). Belachew attributes Ethiopia’s focus on state security to its growing reputation as an ally of Western powers in terms of regional stability and the global war on terror.

If seen from the perspective of human security, the claim by both authors that human security is subordinated to state security is not far from the truth. A cursory look at the FANSPS and the policy discourse—both economic and political—indicates that economic and political projects are presented as instruments of ensuring the survival of the state. This, for instance, stems from the leadership’s perception that abject poverty poses an existential threat to the state and hence securitization of development (see Fana, 2014). Perhaps, the unintended consequence of this is the rationalization of extreme measures taken in the name of fighting poverty such as forced eviction and resettlement of people which undoubtedly affects their human rights and security.

#### **4.3.2. The Security Implications of Landlockedness**

Regarding the national security implications of Ethiopia’s landlockedness, the most recent and rigorous work is that of Yohannes (2017). In his Ph.D. dissertation, *The Nexus between Ethiopia’s Security and its Landlockedness: The Economic, Politico-Military and Regional Dimensions*, Yohannes argues that being a landlocked state since the separation of Eritrea in 1991 makes Ethiopia insecure in three major “sectors of security”—as per the Copenhagen School’s conceptualization of security—namely: economic, political and military. Firstly, in the economic arena, Ethiopia’s landlockedness and its subsequent “...dependence mainly on the Port of Djibouti

[after the Ethio-Eritrean war] has affected the country's effort of bringing about rapid and sustainable economic development..." which is considered by the FANSPS as instrumental in the ensuring of national survival (p.160). Secondly, in the political sphere, it has "debilitated" the government's legitimacy, particularly in the eyes of its opponents. Hence, internal political insecurity. The fact of being landlocked has also "...partly reduced the state's ability of freely interacting with the rest of the world as a sovereign equal", and hence, "external political insecurity" (p.210). Thirdly, concerning military security, the country lost not only its naval force but it also got isolated from the Red Sea costs "...whose importance is highlighted both during the Ethio-Eritrean war and by piracy off the Somali coast". Furthermore, landlockedness imposes vulnerabilities to blockade and military threats from the Red Sea (p.215).

Finally, in addition to the foregoing, Yohannes argues that the Horn of Africa, the region whose security and stability is paramount importance for Ethiopia, "...is rather a security problematic for healing the predicaments of the country's fact of being landlocked" (p.252). This, in other words, means that since the region is Ethiopia's only sea outlet, its stability is vital for the country's economic, political, and military security. In sum, based on his analysis of the nexus between landlockedness and security, Yohannes aptly demonstrated that the relationship pertains to what he called, based on his assessment of the related literature, the "dual vulnerability of developing states". That is, the nexus has to be understood "on account to their landlocked status and on their dependence on transit neighbours for foreign transactions" (p.93). Therefore, his overarching argument is that, on the one hand, "Ethiopia's fact of being landlocked and the preponderant dependence on Djibouti for foreign transactions has militated against its economic, political and military security" (p.93). On the other, the Horn of Africa is pivotal for Ethiopia's security in general and its secure access to the sea in particular.

### 4.3.3. Ethiopia as a Regional Power: A Contested Hegemon in the Horn?

The works that focus on Ethiopia as a Horn of African state are mainly concerned with Ethiopia as a regional power (Belachew, 2014a; Medhane, 2015; and Mehari, 2017), Ethiopia as a regional hegemon (Záhořík, 2014) or ‘imperfect’ hegemon (Le Gouriellec, 2018). The general thrust of these works pertains to the growing influence of Ethiopia on the Horn of Africa’s security and stability. However, they differ in the depth and focus of their assessment of Ethiopia’s regional influence, particularly on the Horn of Africa’s regional security dynamics.

Belachew (2014a), in his comparative analysis, for instance, assesses the role of Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa in regional leadership, particularly with regard to dynamics of regional security. Based on legitimacy theory, he argues that to be accepted as a leading power in a region, states have to fulfil three conditions, namely: (a) *domestic legitimacy*, (b) *regional legitimacy*, and (c) *international reliability*. According to Belachew, therefore, the first condition pertains to the domestic economic and political performances, while the second condition relates to whether the state concerned enjoys “recognition and compliance” by other states in the region. Finally, the third condition pertains to whether the state’s “...alliances with various global powers support or counteract their regional leadership” (p.1).

Based on the foregoing, Belachew argues that Ethiopia fails the test of being a regional power. He attributes this mainly to its domestic legitimacy deficit. That is, according to him, “Ethiopia may dwarf its neighbours across many measures of power, demographic, economic, and military, but its domestic sources of legitimacy are weak” (p.6). Hence, the impact of its regional leadership is a contested one.

Medhane Tadesse (2015) on the other hand, discusses how Ethiopia’s leaders' security perspective and by extension the country’s influence on regional security changes over time, particularly since

1991. According to him, the major factors that defined Ethiopia's past, present and future roles in the Horn of Africa pertain to both domestic and external factors such as "the ethnic question", underdevelopment, access to the sea, and the Nile issues. In the effort to deal with these domestic and external challenges to their security, "successive Ethiopian regimes have followed a Metternichean realpolitik, carefully identifying their state security interests and resolutely pursuing them" (p.333). As such, Ethiopia has been a status quo power seeking to maintain its internal peace and the prevailing balance of power in the region. The only difference between the pre and post-1991 regimes, according to Medhane, is that in the early years of the 1990s "...the EPRDF<sup>47</sup> took the notion of good neighbourliness at face value and downsized Ethiopia's military capacity to the detriment of its security" (p.333). This latter approach created a power vacuum in the region and allowed "conflicts to fester unresolved" while sowing "the seeds of a future conflict". This, in turn, created a situation threatening both Ethiopia's security and the security and stability of the region" (pp.333-334).

In fact, in the early 1990s, the new regime in Ethiopia (the EPRDF) appeared to opt for an inward-looking approach that aimed to restructure the state and mobilizing international support to deal with the rampant poverty in the country. However, the regime realized that it cannot go that far with its dominantly inward-looking approach while Ethiopia's neighbours in the Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea each posed threats on its security. Hence, according to Medhane, the Islamist activism of the NIF (National Islamic Front)-led Sudanese regime and the attempted assassination on Hosni Mubarak in 1995 in Addis Ababa, the Al-Ittihad Al Islamiyah's terrorist threats in the 1990s, and

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<sup>47</sup> EPRDF, Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front is a coalition of four ethnic-based political parties that have been ruling Ethiopia since 1991.

the 1998-2000 war with Eritrea prompted changes in Ethiopia's dominantly inward-looking approach.

Therefore, Medhane noted that the post-1991 regime quickly learned the limits of good neighbourliness and Ethiopia started to pursue its interests in the region and reacted forcefully when threatened. This is done, according to him, "...without waiting for nods of approval from major powers." In doing so, Ethiopia used both its military capability and the regional organizations to compensate for "...the economic limits on its regional influence" (p. 333). Nevertheless, he argues that Ethiopia's diplomatic moves were more fruitful than unilateral military actions in isolating its regional rivals and preventing the emergence of a "coalition of antagonistic countries". It was also instrumental in managing regional security and advancing Ethiopia's "regional policy imperatives" (p.334).<sup>48</sup>

The thrust of Medhane's argument is that having the largest population in and located at the centre of the region, "Ethiopia was meant to be the Horn of Africa's' most influential country" (p.333). The realization of this has been delayed by both domestic and external factors that pertain to Ethiopia's own internal troubles and the region's own makeup. Nevertheless, Ethiopia's influence on the region and the recognition it gets thereof by regional and extra-regional actors has been improving over time due to its active roles and initiatives in the region and economic improvements at home. In sum, Medhane states that Ethiopia's "...multiplicity of roles and initiatives seems to indicate a high degree of coordination at the national, regional, and global

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<sup>48</sup> A few, such as Woldemariam (2018) and Henok (2019) have also assessed how Ethiopia effectively uses international institutions such as the UN and OAU/AU as arenas to advance its foreign policy and national interest, and by extension its national security.

levels aimed at supporting economic development and security, and gaining influence and standing at the regional level” (p.334).

Like Belachew and Medhane, Záhorský (2014) and Le Gouriellec (2018) also assessed Ethiopia’s growing influence in the Horn of Africa from the perspective of a regional hegemon. Considering Ethiopia as a regional hegemon, Záhorský (2014) argues that despite the “enormous economic growth” over the last decade and so, Ethiopia has been confronted with internal tensions and external challenges. Domestically, he views ethnic and religious tensions and socioeconomic frustrations as the major challenges facing the country, while he considers relations with Eritrea and Egypt as well as its involvement in Somalia as the external dimension of the security challenges. Moreover, he observed some linkages between domestic and external challenges. However, he evaluates these “as part of the legacy of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi”, not as a proper security analysis guided by the term he employed, hegemony.

Le Gouriellec (2018), on the other hand, employs the concept of hegemony in a strict sense in assessing Ethiopia’s role in regional security in the Horn of Africa. Accordingly, she asserts that, from the perspective of the idea of hegemony, “Ethiopia is an important case-study in International Relations (IR) for two reasons. Her first reason pertains to the fact that Ethiopia is “a rising power in a conflict-ridden region, presenting itself as a ‘benevolent hegemon’—although frequently perceived differently by its neighbours”. And, secondly, since IR is considered to be about powerful states and the African experience is often neglected, she seeks to test to what extent Africa’s powerful states help examine the idea of hegemony (p.1060). Based on the foregoing, Le Gouriellec states that, under the leadership of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia became visible on the international and regional stages between 1995 and 2012. This happens “...in a national context marked by economic growth, major infrastructural projects, a presence in

international forums and a commitment to peacekeeping operations” (p.1059). In addition, she noted that the country “...stood out as the regional power, a position it claimed on the basis of its territorial size, its geographic location, its thousand-year history and its large population...” (p.1059).

Moreover, Le Gouriellec calls the 2002 FANSPS Ethiopia’s ‘Monroe Doctrine’ in the region that was made in the aftermath of the interstate war with Eritrea, internal leadership shakeup and in the context of the global war on terror. From her perspective, therefore, this takes Ethiopia for granted as a hub of regional stability in the Horn of Africa and identified the region as “a matter of fundamental national interest” as it affects the country’s development. In addition to this, she noted that Ethiopia’s “...foreign policy discourse asserted the primacy of stabilizing the area” paving the way for interventions in Somalia, isolation of Eritrea, participating in the affairs of South Sudan etc. This, then, “contributed to the perception of [Ethiopia’s] role in policing the region” (p.1059). Nevertheless, despite building an identity of a security provider in the Horn of Africa, “...its actual achievements in this field are rather disappointing, prompting Ethiopia’s neighbours to query the legitimacy of the hierarchy it has established” (p.1060). Le Gouriellec, therefore, argues that Ethiopia is an “imperfect hegemon” whose status is challenged not only by its rivals but also by the mismatch between its own aspirations and actions.

Taken together, both Belachew’s and Medhane’s arguments are cognizant of the limitations imposed by the domestic situation on Ethiopia’s exercise of regional influence. However, while Medhane goes beyond the domestic dimension and expounds how Ethiopia effectively used diplomacy to compensate for the limits imposed by domestic factors and military options, Belachew’s analysis remains mainly within the domestic factor (emphasizing on legitimacy). The arguments of Záhorský (2014) and Le Gouriellec (2018) are similar to the foregoing. The main

difference is that the latter authors employed the term hegemony in their analyses of Ethiopia's security and its role in regional security in the Horn of Africa. Like Belachew, Záhorský considers the domestic dimension more problematic and assesses that in the light of the legacy of Meles Zenawi's leadership, whereas Le Gouriellec is mainly concerned with the regional dimension and applied the term hegemony as it is conceptualized in mainstream International Relations theories.

#### **4.3.4. Threats Posed by the Military Presence of Extra-regional Actors**

In the past decade, the threats stemming from extra-regional actors, particularly their military presence in the Horn of Africa is grabbing the attention of scholars and policymakers. In addition to that, the trans-regional security threats spilling from the dynamics of security in the Arabian Gulf has been a subject of scholarly and policy discussion. The implication of this recent development to Ethiopia's national security cannot be overstated. In fact, from the perspective of Ethiopia's landlockedness, part of Yohannes's (2017) argument, discussed above, pertains to the detrimental impact of such a scenario in the Red Sea littoral on which Ethiopia depends for its interaction with the outside world. Unfortunately, there is little scholarly work that examines how this recent development affects Ethiopia's national interest and security.

The article by Gashaw and Zelalem (2016), *The Advent of Competing Foreign Powers in the Geostrategic Horn of Africa: Analysis of Opportunity and Security Risk for Ethiopia*, fills this gap by examining the positive and negative effects of the presence of extra-regional actors in the region. From their perspective, the military presence of extra-regional actors such as the US, France, Germany, China, and Saudi Arabia in the Horn of Africa presents both opportunities and risks for Ethiopia in matters pertaining to military issues, the economy and regional stability and integration. However, they argue that the maximization of benefits and reduction of risks from

these developments depends on Ethiopia's diplomatic effort and the adoption of what they call "rational and assertive foreign policy" (p.777).

The above entails that Ethiopia has to resort to major domestic and external manoeuvres. Domestically, Ethiopia has to deal with sources of its internal vulnerabilities. That is, Ethiopia has to address the legitimacy deficit by dealing with the lack of constitutionalism. Externally, Ethiopia has to improve its relations with Eritrea and maintain good neighbourly relations with the countries of the region. Regarding the extra-regional actors, Ethiopia must endeavour to establish good relations with all of them that have military bases. In the meantime, it should avoid over-reliance on any of these major powers. Apart from these, Gashaw and Zelalem caution against the risk of neo-colonialism and clientelism.

In all, as the foregoing review of the related literature shows, there are few scholarly publications that examined Ethiopia's national security. These works, based on their overarching objective, are grouped in this section into four broad categories, namely: the human security critique of Ethiopia's security policy; the implication of Ethiopia's landlockedness on its national security; Ethiopia as a regional power; and the military presence of extra-regional actors and its security implications. Depending on the purpose of their study, these works have given due attention to certain aspects of the domestic and external sources of Ethiopia's (in)security. Recurring themes pertaining to the domestic dimension are economic development, political legitimacy, human rights, and the ethnic division, whereas threats posed by neighbouring states (in the form of regional rivalry, subversive attempts or interference, the military presence of extra-regional actors) and non-state actors (e.g. terrorism) constitute the external dimension.

However, the gap in the above literature is that the Ethiopian state is taken for granted. Little attention has been given to the state *qua* state and how/whether its security predicaments relate to

the combined effect of external threats/vulnerabilities and the low level of sociopolitical cohesion, high levels of internal political violence, low level of political legitimacy and capacity—i.e., state weakness. Therefore, building on the arguments advanced by the literature on weak states (state weakness) and the empirical literature on Ethiopia, this dissertation examines the domestic and external threats to/vulnerabilities of the Ethiopian state and the interplay thereof. In doing so, the dissertation investigates whether the domestic dimension of security trumps the external one and how/whether the interplay of the internal and external dimensions define Ethiopia's in(security).

#### **4.4. Conclusion and Summary of the Gaps Identified**

Based on the foregoing review of the conceptual literature (in chapter two) and the empirical literature (in this chapter), three pertinent and closely related gaps are identified and synthesized. Firstly, with regard to the national security of weak states, there is a consensus that their security predicaments stem from domestically generated threats and vulnerabilities. The lacuna in this body of literature, however, is that although it may be true that weak states share most or all the attributes and sources of insecurities, little attention has been given to contextual variations, e.g. regional, geopolitical, historical, and patterns of relationships between and among weak states, etc. The assumption here is that despite the shared traits, each weak state differs from the rest in some or many respects. Therefore, while the security predicaments of weak states are in part domestically generated, it does not necessarily lead us to conclude that they are not externally (including militarily) threatened or their vulnerabilities are not exploited by other states (weak or strong) from near or afar.

In fact, as a recent study by Noel Tawagiramungu, Allard Duursma, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe and Alex de Waal (2019) indicates, for instance, “the existing Africa conflict data sets have systematically underrepresent the extent of cross-border state support to belligerent parties in

internal conflicts as well as the number of incidents of covert cross-border armed intervention and incidents using armed force to threaten a neighbouring state” (p. 1). The aforementioned study not only supports the argument presented in this dissertation but also highlights the systematic disregard for the external (transnational) dimension of insecurity that affects weak and fragile African states. . Therefore, taking Ethiopia as a case study, this dissertation engages the existing body of knowledge and attempts to fill this gap.

Secondly, regarding the external (regional) dimension, while the argument that regional security in a weak state-dense region is dominated by the shared internal (in)security dilemma is valid, the claim that this *trumps the external* dimension seems quite problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it falls into the problematic argument of those that deductively applied mainstream IR theories and claimed that weak state-dense regions demonstrate little or no regional security dynamics, thus not worthy of security analysis at the regional level. Secondly, it unduly generalizes and ignores variations among weak state-dense regions which justified the need for systematically and inductively studying differences between regions in the first place. By taking Ethiopia as a case study, this dissertation shows how the external dimension of Ethiopia’s national security is inextricably linked to the Horn of Africa—a dynamic regional security complex. In doing so, it attempts to add some insights by highlighting that, in some weak state-dense regions, the internal security dilemma does not always trump the external. Rather, there is, in certain cases, an interplay between the two dimensions.

Finally, regarding Ethiopia’s national security, the conspicuous gap is that little has been published about it. However, the most important gap pertains to the fact that the Ethiopian state is taken for granted and little attention has been given to the state *qua* state and how/whether its security predicaments relate to the combined effect of low level of sociopolitical cohesion, high levels of

internal political violence, low level of political legitimacy and capacity—i.e., state weakness—on the one hand. And, on the other, it examines whether/how the pattern of interstate relations in the Horn of Africa interplays with Ethiopia’s domestic vulnerabilities/threats. Therefore, building on the arguments advanced by the extant literature and based on the gaps identified, this dissertation examines the internal and external threats/vulnerabilities of the Ethiopian state and the interplay thereof. In doing so, the dissertation adds some insights on the existing body of knowledge pertaining primarily to national—and by extension to regional—security.

## Chapter Five

### Politics of National Liberation: Manifestations of the Ethiopian State's Perennial Weakness and Insecurity

#### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses why and how the Ethiopian state, not just the government in power, has been facing major security challenges from ethno-nationalist movements—also known as national liberation movements or fronts (hereafter NLM/Fs)—over the past decades. In so doing, the chapter demonstrates that the politics of national liberation has been a source of Ethiopia's perennial insecurity and expression of its inherent weakness as a state. The central contention of this chapter is that the politics of national liberation has been a source of Ethiopia's vulnerability and a major threat to its survival. This is mainly due to two reasons: Firstly, ethnically organized “liberation movements or fronts” have been describing Ethiopia as a “prison of nationalities” and/or a “black colonial empire” that has not yet relinquished its subjects. Since the 1960s, the politics of national liberation has been a potent force of political contestation and mobilization rooted in fundamental disputes over the very nature and processes of state building in Ethiopia. Secondly, by conflating state and regime security, state/regime responses to the politics of national liberation have not so far been able to make Ethiopia secure and stable. Instead, the responses added more problems to the complex challenges further entrenching ethno-nationalist sentiments across the country.

Thus, in line with one of the central theses of this dissertation, this chapter serves to elucidate the proposition that *Ethiopia's security predicament is generated by the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and political legitimacy accompanied by recurrent internal political violence, and hence, the domestic insecurity dilemma*. That is, from the perspective of

national security, the politics of national liberation has been a source of Ethiopia's perennial insecurity and inherent weakness as a state. It is a manifestation of the Ethiopian state's low level of socio-political cohesion, national integration or state-to-nation congruence. It is also an expression of both the state's and incumbent regimes' lack of legitimacy and the recurrent political violence in Ethiopia.

The chapter is organized into the following five sections. The first is this introduction. Section two focuses on the evolution and dynamics of the politics of national liberation. The third section examines the interactions between the OLF and ONLF with the TPLF/EPRDF-led government as a case study. Section four discusses the government's responses to the politics of national liberation. The fifth section concludes the chapter.

## **5.2. Politics of National Liberation as 'Counter-hegemonic Discourse' and Militarized Political Movement**

As highlighted in chapter four, the discourse on the Ethiopian state can be divided into three broad views: (a) Ethiopia as an ancient and longest surviving independent African state; (b) Ethiopia as a creation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through territorial expansion and conquest; and (c) Ethiopia as a product of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century scramble for Africa and hence a colonial empire state (Abas, 2014; Asafa, 2000; Mesay, 2003; Merera, 2006; and Tibebe, 1996). These three views correspond to what Merera Gudina (2006) described as the 'contradictory interpretations of Ethiopian history' and by corollary the three theses about the Ethiopian state: the *nation-building thesis*; the *national oppression thesis*; and the *colonial thesis*. These theses also correspond to the structural analysis of John Markakis (2011) and Christopher Clapham (2017b) in which the Ethiopian state is understood from the perspective of centre-periphery relations: the *highland core*, the *highland*

*periphery*, and the *lowland periphery*.<sup>49</sup> Implicitly and/or explicitly, each attributes the contemporary problems of the Ethiopian state to the way it was built and sustained.

Consequently, there is an ostensibly irreconcilable paradox about the Ethiopian state. On the one hand, it is revered as a symbol of Africans' aspiration for freedom and independence during the struggle against European colonial rule. This view is held inside Ethiopia, among a section of its political elite (especially by the Amhara and non-Amhara 'pan-Ethiopian' urban elites) and outside the Horn of Africa by blacks in Africa and elsewhere. In short, Ethiopia's independence was an inspiration during the anticolonial struggles. This is because Ethiopia defeated Italy in 1896 at the Battle of Adowa, shattered its colonial ambition over Ethiopia, and remained Africa's only independent state that managed to escape and support the fights against European colonial rule (Teshale, 1996).

On the contrary, Ethiopia is also viewed by a section of its political elite (particularly the Oromo and the Somali) and some of its neighbours (particularly Eritrea and Somalia) as a "colonial empire" that is yet to relinquish its subjects. It is denigrated as an empire state that participated in the Scramble for Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Jalata, 2000; Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; KII #13, personal communication). Unlike the mainstream view that it is one of the oldest states in the world (Teshale, 1993), it is portrayed as an 'invention' of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a "dependent colonial state" (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990). For them, Ethiopia cannot be a symbol of freedom or independence but rather it is an empire state where struggles for the full realization

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<sup>49</sup> There is contradiction in Clapham's works. On the one hand, he writes about the problematic nature of Ethiopia's statehood, as an extension of the Abyssinian core that is "...responsible for much of the conflict from which the country has suffered". On the other, he states that Ethiopia has "...created an idea of the state, spread much more widely through the society" (Clapham, 2017a, p.2). The evidence he used to back this statement is taken from a research conducted in Northern Shewa, which is considered to be part of the Abyssinian core.

of the right to self-determination have been waged (Asafa, 2000). It is this paradox that generated the politics of national liberation as ‘a counter-hegemonic discourse’ and militarized political movement (KIIs #13, #14, #15, #17 personal communication).

The main contention of the *national oppression thesis* is that the Ethiopian state is a ‘prison of nationalities’, an oppressive entity that denies and violates human, political, and cultural rights. It is a forced (undemocratic) union of diverse nationalities put together under the hegemonic dominance of one group (or to borrow Walleign Mekonnen’s phrase ‘the Amhara and to a certain extent the Amhara-Tigre’ domination) (Walleign, 1969). As part of the Marxist-Leninist debates within the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM), Walleign’s piece “On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia” (1969) is often cited as an important eye-opening for many of the then university students who later became leaders of the various liberation fronts in Ethiopia (Bahru, 2014). The central argument of Walleign’s piece was that Ethiopia is a country of oppressed nations that were subjected to political, economic and cultural subjugation of “...the Amhara and to a certain extent the Amhara-Tigre supremacy”. He also rejected the idea of Ethiopian nationalism as a “fake nationalism” on the ground that that nationalism is not inclusive:

*What is this fake Nationalism? Is it not simply Amhara and to a certain extent Amhara-Tigre supremacy? Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian language is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian music is? Ask anybody what the “national dress” is? It is either Amhara or Amhara-Tigre!!* (Walleign, 1969, p. 2).

Therefore, from Walleign’s perspective, this must be changed through a socialist revolution and the establishment of a “genuine Nationalist Socialist State” that is egalitarian (p. 4). If until that is realized secessionism helps the oppressed to free themselves of the national oppression, Walleign said that he had no objection and asserted: “...for that matter secession is much better than nationally oppressive government” (p.4). As divisive as it was within the ESM, the “Question of

Nationalities” became the ideational foundation of several organized movements, especially proponents of the *national oppression thesis*.

The *colonial thesis*, as an extreme version of the *national oppression thesis*, views Ethiopia not just as a ‘prison of nationalities’ but also as a ‘black colonial empire’. For its proponents, Ethiopia is nothing but the imposition of the ‘Abyssinian rule’ over the peoples of the Horn of Africa. Hence, the unconditional respect for and full realization of the right to self-determination including secession is viewed as a necessary step toward the right direction (Merera, 2006; KIIs #13, #14, personal communication).

A critical examination of the political programmes and arguments of proponents of the *national oppression* and the *colonial theses* reveals that they are different spots in the same political spectrum. Both attribute their opposition against the state to the way it has been built and sustained (KII #16, personal communication). The primary difference between them is whether Ethiopia is just an oppressive state with a hegemonic ethnic group’s dominance or more than that—i.e. a colonial state. This is, for instance, the main difference between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Oromo National Congress (ONC) which later became the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC). This difference entails differences in the desired outcomes of their struggle, i.e. secession or self-rule and democratization (KII #17, personal communication).

Some advocates of the *national oppression thesis* support the ‘right to self-determination including secession’ but their support for session seems tactical: as a matter of principle or ‘a symbolic decoration’, not as something practical (Tesfa, 2015). It is touted as ‘an insurance policy’ for centrifugal forces that the union is voluntary. For instance, the TPLF/EPRDF had championed the cause by including self-determination and secession as fundamental rights in the constitution (see

article 39). Yet, the only secession it allowed in its almost three decades' rule was that of Eritrea. Its counter-insurgency operations against the OLF and ONLF demonstrate its lack of sympathy towards additional secessionist demands (KII #15, personal communication). Regardless, both theses advance the 'right to self-determination up to secession', although not all proponents of the *national oppression thesis* support secession. These differences and similarities make them two faces of the same coin—politics of national liberation.

Therefore, the politics of national liberation in Ethiopia is primarily—and supposedly—a 'counter-hegemonic political discourse' and/or a militarized ethno-nationalist movement against the state and/or subsequent regimes. As such, it is a manifestation of the state's lack of socio-political cohesion, national integration, or state-to-nation congruence. It is also an expression of the recurrent violence and the state's lack of legitimacy. Traditionally, national liberation movements or fronts (hereafter NLM/Fs) are associated with the anti-colonial struggles—mainly against European colonial powers—in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The term national liberation itself is mainly associated with wars of liberation against foreign domination or oppression.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, by definition, NLM/Fs mainly are political and/or politico-military movements that struggle for the freedom of their nation from alien rules (Amin, 2015; Bereketeab, 2017). In the Ethiopian context, like the so-called the second-liberation movements in Africa which targeted post-independence authoritarian regimes, the NLM/Fs use the term—explicitly or implicitly—in the same fashion although this may appear to be strange. Its usage also complicates political interaction between them and regimes in power as it ends up being a zero-sum game.

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<sup>50</sup> It is also used to describe the so-called the "second liberation movements" which emerge due to dissatisfaction over post-independence regimes (see Berouk, 2008 for a brief critique on these movements in Africa).

Arguably, the first organized NLM/F in Ethiopia is the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) which was established in Cairo, Egypt, in 1960. Since then, NLM/Fs claiming to struggle for the self-determination right of the people of this or that ethnic group have been mushrooming. The period between the 1960s and early 1990s was dominated by militant NLM/Fs that used not only discourse but also conventional and unconventional warfare. This includes the ELF, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), OLF, TPLF, the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), and the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), and other smaller movements claiming to represent peripheral communities such as the Afar, Gumuz, Gambella, and Sidama (Mulugeta & Fisseha, 2021). There had also been 'pan-Ethiopian' movements such as the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) which accepted the right to self-determination in principle but did not view the aforementioned NLM/Fs and each other positively (Gebru, 2008).

The leaders and supporters of NLM/Fs view their struggle as either against the unjust state-society relations or the 'colonial rule' that usurped their land, subjugated their people, and destroyed their social and political institutions. They interpret the events of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which led to the emergence of the modern state as a turning point (Asafa, 2000; see the political programmes of the NLM/Fs). They consider Menelik II, the founder of modern Ethiopia, as the embodiment of the state's brutality who more than doubled the territorial and population size at their expense. They lament the 'dual political economy system' that created a landowning society in the north (*rist*) and a landless society in the south (*gult*). They also criticize the nature of the political system—which they call the *nefitegna* (armed settler) system—that favoured appointment

of governors from the north. Furthermore, they point to the garrison nature of the urban centres in the south as an instance of either the nationally oppressive or ‘colonial character’ of the state. The state building process which extended and overlaid the political, social, and institutional norms of the north over the south has been considered as an affront to the communities who were subjected to such treatment (KIIs #13, #14, #15, #17 personal communication).

As argued not only by the NLM/Fs but also prominent scholars of Ethiopian politics (see Clapham, 2017b and Markakis, 2011), the state building process has created a political dynamic of the dominant and the dominated. For example, Clapham (2017b) and Markakis (2011) pointed out how the relationships have been structured. The highland core—the Amhara as well as Tigray—on whose image the state is mainly constructed and sustained is owner of the ‘great traditions’ of Axum, Lalibela, and the Solomonic Dynasty that enjoyed national prominence. The highland and lowland peripheries have mostly been at the receiving end of state policies and governance practices characterized by marginalization and domination. This continued formally until the 1974 Revolution and as an embedded and latent feature of the state until the present. The politics of national liberation has thus been seeking to either radically transform or break away from the state that embodies this system. This makes the politics of national liberation, for its proponents, an ‘emancipatory reaction’ and a liberationist resistance against oppression (KIIs #13, #14, #15, #17 personal communication).

Being ‘emancipatory’, the NLM/Fs also view their struggle as ‘counter-hegemonic’ (KII #13, personal communication). For instance, they contend that both symbolic and material objects that the state promotes as ‘Ethiopian’ are characteristically exclusionary and represent only the dominant groups—the northern. This includes the official flag of pre-1991 Ethiopia, its current

working language and historiography. Materially, they mention the dual character of the political economy of the state in which the highland and the lowland peripheries were subjected to harsh exploitation until 1975. They further argue that the relics of that political economy—despite the return of the ‘land to the tiller’ in 1975 and the federalization of the state—are still embedded in state institutions. The bureaucracy, the security, and other institutions of the state are not seen as reflective of the national character (KIIs #13, #15, personal communication).

Moreover, as an organized movement, the politics of national liberation represents not only the discursive struggle but also the insurgencies waged against the state. Since the inception of the first organized movement, the military dimension has been dominant. To this end, NLM/Fs have been seeking/receiving training, logistical, financial, and moral support from neighbouring states which were also engaged in covert and/or overt hostilities against Ethiopia. For instance while the ELF and EPLF in Eritrea as well as the TPLF in Tigray got support mainly from countries of the Middle East, Egypt and Sudan (Woldemichael, 2013), the WSLF and OLF had received support from Somalia during the 1970s and 80s. In the 1990s and 2000s, the OLF and ONLF had received support from Eritrea (KII #13, KII #15, personal communication). With the exception of the EPLF-TPLF alliance, the armed movements lacked meaningful alliances. Nonetheless, their efforts led to the collapse of the Derg regime in 1991 (Mulugeta and Fisseha, 2021).<sup>51</sup>

Following the fall of the Derg, proponents of the politics of national liberation were split into two rival camps. Some led and joined the TPLF/EPRDF regime and others continued to oppose the government through peaceful and low-key armed insurgency. In the latter case, the OLF, ONLF and other smaller armed NLM/Fs attempted to challenge the regime. Non-armed movements have

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<sup>51</sup> Derg—meaning committee or council—is the name of the military regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991 headed by Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam.

also mushroomed claiming to represent various ethnic groups' quest for self-determination. However, it was the OLF and ONLF that posed considerable threat. The TPLF/EPRDF, itself being one of the movements advancing the politics of national liberation albeit not a proponent of the colonial thesis, had many things in common with these movements. It also worked with them, especially with the OLF and ONLF, in the initial stages of the 1991-1994 transitional period. However, it fell out with both due mainly to 'disagreements over the exercise of the right to self-determination including secession and power sharing' (KII #18, personal communication). While TPLF/EPRDF's commitment to self-determination seems genuine—given its decision to include it in both the 1991 transitional charter and the 1995 federal constitution—it was not committed to entertain another secession after Eritrea (Tesfa, 2015). In addition, EPRDF's desire to be a dominant political force by neutralizing or weakening them had also played a role in this dispute. Hence, the logic of regime security had its own contribution. The next section discusses the OLF and ONLF's engagement with the TPLF/EPRDF-led government as case studies to demonstrate the complexity and intricacies of the politics of national liberation.

### **5.3. The Oromo Liberation Front and the Ogaden National Liberation Front**

#### **5.3.1. The Oromo Liberation Front**

##### **5.3.1.1. *Origin and Development***

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was established in 1973 but its formal launch through a party congress was made in 1976.<sup>52</sup> At the time of its establishment, like many of its counterparts, the OLF was “a motley crowd” including a range of Oromo individuals from young educated Marxists to farmers with no formal education. Its emergence is associated with the development of Oromo nationalism in the 1960s and early 1970s. As such, its origin can be traced back to two major

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<sup>52</sup> Asafa Jalata (1993, p. 393) says that the OLF was officially established in 1974.

historical milestones in the Oromo community in particular and one major phenomenon in Ethiopia in general. The first two were the establishment of the Macha-Tullama Self-Help Association and the Bale Peasant rebellion of the 1960s, and the third was the Ethiopian Student Movement (Asafa, 1993; Mohammed, 2000; Woldemariam, 2018).

The Macha-Tullama Self-Help Association, if one simply takes it by its name, was a grassroots social development organization aimed at improving the socioeconomic condition of the Oromo people. The association was not unique as it was common to establish such kinds of organizations in Ethiopia due to the prohibition of establishing political parties at the time. In fact, many of these associations were primarily interested in local/community development. What made the Macha-Tullama Self-Help Association different was perhaps that many of its leaders eventually got caught up in political confrontations with the regimes in power. Its establishment in 1963 is also considered as a hallmark in the history of Oromos' organized resistance against "national oppression" (KII #15, personal communication).<sup>53</sup> Its membership included quite diverse backgrounds such as civil servants, military and police officers, urban-based intellectuals, merchants, etc. Some of its leaders, especially Brigadier General Tadesse Birru, were respected army officers who had a fallout with successive governments and lost their life in the course of their struggle (Asafa, 1993; Mohammed, 2000; Merera, 2003).

In addition, the Bale Peasant Rebellion of the 1960s had inspired the Oromo elite.<sup>54</sup> The fact that a poorly armed and spontaneous group of farmers was able to resist the government's military for

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<sup>53</sup> There is indeed a deliberate attempt to portray the Macha-Tullama Self-Help Association as the first Oromo nationalist movement by creating narratives around its emergence, confrontation with regimes, and dissolution. Given the fact that its original aim was local/community development, different interpretations of the role of Macha-Tullama Self-Help Association will likely continue.

<sup>54</sup> Bale is currently one of the Zones of Oromia that is located in the southern highlands of Ethiopia. It was one of the provinces in the 1960s.

years was taken as courageous and exemplary not just by the Oromo but also other Ethiopian radical students (Gebru, 1991). The message it sent to them was that the imperial regime can and should be resisted for its exploitative and oppressive nature. Although the rebellion was crushed in the late 1960s due to intensive military campaigns and the organizational limits of the farmer's resistance, it had a lasting impact on the Oromo youth who later formed the OLF (Asafa, 1993; Gebru, 1991; Mohammed, 2000).

Like many other ethno-nationalist and pan-Ethiopian political organizations in Ethiopia, the emergence of the OLF can also be seen as a product of the Ethiopian Student Movement. In fact, its prominent leaders such as Baro Tumsa and Ibssa Gutama were among the prominent participants/leaders of the movement. OLF's political views and ideals were thus directly and indirectly shaped by the debates within the student movement. More importantly, however, it views the Oromo's experience within Ethiopia as that of a colonial subjugation than a mere national oppression (KII #15, KII #16, personal communication).

Therefore, as Asafa Jalata (1993) puts it, although the OLF's establishment was "a continuation" of the aforementioned Oromo struggles, it was also "a radical departure" from them due to its organizational setup and ultimate political objective due to three reasons: Firstly, the OLF was created by "revolutionary and intellectual Oromos" from two clandestine groups that had been meeting in Addis Ababa, i.e., *Bakalcha* Oromo and *Oromia*. It was a series of debates and negotiations between these two groups that produced the first political program of the OLF in 1973 and later amended in its first congress in 1976. Secondly, the creation of the OLF was aimed at providing a central leadership to the struggle that was dispersed across the Oromo inhabited areas. Thirdly, and most importantly, the main political objective of the OLF was "the realization of national self-determination for the Oromo people and their liberation from oppression and

exploitation in all their forms" . The program further says that "...this can only be realized through successful consummation of the new democratic revolution and the establishment of people's democratic republic of Oromia" (OLF's Political Program, cited in Asafa, 1993, p. 893)

Shortly after they formulated the political objective, the founding members met with other like-minded leaders of the now defunct Ethiopian National Liberation Front (ENLF) which was based in the Middle East to launch a guerrilla movement (Asafa, 1993; Mohammed, 2000; Woldemariam, 2018) in a place called Galamso, east Harrarghe. One of the prominent leaders of this group was Jara Abagada who, until 1978, led the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)—the armed wing of the OLF. However, toward the end of the 1970s, the leadership and members of the OLF were unhappy about the progress made by the struggle and wanted to improve its organization and operation. As a result, Jara was replaced by Baro Tumsa as the leader of the OLA. A disagreement over this had ensued and eventually led to split between Jara and the rest. Amidst this infighting, Baro Tumsa was killed in a shootout with a junior member. Jara also left the OLF for good and eventually established the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO). This, in addition to the impact of the 1977-78 Ethiopia-Somalia war, had severely weakened the OLF (Asafa, 1993, Woldemariam, 2018).

Regardless, the OLF gradually expanded its operational zone from what is now eastern part of Oromia to Bale and then to western Oromia, particularly Wollega. In the few areas it had "liberated", it attempted to implement its social, economic, and political objectives (Asafa, 1993; KII #15, personal communication). Nonetheless, as a national liberation movement, providing a centralized leadership proved to be quite difficult for the OLF. The first challenge it faced stemmed from regional and religious divisions which, Asafa Jalata claims, was "intensified by a century of colonialism" (1993, p. 895). Furthermore, the difference in social and political background, among

its members, happened to be difficult to manage. Moreover, the OLF, since its establishment, has been sandwiched between its struggle against the Ethiopian state/government and the overlapping of Somalia's territorial claim over Ethiopia with what it considered as parts of Oromia. This did not only narrow its operational zone but had also made it a target of the two powerful armies of the Horn of Africa (Leenco, 2004; Mohammed, 2000).

#### **5.3.1.2. Abortive "Self-Determination"?**

When the Derg regime collapsed in 1991, although the OLF had its own army and some areas under its control, "it did not fully achieve a military victory" like the EPLF and the TPLF. This made the OLF a "junior partner" during the London Conference that charted the post-Derg political transition and the Transitional Government that followed. In turn, it had forced the OLF to agree "...to seek a peaceful political solution for the Oromo question". The collapse of the Derg and the successes of the Eritrean and Tigrayan struggles were, however, taken as encouraging signals for increasing the OLF's commitment to self-determination despite the setbacks it faced thus far (Asafa, 1993, p. 397). But, contrary to its expectation, neither the TPLF nor the EPLF seemed keen on accommodating its aspiration to create the republic of Oromia. This had made OLF's commitment to a "peaceful political solution" short-lived (KII #15, KII #16, personal communication).

Frustrated by the ever expanding operational zone of the TPLF/EPRDF into territories that it considered its own social base, the OLF attempted to assert itself in some parts of Oromia. Eventually, the relation between the OLF and TPLF/EPRDF, by extension the Transitional Government, began to deteriorate. Although the OLF shared EPRDF's view, as per their joint communique, that the struggle was "...against the anti-Charter forces who are also anti-peace, anti-democracy, and anti-equality" (*Addis Zemen*, 20 October 1991), the OLF saw the continued

expansion and presence of EPRDF's forces into Oromia as an affront (*Addis Zemen*, 3 April 1992). This was further complicated by the insertion of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO)—which was established by the TPLF mainly out of Oromo prisoners of war just a year before the fall of the Derg—into the scene (KII #15, personal communication).

Perhaps understanding that the EPRDF was not going to allow it to “peacefully seek a political solution to the Oromo question”, the OLF forces started to forcefully resist its expansion and presence especially in eastern and western parts of Oromia. As reports of violent clashes and attacks became common, OLF and TPLF/EPRDF started to trade accusations against each other (see *Addis Zemen* from October 1991 to May 1992). In eastern Ethiopia, the violent clashes and tension between the two became so high that the then Minister of Defence, Seye Abraha, had to visit the place. After his visit, Seye said that it was “...difficult to say that there is one government in the country...and this region is not under the Transitional Government”. He further noted that “in these places, the government apparatus, offices, workers and organizations are hindered; and when we consider that the OLF alone operates in the area, we can assert that the country is being ruled by two governments” (*Addis Zemen*, 28 March 1992). Moreover, he stated that “the fact that OLF prevents others from operating in areas it controlled but enjoys the freedom to do so elsewhere where other members of the Transitional Government control makes it strange and antithetical to a peaceful process” (*Ibid*).

Seye did not try to hide his disdain for the OLF when he referred to OLF's seats in the council of the Transitional Government as “...not reflective of its negligible contribution to the overthrow of the Derg. Had this been seriously considered, it would have lesser seats in the Council. The seats were allotted to it because it promised to operate peacefully in line with the Transitional Charter”. From his perspective, OLF's behaviour is contrary to the pledge it had made. He lamented that

“resort to armed conflict is not justified when one can promote political views in a democratic and peaceful process” (*Ibid*). Hence, although he said that his visit should not be construed as a preparation for war, his visit in fact foretold the imminent violent confrontation between the two.

Accusations of who attacks whom first aside, it can be understood from OLF’s actions and statements that its expectation that it would be allowed to administer Oromia (known as Region 4 during the transition period), like the TPLF and EPLF did in their respective domains was not fulfilled. The EPRDF also appeared to be determined not to fulfil this expectation. This led the OLF to accuse the TPLF/EPRDF of trying to replace the Derg in Oromia and be the “new lord” (*Addis Zemen*, 1 April 1992). OLF’s disillusionment with the promises of the transitional process and TPLF/EPRDF’s determination to keep the OLF checked—including through the use of the OPDO as a replacement—made the possibility of peacefully solving their differences unlikely (Plaut, 2006).<sup>55</sup>

Finally, in a series of accusations and counter accusations through press statements, the TPLF/EPRDF and OLF appeared to have realized that their goals are incompatible. This was happening despite a series of discussions and third party mediations (mainly by the EPLF and the US diplomats in Addis Ababa). EPRDF said that the OLF was dishonest because “what it said and what it did were contradictory”. From the EPRDF’s perspective, “although the OLF publicly states that it does not have the intention to establish an independent state of Oromia, the EPRDF and all Ethiopians know the position of the OLF very well. Is not a secret. This has been declared by the OLF itself in many gatherings, conferences and rallies” (*Addis Zemen*, 1 April 1992). Nevertheless,

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<sup>55</sup> Several OLF leaders, including Dawud Ibssa and Tadesse Ebba (Fido), mentioned this as one of the reasons why it was difficult to continue within the Transitional Government ([https://wikileaks.wikimee.org/gifiles/docs/5120964\\_interview-with-chairman-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-.html?msclid=32f0727ad06311ec9adc13caebc6d467](https://wikileaks.wikimee.org/gifiles/docs/5120964_interview-with-chairman-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-.html?msclid=32f0727ad06311ec9adc13caebc6d467) )

the TPLF/EPRDF said that it was not against the OLF's view of creating an independent state *per se*; but rather only its violent actions. The EPRDF urged the OLF to pursue a peaceful approach, emphasizing its waning patience. Rejecting EPRDF's criticism of its political stance, the OLF said that "...although the appropriateness of evaluating the political stance of one another is questionable, the OLF is firm both in its name and political stance, from the beginning until today. That is, it is struggling for the Oromo people's right for self-determination". In addition, the OLF criticized the TPLF for being opportunist and "cosmetically changing itself" from TPLF to EPRDF and "from Tigray Republic to Revolutionary Democratic Ethiopia" (*Addis Zemen*, 3 April 1992).

In what appeared to be a coordinated effort to discredit the OLF, the OPDO also released a separate statement accusing the OLF of destabilization. In this press statement, OPDO blamed the OLF for choosing "the path of war instead of peace" violating the pledge it made to respect the Charter. It also said that the Oromo people know that it had opted for war and it has been provoking and instigating violence in many parts of Oromia. The OLF "chose violence", according to the OPDO, "...to impose its views on people because it knows well that it cannot win the upcoming election". It also accused the OLF of pitting people against each other based on their ethnic differences (*Addis Zemen*, 9 April 1992).

Meanwhile, following a meeting held on 15 April 1992, TPLF/EPRDF and OLF agreed to work together and settle their disputes based on the Charter. The two sides were mediated by the United States and the EPLF agreeing that the dispute between them "need fundamental solutions and be settled peacefully" (*Addis Zemen*, 17 April 1992). Therefore, both sides agreed to facilitate free and genuine elections in the regions. The agreement included five important points ranging from the cessation of hostile acts and preparing for a peaceful election. The most important point of the agreement was, however, the one that required all armed groups to withdraw from civilian areas

and be stationed in the camps assigned to them within a week after the signing of the agreement (*Addis Zemen*, 17 April 1992). The OLF followed through this and started to send its forces to the designated camps. Amidst this, however, it was accused of committing the notorious massacres of Bedeno, Weter, and Arba Gugu, and ambushing the EPRDF forces in Mechara and Mechecta (*Addis Zemen*, 18, 21, and 23 April 1992).

According to reports of the TGE, the 150 civilians were killed in east Hararghe (Bedeno area). The report alleged that the OLF killed them for various reasons after capturing them from Weter, Langey, Bedeno and other places. The killed were beaten, stabbed, and thrown into pits and gorges. In terms of number and ethnic background the victims include 36 Oromos, 95 Amharas, 7 Gurages, and 6 Tigres. OLF controls Bedeno since Sene 1983 (*Addis Zemen*, 18 April 1992). The TGE council of representatives established a five-member special committee to investigate the massacres. The committee did not include members of the EPRDF and OLF. The decision to establish the committee was supported by the majority of council members. A council member (representing OPDO) who presented the agenda for discussion openly accused the OLF and said that it will not escape justice. A member of the OLF lamented that it was unacceptable to blame his organization siding with one party and merely based on unverified media reports. He also demanded that if there must be investigation it should be comprehensive including other parts of the region including Weter, Harrar, Kulubi etc. (*Addis Zemen*, 23 April 1992).

The Council of Representatives, in its 44<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session, condemned “the massacre of civilians committed by members of the Oromo Liberation Front and decided that they face justice”. It also approved the report of the Investigating Team in its entirety. The OLF “accepted the decisions of the Council and conceded that its officials and the Front are responsible”. According to the report, the exact number of victims is not known. The report also alleges that from July 1991 to April

1992, the OLF had “executed about 36 prisoners from those under its custody” (*Addis Zemen*, 28 May 1992).<sup>56</sup>

From this point onward, the EPRDF-led Transitional Government and its security chiefs—Samora Yenus (Chief of the Eastern Command) and Hayelom Araya (Chief of the Southern Command—started to portray the OLF as a major security threat (see for example *Addis Zemen*, 30 April and 12 May 1992). Samora said that despite OLF’s claim that some of the clashes were happening without the knowledge of the leadership “...the OLF is coherent in its tactic and strategy. It knows what it is doing. It chose to use minor attacks because it does not want to resort to major ones because it is a better option”. Therefore, according to Samora, “...each damaging act is taking place with the full knowledge and even instruction of the top leadership. Its goal is to create a perception that there is no peace...” (*Addis Zemen*, 30 April 1992). The OLF-EPRDF tension continued worsening. In a meeting held on 19 June 1992, Leenco Lata told OLF’s supporters that the organization had decided not to participate in the planned elections. He cited the harassment by the EPRDF, the shutting down of OLF’s offices, and the arrest and denial of freedom of movement of its officials as reasons (*Addis Zemen*, 20 June 1992).<sup>57</sup> And, a week after this, the OLF had announced in a letter to the Council of Representatives that it had withdrawn from the Transitional Government (*Addis Zemen*, 25 June 1992).

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<sup>56</sup> The 1993 Human Rights Watch report confirmed more or less similar figures and blamed the OLF and its supporters for most of the attacks against the Amhara. Unlike *Addis Zemen*’s report, however, it reported that “while admitting that its supporters were responsible for the massacre, the OLF denied institutional responsibility” (Human Rights Watch, World Report 1993-Ethiopia, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/WR93/Afw-01.htm>).

<sup>57</sup> Leenco’s claim of harassment and detention of its members was corroborated by human rights organizations and reports produced by other international agencies (“Profile Series Ethiopia: Update on Political Conditions”, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=22874>).

### 5.3.1.3. Back to Square One

After OLF's withdrawal, things started to quickly change in TPLF/EPRDF's favour mainly due to the latter's better military capacity. In the summer of 1992, the OLF transitioned from a "junior partner" to a major threat to the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE)" and the process of transition from war to peace. There were sporadic fighting between OLF forces that were not encamped and the TPLF/EPRDF forces. By the end of 1993, thousands of OLF fighters were either captured or had surrendered as POWs (*Addis Zemen*, 28 May 1995).<sup>58</sup> Thus, after significantly weakening the OLF, Meles Zenawi—president of the Transitional Government—said that "at present, there is no organized group that will destabilize any part of Ethiopia militarily. There might be some bandits but there is no way these will pose serious challenges to security". Meles also said that "there are currently 20,000 OLF fighters caught as POWs....except those suspected of serious crimes, they will be released soon" (*Addis Zemen*, 20 December 1992).<sup>59</sup>

In the following months, the OLF faced both internal and external challenges. Its members and leaders were forced into voluntary and involuntary exile, while a few continued fighting in the country's east and west. The leadership was not able to muster a unified position on the next steps. As a result, it lost not only a huge number of its fighters but also access to the very limited political space—including the government-controlled media through which its side of the story was occasionally heard (KII #15, personal communication).<sup>60</sup> The narrative around its withdrawal and

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<sup>58</sup> See "Profile Series Ethiopia: Update on Political Conditions" <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=22874>

<sup>59</sup> The OLF argued that most of these were not captured during fighting. They were in the camps based on the agreement entered earlier. It believed that it was deceived by the EPRDF that despite the agreement that all fighters will be encamped, EPRDF forces were everywhere in the country. The EPRDF, on the other hand, insisted that based on the decision of the Council of Representatives, the EPRDF forces are interim defence forces of the country and they had to be wherever they were needed (*Addis Zemen*, 27 June 1992).

<sup>60</sup> During the course of the data collection/generation from Addis Zemen, for instance, the present author observed that coverage of the OLF eventually faded away and occasionally reappeared only in connection with alleged disturbances, explosions, and low-key military clashes with the ENDF.

operation—particularly among the non-Oromo—was thus primarily dominated by the government’s perspective. In what can be considered as reinforcing an already existing stereotype, the name OLF was associated with separatism, bombings of public infrastructure, and harassment of non-Oromos (especially the Amhara) living in Oromia like the Bedeno and Arba Gugu massacres. Among the Oromo nationalists, however, its withdrawal had created mixed feelings of betrayal by the TPLF/EPRDF and determination to continue the struggle for self-determination (Asafa, 1995).

Following the inauguration of a new constitution in 1995 and the formal federalization of the state along ethno-linguistic lines, the EPRDF through the OPDO continued to govern what is now officially called Oromia National Regional State. From the Oromo nationalists’ perspective, the OPDO is “TPLF’s tool” presented as “an alternative to the OLF” to rule the Oromo people. The TPLF/EPRDF-led government, on the other hand, is “an occupying force” that replaced the Derg and created a surrogate (i.e. OPDO) “to divide and rule like before” (Asafa, 1993, p. 398). Even though the right to self-determination including and up to secession has been made the organizing principle of the Ethiopian federation (see article 39 of the FDRE Constitution), there appeared to be no way for the OLF to peacefully invoke that provision as the EPRDF consolidates its power. Hence, the OLF had regrouped and resuscitated its insurgency with varying degrees of tenacity albeit a debilitating internal crisis within the organization itself (KII #15, KII #16, personal communication).

In the second half of the 1990s, the OLF based its offices first in Somalia taking advantage of the situation in that country and later both in Somalia and Sudan when the Ethio-Sudan relation

seriously deteriorated following the attempted assassination on Hosni Mubarak in 1995.<sup>61</sup> Coordinating its dwindled forces from these two offices, the OLF attempted to launch attacks on government forces and installations both in eastern and western parts of Oromia Region. It also tried to mobilize its supporters in the region. However, the OLF was not able to mobilize a successful insurgency that matches the military strength of the EPRDF-led government apart from sporadic hit-and-runs. The divisions and crisis within the organization was also deepening leading to splits within the leadership and the fleeing of some into Europe and the United States (Mohammed, 2000).

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the government had routinely accused the OLF, along Al Itihad Al Islamiyah (here after AIAI), of being behind the explosions and instabilities in various parts of the country including Addis Ababa. For instance, in one of the high profile cases, the Federal Police announced in a press statement that it had captured "...terrorists who [were] responsible for bombing Belayneh Hotel in Dire Dawa and Blue Tops Restaurant and Tigray Hotel in Addis Ababa". The statement alleged that the "terrorists" were members of the OLF. According to the police, in a series of attacks carried out in Harrar and Addis Ababa: (1) on 11 February 1997, 2 were killed and 10 wounded due to an attack on Harrar's Belayneh Hotel; (2) on 11 April 1997, 2 were killed and 32 wounded due to an attack on Addis Ababa's Tigrai Hotel; and (3) on the same day, 8 were wounded due to an attack on Blue Tops Restaurant. In addition, the police claimed that the attacks had caused severe property damages. The police reported that it had captured three individuals as leaders of the "terrorist cell that infiltrated the cities" and the remaining operatives were also being captured (*Addis Zemen*, 6 November 1997). The OLF had never taken

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<sup>61</sup> In a tit-for-tat for Ethiopia's support for SPLM/A following the attempted assassination, Sudan provided safe-havens for the OLF (Berouk, 2011).

responsibility for these explosions and its leaders actually assert that they had never used such tactics in their struggle.<sup>62</sup>

In 1998, the Ethio-Eritrea war had presented both new opportunities and challenges to the OLF in reviving itself and continuing the armed struggle. The war was a defining event for the Horn of Africa as it changed the regional alliance where enemies suddenly became allies and allies became enemies. The OLF was also forced to adapt to this sudden change. In what appears to be a *quid pro quo*, Ethiopia had convinced Sudan to force the OLF stop any operations from its territory (KII #1, KII #2, personal communication). As a result, the OLF had to move its headquarters from Sudan to Eritrea which provided it with both financial and material support (Shin, 2009). With this newly found financial, material and even logistical support including transportation of hundreds of trained fighters from Eritrea to Somalia, the OLF renewed its insurgency from the Ethiopia-Somalia and Ethiopia-Kenya borders.<sup>63</sup> However, OLF's safe-haven in Somalia did not last longer. A deal between a prominent Somali warlord (Hussein Aideed) and the Ethiopian government resulted in the expulsion of the OLF leaders (KII #2, personal communication).<sup>64</sup> Its offices in

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<sup>62</sup> See "Interview with Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front"  
[https://wikileaks.wikimee.org/gifiles/docs/5120964\\_interview-with-chairman-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-.html?msclid=32f0727ad06311ec9adc13caebc6d467](https://wikileaks.wikimee.org/gifiles/docs/5120964_interview-with-chairman-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-.html?msclid=32f0727ad06311ec9adc13caebc6d467)

<sup>63</sup> "Oromo forces 'on the move' in Somalia" BBC News, Monday, July 12, 1999,  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/392488.stm>

<sup>64</sup> Aideed's move was aimed at improving the hitherto deteriorated relations between Ethiopia and his faction due to him allowing the OLF to operate from Mogadishu. These measures were therefore taken as the implementation of an earlier agreement with Ethiopia (*Addis Zemen*, 12 November 1992). Aideed had also expelled senior leadership of the OLF including Gelassa Dilbo, Aba Challa Lata, Aba Biya, Dawud Ibssa, and Bultum Biya who went to Eritrea. Their expulsion was confirmed by a third party, Egyptian and Libyan diplomats in Somalia. *Addis Zemen* cited an anonymous senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, who said that this came after the Aideed's faction was warned not to provide safe-haven to terrorists (*Addis Zemen*, 17 December 1999).

Mogadishu was also shut down.<sup>65</sup> Regardless, it continued its low-key operations in the south and west and claimed some gains which were denied by the government.<sup>66</sup>

In the early 2000s, although the OLF's insurgency continued to face similar challenges, it was able to launch some attacks on the Ethiopian army. This was mainly due to three reasons: the vacuum created by the political tension within the TPLF/EPRDF, sporadic protests in Oromia—particularly widespread Oromo opposition against the government's decision to move the regional capital of Oromia from Addis Ababa to Adama—and Eritrea's renewed support in an attempt to take advantage of the situation within Ethiopia. In addition, the defection of senior officials, especially Speaker of the House of Federation Almaz Meko and her decision to join the OLF, had also boosted morale.<sup>67</sup> The protest against the transfer of the regional capital, the government's repressive response and the ensued student riots and arrests had created a conducive environment to recruit more fighters including university students (KII #17).<sup>68</sup>

In the first half of 2000s, particularly until the 2005 national elections, the OLF appeared to have become stronger for the first time since it withdrew from the Transitional Government (Plaut, 2006). More fighting between the OLF and the Ethiopian army were also reported during this time both by local and international media.<sup>69</sup> However, this was eventually overshadowed by the

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<sup>65</sup> "Aideed shuts down Oromo Liberation Front in Mogadishu"

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/1999/12/01/aideed-shuts-down-oromo-liberation-front-mogadishu>

<sup>66</sup> "Ethiopia denies Oromo rebel successes", BBC News, Thursday, August 19, 1999

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/418699.stm>; "Ethiopia says Oromo rebels crushed", BBC News, Thursday, August 19, 1999 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/424672.stm>

<sup>67</sup> "Ethnic Tension Sparks Ethiopian Defection", Tuesday 12 August 2001

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1490533.stm>; Another official also defected and sought asylum claiming that he was being persecuted because he 'raised some questions', "Ethiopian official seeks asylum", BBC News Wednesday, 8 May, 2002 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1974698.stm>

<sup>68</sup> The government—both the regional and federal—had also used allegation of affiliations with the OLF to quell protests and take tougher actions against the protesters (See *Addis Zemen*, 11-25 March 2004)

<sup>69</sup> "Fighting on Ethiopia-Sudan Border" Saturday, 29 June 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2074774.stm>; "Ethiopia says Oromo Rebels crushed", Friday, 5 July 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2095436.stm>

government's decision to open-up the political space and hold a highly contested election in which old and new Oromo political parties actively participated. The OLF—forming a tactical alliance with other Ethiopian opposition groups—tried to capture the momentum of the post-election crisis in Ethiopia. The Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD) was formed by the OLF, ONLF and the CUD (Coalition for Unity and Democracy)—whose leaders were jailed following the dispute over the election result. They pledged to increase the pressure on the already challenged government. Neither this new alliance nor the OLF happened to be able to put significant pressure on the government other than some public relations campaigns. The only notable “victory” that generated a morale boost at this time was the defection of a senior officer of the Ethiopian army—Brigadier General Kemal Gelchu—to Eritrea along with hundreds of troops and his decision to join the OLF fighters. This meant a lot for the OLF, not just politically but also militarily as the General brought well-trained soldiers with him. In fact, behind all these, Eritrea's political and logistical support was instrumental (Plaut, 2006; Shin, 2009).<sup>70</sup>

Although General Kemal Gelchu's joining the OLF appeared to have brought fortunes to the organization, it eventually proved otherwise as the General and the OLF could not agree on political and tactical matters. One of the main differences was the General's insistence that the struggle was to bring democracy to Oromos and the rest of Ethiopia and the OLF should work toward that goal. Majority of the OLF leadership did not agree with him but some of those who were expelled a few years ago supported him (Shin, 2009). Eventually, he himself was expelled from the OLF but remained in Eritrea. Since then, the OLF was not able to muster a strong force and pose significant military threat against the Ethiopian army apart from the usual sporadic hit-

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<sup>70</sup> “Ethiopian commander joins rebels”, BBC News, Thursday, 10 August 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4779189.stm>

and-runs (Shin, 2009). The only notable moment was around 2009/10 in which the movement of its forces caused unease along the Ethiopia-Kenya border. This was also short-lived as it faced joint military responses from Ethiopian and Kenyan security forces.<sup>71</sup>

In 2012, the OLF faced yet another challenge following the release of a press statement on behalf of the OLF. The statement declared that the OLF has decided to renounce its secessionist program and the insurgency as a means thereof.<sup>72</sup> Initially, it was received by many enthusiastically, if not mainly by many Oromo nationalists.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, however, it became clear that the statement was released by a splinter group that broke up with the one in Eritrea. The core of this group was mainly based in the United States. The OLF in Eritrea responded in a counter-statement categorically rejecting the claim that it had changed its program and means of struggle. It said that the previous statement was made by a “negligible minority” that tried to illegally change the “organizational norm and constitution” and “usurp the name OLF”. Regarding the change of the objective, it asserted that “...it goes without saying that neither unity nor independence can be imposed by force or by deception if what we need is peace, freedom and democracy, which are prerequisite for development and prosperity. We have to believe in, trust and accept the free will of the people as the final verdict on this issue”.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> “Ethiopia, Kenyan forces joined in offense against Oromo rebels”, 7 November 2010, <https://sudantribune.com/article36561/>; “Kenya assists Ethiopia fight Oromia rebels”, 9 December 2011, <http://www.afrol.com/articles/37030>

<sup>72</sup> “Ethiopian separatist group gives up secession demand”, Sudan Tribune, 5 January 2012, <https://sudantribune.com/article40639/>;

<sup>73</sup> “As separatists in Ethiopia disarm, a new chapter for D.C.’s Oromo community”, Washington Post, 1 April 2012 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/as-separatists-in-ethiopia-disarm-a-new-chapter-for-dcs-oromo-community/2012/04/01/gIQArnUtpS\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/as-separatists-in-ethiopia-disarm-a-new-chapter-for-dcs-oromo-community/2012/04/01/gIQArnUtpS_story.html)

<sup>74</sup> “OLF Statement on a Bogus Press Release in the Name of OLF”, OLF, 2 February 2012, [http://www.omoliberationfront.org/News/2011/OLF\\_Statement\\_January\\_2012.pdf](http://www.omoliberationfront.org/News/2011/OLF_Statement_January_2012.pdf)

## 5.3.2. The Ogaden National Liberation Front

### 5.3.2.1. *Origin and Development*

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (hereafter ONLF) was established in 1984 as a “grassroots social and political movement” demanding the right to self-determination for the Ogaden people in Ethiopia.<sup>75</sup> The Ogaden are the largest Somali clan in the Somali Region. Although the name Ogaden represents just one of the diverse Somali clans in Ethiopia, the ONLF’s leaders argue that its struggle is for all Somalis of the current Somali Region (KIIs #13, #142, personal communication). A careful examination of the Ethiopian Somalis’ politics of national liberation indicates that its origin can be traced back to three developments in Somali nationalism in the Horn of Africa: *resistance*, *irredentism*, and *secessionism*. Similarly, ONLF’s establishment can be understood by examining the changes and continuities in Somali nationalism.

The early Somali resistance was directed against two forces in the region—Britain and Ethiopia—from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was a dual resistance against European colonialism and incorporation into the Ethiopian state. Led by Sayid Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan (also known as the “Mad Mullah”), Somalis of the then Ogaden areas had fiercely fought against the two forces for decades although they eventually lost their territories to them. Successive Ethiopian rulers had managed to legalize their sovereign claim over the Ogaden first when Britain and other colonial powers signed treaties recognizing Ethiopian borders. Later, this was cemented by a treaty in which the British government agreed to transfer the administration of the area to Ethiopia in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Lewis, 1965; Omar, 2001; Samatar, 2004).

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<sup>75</sup> See ONLF’s profile at <http://www.onlf.org>

Following independence in 1960, successive governments of Somalia sought to unite the Somali people who had been dispersed within three other countries of the region. While they considered the merger of British and Italian Somaliland a success, Somali leaders saw the desire to bring the remaining three—from Ethiopia, Kenya, and French Somaliland (Djibouti)—as a legitimate goal. Accordingly, article 6 (4) of the 1960 Constitution of Somalia stipulated that “The Somali Republic shall promote, by legal and peaceful means, the union of Somali territories.”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, irredentism and/or the aspiration for the creation of “Greater Somalia” became the bedrock of post-independence Somali nationalism. One of the areas that Somalia sought to incorporate was the Ogaden (current Somali Region). This led Ethiopia and Somalia to several skirmishes including two major wars. The last full-scale war—the 1977 to 1978 war, also known as “the Ogaden War”—was consequential to Somalis on either side of the border. For Somalis of Ethiopia, it had indelible consequences in terms of how they perceive the Ethiopian state/governments and how they were, in turn, perceived by successive regimes (Abdullahi, 2007; Omar, 2001; Samatar, 2004).

Somalia’s irredentism had generated two national liberationist perspectives among the Ethiopian Somalis. The first was fully sponsored and groomed by Somalia’s government in the late 1960s and 1970s. The second had evolved out of the first and sought to distance itself both in terms of objective and operation. While the first sought to separate the Ogaden from Ethiopia and merge it with Somalia, the ultimate objective of the second has been separating the Ogaden from Ethiopia and establishing an independent state. There were two organizations that advocated for the first goal. The least known and short-lived Ogaden Liberation Front (established in 1963) and the well-

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<sup>76</sup> The Constitution of the Somali Republic (1 July 1960) available at <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/so/so001en.pdf>

known Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF—established in 1976) (Henze, 1985).<sup>77</sup> Trained and armed in Somalia, WSLF had fought alongside the Somali National Army in the 1977/78 Ethio-Somalia war. The defeat of Somalia in 1978, WSLF’s heavy reliance on support from the government of Somalia which eventually dwindled, and the disenchantment with WSLF’s goal of merging the Ogaden with Somalia had forced some members of WSLF to raise questions. Especially in the 1981 congress of the WSLF, members of the front’s youth league advocated for independence from the dictations of and dependence on the government of Somalia. In 1984, after realizing that the WSLF cannot address their demands, these individuals founded the ONLF as an independent organization. This represented the emergence of the second perspective which calls for the self-determination of the Ogaden people in Ethiopia rather than joining Somalia (Abdullahi, 2007; KIIs #13, KII #14, personal communication).<sup>78</sup>

The ONLF views the Ethiopian state as a colonial empire that still continues to colonize the Ogaden and the Ogaden as a nation awaiting a delayed liberation.<sup>79</sup> According to one of its senior leaders and founding members, Abdirahman Mahdi, “Ethiopia has been a participant and a partner with the colonial powers that divided Africa amongst themselves but has never relinquished its colonial possessions”.<sup>80</sup> One of these colonial possessions, the ONLF asserts, is the Ogaden people who have been denied their right to self-determination. Therefore, its political objective is “...to obtain the right of self-determination, rather than a struggle aimed at realizing the identity of a

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<sup>77</sup> Henze, P. (1985). *Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia Regional Resistance to a Marxist Regime*. Prepared for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defence for Policy, December 1985, Rand. University of Central Arkansas, Ethiopia/Ogaden (1948-present). <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/69-ethiopiaogaden-1948-present/>.

<sup>78</sup> “The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): Political Background” [http://onlf.org/?page\\_id=12](http://onlf.org/?page_id=12)

<sup>79</sup> It is important to note that since the ONLF represents, as indicated above, only one of the Somali clans in the region, its politics and claim to represent all Somalis in Ethiopia has been contested and divisive.

<sup>80</sup> “The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): Past and Present” [http://onlf.org/?page\\_id=5](http://onlf.org/?page_id=5)

nationality. This is because Ogaden has never been historically or politically part of Ethiopia.”<sup>81</sup> The ONLF views itself as the “vanguard organization” that leads the Ogaden people in a manner that is “free from foreign intervention and pressure”. Doing so, the ONLF presents its political objectives as different from WSLF’s struggle to make the Ogaden part of “Greater Somalia”.<sup>82</sup> It also rejects the effort to keep the Ogaden as one of the self-governing autonomous regions of Ethiopia (KII #13, personal communication). Nevertheless, apart from having such a radical political objective, the ONLF—after its establishment—was not militarily active in the pre-1991 struggle. It was mostly engaged in recruiting members in the diaspora (Abdullahi, 2007).

#### **5.3.2.2. Abortive Self-Determination?**

The collapse of the central government in Somalia, the fall of the Derg in Ethiopia and the return of the Ogaden people who were refugees in Somalia to Ethiopia had all contributed to ONLF’s dominant role in the post-1991 transitional period. The absence of an organized force to partner with and the vacuum it created made the ONLF—along with WSLF—the relatively most viable organized party in the region (KII #13, KII #14, personal communication). Before that the ONLF had no meaningful presence in the region. It is also important to note that TPLF/EPRDF forces did not enter most parts of the region even months after they captured Addis Ababa. Its contingents entered some parts of the region for the first time a month after the fall of the Derg (*Addis Zemen*, 30 June 1991). The ONLF had also managed to exploit the opportunity created by the prevailing situation and present itself as a better partner and a leader to the Somali people (Hagman and Khalif, 2006; Markakis, 1994).

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> “The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): Political Objectives” [http://onlf.org/?page\\_id=14](http://onlf.org/?page_id=14)

As a result, the ONLF won more than 60 percent of the seats in the regional council in the 1992 election while the remaining seats were won by WSLF and other smaller parties (Abdullahi, 2007; Hagman and Khalif, 2006; Markakis, 1994).<sup>83</sup> Following the election victory, the ONLF appointed its leaders as president, vice president and speaker of the regional council (Hagman and Khalif, 2006; Markakis, 1994/1996). Interestingly, however, ONLF's chairman Sheik Ibrahim Abdalla Mohammed who was living in Saudi Arabia at the time did not participate in the election. Nor was he a member of the newly established regional government. Some suggest that he found it very difficult "to accept Ethiopia's sovereignty" over the region which was an indication that "ONLF's commitment to the new order in Ethiopia was not solid" (Markakis, 1996). Nevertheless, in a statement made in early 1992, the ONLF affirmed its commitment for peace and democracy "...in the spirit of the Transitional Charter and the rights and interests of nationalities". It also expressed its commitment to live peacefully with peoples of other nationalities "with a spirit of equality and consent" (*Addis Zemen*, 29 February 1992).

However, the first president of the region, Abdullahi Mohammed Sadi, did not hide what his organization sought to achieve. In fact, he "...vowed to test Ethiopian intention and, if necessary, to exercise the right to self-determination" (Markakis, 1996). Apparently, this was the ONLF's plan from the very outset because it took "the self-determination up to and including secession" provision of the Transitional Charter at face value (Hagman and Khalif, 2006). Writing retrospectively, Abdirahman Mahdi also said that it was after considering the opportunities afforded by the Transitional Charter and process that the ONLF "...decided to give peace a chance and avert a costly and unnecessary war".<sup>84</sup> By this he meant that ONLF believed that there was an

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<sup>83</sup> ONLF actually says that it won 84 percent of the seats in the regional council (see "The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): Past and Present" [http://onlf.org/?page\\_id=5](http://onlf.org/?page_id=5)).

<sup>84</sup> See "The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): Past and Present" [http://onlf.org/?page\\_id=5](http://onlf.org/?page_id=5)).

opening to exercise the right to self-determination which it had to test (KII #13, personal communication).

While officially assuming the responsibility of administering the region, the ONLF was also simultaneously trying to establish itself as the “vanguard organization” of the Ogaden. In doing so, it appointed its members in many of the regional offices including the executive of the regional administration (KII #13, KII #14 personal communication). After attempts to make Dire Dawa the region’s capital had failed due to opposition from Oromo organizations, it picked Gode—a town deep in the Ogaden clan’s stronghold.<sup>85</sup> Beyond this, however, the ONLF was no match to the challenges facing the people of the region. It had neither the experience nor the required resources to administer a region that was devastated by violent conflicts, drought, famine, and poverty. As a result, there was no meaningful activity aimed at the recovery of the region (KII #13, personal communication). Instead, in 1993, the region’s president and most of his cabinet members were accused of corruption by the Ministry of Justice. In response, the president accused the central government of interference. The central government then responded by arresting the president and some of his cabinet members (Asnake, 2013; Samatar, 2004). Hassan Jire Qalinle had replaced Abdullahi Mohammed Sadi.<sup>86</sup>

In addition, the ONLF had faced three major challenges that became obstacles to the progress toward its goal. The first was the lack of cohesion within the ONLF itself. Its internal politics was affected by factionalism and leadership rivalry. As Markakis (1996) observed, “lacking firm

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<sup>85</sup> In its first council meeting, members of Council had decided to make Dire Dawa the interim capital of the region. They had first debated to pick between Dire Dawa and Gode and the former was selected by the majority “for its size and ease of access to communication”, although Gode was also nominated “due to its geographically central location in the region”. The other contending issue debated by the Council was the name of the region. Three names were suggested: *Ogadenia*, *Western Somalia Region*, and *Somali Region*. However, since council members were unable to reach an agreement, they had postponed their decision (*Addis Zemen*, 2 February 1993).

<sup>86</sup> See “The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): Past and Present” [http://onlf.org/?page\\_id=5](http://onlf.org/?page_id=5).

leadership and direction, the ONLF spoke with many voices, some calling for secession and others for acceptance of the reformed Ethiopian state” (p.568). Therefore, it was not just its regional administration, its intraparty affairs had also been beset by ineffectiveness. Added to this trouble was the growing interference on regional matters by the central government (Khalif and Doornbos, 2002).

The second challenge the ONLF faced came from the non-Ogaden Somalis of the region. There were more than a dozen smaller political parties organized along clan lines which complained about ONLF’s projection of Ogaden hegemony in the region (Asnake, 2013). Some of these include Gurgura Liberation Front, Horiyal Democratic Front, Issa and Gurgura Liberation Front, Rer Barre Peoples’ Party, and Sheikash Popular Democratic Movement. After accusing the regional administration of ineffectiveness and inefficiency, the parties requested the president of the region to call an urgent meeting “to discuss how the region’s problems can be solved”. Furthermore, “the parties also called on the central government to intervene to help solve the political, administrative and other problems affecting the region” (*Addis Zemen*, 5 June 1993).

The worsening of its relations with the TPLF/EPRDF—by corollary the TGE—and the central government’s increasing interference in the region’s affairs was the third challenge that the ONLF had faced (KII #13, personal communication). Initially, the TPLF/EPRDF seemed less interested—or as Markakis noted, it had doomed it “a hopeless venture”—to engage in the region’s affairs (Markakis, 1994). This approach was quite different from what the TPLF/EPRDF had been doing elsewhere where it went on to the extent of sponsoring surrogate parties. Eventually, however, it appeared that the TPLF/EPRDF had a “second thought” after closely observing the

ONLF (Markais, 1996; Hagman and Khalif, 2006).<sup>87</sup> This reached its climax when the ONLF tried to assert the region's right to self-determination. According to Abdirahman Mahdi, dismayed by the EPRDF-led government's undue interference, the ONLF had held a press conference in Addis Ababa on 28 January 1994 and called for a referendum on the Ogaden self-determination. The following month, in February 1994, it again called for a referendum through the regional council. The council, according to Abdirahman Mahdi, had passed the resolution unanimously.<sup>88</sup>

The central government swiftly responded by removing and arresting Hassan Jire Qalinle and other members of the ONLF. The regional executive was also dismissed on grounds of corruption and other allegations (Khalif and Doornbos, 2002). The president was then replaced by Abdurahman Ugaz Mohammed who was not a member of the ONLF but was from the Ogaden clan. This was followed by the worsening of the political instability in the region which again resulted in the replacement of Abdurahman Ugaz Mohammed by his deputy Ahmed Makail Hassen as acting president in December 1994 (Hagman and Khalif, 2006; Markakis, 1996). Between January and February 1995, relations between the central government and the ONLF had broken down. The ONLF "closed its Addis Ababa office, announced its boycott of the 1995 election, and broke off all contacts with the EPRDF".<sup>89</sup>

Meanwhile in March 1995, a splinter group claiming to be the "legal ONLF" emerged and announced that the decision made by the "...mostly diaspora-based Central Committee members

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<sup>87</sup> One instance of this "second thought" is EPRDF's encouragement of clan-based parties to unite and form a single Somali party. For instance, on 6 June 1993, *Addis Zemen* reported that "Nine Ethiopian Somali political parties stated that they have a plan to form a single political party". The aim of the merger, according to the officials of the parties, was "to create a broad-based organization that can respond to the needs of the people in line with the transitional charter and other proclamations enacted by the council of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia". According to them, this kind of party will contribute for creating "...a sense of Ethiopianness [ኢትዮጵያዊ ስሜት]" and would play a positive role in encouraging democratic and peaceful political struggle" (*Addis Zemen*, 5 June 1993).

<sup>88</sup> See "The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): Past and Present" [http://onlf.org/?page\\_id=5](http://onlf.org/?page_id=5)

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

of ONLF was illegal”. The group said that “the ONLF has no demand for secession” because the new constitution has addressed their demands and created “...a conducive situation for self-administration and development”. Abdulkadir Ahmed who was the head of ONLF’s Addis Ababa liaison office said that “since the people can now administer themselves, the region can also develop itself, and the constitution satisfactorily addresses our demands, we have no reason to push for secession”. Noting that the ONLF had participated in the drafting and adoption of the constitution, which he said was “a result of lengthy struggle”, he also confirmed the ONLF’s participation in the election that was scheduled for 6 May 1995 (*Addis Zemen* 26 March 1995). Following this, the splinter group held a meeting in Harrar in May 1995 and replaced the central committee with 47 new members. The new central committee accused those on the other side of “not wanting to see Somalis enjoying peace like the rest of Ethiopians” (*Addis Zemen*, 14 May 1995).

As a result, by the end of 1995, there were two ONLFs: the “legal” ONLF led by Bashir Abdi Hassan and the outlawed ONLF led by Sheik Ibrahim Abdalla. The “legal” ONLF continued its political engagement and participated in the 1995 election while the outlawed ONLF had eventually found itself in a violent confrontation with the central government (Abdullahi, 2007; Markakis, 1996). Therefore, the ONLF we knew until late 1994 had lost its control over the region, a part of its members and leaders and, most importantly, its access to the people it claimed to represent had been restricted as its members continued to clash with the army. This paved the way for the replacement of the ONLF, as the region’s ruling party, by the Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL) which was established in early 1994—a strategy devised by the EPRDF (Hagman and Khalif, 2006). ESDL and the “legal” ONLF were eventually merged, forming the SPDP—

the Somali People’s Democratic Party—was born in 1998 (Asnake, 2013). With this, ONLF’s attempt at exercising “the right to self-determination” got aborted.

### 5.3.2.3. *Back to Square One*

Like the OLF, the ONLF had to also recalibrate the struggle—this time with the barrel of the gun. Unlike the OLF, however, the ONLF did not have an armed wing that it could automatically mobilize. It had to organize it anew. Of course, as an offshoot of the WSLF, some of its leaders were already experienced guerrilla fighters (KII #13, personal communication). But, as an organization—as the ONLF—it was almost new to insurgency. It needed some time and some partners to reboot its struggle. Therefore, it signed partnership agreements with two insurgents: the OLF and *Al-Ittihad Al-Islamiyah* (AIAI) in 1996.<sup>90</sup> They mainly agreed to coordinate their military, diplomatic and political endeavours (Abdullahi, 2007; Shin, 2009). Regardless, it was not able to project itself as a force that would pose a serious threat. In the second half of the 1990s, the government was instead more concerned about the threat posed by AIAI which was operating both in Ethiopia and Somalia. Its military operations in the Somali region and in Somalia were also primarily against the AIAI, not the ONLF.<sup>91</sup>

Eclipsed by AIAI, the ONLF spent the late 1990s trying to establish itself as an organized insurgency. To this end, it had made some changes in the leadership. It appointed Admiral Mohamed Omar Osman as its Chairman (Abdullahi, 2007). Nevertheless, the ONLF was able to launch major attacks on government forces only after the early 2000s. By 2005, it had begun to

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<sup>90</sup> *Al Ittihad Al Islami also Al Ittihad Al Islamiya* (AIAI), meaning “Islamic Union” was established in 1984 first as a resistance against the Siad Barre rule and later evolved into a fundamentalist organization that aims to use Islam to unite the troubled post-1991 Somalia. In the early 1990s, it operated in the Somali region and mostly clashed with Ethiopia between 1994 and 1997. The Ethiopian government accused AIAI of the explosions in some Ethiopian towns including Addis Ababa. Ethiopia’s sustained military operations had weakened and finally made it dysfunctional (Bryden, 2003; Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019)

<sup>91</sup> Addis Zemen also did not mention the ONLF in any occasion until mid-2000. It sounds like it did not exist.

claim “battlefield successes” and ongoing operations. In 2005, for instance, it claimed that it had carried out an operation called *Operation Mandad* which “...aimed at weakening Ethiopian government forces in Korahey and Dolo districts”.<sup>92</sup> A thorough analysis of timelines of events indicates that the most intense period of ONLF’s insurgency was between 2006 and 2009. In those three years, it had carried out several attacks including exploding bombs in cities and towns.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the time it had to prepare for carrying out the attacks, ONLF’s intensifying insurgency during the aforementioned period can be attributed to three major factors. The first is Ethiopia’s pre and post-election fragility that ensued after the dispute over the 2005 election. This had increased the government’s insecurity and the country’s fragility (KII #13, KII #14, personal communication). As mentioned elsewhere, it was during this time (in 2006) that the ONLF had formed an alliance known as Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD) with the OLF and other opposition groups to step up the pressure on the government (Abdullahi, 2007). Secondly, it was also during this time that Ethiopia had significantly increased its role in the formation of a Transitional Federal Government in Somalia and directly intervened in Somalia in late 2006.<sup>94</sup> The ONLF was against Ethiopia’s intervention not necessarily because it had links with the Union of Islamic Courts which controlled Mogadishu but due to the fact that Somalia had been a safe-haven

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<sup>92</sup> “Ethiopian rebels claim victory over government forces in southeast”, Sudan Tribune, 24 April 2003 <https://sudantribune.com/article9895/>

<sup>93</sup> See “Ethiopia army clashes with rebels”, Thursday 21 April 2005 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4470649.stm>; “Ethiopia’s Ogaden rebels claim attacks against regular troops”, 27 October 2005 <https://sudantribune.com/article12880/>; “Ogaden draws in tension once more” 2 October 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5383012.stm>; “Ogaden rebels say 43 Ethiopian soldiers killed in ambush attack”; 3 July 2007 <https://sudantribune.com/article22935/>; “Ethiopia claims killing of rebel leader in Ogaden”, 23 January 2009 <https://sudantribune.com/article29828/>;

<sup>94</sup> The increased tension and attack followed a failed attempt by Ogaden traditional leaders/elders to make peace between the ONLF and the government. According to BBC, for instance, “The push against Ogaden National Liberation Front rebels came after Somali elders had gone to Europe and the US to meet them, he said. Mr. Meles said he endorsed the meetings to try to resolve the conflict in the region, but that the talks had failed. He said the offensive was requested by elders after they returned to Ethiopia” (“Ethiopia attacking Ogaden rebels”, 4 August 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5244916.stm>).

for its forces. As a third factor, it is also important to consider the alleged increase in support from Eritrea to Ethiopian rebels as Ethiopia was facing both domestic and external instabilities (KII #13, personal communication). The Ethiopian government had also alleged that there was coordination among its enemies (*Addis Zemen*, 22 October 2006).

The most notable attack that earned the ONLF international attention was the 24 April 2007 “Abole Attack”. This attack on an oil field, where a Chinese company operated, claimed the lives of 74 workers including 9 Chinese.<sup>95</sup> It had also kidnapped seven Chinese who were working on the field.<sup>96</sup> Following this attack, Somali Region, particularly the Ogaden clan inhabited zones suffered severe clashes including a year-long siege. Between 2007 and 2012, the government intensified its counter insurgency, while the ONLF kept claiming “victories” that none had been able to verify. The counter-insurgency strategy of the government—done directly by federal forces and through the region’s special police (also known as *Liyu Police*)—was also criticized by human rights organizations and keen observers (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Somali Region was one of the most militarized and tightly controlled regions in Ethiopia with no end in sight to violence by 2012.

#### **5.4. Implications of the OLF’s and ONLF’s Politics of National Liberation**

As an armed national liberation movement that has been in the political scene for more than four decades, the OLF had seriously challenged and rejected both the Ethiopian state and its successive governments. If solely seen from a military perspective, it has not been able to achieve what the Tigrayan and Eritrean movements had achieved. It was not able to “liberate” the areas where the

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<sup>95</sup> “Scores die in Ethiopia oil attack”, 24 April 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6588055.stm>

<sup>96</sup> “China strongly condemns attack on Chinese oil company site in Ethiopia”, 25 April 2007 <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceus/eng/xw/t314025.htm>; “Ethiopia rescue attempt warning”, 26 April 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6595339.stm>

Oromos live. This does not mean, however, that its struggle was in vain or it did not have political and security consequences. The armed struggle and government responses to that—which will be discussed later in this chapter—had affected the organization, the Oromo people, and the Ethiopian state altogether.

Firstly, although we cannot find statistical evidence to determine the extent to which Oromos are affected by or subscribe to OLF's political program, its political agenda has been received well by a significant section of the Oromo elite. Many Oromo political elite often argue that their ethnic group is one of the most marginalized groups in Ethiopia. If the earliest, modest and organized resistance against this marginalization was the Macha-Tullama Self-Help Association, then the OLF insurgency can be understood as the radical expression of that which attracted a significant number of followers. In between, we have other Oromo political parties that demand the respect for human and civil rights of the Oromo within Ethiopia (KIIs #15, KII #17, personal communication).

Secondly, it would not be exaggeration if one claims that the OLF and/or Oromos who were suspected of having association with it have been one of the most persecuted in Ethiopia over the past decades. Thus, the ordeals they or their acquaintances had been through due to the criminalization of being an OLF member or sympathizer had resulted in the valorisation of some of its political program (KII #17, personal communication). A thorough analysis of human rights reports and government's characterization of the OLF and actions taken against its supporters are indicative of the seriousness with which the government views the political, if not military, threat posed by the OLF. OLF's supporters or those suspected of being so have been treated as threats and targeted by the security apparatus as such (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

Last, but not least, regardless of how the government responded and how the OLF aims to achieve its ultimate political objective, it is obvious that the OLF's politics of national liberation would make any government uncomfortable. That is, even if one ignores other factors that justify resistance against secession, it is not possible to ignore the fact that secession of Oromia means automatic disintegration of Ethiopia—due to the region's geographic location. It does not matter whether it is done peacefully through a referendum or violently through armed insurgency, if the demand for self-determination equals possible secession, the outcome will be inevitable dismemberment of Ethiopia. Perhaps being aware of its disastrous impact, OLF's leaders do not often address this question directly. For instance, in an interview published on WikiLeaks, OLF's chairperson Dawud Ibssa was asked whether he thought about the consequence of Oromia's secession on Ethiopia. His response was:

*Well, (laughs) I understood your question. Yes, the political program of the OLF says self-determination but, having this program, we joined the transitional government in 1991 with the vision of making Ethiopia equal for all and to participate in changing the situation in Ethiopia so that Ethiopia will be owned by all and become a common and democratic state for all the nations, nationalities and people, big and small. We wanted to accommodate the aspirations of our people within a new voluntary unity based on democracy, freedom and equality, and it was to make this a reality that we joined the transition in 1991. The question is whether others are ready to accommodate the aspiration of our people who have been subjugated and marginalized for the last 120 years.<sup>97</sup>*

Obviously, his response does not address the question directly. It is rather a reference to OLF's previous position and effort—which the EPRDF did not accommodate. What remains vague, more than two decades after the transitional period, is what does “voluntary unity” imply? How does the

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<sup>97</sup> “Interview with Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front”, *The Global Intelligence Files*, 8 June 2007, [https://wikileaks.wikimee.org/gifiles/docs/5120964\\_interview-with-chairman-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-.html?msclkid=32f0727ad06311ec9adc13caebc6d467](https://wikileaks.wikimee.org/gifiles/docs/5120964_interview-with-chairman-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-.html?msclkid=32f0727ad06311ec9adc13caebc6d467)

OLF plan to realize it? Is it through a referendum? Or, would it be enough if Ethiopia becomes a democratic state with the current federal system intact? As seen in relation to the 2012 split among the OLF leaders and supporters, there does not seem a consensus. Thus, it is not surprising that the question of whether they should abandon secessionism has occasionally created some division within the movement. But, based on the 2012 statement, one can argue that the leadership which still controls the OLF may seek a referendum. The question, therefore, is would any Ethiopian regime take that risk and allow a referendum on secession? What we know so far is that the EPRDF—the very entity that made it a constitutional right—was not willing to take this risk. If this does not tell the depth of the insecurity and vulnerability of the state, nothing can. This is because as Oromia is geographically located at the centre of Ethiopia, its secession will automatically lead to the disintegration of Ethiopia.

To comprehend the ONLF's politics of national liberation, it's crucial to acknowledge that it not only challenges the government's legitimacy but also rejects the Ethiopian state and government as colonial entities forced upon the Ogaden. Therefore, the ONLF is of the opinion that the best way to resolve this situation is by recognizing and implementing the right to self-determination (which is essentially secession) as recognized in the federal Constitution. Although a latecomer to armed insurgency, compared to the OLF, it had finally been able to grab both local and international attention due to the brutality of its 24 April 2007 “Abole Attack”. Nevertheless, as was argued in the case of the OLF, assessment of ONLF’s role in the perennial insecurity of the Ethiopian state should not be confined to whether it poses a serious military threat. Nevertheless, looking at it purely from a military angle, it has not succeeded in liberating the territory it lays claim to.

Even though the region is considered peripheral, successive Ethiopian governments have consistently maintained their firm position on retaining control over the region, making secession highly unlikely. This should not be construed to mean, however, that ONLF's insurgency does not have consequences. Its insurgency and subsequent responses of the government had affected the Somali region and the Ethiopian state altogether. Its effects are not limited within Ethiopia; neighbouring Somalia had also been affected by it. As one of the constituencies of the Ethiopian state, what is currently known as the Somali region has historically been one of the most neglected, poverty stricken, and violence ridden regions. Until recently, there was no meaningful investment and infrastructure in the region. Subsequent regimes have failed to socially, politically, and economically integrate it to the rest of the country. As the "lowland periphery" of the Ethiopian state—to borrow Markakis's term—"Somalis have very little reason to insist on being Ethiopian" (KII #14, personal communication). ONLF's politics of national liberation and insurgency thrives on this grim reality. Therefore, its insistence that the future of the Somali region should be decided by a referendum—else through armed insurgency—and the obvious risk that discourages accommodating this demand has been one of the sources of Ethiopia's security predicament.

Furthermore, like the case of the OLF, we do not have statistical evidence to determine the extent to which Somalis subscribe to or oppose ONLF's political program. However, it is also difficult to refute that it has a significant support base primarily among the Ogaden clan of the Somali region despite its lack of popularity among other clans such as the Issa. By carefully examining the severity of reported human rights violations in the Ogaden dominated zones, one can infer that the acts of repression in part reflect the degree of real or perceived support for ONLF. As mentioned earlier, ONLF's Somali rivals are primarily the non-Ogaden Somalis who feel threatened by the prospect of the Ogaden clan's hegemony. We cannot, of course, ignore the

Ogaden Somalis of the ruling SPDP who, as the governing elite of the region, have to also stand in ONLF's way. This has generated, in addition to the usual inter-clan rivalry, a particular political dynamic which successive Ethiopian governments including the EPRDF-led government tend to exploit. This adds another layer to the already tough problem and, in turn, generates complexity.

Finally, so far as the ONLF's political objective remains realizing self-determination and the Ethiopian government's response is preventing that at any cost, the Somali region remains part of Ethiopia's security calculus vis-à-vis Somalia. If trends and patterns from the 1960s to the present tell us anything, it is the fact that decoupling the Somali region from the Ethiopia-Somalia bilateral relations is a remote possibility. Therefore, both the ONLF's politics of national liberation and the Ethiopian government's response to it will be affected by and will affect the regional security dynamics.

### **5.5. Responses to the Politics of National Liberation**

This section discusses the state's/regime's response to the politics of national liberation. In doing so, the section examines the nature and efficacy of the responses and whether the responses are aimed at addressing the insecurity of the state from the perspective of improving the level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, legitimacy, capacity and ending violence. Or, whether the responses merely focus on the security of the regime. The year 1991 is a hallmark in Ethiopian political history in general and in terms of the responses to the politics of national liberation in particular. In the pre-1991 era, the responses were mainly characterized by denial and suppression. The imperial regime that reigned over Ethiopia before the 1974 revolution was not ready to address the politics of national liberation. As its response to university students' protests promoting the "question of nationalities" show, it treated identity-based political agitations as treasonous since they threaten the very idea and political economy of the state (Bahru, 2014). It

was not also willing to grant some kind of autonomy that would take power away from the emperor (Van der Beken, 2007). In fact, autonomy appeared to be seen as antithetical to national unity and territorial integrity. It was partly this aversion that led to the dissolution of the Ethiopia-Eritrea federation in 1962 which strengthened Eritreans' resolve to secede (Tekeste, 1997; Zewde, 1999).

The Derg regime further militarized the responses, although it was initially more progressive when it came to the demands for equality between and among social groups in Ethiopia. The revolutionary policies it adopted also directly and indirectly recognized that the sources of Ethiopia's insecurity were rooted in the state building process. Guided by socialist ethos, it took radical measures including the most acclaimed redistribution of "land to the tiller" (Dima, 2009; Van der Beken, 2007). Nevertheless, compared to the previous regime, the Derg was challenged by several armed NLM/Fs including the ELF, EPLF, TPLF, OLF, and WSLF. The Derg spent almost all of its political reign fighting these groups, particularly the EPLF and TPLF (Mulugeta and Fisseha, 2021; Young, 1996). By 1991, it was these two that managed to overthrow it and capture state power allying the OLF as a junior partner.

From the outset, TPLF/EPRDF considered addressing the demands for the right to self-determination as the "solid foundation" to the unity of Ethiopia. Its top officials often argued that the state will disintegrate if it does not address the demands. If Ethiopia was to solve the threat to its survival, it had to confront the problems of the state building process, address/redress the past and build the future in a new social contract (*Addis Zemen*, 13 December 1994). Therefore, the TPLF/EPRDF responded to the politics of national liberation in three major ways after it captured state power; namely, political, constitutional/legal, and coercive.

### 5.5.1. The Political Response: Inclusion/Partnership, Co-option and Divide-and-Rule

The launching of the post-1991 transition from war to post-war, military to civilian, and centralization to devolution of power was an opportune moment to find genuine solutions to Ethiopia's insecurity. The "Peace and Democracy Conference" of July 1991 in which dozens of NLM/Fs participated also appeared to be a step toward the right direction. Therefore, it can be taken as inclusion of or partnering with diverse stakeholders as the process aims to chart the future of Ethiopia and identify avenues to solve its perennial problems through consultation. A review of the list of participants reveals that there was an attempt to be as inclusive as possible.<sup>98</sup> This is, of course, without ignoring the systematic exclusion of non-ethno-nationalist rivals like the EPRP. Some argue that their exclusion was a ploy to give upper hand to ethno-nationalists, while the TPLF/EPRDF claims that they had declared war on the transitional government (*Addis Zemen*, 27 June 1991; KII #15, personal communication).

Nevertheless, the transition was friendly to the proponents of national liberation due to two reasons, if seen from the perspective of the TPLF/EPRDF. Firstly, it was the NLM/Fs that controlled state power. Secondly, there was a plethora of armed NLM/Fs that claim to fight for self-determination. Pan-Ethiopianists were simply eclipsed by NLM/Fs as can be seen from the list of participants (*Addis Zemen*, 6 and 7 July 1991). Therefore, the first political response to the politics of national liberation was accommodation. The unprecedented level of including/partnering with proponents of the politics of national liberation has since been the feature of post-1991 Ethiopia.

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<sup>98</sup> For the list of participants, see *Addis Zemen*, 6 and 7 July 1991.

The second feature of the political response is characterized by what some called “divide and rule” (Merera, 2006). From the beginning, the TPLF/EPRDF had followed two seemingly contradictory but complementary strategies as far as the NLM/Fs are concerned. The first was inviting and making them “junior partners” in its venture to make the country governable (KII #15, personal communication). For instance, the TPLF/EPRDF went as far as seeking the help of the Government of Sudan to find leaders of the WSLF so that Somalis could be part of the process. That was how WSLF became one of the representatives of Somalis during the transitional period (Markakis, 1994). TPLF/EPRDF had also initially tried to placate the OLF by agreeing to allocate a reasonable number of seats in the Council of Representatives (KIIs #15, KII #16, personal communication)—which a senior TPLF/EPRDF leader later lamented “not reflective of OLF’s negligible contribution to the overthrow of the Derg” (*Addis Zemen*, 28 March 1992). However, whenever the co-option failed to produce the desired outcome, the TPLF/EPRDF resorted to the second strategy which is “divide and rule” (KIIs #13, #15, #16, personal communication).

Careful examination of TPLF/EPRDF’s engagement with the OLF and ONLF shows that it had troubles with both the moment they started to assert themselves and their goals. Although it did not formally demand them, it seemed that it expected them to drop their secessionist goals once they joined the TGE. It expected them to continue as “junior partners” (KIIs #13, #15, #16, personal communication).<sup>99</sup> For example, when asked about political parties that seek secession, Meles said that “...many of the political parties are revising their secessionist programmes after assessing EPRDF’s positions [‘on questions of nationalities’] and the measures it has taken so far” (*Addis Zemen*, 30 June 1991). He said this just before the formal establishment of the TGE and

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<sup>99</sup> The fact that the EPLF did not join the TGE but instead established its own Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) had a message, i.e. it was a special case.

told journalists that his party was working to narrow its differences with some who had not done so. In 1992, the TPLF/EPRDF had also accused the OLF: "...although the OLF publicly states that it does not have the intention to establish an independent republic of Oromia, the EPRDF and all Ethiopians know its position very well. It is not secret" (*Addis Zemen*, 1 April 1992). This indicates the fact that TPLF/EPRDF did not have a plan to allow secession once Eritrea's issue was addressed. Therefore, where an NLM/F insists on exercising self-determination, an alternative organization, a splinter group or a "surrogate party" pops up (KIIs #13, #15, #16, personal communication).<sup>100</sup>

For instance, the OPDO (Oromo People's Democratic Organization), which the OLF views as "TPLF's surrogate", was established mainly out of POWs just a year before the fall of the Derg and soon after the TPLF/EPRDF realized that the OLF cannot be a "junior partner" (KIIs #15, #16, personal communication). Similarly, TPLF/EPRDF assisted the various clan-based Somali parties to merge into a single party—the Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL) in 1993—that would rival the ONLF. Thus, following the ouster of ONLF, ESDL replaced ONLF as the region's ruling party (KIIs #13, #14, #15, personal communication). As much as it was unfair to the OLF and ONLF, the strategy seemed the cheapest to getting rid of rivals that the TPLF/EPRDF deemed implacable.<sup>101</sup>

The TPLF/EPRDF used the co-option and division strategy even amidst "peacemaking" efforts. Since 1991, neither the TPLF/EPRDF nor its armed opponents had shown serious commitment to

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<sup>100</sup> Some OLF leaders, including one of its former leaders, argue that the OLF did not want secession. What it sought was a democratic self-rule. However, he concedes that there have always been some individuals who entertain secession within the OLF. He said that "these have taken the issue as a career" (KII-3, personal communication)

<sup>101</sup> The EPRDF employed this strategy in the regions where it does not directly administer and called them "partner organizations".

settle their disputes peacefully. When they half-heartedly tried, talks often got stalled due to incompatible preconditions (KII #17, personal communication). For instance, the TPLF/EPRDF always demanded that they publicly renounce their insurgency and accept “the constitutional system” to have talks on substantive matters. On the other hand, both the OLF and ONLF reject this precondition and insist on the need to have an international mediator. The TPLF/EPRDF had never accepted their preconditions. Instead, it always exploited opportunities whenever they experienced factional problems (KIIs #13, #14, #15, #16 personal communication).

### **5.5.2. The Legal Response: Constitutional Recognition or Accommodation and “Rule by Law”**

Perhaps the most radical response of the TPLF/EPRDF-led government to the politics of national liberation is its elevation as an existential issue and the extraordinary decision taken thereof, i.e. the recognition of self-determination including secession as a constitutional right. Both the transitional period Charter (Article 2) and the Federal Constitution (Article 39) recognized this as “unconditional right”.<sup>102</sup> As counterintuitive as it sounds, the justification provided for this is that if the right is recognized/guaranteed as such, it will save the country from disintegration. In the handing over ceremony of the formally adopted constitution in December 1994, Meles Zenawi said that:

*Contrary to the concerns of many that the inclusion of the right of nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination including secession will lead to the disintegration of Ethiopia, this will help us build the unity of the country on a solid foundation. It heralds that peoples’ and democratic forces’ struggle against national oppression and discrimination has come to a victorious conclusion ... .The inclusion of this provision will*

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<sup>102</sup> Interestingly Article 39 was approved by an overwhelming majority (508 support). Only 7 voted against while 1 abstained (*Addis Zemen*, 3 December 1994).

*elate the oppressed people and those who stand for peoples' unity based on equality (Addis Zemen, 13 December 1994).*

Therefore, for Meles and his government, this is due recognition of and direct response to the “question of nationalities”—hence, a response to the politics of national liberation. However, the government’s approach to this provision has been paradoxical. It actively attacked both those who wish to invoke this right and those who promise to scrap it from the constitution. That is what the experiences of the two major NLM/Fs, the OLF and ONLF, who sought to invoke the right show us. In the meantime, the TPLF/EPRDF fiercely defended the inclusion of the right whenever it was contested by opponents. A good example is EPRDF’s response to one of the major opposition parties’ proposals to amend article 39 and other provisions during the 2005 election. In its press statement, the TPLF/EPRDF warned that the recognition and respect for peoples’ right to self-determination “...is not a matter of choice but a question of survival and unity” (*Addis Zemen*, 16 March 2005).

In all, a thorough analysis of statements and justifications made by the TPLF/EPRDF-led government reveals that the constitutional response has three major implications for Ethiopia’s survival and unity—by implication security. Firstly, as it represents both the recognition of past injustices and future aspirations, it creates a better foundation for unity based on mutual consent. The most common argument one hears is that if people know that they can leave the union when they feel they have to, it will build their confidence and avoid mutual suspicion. Secondly, although it is “unconditional right”, it is in practice dependent on whether peoples’ rights are not respected. If their rights are respected, people will not opt for secession because they understand the benefits of a united people (see *Addis Zemen*, 16 March 2005). In relation to this, in a 2005 press statement stressing why article 39 is a unifying provision, the EPRDF said that “...if their equality and their

quest for power and fair representation are respected, people do not have a reason to opt for secession. They understand that a large state is a large market”. It further noted that the EPRDF believes that “when their economic ties develop, their unity would inevitably be strengthened. Regardless, if the demand continues to arise and an attempt is made to subdue the people, it will lead the country to ceaseless crisis” (*Addis Zemen*, 16 March 2005).

Finally, it is important to note that the TPLF/EPRDF-led government views this right as the right of “nations, nationalities, and peoples”, not of political parties. A telling example is Meles’ response to journalists when he was asked why his government allowed Eritreans to hold referendums but not the Oromos. He said that there had not been any demand that questioned the need to live together in any of Ethiopia’s regions including Oromia. However, he asserted that “...some political organizations may hold certain views. But these organizations cannot decide people's fate. When we say people's right to self-determination, we are not talking about political parties” (*Addis Zemen*, 8 May 1993). This can be seen as a nail in the coffin as far as the applicability of the right to secession is concerned.

The second dimension of the legal response pertains to the government’s systematic use of available legal instruments to tackle the threats posed by the OLF and ONLF, among others. This is not, however, a response limited to the politics of national liberation. It has been part of the broader crackdown on dissent. For long, particularly after the 2005 post-election violence, human rights organizations and opposition groups have been complaining about the use and abuse of legal instruments to stifle dissent. Some called this systematic use of legal instruments “rule by law” (Adem, 2012; Zelalem, 2017).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> See also “African Authoritarianism 2.0” [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/african-authoritarianism\\_b\\_5652395](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/african-authoritarianism_b_5652395)

In addition to the regular criminal prosecutions, the government had introduced one of the most draconian laws: Proclamation No. 652/2009 or “A Proclamation on Anti-Terrorism”. It was adopted by the parliament in 2009 “to tackle the threat of terrorism”. In June 2011, in a not-so-surprising move, the parliament designated the OLF and ONLF, among three others, as terrorist organizations.<sup>104</sup> Although both local and foreign organizations were targeted, the proclamation had been used as an instrument to clamp down on domestic dissent (Zelalem, 2017). Therefore, not only did the designation proscribe membership and support to the OLF and ONLF, reporting about their activities eventually became a criminal offense.<sup>105</sup>

### **5.5.3. The Coercive Response: suppression, counterinsurgency and “counterterrorism”**

The third response pertains to use of force to crush both street protests and armed insurgencies that were alleged to have linkages. A careful analysis of the government’s coercive response indicates that there are at least three types of coercive responses. Direct military operation (counterinsurgency) by the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), establishing and engaging regional paramilitary forces (also known as *Liyu Hayil*) in counterterrorism operations, and using co-opted local militias as first responders. In addition, the government often resorted to the use of the regular police—federal and regional—whenever necessary (KIIs #6, #8, #14, #15, personal communication). In dealing with the ONLF and the OLF, all the coercive tools were used, although the use of the *Liyu Hayil* had been common in Somali Region since 2010. The designation of these movements/fronts as terrorists in 2011 had also conflated counterinsurgency and counterterrorism (Hagman, 2014; Love, 2021).

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<sup>104</sup> The remaining three—one local and two foreign—are Ginbot 7, Al Shabaab, and Al Qaeda.

<sup>105</sup> “In Ethiopia, anti-terrorism law chills reporting on security”, 24 June 2011 <https://cpj.org/2011/06/in-ethiopia-anti-terrorism-law-chills-reporting-on/>

However, it should be noted that the government often combines coercive responses with the above discussed non-coercive ones. Some (Mehari, 2015) also argue that there is a distinctive “Ethiopian Doctrine” as far as counterinsurgency and counterterrorism is concerned. That is, the political work of the government often leads to military operations, not vice versa. Senior military officers (KIIs #6, #8, personal communication) who led such responses also agree with this view. This doctrine is primarily inspired by TPLF/EPRDF’s own experience as a former insurgent as well as the experience developed over the years in countering armed rebels (Mehari, 2015).

In all, the government determined that the best way to deal with the politics of national liberation is alternately using the means available at its disposal. For instance, Meles said that “...it is necessary to crush the illegal activities of armed groups through any legal means because if, for example, the ONLF and OLF get the upper hand, they will disintegrate the country” (Addis Zemen, 22 October 2006). However, he also noted that his government does not want to rely solely on coercive means. In outlining the policy, he stated that:

*The government's position is that the first step is neutralizing and controlling, through any legal means, those forces that are trying to illegally overthrow the system in contravention to the constitution. This is the first part of the policy. The second part of the policy is that if these forces accept the constitutional system, advance their objectives peacefully, declare this publicly, and confirm their declaration in practice, negotiation can be held. If this does not happen, the government's position is that there will not be negotiation with these forces (Addis Zemen, 22 October 2006).*

In short, while no progress had been made as far as the non-coercive approach is concerned, the government was determined not to let them achieve their goals by force. As the late Meles told the parliament in October 2006, while both the OLF and ONLF may continue their insurgency, his government believes that “the remaining option regarding these forces is to ensure that their plan

will not work. Unless they realize that they cannot do it by force, it is unthinkable that they will opt for peace and negotiation” (*Addis Zemen*, 22 October 2006).

#### **5.5.4. Efficacy of the Responses**

If the responses’ efficacy to address the politics of national liberation is to be measured by the degree of recognition and accommodation, the post-1991 political system should have been embraced by the movements/fronts as it legalized the right to self-determination including secession. No other constitution in the world, since the end of the Cold War, enshrined this as a right. As such, it can be taken as a radical measure—“a leap in the dark” (Brietzke, 1995)—on the part of the government. However, one may also wonder what would the use of enshrining a right in a constitution be if one cannot invoke it and if the government does not respect it? This is the contradiction that characterizes the post-1991 political order. The TPLF/EPRDF-led government did not have a plan to allow secession and its commitment to it was in principle only. While construing the right to self-determination as self-administration through devolution of power to ethno-linguistic groups and allowing them to establish administrative units, the possibility of allowing another secession was not considered (KIIs #18, #19, personal communication).

Some, including the TPLF/EPRDF, attribute the relative peace in the post-1991 political order to the constitutional response. They argue that had it not been for the recognition of the right to self-determination and devolution of power so that ethnic groups administer themselves, the more than a dozen national liberation movements/fronts would not have stopped their insurgency. Therefore, from their perspective, the constitution has effectively addressed decades of demands and ensured the survival of the Ethiopian state.

Others, however, contend that this is not necessarily the case. What the post-1991 political order does is either localizing conflicts (Asnake, 2010) or sowing the seeds of the country’s future

disintegration (Assefa, 2012; Semahegn, 2014). The former, based on in-depth studies about conflicts in Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz regions, argues that while conflicts involving the centre and major armed groups have declined, intra-regional and inter-regional conflicts have been on the rise. The latter also argued that by adopting a failed model of “socialist federation”—like that of Yugoslavia and USSR—the system that the TPLF/EPRDF installed has exposed the country to a risk of disintegration.

There is mixed reaction as far as the coercive responses are concerned. Although the post-1991 insurgencies launched by the two major groups, the OLF and ONLF, were not as militarily seriously threatening as those of the TPLF and EPLF in the pre-1991 period, the political consequences of their very existence and the ensuing counterinsurgency operations were by no means inconsequential. The post-1991 government had never enjoyed considerable legitimacy in both Oromia and Somali regions. In fact, the government was forced to introduce the paramilitary forces (*Liyu Hayl*) that are staffed by officers and troops exclusively recruited from the respective ethnic communities which was seen as politically less costly and militarily more effective. As a counterinsurgency strategy, it spared the national army from getting dragged into everyday operations within the regions (KIIs #6, #13, #14, #15, personal communication). As much as one may see this as a better and more effective approach, the introduction of the *Liyu Hayl* has had its own consequences. Some of these were impunity, human rights abuses and militarization of local politics, especially in the Somali region (HRW, 2017).

In all, although the post-1991 response to the politics of national liberation has been unique on its own, the Ethiopian state still remains contested. The federal dispensation has a reasonable degree of backing from one end of the politics of national liberation’s spectrum—i.e. proponents of national oppression. Nevertheless, both the state and the regime lacked enough legitimacy due to

the prevailing authoritarianism and the continuation of real and perceived horizontal inequalities. Moreover, as the system created more room for unbridled ethno-nationalism and instrumentalist mobilization of identities, the responses to the politics of national liberation have not yet helped the Ethiopian state to become cohesive, legitimate, and peaceful.

## 5.6. Conclusion

In all, the politics of national liberation has been a major source of Ethiopia's domestic insecurity as a state—not just the regimes'—since the 1960s. It is a clear instance of Ethiopia's insecurity from the perspective of one of the central thesis of this dissertation. That is, the politics of national liberation generates *Ethiopia's security predicament* exemplifying *the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and political legitimacy accompanied by recurrent internal political violence*. Hence, it precipitates the domestic insecurity dilemma—threatening both the state and the regime. The state has been insecure as the threat the politics of national liberation posed is against all the component parts of the state, namely; the *idea of the state*, its *physical base* and *institutional expression*.

The fact that the state has been rejected either as “a prison of nationalities” or “a black colonial empire” has caused an ideational crisis which successive regimes attempted to address through radical changes like the 1974 social revolution and the post-1991 shift toward ethnic federalism. The insurgencies have also weakened its physical and institutional viability to withstand the dangers of disintegration. Its national cohesion, if any, and territorial integrity have been eroded and tested. Therefore, the politics of national liberation constitutes a major politico-military challenge, or to borrow Ayoob's phrase, a “security predicament” of the Ethiopian state.

The political and legal responses—the initial inclusion of stakeholders/political parties and constitutional recognition of the right to self-determination respectively—could partly be sincere responses aimed at securing the state. As the TPLF/EPRDF regime and its supporters argued, it might also have averted the country’s disintegration. However, the logic of regime security embedded in the remaining responses—i.e., co-option, “divide and rule”, “rule by law”, coercion—had complicated the already complex politico-legal arrangement. The fusion of state and regime security has also deepened Ethiopia’s insecurity. Since the TPLF/EPRDF-led government was neither prepared to share power nor committed to genuine democratization as stipulated in the constitution, the responses have further entrenched grievances, polarizations, and ethno-nationalist mobilizations. These were in fact concealed by Ethiopia’s relative stability after 1991 and the notable economic progress it witnessed since the early 2000s. As such, The Ethiopian state is still rhetorically and militarily challenged by movements advancing the politics of national liberation. Violence continues to be the dominant instrument through which the settlement of differences are pursued. The logic of regime security is also playing the usual role of aggravating the (in)security predicament.

A number of lessons can be drawn from the foregoing. As a manifestation of the state’s lack of legitimacy and low level of sociopolitical cohesion—also referred to as lack of national integration—it is indeed a threat as well as a vulnerability. Compounded by the recurrent political violence, the politics of national liberation threatens the very survival of the state, not just incumbent regimes. As stated above, it is a threat to the state because it targets all the component parts of the state—the *idea*, the *physical basis*, and *institutional expression*. When one claims that its struggle is for the full realization of the right to self-determination and when that practically means breaking a section of the state away from it, it is obviously a threat.

It is also a vulnerability as it exposes the state and regimes to manipulation and subversion by foreign powers including neighbouring rivals. As it constitutes the fundamental weakness of the domestic makeup of the state, it makes it easier for foreign agents to prey on domestic rivalries and fault lines along ethnic or ethno-religious cleavages. Ethiopia's experience attests that most of the insurgencies have been covertly or overtly backed by at least one of its neighbours (KIIs #1, #2, personal communication). Both in the pre-and post-1991 eras, Ethiopia had been a victim of and was dragged into mutual subversion through rebel movements—particularly those fighting to secede. Thus, the politics of national liberation constitutes Ethiopia's perennial weakness and insecurity as a state. As such, it is a major aspect of the domestic dimension of Ethiopia's security predicaments.

## Chapter Six

### Building a National Army: The Paradoxes of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces

#### 6.1. Introduction

Like the preceding chapter, this chapter also focuses on the domestic dimension of Ethiopia's (in)security. The primary focus is on once again the central thesis of the dissertation that Ethiopia's security predicament is generated by the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and political legitimacy accompanied by recurrent internal political violence, and hence, domestic insecurity dilemma. This chapter differs from the preceding chapter, however, as it further focuses on one more relevant factor, i.e. institutional capacity. Capable and legitimate state institutions play an important role in enhancing the security and welfare of states. Building such institutions, however, has been an elusive endeavour for most developing states. As a result, low levels of institutional capacity and legitimacy remain among the domestic factors affecting the national security of states, particularly of the states that are considered to be weak or fragile. Building on the extant literature on institution building and national security of weak states discussed in chapter two and here in section two, this chapter examines EPRDF's attempt of building a national army for multi-ethnic Ethiopia.

This chapter shows that the efforts of building a national army under EPRDF's rule manifested two fundamental paradoxes: a legal-political paradox and a capacity-legitimacy paradox. That is, the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) is required by law to be a non-partisan professional army, yet the political framework—the strategic, doctrinal, and training manuals—requires it to be politically loyal to the ideology of the former EPRDF. In addition, the ENDF had earned an international reputation as a capable force of regional peace and security, yet domestically it is

viewed as an instrument of EPRDF's repression and brutal crackdowns across the country. These paradoxes created problematic civil-military relations and constitute part of Ethiopia's vulnerability. As such, the ENDF's experience reveals the dangers of building a politically partisan national army. It also reveals the tension between and conflation of state and regime security (Yonas and Asnake, 2024).

The chapter is organized into five sections. The first section is this introduction. Section two briefly reviews the literature on the ENDF. The third section discusses the EPRDF's endeavour to transform its insurgent army into a national army. Section four illustrates the paradoxes of the ENDF that was built in the context of the post-1991 political dispensation. The fifth section concludes the chapter. The scope of the chapter, like the other chapters, is delimited to the period between 1991 and 2012. Therefore, it does not deal with Ethiopia's experience before 1991 and after 2012.

## **6.2. Building a Defence Force, Civil-Military Relations, and National Security**

Deploying uniformed and non-uniformed personnel in Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and other parts of Africa, Ethiopia has been among the top troop-contributing countries in the world for the United Nations peace support operations (UN, 2018).<sup>106</sup> Its contribution is not only quantitative but also qualitative, as it is known for deploying disciplined troops that deliver diligently. In addition, Ethiopia has been a major player in the war on terror in the Horn of Africa. Until recently, it was considered as a major US ally that helped maintain peace and security in the region. This was possible, in part, thanks to the reputation of the ENDF as an army that was adept at carrying out its missions. It helped the country project an image of a regional force to be reckoned with.

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<sup>106</sup>“ Summary of Troop Contributing Countries By Ranking: Police ,UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troop” as of 28/02/2018 (accessed 3 March 2023 [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2\\_country\\_ranking\\_report.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2_country_ranking_report.pdf))

Yet, seen from within Ethiopia and as a national army, the ENDF had achieved little legitimacy, internal cohesion, and professionalism. Since its inception in the 1990s, it was viewed by its domestic critics as an extension of the EPRDF. Opposition politicians and human rights defenders accused it of being the manifestation of TPLF/EPRDF's dominance over Ethiopian society and the government's instrument of repression respectively (Veen, 2016). As such, this chapter shows that despite ENDF's earned international respect as a force of peace and stability, Ethiopia's attempt at building a national army under the EPRDF had been characterized by fundamental paradoxes (Yonas and Asnake, 2024). These paradoxes expose the limitation of the ENDF—as a state institution—that is entrusted by the constitution to defend Ethiopia's national security.<sup>107</sup>

The scant literature on the ENDF (Alem, 2020; Adejumobi and Binega, 2006; Ferras, 2022; Mulugeta, 2017a; Mulugeta, 2017b; Veen, 2016) mainly focuses on five interrelated themes: the politics of defence budgeting (Adejumobi and Binega, 2006) the transition of TPLF/EPRDF's army from a rebel to a national army, i.e. ENDF (Mulugeta, 2017a), the Disarmament Demobilization Reintegration (DDR) project that took place from 1991 to 1997 (Mulugeta, 2017b), the defence review or reform processes since 1991 (Ferras, 2022), and the army in the broader politico-security context of the country (Alem, 2020 and Veen, 2016). Although each of these works (see below for a brief review) has captured an important dimension of the ENDF

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<sup>107</sup> Veen (2016) also noted this as part of the three paradoxes he mentioned in his report, *Perpetuating Power: Ethiopia's political settlement and the organization of security*. The remaining are economic (economic growth yet little improvement in human development) and political (progressive constitution yet political dominance and repression) respectively. However, he does not delve into the details of the paradox other than saying that “on the one hand, many commentators have acknowledged the contribution of the Ethiopian military to regional stability through, for example, substantial peacekeeping contributions and acting as US ally in the Horn of Africa theatre of the “global war on terror”. At the same time, others argue that the concentration of political power in the hands of the EPRDF results in the use of state security forces (police and intelligence in particular) as instruments of the party to preserve the existing power structure” (p. 8). Focusing mainly on the ENDF, and building on Veen's observation, this article delves deeper and examines the paradox not just from the point of view how it is viewed, but also how it is constituted and managed.

within its own scope, these works gave little attention to the aforementioned fundamental paradoxes and the sources thereof. Therefore, this chapter fills the gaps situated at the intersection of institution building, civil-military relations and national security of developing states, this article critically examines Ethiopia's attempt of building a national defence force under EPRDF's rule.

As discussed in chapter two, the literature on the national security of developing states—most of which are also known as fragile or weak states—attributes the major security challenges they face to domestic factors (Ayoob, 1993; Buzan, 1991; Feraru, 2017; Radin, 2020; Sorenson, 2007; Wehyee, 2017). That is, the vulnerabilities of and threats to the national security of these states are considered to be domestically generated (Ayoob, 1993). The domestic factors include low levels of socio-political cohesion or national integration, legitimacy and institutional capacity and a high level of internal political violence (Ayoob, 1993; Buzan, 1991; Feraru, 2017; Radin, 2020; Sorenson, 2007; Wehyee, 2017). Beyond the low level of cohesion/integration and the recurrent political violence, these states face challenges in performing their “core functions” of providing security and basic services to and having legitimacy among their citizens.

The challenges of performing the “core functions” constitute the three major gaps that such states have to overcome, namely the *security gap*, *capacity gap*, and *legitimacy gap* respectively (Tyagi, 2012). It is important to note, however, that neither the three gaps nor their solutions are mutually exclusive. Although the focus or priority could be on addressing one of them, they can also be addressed simultaneously depending on resources and priorities. Regardless, addressing the three gaps requires reforming/rebuilding existing state institutions and/or building new ones in a manner that enables the state to carry out its core functions (Tyagi, 2012; Radin, 2020). In most cases, as some studies suggest, local politics takes primacy over other factors (Radin, 2020).

Therefore, building a defence institution—as an instrument of exercising one of the core functions of the state—is one way of overcoming the security gap. According to McNerney et al (2016), the focus of building defence institutions is on the effectiveness, transparency, and responsiveness of the institutions. It also focuses on ensuring civilian control over the military, respect for the rule of law and improving the army’s professionalism (p. 3). Simonson (2007), on the other hand, highlights that defence building, as a form of state-building which may be done by domestic and international actors, focuses not just on building an army but also on establishing an institution that reflects the social/ethnic composition of the state (p. 571).

At the heart of building a defence institution is the introduction and socialization of norms that govern civil-military relations. As such, “civil-military relations are key features of political life in all [states] that maintain permanent military organizations, tasked with the defence of the state and its citizens” (Bruneau and Croissant, 2019, p.1). The dominant focus of civil-military relations has been on control of the military by the civilian branch of the government. It is also about the nature of relations between the military and civilian leaders on the one hand, and the nature of relations between the military and the civilian population on the other (Khisa and Day, 2020). Furthermore, the focus has recently expanded and started to include ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the military (Bruneau and Cristiana, 2008). Therefore, the contemporary issue of civil-military relations pertains to the creation and preservation of an effective and efficient military that is subordinate to civilian oversight or control (Bruneau and Croissant, 2019, p.1).

The nature of civil-military relations in developing states is determined by their colonial and post-colonial experience, the political and economic situation of the country, and the extent of the state’s control over its affairs. This is particularly the case for African states (Khisha and Day, 2020; Ngoma, 2006). Until recently, much of the discussion about civil-military relations in Africa

focuses on two opposite developments: the military coups and the role of the military in modernizing African states. A recent attempt at reconceptualising civil-military relations, however, captures other dimensions such as how African states are also moving away from different types of relations that focus on control, effectiveness, and efficiency (Khisha and Day, 2020).

Ethiopia's experience of building defence institutions and establishing norms of civil-military relations in the context of addressing its national security concerns is both unique and somehow similar to the rest of the developing states of Africa and elsewhere. It is unique because its experience is not influenced by direct colonial control or the inheritance of a colonial army. On the other hand, it is somehow similar because it also suffers from the three gaps in performing the core functions stemming from state weakness. In addition, despite not being colonized, it borrowed from the West not only modern technologies of warfare but also ways of building and maintaining an army. This has been the case since the establishment of a centralized modern army during the era of Emperor Haile Sellasie (Yohannis, 1984; Mulugeta, 2017a).

Dating back to the first quarter of the 20th Century, the history of a modern national army in Ethiopia is relatively recent. It was established by Emperor Haile Selassie just before the 1936 Italian invasion and subsequent occupation for five years. Before the 1930s, what Ethiopia had was autonomous regional armies that could be summoned by the emperors that reigned over the country whenever needed (Erlich, 1983; and Yohannis, 1984). The building of the Imperial Army that began before the invasion resumed after the defeat of Italy in 1941. Supported by the British, Swedish, Norwegian, Indian, and American military advisors, the Imperial Army grew large and powerful by the 1950s and 60s. (Fantahun, 2014). By the time Derg, the military junta which

overthrew Haile Selassie in 1974, took power, the Ethiopian national army was composed of a navy, an air force, and a ground force (Fantahun, 2014).

Between 1974 and 1991, the former Imperial Army—renamed the Revolutionary Army—saw massive modernization and qualitative and quantitative improvement due to intensifying internal and external military threats as well as civil and interstate wars (Fantahun, 2014 Gebru, 2009). The newly found ideologically-driven friendship with the USSR and Cuba following the Ethiopia-Somalia war of 1977-1978 played a major role in modernizing and expanding the army (Gebru, 2000; Patman, 1990; and Yordanov, 2016). After fighting multiple protracted insurgencies for about seventeen years, the Revolutionary Army was defeated and replaced by a coalition of rebel forces called the EPRDF in 1991. As the EPRDF had no interest whatsoever to retain it, the Revolutionary Army was dismantled through a post-war Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of more than 300,000 soldiers (Mulugeta, 2017b). In terms of civil-military relations, the Imperial Army and the Revolutionary Army were quite opposites. While the Emperor maintained civilian oversight and endeavoured to ensure that the army was apolitical and professional, the military was above everything during the Derg (military) period. Moreover, there was no possibility for the army to remain apolitical, given the nature of the military regime, the ongoing Revolution, and the civil wars. These factors did not allow for political neutrality (Alem, 2020; Yohannis, 1984).

As the focus of this dissertation is on the post-1991 era, let us briefly review the relevant literature on the post-1991 Ethiopian army. Unfortunately, there is little published work on post-1991 defence building and civil-military relations in Ethiopia. In their assessment of factors that determine the defence budget of Ethiopia, Adejumobi and Binega (2006) examined the politics of budgeting for the military and found that it fluctuated depending on the real and perceived threats

from within and outside the country. Hence, although there has largely been a significant reduction in military spending, compared to the preceding period of the Derg, the defence budget had increased by 180 per cent during the Ethio-Eritrean war (p. 68). The authors noted that there was again a reduction in the defence budget after the end of the war. Nevertheless, they maintained that it was still high as the ENDF had to modernize and the government eventually recognized the strategic importance of the army (*Ibid*).

In illustrating the process of building a national army from a rebel army, Mulugeta (2017a) argued that “...the Ethiopian experience is a nearly unique example of restructuring a people’s army into a national military, something rarely if ever attempted with this kind of comprehensiveness” (p. 161). From his perspective, such is a success story as the EPRDF was able to completely replace the pre-1991 national army with its own army without much resistance. What his work avoided discussing was the long-term cost of—be it economic, political, or security—doing so. In his other work that focuses on the DDR project undertaken by the EPRDF—and in which he was the chief DDR Commissioner—Mulugeta asserted that the process was not only nationally owned with little external support but also one of the few success stories of post-conflict security sector reform (Mulugeta, 2017b). Hence, we can infer from the two works that by transitioning its rebel army to a national army and undertaking DDR, the EPRDF was able to establish a national army grounded in the ethos and principles of its own insurgency. As a result, Mulugeta contended, “high levels of discipline were maintained; failure to complete assigned tasks as a result of cowardice or negligence was considered worthy of major punishment. This tradition of devotion to duty and excellence in task delivery was an important basis for the later transformation of the EPRDF into today’s Ethiopian National Defence Force” (p. 169). While having this positive assessment,

Mulugeta's work gave little attention to issues of professionalism or political partisanship, internal cohesion and legitimacy.

Patrick Ferras (2022), on the other hand, examined defence reforms undertaken by the government between 1991 and 2018. According to him, there have been four defence reforms since 1991 and they were mainly influenced by internal and external factors. According to him, the first reform was undertaken between 1991 and the end of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The major focus of the reform varied from DDR in the early 1990s to the mobilization of the war against Eritrea. He noted that while Ethiopia was set for cost reduction in early 1990s, the fact that "...the Ethiopian army was not organized as a function of the regional challenges" was the lesson drawn from the experience of the war (p.169). Hence, in the second phase of the reform which took place between 2001 and 2012, the size of the army was maintained at 135,000 from the pre-war army of 50,000 after demobilizing about 130 thousand of them (Ibid). Since the third reform (2012-2018) under the leadership of Prime Minister Haile Mariam Desalegn and the fourth under Prime Minister Abiy (post-2018) are beyond the scope of this dissertation, they are not discussed here. Suffice to say that the reforms reflected domestic and regional (re)configurations. While Ferras's discussion covers important milestones in the establishment and transformation of the ENDF, much of the four phases correspond mainly to the general national politics than that of the ENDF reform itself.

Finally, Alem (2020) and Veen (2016) examined the role of the ENDF within the broader context of the country's "political order" and "political settlement" respectively. Historicizing the role of the national armies in Ethiopia, Alem noted that "despite the military invariably being the strong arm of the state, the way it has played its role in the political order has not been the same" since the Haile Selassie era (p. 2). Comparing the three (Imperial, Derg, and EPRF), Alem pointed out

that “...during the three marked periods in the history of modern Ethiopia, the civil–military relation wavered between a state or condition wherein there was a separation between civilian leadership and an apolitical military, to an extreme case of blurred disunion between the military and political leadership” (*Ibid*). Therefore, the Derg period was characterized by a complete merger of military and civilian affairs and the former’s dominance in every civilian aspect. On the contrary, the Imperial and EPRDF periods have some commonalities such as the civilian control over the army, albeit for the narrow interest of the ruling elite. Nevertheless, the ENDF is not as apolitical as that of the Imperial Army (*Ibid*). Alem’s assessment resonates with the widely held view among the ENDF’s critiques in that the distinction between the ENDF and EPRDF is in name only and it is clear where the ENDF’s loyalty lies. As will be shown in the next sections, the ENDF’s partisanship is a result of deliberate political decisions (see *Building an Army*, 2001; Yonas, 2022).

Similarly, Van Veen (2006) discusses the ENDF within the broader politico-security context of Ethiopia. Considering it as one of the main branches of the security sector, Veen’s study revealed mixed results. That is, citing his interviewees, he said that the ENDF has been on a “sustained trajectory of professionalization” that focused on the army’s “...human resources, education and operational capability” (p. 34). In addition, the ENDF’s “...competence and its international standing make it a positive exception to the lack of “technocratic integrity” that has been observed in respect of other aspects of the Ethiopian administration, i.e. the prevalent lack of alignment between bureaucratic capability and bureaucratic autonomy that is required for effective policy implementation” (*Ibid*). Furthermore, given the level of its economy, “...in the development of the fighting capacity of its military forces, Ethiopia has paid significant attention to the problem

of resources” focusing on striking a balance between cost-effectiveness and operational capacity (p. 35).

However, while citing the positive progress made by the ENDF, he also found that there is a prevailing view among observers that “...the TPLF’s military structures were not disbanded after 1991, but rather they replaced the army of the [Derg] to be reincarnated as the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)” (p.22). Therefore, he concluded that, on the one hand, “...the TPLF’s military structures and forces were in a constant state of transition for at least the first decade after the overthrow of the junta [Derg]” and on the other, the national army “...in the modern sense started to emerge in the early 2000s and is still in the process of professionalization and transformation in terms of the representativeness of its composition” (p. 22). Hence, as much as its reputation as a capable and disciplined army in international missions is undeniable, it is also undeniable that it has been accused of being loyal to TPLF/EPRDF and an instrument of EPRDF’s repression like other institutions of the security sector (*Ibid*). Compared to the other works, thus, Veen’s work better captures the paradox of or the contradictory views about the building and sustenance of the ENDF, not just as an army, but also as a state institution that was supposed to be professional, politically impartial, and guided by the constitution’s legal and normative principles of civil-military relations.

While each work reviewed above captured an important dimension of the ENDF in its own scope of the study, these works have overlooked or given little attention to the two important paradoxes mentioned above. By way of examining the process and dynamics of building the ENDF, this chapter not only elucidates the challenges of building a capable and legitimate state institution—in our case the national army—but also fills in the lacuna in the above discussed literature.

### 6.3. The Departure and Formal Establishment: “It was as though Ethiopia had never had an armed force”

The ENDF of the post-1991 political order was a product of a post-civil war political un/settlement. It was a conspicuous manifestation of the adage: “the victor takes all”. It was hardly an outcome of a normal post-conflict DDR project. Rather, as one of its architects later boasted in an academic article, it was “a nearly unique example” of transforming a rebel army into a national army (Mulugeta, 2017a, p.161) through a comprehensive and deliberate dismantlement of what existed before. No matter how those who were in the driver’s seat of its establishment justify their action, the process through which the ENDF had been built was not an inevitable outcome but a narrow self-serving choice. And, this was done at the state’s political, economic, social and security expenses. Therefore, as Adejumobi and Binega (2006) succinctly put it, the replacement of the former Ethiopian army by the EPRDF army “...was as though Ethiopia had never had an armed force” before 1991 (p.64).<sup>108</sup>

Formally established by article 87 of the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (hereafter FDRE) and Proclamation No. 27/96, the ENDF of the 1990s was the TPLF/EPRDF army. Between 1991 and 1996, it functioned as a *de facto* army of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) upon the decision of the Transitional Council (Mulugeta, 2017a). The entire personnel of the *de facto* army was composed of EPRDF’s rebel army, the core of which was TPLF’s army—the largest and most dominant force within the EPRDF.<sup>109</sup> The command and

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<sup>108</sup> Cognizant of the gap in the newly established ENDF, the government eventually decided to hire about 6000 former soldiers who were considered to have high level of technical expertise and experience no record of criminal offence (Addis Zemen, 28 May 1995).

<sup>109</sup> Initially, the EPRDF was a front of or coalition of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (ENDM) which eventually became the ANDM (the Amhara National Democratic Movement). It was later joined by the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) and much later by the Southern Ethiopian Peoples’ Democratic Movement (SEPDM).

control of the army were mainly in the hands of TPLF's fighters (KII #2, personal communication). To be precise, therefore, what was called the army of the transitional government was essentially an amalgam of "ethnic armies with varying degrees of resources, experience, and discipline. Although they had some sort of joint command at the EPRDF level, each army was organized and led along ethnic lines. This continued until a decision was made by the political wing of the EPRDF to merge them" (KII #6, personal communication).

Another important move taken by the EPRDF was that it demobilized thousands of its fighters, mainly Tigrayans, while simultaneously recruiting new members from other ethnic groups of the country. This was done primarily for two reasons. Firstly, Tigrayans—as TPLF's fighters—constituted disproportionately the largest number of the EPRDF army. Secondly, the new constitution and the proclamation establishing the ENDF required that the ethnic composition of the ENDF reflect the ethnic composition of the country (Article 87). Therefore, if the ENDF was to reflect the country's ethnic composition, it was mainly the TPLF and to a lesser extent the EPDM (which later became ANDM—Amhara National Democratic Movement) which should demobilize their fighters. Accordingly, the TPLF initially demobilized 20,000 fighters and by 1997 the number had reached 30,000 (*Addis Zemen*, 2 December 1995, KII #9, personal communication).

The transition from a rebel army to a national defence force was, however, not smooth and easy. The first challenge was convincing the former rebels that they are salaried public servants and hence formal remuneration. One informant recalled that "it was very difficult for many of us to accept the new reality of being a paid fighter. We thought we would continue like the times of the armed struggle. We thought it was unbecoming of a freedom fighter to get paid. Thus, we resisted accepting the first few payments. That is of course until we realized that things have changed for good and life was also about to be different" (KII #6, personal communication).

The other challenge pertains to the merging of the command structures under one army—the ENDF—and being under a commander from a formerly “another group”. This required readjusting oneself to the new reality of being a member of a multi-ethnic army that was at its infant stage (KIIs #6 and #9, personal communication). Nevertheless, while all the subsequent changes were replacing old routines and practices, one thing remained unchanged. That is, the in-depth political discussions and periodic evaluations (*gimgema*) that were characteristic of the TPLF/EPRDF continued for a few more years.<sup>110</sup> Eventually, the explicit political discussions were replaced by “educational discussions” about “the constitutional system”—a new name for political indoctrination of the army through the Indoctrination Directorate. The *gimgema*, however, continued as part of building and administering the ENDF (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication).

With the change in routines and practices, new forms of relations began to emerge within the new national army. These, in turn, resulted in new dynamics among its members. One of these dynamics relates to the distribution of ranks and concomitant dis/satisfactions. At the most senior levels, military ranks from Brigadier General to Major General were awarded in 1996 to the most senior members of the army from the three major ethnic groups—the Oromo, Amhara, and Tigre. An attempt was made to balance the ethnic composition, although it was still in favour of the Tigrayans. The two main criteria, according to interviewees, were the year of joining the armed struggle (the earlier, the higher) and concrete contribution to the armed struggle. In fact, in addition

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<sup>110</sup> *Gimgema* (Amharic) is rigorous evaluation and self-evaluation process that aims to correct or re-orientation the conduct of cadres of the EPRDF in line with the political alignment and the way ahead. It was practiced not only in the army but also in town hall meetings and the closed discussions. The TPLF/EPRDF was known for its stringent process of subjecting party members for periodic *gimgema* or during/after major political challenges (Labzae, 2020; Mehane and Young, 2003).

to these, the person should be positively evaluated and recommended by the political leadership (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication).

Another consideration was ethnic background since the constitution requires balancing the ethnic composition of the army. To this end, five years of service as a rebel was deducted from TPLF fighters' entry to the armed struggle so that it could serve as an affirmative action for members from other ethnic groups. Some informants recalled that some TPLF fighters resented this for some time as the initial promotion of others hinged on their concomitant demotion. Regardless, "they were still disproportionately represented at the middle and higher levels since most of them had joined relatively earlier than others as fighters" of the TPLF/EPRDF army (*Ibid*).

It is also important to note that the EPRDF leadership had determined not to have a large army from the outset. A 1996 document prepared for the command and staff of the ENDF and public statements by the civilian and military leadership indicates that the goal was to establish "a small but effective army" that relies on the quality of its human resources than the quantity of its personnel and armament (MoND, 1996, FANSPS, (2002) and *Addis Zemen*, 13 May 1994 and 2 December 1995). Both the civilian and military leadership appeared to have an aversion toward a large army like that of the pre-1991 era. The justification for this was both economic and political. Economically, it was believed that "the new struggle is against poverty" and the army should not be a burden on the country's economy. There was a desire to limit the defence budget to or below the international ceiling of 2% of the country's GNP (MoND, 1996; *Addis Zemen*, 13 May 1994 and 2 December 1995; Mulugeta, 2017). Politically, "a small but effective army" was meant to be an army that is strictly under civilian oversight and hence no threat to the continuity of civilian leadership (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication; Mulugeta, 2017a). Thus, by the time the Ethio-Eritrean war broke out in May 1998, the size of ENDF was estimated to be 50

thousand. This army was not merely lacking in numbers, but also completely unprepared for the full-blown conventional warfare that unfolded in 1998 (KIIs #6 and #9, personal communication).

Consequently, when the war with Eritrea broke out, the government resorted to three significant measures—a massive recruitment drive for new soldiers, recalling former TPLF/EPRDF combatants and members of the previous army and maintaining a defensive position against the Eritrean army until the recruits and former fighters/soldiers were ready. Following a year of defensive actions, the ENDF, reinforced by hundreds of thousands of newly trained soldiers and former members of the previous army as well as the TPLF/EPRDF fighters, pushed back Eritrean forces. Within a few months, it launched a series of new offensives and chased the Eritrean army up to 25 kilometres inside Eritrean territory which later become the temporary security zone—the zone where the UN peacekeeping force (UNMEE) was deployed (KIIs #6, #9, #10, personal communication).

One of the most important lessons drawn from the war was that similar strategic blunders should not be allowed to happen again. To this end, EPRDF’s notion of a “small but effective army” had to be revisited, though not completely discarded. The Foreign Affairs and National Security white paper that was published after the war in 2002 and a 2001 document guiding army building (see Yonas, 2022) reaffirmed the commitment to a cost-effective army. The major shift, as indicated in both documents, is that the size and capability of the army will be based not on the mere conviction of maintaining a small army but on concrete and systematic threat analysis. In fact, the war served as an eye-opener for the EPRDF and contributed to the redefining of the ENDF (KIIs #6, #9, #10, personal communication).

The war, responsible for the loss of approximately one hundred thousand lives, formally ended with the Algiers peace agreement in December 2000. A dispute regarding the manner in which the

war was carried out and concluded resulted in a split in leadership within the TPLF/EPRDF in 2001. The split shed light on the troubling state of civil-military relations before and during the war, ultimately resulting in the removal of top military officials. (Medhane and Young, 2003). Accordingly, the General Chief of Staff, L/General Tsadkan Gebretensae and the commander of the Air Force M/General Abebe Tekle Haimanot, among others, were forced to retire from the ENDF. General Samora Yenus who supported Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's faction became the Chief of the General Staff (*Addis Zemen*, 27 May 2001). The contentious issue at the time was whether members of the ENDF should discuss the post-war political development and direction within TPLF/EPRDF. General Tsadkan and General Abebe, along with a few other officers, reportedly rejected the idea of having such a discussion within the army. Hence, both were subjected to forced retirement while some of the civilian leadership, including the former minister of defence, Seye Abraha, was arrested (KIIs #6, #9, #10, personal communication).

Chief of the national intelligence agency, a close ally of the Prime Minister, Kinfe Gebremedhin was assassinated by an ENDF officer inside the Defence Officers' Club while preparing to lead a discussion. Despite this, officers supporting for the initiative to discuss the divisive political issue of the TPLF appeared in the national media and reassured the public that it was within their constitutional rights to stay informed about the country's ongoing developments, which they are safeguarding (KII #9, personal communication and *Addis Zemen* 19 May 2001).

Therefore, the ENDF at all levels discussed and evaluated the ten-year performance of the army since its establishment. However, "how the war was conducted and ended was not evaluated" (KII #6, personal communication). It was rather a general evaluation of the preceding ten years followed by discussions revolving around ongoing political developments and future trajectories. Interestingly, one of the most recurring issues raised was "Tigrayans' dominance within the

ENDF”—an issue none would have dared to raise under normal circumstances. “Officials appeared to agree with this and included it in the report that was sent to the Prime Minister” (KII #9, personal communication). However, once the Prime Minister had effectively resolved the political crisis by purging his adversaries, he instructed the army's top officials to refrain from using such labelling, emphasizing its dangerous and divisive implications. Following that, no one had the audacity to dispute that command and bring up the matter again. (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication).

But some important changes were introduced after the political crisis, including the gradual demobilization of 130 thousand soldiers from a total of about 300 thousand. Unlike the quite smaller pre-war army of 50 thousand, the ENDF was kept at around 140 thousand strong, relatively well-equipped and battle-tested. The army experienced another change which involved the use of a manual, colloquially referred to as the *Red Book*, written by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, for extensive political indoctrination. The *Red Book* clearly exposed the blurred line between the party and the supposedly politically neutral army, explicitly defining the ENDF as the “last fortress of revolutionary democracy”—the ideology of the EPRDF (Building an Army, 2001). Therefore, it determined that recruits and leaders of the army should only be from societies that are beneficiaries of and loyal to revolutionary democracy. With this, the army's pre-war non-partisan pretence was supplanted by a partisan dedication to revolutionary democracy (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication; Yonas, 2022).

It is with the above political commitment that the ENDF faced the 2005 post-election crisis that ensued after an unprecedented electoral contest and outcome in which the opposition won one-

third of the parliamentary seats.<sup>111</sup> The election and resulting crisis created tension within the ENDF between Tigrayans and non-Tigrayan officers, especially those from Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups. Enraged by the support given to the opposition parties by members of the ENDF, as one of our informants noted, the EPRDF and the officials of the army launched evaluations in military camps which were found in electoral districts where the opposition received more votes. In these meetings, senior civilian and military leaders expressed their disappointment over the fact that members of the ENDF voted for the opposition, despite being entrusted as the guardians of revolutionary democracy (KII #11, personal communication). Once the EPRDF quelled post-election protests in Addis Ababa and other major towns of the country, it then initiated purges within the army. As a result, some senior officers of the army were forced to retire, others including air force pilots defected. Since then, defection and purge became the two common ways in which soldiers leave the ENDF (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication).<sup>112</sup>

In spite of the damage caused by the 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrea war and the 2005 elections, the ENDF emerged as a relatively strong and regionally engaged force. Its intervention in Somalia in 2006 and its ever-increased participation in international peace support operations coupled with Ethiopia's partnership with the US as a strategic ally enhanced the stature of the ENDF. Its extensive participation in the national economy, facilitated by the former Metals and Engineering Corporation (METEC) receiving substantial government contracts, expanded the army's role

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<sup>111</sup> This is the official result. The major opposition coalitions the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) claimed that they actually won the election (Abbink, 2006). The controversy over this led to a standoff between the government and opposition parties and their supporters which was eventually followed by protest and violent crackdown. It was claimed that the ENDF—mainly through its special commando forces known as Agazi Division—the main perpetrator of the close to 200 hundred deaths that ensued.

<sup>112</sup> Regarding the officers who defected from the army, the then Minister of Defence Kuma Demeksa said that "...As a leadership of the armed forces, when a general or someone defects, we see it positively. Because, we are of the view that there could have been a problem had this people stayed. There is something that makes them defect. Thus, if they stayed, it will be a problem. We, therefore, say 'it is good that they left'" (Addis Zemen, 30 November 2006)

beyond military affairs (Tefera, 2019). Therefore, with a greatly improved image and capability, the ENDF earned fairly reasonable international respect. As such, it succeeded in projecting Ethiopia and itself to the outside observers as a force of regional peace and security. Reference was made to it as the Horn of Africa's powerful and battle-tested army that is known for successfully delivering and carrying out mandated missions (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication; Mulugeta, 2017a; Veen, 2016). However, except for regime supporters, the ENDF was not able to earn notable legitimacy and respect domestically. The lack of domestic legitimacy is mainly attributed to its close association with the TPLF/EPRDF, the brutality of its counter-insurgency operations in some parts of the country (mainly in Oromia and Somali regions), and frequent deployments to quell protests against the EPRDF-led government. Moreover, its internal cohesion was also suspect due to the real and perceived "Tigrayan dominance" within and outside the army (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication).

#### **6.4. The ENDF's Paradox: Law, Politics, Capacity and Legitimacy**

As illustrated in the preceding section, ENDF's evolution is characterized by a relative rise to prominence from a rebel to a national army that was shaped by domestic and external factors. Its stature was an outcome of decades of changes and continuities not only within itself as a state institution but also outside it in Ethiopia in particular and the Horn of Africa as well as the world in general. Nevertheless, the ENDF of post-1991 manifested two fundamental paradoxes in terms of building a national army: legal-political and capacity-legitimacy/cohesion.

##### **6.4.1. The Legal-Political Paradox**

As mentioned earlier, the ENDF is formally established by article 87 of the FDRE constitution and Proclamation No. 27/1996. Certain provisions of the original proclamation were amended by subsequent proclamations that were adopted following major changes in the political and security

environment including the Ethio-Eritrea war. This includes proclamation 123/1998 and proclamation 343/2003. Combined, these documents represent the evolution of the legal framework governing the post-1991 ENDF.<sup>113</sup> As the supreme law of the land, the Constitution's Article 87 outlines five major principles. That is, (a) *the composition of the national armed forces shall reflect the equitable representation of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia*; (b) *The Minister of Defence shall be a civilian*; (c) *The armed forces shall protect the sovereignty of the country and carry out any responsibilities as may be assigned to them under any state of emergency declared in accordance with the Constitution*; (4) *the armed forces shall at all times obey and respect the Constitution*; and (5) *the armed forces shall carry out their functions free of any partisanship to any political organization(s)*. In addition, the preamble of Proclamation 27/1996 reaffirmed the above principles and stipulates that the ENDF was established to safeguard Ethiopia's sovereignty and to "embody a fair representation" of its people.

In terms of organizational structure, article 3 of the proclamation provided that the ENDF is composed of the Ground Force and the Air Force. Recruitment to these branches of the ENDF, according to article 4, is required to be based on fair representation of the diverse people of the county. Moreover, it stipulated that "officers shall be recruited only from among the ranks of the Defence Forces". The aim of the first requirement is obviously to maintain a fairly balanced ethnic representation within the army. The second requirement is, however, quite restrictive and appears to be politically motivated. Although no further justification is provided in the proclamation, interviews with well-informed insiders reveal that the primary reason was the EPRDF's desire to maintain the status quo and cohesion within the ENDF as an offshoot of its military wing. In fact,

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<sup>113</sup> Since it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, latest proclamations and their amendments are not included here.

allowing recruitment of officers from outside the ENDF was considered to be inviting aliens—and hence trouble—to the ENDF (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication). Regardless, per article 8 of proclamation 27/96, the ENDF as a state institution and its personnel as members of a national army are required “...to uphold the Constitution as well as obey military laws, rules, directives and all standing orders”. The Prime Minister, a civilian Minister of Defence, and the General Chief of Staff are placed at the top of the ENDF’s organogram (see articles 23 and 24).

In line with the changing politico-security environment, additional proclamations amending certain provisions of Proclamation 27/96 were introduced. For instance, Proclamation 123/98, which came into effect on 30 June 1998, amended the service and age limit set by the preceding proclamation to ease the recruitment of former fighters and soldiers in the fight against Eritrea. Furthermore, Proclamation 343/2003 of 3 June 2003 amended provisions pertaining mainly to the definition of terms—such as non-commissioned officer—, an extension of the retirement age from 45 to 48, the establishment of military courts, etc. It also made a very important addition which provides for the possibility of each force of the ENDF having “reserve forces as may be necessary” (see Article 2). Because this amendment was introduced in the aftermath of the Ethio-Eritrean war, the rationale was to keep the 130,000 soldiers that were demobilized after the end of the war (Mulugeta, 2017a and b). This is mainly because the threat of Eritrean aggression was not completely removed and in the event of another round of war, the reserve forces would be recalled for duty (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication).

In all, the aforementioned proclamations along with the FDRE constitution form the legal framework of the ENDF of 1991-2012.<sup>114</sup> This legal framework, as it stands, makes the ENDF a

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<sup>114</sup> The legal and political instruments introduced after 2018 are not discussed because they are beyond the scope of this article.

politically non-partisan and professional national army. None of these legal instruments require members of the ENDF to defend any political ideology or political organization. Yet, contrary to the legal framework, it had been a politically partisan army both in theory and practice. The documents reviews, interviews and informal conversations with ENDF officers reveal that the EPRDF had little interest in building a non-partisan army. It was simply paying lip-service to the Constitution and the principles of the rule of law, while simultaneously building a partisan revolutionary democratic army albeit partially secretly (see *Building an Army*, 2001; Yonas, 2022). Therefore, although some depicted the evolution of the ENDF as an instance of “building a national army from a revolutionary democratic army” (Mulugeta, 2017a), it was rather an instance of a failed attempt at building a non-partisan professional national army. This is partly because the process of building a non-partisan army was put on reverse gear midway and led to the path of becoming a revolutionary democratic army again.

As a thorough analysis of a document that had been kept secret until recently, *Building an Army in a Revolutionary Democracy*—also known as the *Red Book*—reveals, the army that the EPRDF sought to build was designed to be “the last fortress of revolutionary democracy” (see Yonas, 2022) for a detailed analysis of the *Red Book*). Written by the then Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in the aftermath of the Ethio-Eritrean war and amidst the political turmoil within the TPLF/EPRDF in 2001, the document which held a doctrinal role served as the single most important guideline for building the ENDF. It also defined the principles and norms of the civil-military relations. To quote one of its revealing paragraphs, the document asserts that:

*It is necessary to clearly and plainly state that the defence force we are building is the shield of our revolutionary democratic system. There is an expression that a defence force is built to protect the security of the state. Since there is no way of defending the state separately from the security of the system, it can be said that this expression is right. On*

*the other hand, there is a view that the state and the system within are different; and the objective of the army is to protect and defend not the system but the state. Since such a distinction does not and cannot exist, and to be free of this inaccurate view, we should put it clearly; that its objective is protecting the revolutionary democratic system (Building an Army, p.5).*

This is a deliberate—not an inadvertent—conflation of state and regime security. The army that is entrusted by the Constitution to defend the state and the people was told and instructed, for two decades, that defending the system (i.e. the regime) is defending the state. Failing to do so, is failing to defend the state. In the words of the document, “...defending the security of our country and our system is not separate. If our revolutionary democratic system does not exist, there cannot be a country we can call ours” (*Ibid*, p. 27). Therefore, from the perspective of those in charge of the ENDF, protecting and defending the country and the system is all the same and they use both expressions as they see fit (*Ibid*). Thus, there is no reason not to doubt that when the 1996 staff and command officers training manual and the 2006 military doctrine talk about defending the country or the system, they are referring to the revolutionary democratic system of the EPRDF (see MoND, 1996 and 2005).

It is also important to note that once this determination was made, recruitment, training, indoctrination, and promotion are all expected to be in a manner that advances allegiance to revolutionary democracy within the army. Therefore, members and leaders of the ENDF are expected to hail from a section of the society that benefits from and will be loyal to the revolutionary democratic system (*Ibid*, pp. 26-27). Conversely, this means that there are sections of the Ethiopian society that are not beneficiaries and loyal to the system. A part of these is sometimes disparagingly referred to as either “chauvinists” or “narrow nationalists”. The ENDF

is not open to them and if they happen to be within it by any chance, they will be purged without any hesitation (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication).

In all, the legal-political paradox of the ENDF is deeper than what one normally expects. This is because there is a stark difference between what the legal framework promises and what the political instruments and practices intend to achieve. Therefore, what this paradox exposes is not an ordinary authoritarian deviation from a given legal framework. It is rather an extraordinary contradiction between a progressive constitutional/legal provision and a political project that runs against it. As such, what makes the paradox ironic is that both the constitutional/legal provisions and the political project that derails them are the makings of the same entity—the EPRDF. This serves as a clear example of what Brian Job (1992) calls internal insecurity dilemma—a situation in which a regime’s policies and actions to ensure its security further expose both the regime and the state to insecurity.

#### **6.4.2. The Capacity-Legitimacy Paradox**

As stated from the outset, the ENDF had been successful in projecting itself, and by implication Ethiopia, as a force of regional peace and security in the Horn of Africa. It was viewed as one of Africa’s abled, battle-tested and disciplined armies that “excellently delivers” and is “highly operational” (Ferras 2022; Mulugeta, 2017a; Veen, 2016). This recognition by the outside world is earned due to ENDF’s proven record mainly in its participation in several UN and AU-led peace support operations. Deploying 8,338 personnel (7750 male and 588 female), it placed Ethiopia on the world map as the top troop-contributing country in the world (UN. 2018). In addition to the

UN peace support operations, it also deployed more than 4000 troops under the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).<sup>115</sup>

Beyond peacekeeping, the ENDF had intervened in Somalia several times since the early 1990s to flush out “international jihadists and local terrorists” that operated under the now-defunct *Al Itihad Al Islamiyah*. The operations were sometimes conducted deep inside Somalia (KIIs #6, personal communication). And, in 2006 and 2007, it carried out a successful military campaign and chased the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) after the Ethiopian government accused it of posing a “clear and present danger” against Ethiopia’s national security (*Addis Zemen*, 24 November 2006).

Although there is no systematic study that investigated the factors that contributed to ENDF’s success in its international missions, anecdotal references have been made to the ethos and principles developed by the EPRDF during the armed struggle and later incorporated into ENDF’s military doctrine. Some of these values and principles include maintaining a high level of discipline, completing assigned tasks, devotion, and excellence (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication; Mulugeta, 2017a). Furthermore,

*The commitment of the civilian and military leadership to maintain high standard performance and determination not to allow any infraction were instrumental. Furthermore, members of the ENDF normally view participation in peace support missions as a life-changing opportunity since the payment is significantly higher than their salary (KIIs #10, personal communication).*

Therefore, the ENDF soldiers were not only tightly supervised but also highly motivated to deliver the assigned mission. Despite being highly respected internationally, the ENDF never gained the

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<sup>115</sup> See AU’s brief notes on the ENDF at <https://amisom-au.org/ethiopia-endf/#:~:text=The%20Ethiopia%20National%20Defence%20Forces,the%20AMISOM%20concept%20of%20operations>

same level of respect and legitimacy at home. Except for regime supporters, EPRDF's opponents and human rights defenders criticized it for being an instrument and coercive expression of the EPRDF regime's authoritarian governance. A senior Officer interviewed for this dissertation said that,

*Wherever we went outside Ethiopia, we were respected as members of the Ethiopian army. We were viewed as committed, disciplined, and serious in handling the missions assigned to us. However, when we come back, we are still being seen by the people as the instrument of EPRDF's authoritarian rule (KIIs #9, personal communication).*

The lack of domestic legitimacy is attributed mainly to the effects of counterinsurgencies in some parts of the country (e.g. Oromia and Somali regions) and frequent domestic deployments of the army during protests and unrest. According to the above informant, "The orders given to the army and the army's actions during disturbances have also contributed to the negative perception toward the Defence Force" (*Ibid*).<sup>116</sup>

The lack of ENDF's domestic legitimacy, according to key informants, was not limited to how the civilian population viewed the army. It is also manifest in how members of the ENDF themselves view the ENDF. As mentioned earlier, several ENDF members feel that the army was "dominated by Tigrayans", or to be specific former TPLF fighters turned officers. This was publicly discussed within the army only once during the 2001 defence review and *gimgema* (evaluation) that ensued after the split within the TPLF/EPRDF. Fearing the consequences, the issue was never raised in public again. But it does not mean that members do not talk about it in private (KIIs #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, personal communication). Coupled with the lack of good governance, poor living conditions, and inequality among members of the ENDF (partly a result of having the

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<sup>116</sup> According to some informants, since domestic protesters are normally portrayed as "anti-peace" or "anti-development" forces, the orders are normally to take "necessary measures", i.e. using live bullets.

“opportunity” to participate in peacekeeping missions and through abuses of positions), etc. it had a negative effect on the army’s internal legitimacy. As a result, both the legitimacy and internal cohesion of the ENDF were not as good as its international reputation. This has been one of the primary reasons for the significant number of defections and recurrent purges.<sup>117</sup>

In all, the capacity-legitimacy paradox of the ENDF is a result of the mismatch between the principles and standards of practice upheld at the international and domestic levels. It is also a result of a mismatch between the image that the ENDF projects to the outside world and the image it has domestically. “The ENDF observes or respects, to the extent possible, international principles and standards of practice such as human rights, humanitarian law, and rules of engagement. Its members are given adequate pre-deployment training” (KII #10, personal communication). In addition, “...the officers heading international missions are normally very senior and close to the civilian government. There is a mutual understanding between the civilian and military leaders that participation in such missions would have immense contribution to the army’s and the government’s image” (KII #8, personal communication). Therefore, there was little tolerance for infractions among the ENDF members who are recruited for deployment.

Domestically, the priority and dynamics are different. Maintaining order and quelling any serious opposition to the regime, often in violation of the constitutionally sanctioned rights and freedoms, was quite common. The political exigencies of the regime take precedence over principles and norms limiting coercive action. Moreover, the ENDF, with a political mandate to serve as the last

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<sup>117</sup> In a recent interview, the current General Chief of Staff of the ENDF, Field Marshal Berhanu Jula told Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) that defection from the army had been a serious issue since early 2000s. According to him, the issue was as serious as becoming a criteria of evaluating the performance of senior commanding officers. That is, the lesser the defection from a division or command of an army that one commands, the favourable the evaluation (see ESAT Interview with Field Marshal Berhanu Jula, Amharic, accessed 20 February 2023, <https://youtu.be/0zO09-bHFQw>).

fortress of the regime, embodies the conflation of regime and state security and the tension thereof. Hence, along with the other branches of the security apparatus, the ENDF is domestically known for its excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings as seen during political protests, the 2005 post-election crisis, and the counter-insurgency operations in Oromia and Somali regions and elsewhere in the country. The ENDF's capacity to deliver internationally and domestically is, therefore, based on contradictory and inconsistent standards of operation. As a result, the legitimacy and respect it earned are consistent with how it was designed and carried out its mandates.

## 6.5. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to elucidate the domestic dimension of Ethiopia's (in)security using the experience of building a national army as a case study. While explicitly and implicitly being a reflection of the low level of cohesion/integration and the recurrent political violence, this experience demonstrates a particular challenge a state like Ethiopia faces. That is, the challenge of building a state institutions that perform their "core functions" of providing security and basic services to and having legitimacy among their citizens. As mentioned in section two of this chapter, the challenges of performing the "core functions" constitute the three major gaps that such states have to overcome, namely the *security gap*, *capacity gap*, and *legitimacy gap* (Tyagi, 2012). The experience of the ENDF—as a state institution—tells us a mixed story.

On the one hand, the domestic and external factors such as the EPRDF's policy of maintaining tight civilian control over the military, the principles and ethos of its own experience during the armed struggle, regional and global geopolitical issues such as participation in international peace support operations, being a battle-tested army in a hostile neighbourhood, and being a partner in the global war on terror helped it build a positive image. This, in turn, helped Ethiopia project itself

as a force of regional peace and security. As such, the ENDF escaped the *security* and *capacity gaps* that characterize states that manifest features of state weakness. With all its limitations and challenges, it was able to reasonably project the state's capacity within and beyond its borders.

On the other hand, however, it suffers from the *legitimacy gap*. This is a reflection of the overall inherent insecurity of the Ethiopian state and the EPRDF's regime. That is, as seen in both the legal-political and the capacity-legitimacy paradoxes, the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration are manifested by the political requirements of being and operating as ENDF. Being the last fortress of revolutionary democracy, i.e. regime security, it is not only politically partisan but also exclusionary. Its mandates and Ethiopians being its members were predicated on loyalty to the regime's ideology and not hailing from societies that are considered to be "chauvinists" and "narrow nationalists". Therefore, although it was instrumental in maintaining domestic and regional order and stability, the ENDF was mainly viewed as a mere instrument of EPRDF's authoritarian rule. As such, it has not been able to earn domestic/internal respect and legitimacy despite its international reputation. In other words, the nature of civil-military relations is so problematic in that its partisanship reflects the seriousness of the internal insecurity dilemma.

In all, the paradoxes discussed in the preceding sections have serious implications for building a national army, civil-military relations, and national security. Firstly, in terms of building a national army and the management of civil-military relations, the ENDF's experience exposes the limitations and dangers of establishing a politically partisan army. Such an army, even if it "excellently delivers", perpetuates authoritarianism and insecurity within the borders of the state concerned. The nature of civil-military relations is also dependent on personal/collective loyalties rather than established institutional norms and principles. Secondly, in terms of national security, the ENDF's experience exposes the danger of conflating regime security and state security. A

major problem in weak (authoritarian) states is that the fusion of regime security and state security begets and/or aggravates political crises and violence. As witnessed in the 2001 split within the TPLF/EPRDF, the 2005 election-related crisis members of the ENDF had sided with opposing political factions and groups. In certain instances, they have also defected to insurgent movements—as in the case of the 2008 defection of officers and their subordinates to OLF/Eritrea. This tells us that unless state institutions—having the mandate of performing the state’s “core functions”—overcome the *security gap*, the *capacity gap*, and the *legitimacy gap* reasonably effectively, the state is vulnerable. Most importantly, as the experience of the ENDF shows, capacity alone is not sufficient. So far as the state, the regime, and its institutions lack legitimacy, a *security gap* that eventually challenges institutional capacity is likely to emerge. This exposes the state to domestic and external insecurities.

## Chapter Seven

### The Near Neighbours: Dynamics of Ethiopia's Engagement with and Policies toward Eritrea and Somalia

#### 7.1. Introduction

The focus of the previous chapters—chapters five and six—was on the domestic dimension of Ethiopia's national security. Doing so, the chapters addressed one of the central theses of the dissertation that Ethiopia's security predicament is generated by the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and political legitimacy accompanied by recurrent internal political violence, and hence, domestic insecurity dilemma. This and the next chapter, on the other hand, focus on the external dimension. In doing so, the chapter addresses the other central thesis of the dissertation that *despite the gravity of the domestic insecurity dilemma, the external dimension of (in)security has also been important. And, the domestic insecurity dilemma does not always trump the external.*

By extensively citing statements, briefings, and interviews published on *Addis Zemen* and by augmenting them with data collected through key informant interviews, document reviews, and secondary sources, this chapter elucidates how Ethiopia's relations with its *near neighbours* shape its national and regional security policies. What we call the near neighbours in this chapter—Somalia and Eritrea—are near not merely geographically but also from socio-political, demographic, and strategic perspectives. Ethiopia's engagement with Eritrea and Somalia has been intense not only due to geographic proximity but also because of socio-political, demographic, historical, cultural, as well as geostrategic factors. It has also been complex due to the intermeshing of their internal and external security concerns (Belete, 2024). As such, Ethiopia's relations with

the two evince what Buzan *et al.* (1991, 1998 and 2003) call *patterns of amity and enmity*. These patterns are not entirely new but rather built on already existing prejudices and tensions.

It is important to note from the outset that, as the following sections show, a rigid domestic—external dichotomy does not apply here since what appears to be external eventually gets linked to the internal and vice versa. Focusing on how Ethiopia dealt with its near neighbours, therefore, this chapter highlights the strategic importance of Somalia and Eritrea in Ethiopia’s national security calculus. Accordingly, the next section provides a broad background to Ethiopia’s relations with Somalia and Eritrea. The third and fourth sections examine the nature and dynamics of Ethiopia’s engagement with and policies towards Somalia and Eritrea respectively. Finally, the last section concludes the chapter.

## **7.2. Background to Ethiopia’s Relation with Somalia and Eritrea: Revisionists against a Status Quo State**

Somalia and Eritrea are the two countries in the Horn of Africa that Ethiopia has intense relations with. Although Ethiopian, by virtue of being geographically at the centre of the Horn of Africa, is physically and demographically connected to all the states of the region, its relations with Eritrea and Somalia are particularly unstable, characterized by both commonalities and peculiarities. The commonalities are deeply rooted in Ethiopia’s state-making/state-building processes, the resistance it faces, and the responses thereof. Furthermore, Ethiopia has a sizable Somali population and almost all Somali clans are found in Ethiopia. With Eritrea, there is a deep cultural, linguistic and historical relations. The difference is rooted in the fact that while Eritrea was part of Ethiopia, Somalia has been a sovereign neighbour with territorial claims over a fifth of Ethiopia. The three have also a shared yet brief history of being under the occupation and colonial rule of a single European power—*Africa Orientale Italiana* (Bahru, 2001).

Over the past half a century, Ethiopia had fought three major interstate wars—two against Somalia during the Cold War and one against Eritrea after the end of the Cold War. It had also militarily intervened in Somalia several times since the late 1990s, the recent being the 2006 large-scale intervention to oust the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). In addition, it fought proxy wars involving Somalia and Eritrea (Berouk, 2011, Clapham, 2017; Heally 2011). Therefore, Somalia during the Cold War and after and Eritrea as a flashpoint of insurgency during and as a neighbouring state after the Cold War have been major considerations of Ethiopia’s security policy (KII #2, personal communication).

### **7.2.1. Somalia: Irredentism, War, and Mutual Subversion**

The inherently contradictory state-building aspirations and experiences of Ethiopia and Somalia has shaped their relations. That is, while Ethiopian leaders have been preoccupied with maintaining Ethiopia’s territorial integrity, Somali leaders, on the other hand, have been aspiring to forge “Greater Somalia” by carving Somali-inhabited territories out of their neighbours including Ethiopia (Clapham, 2017). Therefore, Ethiopia and Somalia, from the 1960s to the late 1990s, were the Horn of Africa’s main status quo and revisionist powers respectively.<sup>118</sup> As such, Ethiopian leaders who, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, have been engaged in state-making were consolidating the country’s territorial, demographic and national make-up. The consolidation took diverse forms from empire-building to the formation of a socialist republic and from a unitary state to a multi-ethnic federation. This state-making and/or building process, like elsewhere, was both bloody and brutal. There were fierce resistances against incorporation and expansion as well as peaceful submissions as discussed in the preceding chapters. This process, in one way or another,

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<sup>118</sup> One of the factors that create a security dynamic in a regional security environment is the rivalry between the status quo and the revisionist powers that have diametrically opposite interests as far as the prevailing status quo is concerned (Buzan and Waever, 2003).

shaped the way Ethiopia views and is viewed by the near neighbours, especially Somalia (Clapham, 2017).

There was no way that Ethiopia would accommodate Somalia which, encouraged by the successful unification of the British and Italian Somaliland, vigorously pursued unequivocal irredentist claims and policies over the Somali-inhabited parts of the Horn of Africa. The fact that what Somalia claims as its own constitutes about a fifth of Ethiopia's entire territory makes it even harder to have a negotiated settlement no matter how the claim was presented. Nevertheless, Somalia pursued the irredentist claim using policies ranging from enshrining it in the constitution of the Republic to engaging in outright invasion (Patman, 1990).<sup>119</sup> Therefore, in 1964, under the leadership of Ali Shermarke, Somalia demanded that the Ogaden and Haud areas that Ethiopia controls since 1887 (officially handed over by the British in 1887 and 1954) be returned to it. Ethiopia rejected the demand and war broke out along the borders of the two countries. The Ethiopian Army successfully repelled the Somali Army and the conflict froze for some time. Determined to deter further attacks from Somalia, Ethiopia stationed its army division along the Ethiopia-Somalia border. This was the first major militarized encounter that the two had after Somalia's independence (Mesfin, 1977; Patman, 1990).

Since the 1964 war, the relation between the two countries had been characterized by mutual mistrust and enmity. This intensified following the 1969 coup d'état that brought General Siad Barre to power. Under General Barre, Somalia began to build a large and well-armed with the support of the Soviet Union and other countries of the then Eastern bloc. In addition, Somalia provided a safe haven for Ethiopian rebels and recruited and trained Somali insurgents—such as

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<sup>119</sup> The Constitution of the Somali Republic (1 July 1960).

the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). The goal of the WSLF was not just to separate from Ethiopia but also to unify the Somali-inhabited territory with the Republic of Somalia.<sup>120</sup>

While Somalia was preparing to regain the lost “people and territories”, Ethiopia was going through a revolution that weakened the centre and divided the national elite. Thus, the domestic crises that the 1974 revolution precipitated appeared to have presented an opportune moment for the realization of “Greater Somalia” as Ethiopia was engulfed by violence and insurgencies in several places. It was in this context that the second Ethio-Somali war—also known as the “Ogaden War”—erupted in July 1977 with the launch of military attacks from multiple fronts and with a combination of conventional and insurgent warfare. The war, in fact, started as an insurgency by the WSLF, which was followed by the conventional warfare of the Somali National Army (Patman, 1990; Yordanov, 2016).<sup>121</sup>

Initially, the Ethiopian army was overwhelmed by the Somali army which advanced to the Eastern and Southern hinterlands of Ethiopia. This tide was, however, reversed once the Cuban/Soviet peace initiative was held in Sana’a, Yemen (Patman, 1990). That is, the Cubans and the Soviets—which saw the possibility of creating socialist solidarity in the Horn of Africa gave up once they learned that the two states of the region have inherently incompatible goals. Therefore, they switched their ties from Somalia to Ethiopia and they provided a massive supply of arms including technical and logistical support as well as deployment of advisors and fighters. By March 1978,

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<sup>120</sup> CIA 1983. Ethiopia-Somalia: Continuing Military Imbalance in the Ogaden, an Intelligence Assessment. Director of Intelligence.

<sup>121</sup> The government of General Siad Barre never admitted that it was behind the outbreak of the fighting and argued that it only supported the Somali people’s—who are under Ethiopian colonial rule—aspiration for independence (see CIA 1983. Ethiopia-Somalia: Continuing Military Imbalance in the Ogaden, an Intelligence Assessment. Director of Intelligence).

the Somali National Army—and its surrogate, the WSLF—lost the war and retreated to Somalia (*Ibid*).

The defeat of the Somali Army, however, did not herald a period of peaceful coexistence between Ethiopia and Somalia. Rather, it paved the way for a mutually destructive practice of subversion and proxy war. Both Somalia and Ethiopia started to host, train and support rebels/insurgents of the other in a bid to weaken or overthrow their enemy. This continued until the two sides signed a peace agreement in 1988 in which they agreed to exchange POWs, normalize relations, and refrain from subversive activities (Berouk, 2011, Woodward, 2006). However, it was too late for the regimes in Somalia and Ethiopia as they toppled one after the other in January and May 1991 respectively. This resulted in the collapse of central authority in Somalia and the beginning of a new political order in Ethiopia.

### **7.2.2. Eritrea: Federation, Insurgency, and Secession**

A section of what is now called Eritrea was part of the historic “Abyssinian Empire” which constituted the central and northern highlands of present-day Ethiopia including part of the coastal areas of the Red Sea (Zewde, 1999). The people across the borders share several attributes including language and religious affiliation. However, with the advent of colonialism, the loss of coastal regions by Ethiopia, and Italy's colonization of Eritrea until 1941, the ties and interactions underwent significant changes. Following Italy's defeat in 1941, the Ethiopian government lobbied to “unify Eritrea with its motherland”. A significant number of Eritreans—mainly Muslim lowlanders—were campaigning for independence arguing that they had “developed a separate national identity”. Other Eritreans—primarily Christian highlanders—wanted Eritrea to be part of Ethiopia (Clapham, 2001; Zewde, 1999). As a compromise, the United Nations decided to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952 (UN Resolution 390; Biziouras, 2013).

Initially, the federation seemed to work well. However, neither side of the opposing views was entirely satisfied. Therefore, after ten years of trials and intrigues, the emperor with the support of a section of the Eritrean elite, dissolved the federation and made Eritrea a province of Ethiopia in November 1962 (Tekeste, 1997; Zewde, 1999). Many consider this decision as an important factor that aggravated the centrifugal tendency in some sections of Eritrean society. It also gave impetus for the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) which was established in Cairo in 1960 to mobilize fighters for armed resistance (Biziouras, 2013). Eventually, other movements joined the armed struggle and in 1973, the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front)—a splinter of the ELF—became a major force in Eritrea's march toward secession.

In all, following the dissolution of the federation, the situation in Eritrea got complicated and Eritrea became what Addis Birhan called “a problem child of Ethiopia” (Addis, 1998). For about three decades since then, successive governments tried to quell the Eritrean insurgency by force. The result was a civil war of biblical proportions that affected not just Eritrea, but also the rest of Ethiopia including the student and ethnic-nationalist movements (*Ibid*). The Eritrean insurgency did not only bog down the country in a long dragging insurgency but also became an inspiration and a source of moral and logistical support for the liberationist movements that emerged in the 1970s and 80s. In May 1991, therefore, Eritrea became a *de facto* state falling under the total control of the EPLF.

### **7.3. Ethiopia's Engagement with and Policies toward Somalia under EPRDF**

A thorough analysis of Ethiopia's engagement with Somalia in the post-1991 context indicates that it has three broad phases—as well as corresponding patterns—which reflect the evolution of Ethiopia's overall relations with its neighbours. The first is characterized by idealism and solidarity reflecting the inexperience, if not the naiveté, of the ruling elite that took power in Ethiopia in

1991. The second is characterized by the defensive engagement that came in reaction to the realization of the region's complexity. The third is dominated by regional activism and pragmatism resulting from the understanding of Ethiopia's strategic relevance in the region and growing ambition to become the region's hegemon. This section discusses these three phases in detail.

### **7.3.1. Idealism and Solidarity**

In 1991, Somalia became a state that transformed from a strong arch-rival to a collapsed neighbour. When the EPRDF captured state power on 28 May 1991, it was already months since the central government in Somalia collapsed and clan-based warlords emerged as powerful politico-military actors across the country. Being new to state power and grappling with domestic security and humanitarian challenges, Somalia was not an immediate priority for the new authorities in Ethiopia. For that matter, they themselves did not consolidate their political and territorial control over Ethiopia. Nevertheless, with the escalation of violence and humanitarian crisis as well as the influx of refugees, Somalia was increasingly becoming too unstable to ignore. It was beginning to attract not just Ethiopia's but also the rest of the world's attention—resulting in efforts ranging from a series of reconciliation/peace conferences to the US's failed/humiliating intervention as well as the UN's unsuccessful peacemaking/peacekeeping missions (KIIs #1, #2, personal communication).

Given the domestic and regional context, Ethiopia's engagement with and policies toward Somalia was different from the pre-1991 period. The EPRDF-led government took it upon itself to help Somalis resolve the crisis. It hosted more than a dozen peace/reconciliation conferences and generously welcomed Somali refugees. This commitment was informed by two major factors: (a) the leadership's sense of indebtedness to Somalia—which helped them during Siad Barre's time—and as a way of showing solidarity during hardship, and (b) the overall foreign policy orientation

that relations with neighbours ought to be based on good neighbourliness and non-interference (KIIs #1, #2, personal communication; MFA, 1996).

In terms of policy orientation, one can easily discern the basic premise of the government's view about foreign relations vis-à-vis neighbouring states from policy documents (see MFA, 1996), public statements and briefings. Officials often blamed successive Ethiopian regimes for harbouring a “siege mentality” and antagonizing Ethiopia's neighbours. For instance, as early as 21 September 1991, the then Transitional Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a press statement that:

*Contrary to the policies of the former regime, Ethiopia will have peaceful and cooperative relations with all countries in general and neighbouring countries in particular. [The government decided this] because it understood that unless its neighbours are peaceful, there is no guarantee for peace in Ethiopia. The TGE will strictly adhere to a non-interference policy in neighbouring states' affairs (Addis Zemen, 22 September 1991).*

Furthermore, Ethiopian authorities were of the view that they should help Somalis solve their problem not only as neighbours but also as an indebted former rebel movement. “Several senior officials—mostly the TPLF/EPRDF leadership including late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi—used to carry Somali passports to travel abroad. They also lived in Somalia and received logistic support from Siad Barre's regime”. Therefore, given the worsening situation, “they were genuinely committed to helping Somalis who helped them during the armed struggle” (KIIs #1, #2, personal communication).

In addition, as a TGE official said at the time, “...there are two million Somali refugees in Ethiopia who share similar identity [with the Ethiopian Somalis]. Due to this reason, the instability in Somalia directly and indirectly concerned Ethiopia” (Addis Zemen, 21 November 1992). The then

Minister of Economic Development and Cooperation Abdul Majid Hussein and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu also said that Ethiopia cannot sit idle while a neighbour that shares thousands of kilometres of borders is engulfed by violence. They were concerned about the implications of Somalia's situation on Ethiopia's peace and stability (*Ibid*). Thus, the government tried to bring every major warlord to the table in the multiple rounds of reconciliation conferences hosted in Sodere, Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar. It also hosted humanitarian conferences and facilitated its delivery to Somalia "including permitting landing and take-off from Ethiopian airports" (*Addis Zemen*, 6 December 1992). This was done while Ethiopia itself was amidst the early stage of the post-war transition.

The policy remained unchanged even when there were some indications that the situation in Somalia was getting out of control. The government was certain that it could tackle any threat originating from unstable Somalia. Meles said, "...Ethiopia does not need any assistance to protect and control the region adjacent to Somalia and has taken the necessary measures. The country has the capacity to control unlawful activities and armed groups are not allowed to cross into Ethiopian territory...And so far, there is no incidence of armed groups crossing into Ethiopia." (*Addis Zemen*, 20 December 1992). He further said that even in the event of a security threat "...Ethiopia will not deny shelter to refugees". As far as the possibility of Ethiopia providing military assistance is concerned, he asserted that "Ethiopia does not have such a policy. Rather, Ethiopia can play a constructive role by inviting Somali forces for reconciliation processes". In fact, he cautioned against favouring one Somali group against another as this would "complicate the situation" in Somalia (*Addis Zemen*, 20 December 1992).

Thus, in the early 1990s, the Ethiopian government maintained an equidistant position in its relations with the Somali factions believing that siding with rival groups was one of the problems

of Ethiopia's policy toward its neighbours. For instance, Meles often made sure that he met the leaders of opposing factions one after another as in the case of General Farah Aideded and General Ali Mahdi Mohammed (KIIs #1, #2, personal communication). As the then TGE's President, Meles affirmed that "Ethiopia will not side with one group against the other. Since the situation in Somalia will inevitably affect Ethiopia directly and indirectly, the peace and security situation in Somalia has implications for Ethiopia" (*Addis Zemen*, 30 December 1992). Therefore, Ethiopia hosted peace and humanitarian conferences that are "inclusive and coordinated with the international community" (KII #1, #2, personal communication). The reason why Ethiopia hosts the conferences had a lot to do with its national interest and security and the shared interests of both Ethiopia and Somalia. According to Meles,

*Viewing the effort to create peace inside Somalia as something that is outside the scope of Ethiopia's domestic condition and Ethiopia's interest is not right. There is an issue that forces us to get involved, in good faith and interest, in Somalia's affairs. When there is instability in Somalia, it will have spill-over effects on us, at least in terms of the refugee influx. If Somalia becomes stable and Ethiopia and Somalia establish new relations, we will reap economic and other forms of benefits. Therefore, our effort is not just to bring peace and democracy to Somalis. It is for the sake of our own national interest and future opportunities. Because [of this] we cannot sit aside while Somalia gets burned. If Somalia becomes stable, we can jointly create a shared benefit out of it (*Addis Zemen*, 3 February 1993).*

This implies that although Ethiopia upholds the non-interference policy, it does not mean that it was a disinterested neighbour. It has a vested interest in Somalia's domestic situation because of its implications for Ethiopia's overall security (KII #1, #2, personal communication). This should be seen from the perspective of the broader foreign and national security policy orientation of the

time (MFA, 1996). For instance, on the occasion of the second anniversary of *Ginbot 20*, Meles said:

*...our country's peace and development cannot be viewed without the peace and development of our neighbouring countries' peoples. Based on this, the Transitional Government [of Ethiopia] has been endeavouring to establish healthy relations with countries of the Horn of Africa in line with the foreign policy that is based on the Transitional Charter. ... [Concerning Somalia], ...although the relation had been sour due to the nature of the regimes both in Ethiopia and Somalia, as neighbours, we have now proved to the people of Somalia that we are valuable friends. We have hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees although Ethiopia is poverty-stricken. With Sudan, Kenya, and Djibouti a healthy relationship that is based on mutual respect, mutual assistance, and non-interference in one another's internal affairs has been established. To strengthen people-to-people relations, conditions are improved so that the citizens of these countries can enter Ethiopia without a visa. In general, at the level of the Horn of Africa, the Transitional Government will strive to improve our friendship with countries of the region by establishing strong economic, political and cultural relations based on equality and mutual benefits (Addis Zemen, 29 May 1993).*

As the situation in Somalia worsened, Ethiopia's involvement also grew as a concerned neighbour that would eventually be affected by the developments inside Somalia. Perhaps in recognition of this, the 29<sup>th</sup> OAU Heads of State and Government Summit that was held in Cairo in July 1993 delegated Ethiopia to follow up on the situation in Somalia on its behalf. Commenting on this, Meles said:

*...the issue of Somalia cannot be seen as an external affair as it directly affects Ethiopia's interests. Due to this reason, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia has been working hard to help Somalis solve their problems. Regarding OAU's decision that Ethiopia follows up on Somalia's issue on behalf of the Organization, we have been following up on the issue even before the decision. What makes it different now is that we follow the Somalia situation not only as a country or as an affair of the Horn*

*of Africa, but as an affair of Africa in general. This will have some influence (Addis Zemen, 3 July 1993).*

The government did not take the delegation lightly. It had assigned a committee of experts to follow up on the situation in Somalia. The more it gets involved, however, it started to face some challenges both from within Somalia and from outside the region. Over the next few years, the situation in Somalia became complicated and appeared hopeless. Some Somali factions, especially those led by Hussein Aideed started to complain about Ethiopia's increasing role in Somali affairs, while rival states like Egypt slowly started to increase their presence in the region. One significant moment occurred when Egypt initiated a peace and reconciliation process that effectively divided Somali factions. Some aligned with the process organized by Ethiopia (led by General Ali Mahdi), while others joined the Egyptian initiative led by Hussein Aideed. The Ethiopian government openly complained about the detrimental role played by Egypt and asserted that it does not approve of any external meddling that complicates the situation in Somalia (*Addis Zemen*, 24 December 1997). A senior Ethiopian diplomat went on to say that,

*...the so-called reconciliation agreement made in Cairo, Egypt, will invite serious danger rather than peace and establishing a stable government in Somalia. However, Ethiopia will continue its effort to bring about sustainable peace in Somalia...the Cairo agreement is an obstacle to ongoing efforts to bring about unity and sustainable peace in Somalia, and stop ongoing clan conflicts ...the Cairo meeting did not include all stakeholders...Since it includes one and excludes others, the Cairo meeting places obstacles on efforts that have been made without any influence (Ibid.)*

Obviously, the Ethiopian government was sending a clear message to both Somali factions and Egypt that it has a stake in what happened in its backyard to which Egypt eventually responded somehow positively. In an interview with local and international journalists held in Addis Ababa, Egypt's Foreign Minister Amr Mussa said that "Egypt has no intention to sabotage Ethiopia's

efforts” and stressed that “the Cairo agreement was built on the Sodere process. Like Ethiopia, Egypt also gives attention to Somalia's problems. The rumours that are circulating regarding the role of Egypt are simply untrue” (*Addis Zemen*, 27 February 1998). Minister Musa further noted that “...the relation between Egypt and Ethiopia is way better than and different from the rumours and I had fruitful discussions with both Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin” (*Ibid*).

However, Egypt’s assurances did not convince Ethiopia since the two countries have competing interests in the region due to Egypt’s long standing rivalry with Ethiopia over the issue of the Nile River (see chapter 8 on the politics of the Nile) (KII #1, personal communication Therefore, from Ethiopia’s perspective, Egypt has no business in the region except complicating matters. Seyoum Mesfin, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, said that:

*...in addition to the emergence of several clan-based factions and warlords, what complicated Somalia's problem is external actors [such as Egypt] and their undue meddling. IGAD is willing to support those who are genuinely interested in helping the people of Somalia. The sad thing, however, is the result gained from the responsibility given to Ethiopia and IGAD's own effort has been derailed by the recent event in Cairo. Since actions taken by external meddlers would multiply new agendas and complicate problems rather than helping Somalis solve their problems, the best option is to align with IGAD's plans (Addis Zemen, 19 March 1998).*

In essence, Ethiopia's policy towards Somalia was primarily influenced by the views of Ethiopian leaders towards Somalia, rather than considering the country's actual capabilities and the complexities of security in the Horn of Africa. It was also informed by their view that Ethiopia’s relations with its neighbours would be better if they denounced the “aggressive policy” and “siege mentality” of previous regimes. Although this seemed to have worked briefly in the early 1990s,

it gradually changed as the situation in Somalia deteriorated and the role of external actors posed threats.

### **7.3.2. Defensive Engagement: Facing the Reality**

The idealist/solidarist policy orientation toward Somalia, and for that matter the Horn of Africa, lasted only half a decade. Policy/decision makers, despite their conviction, had to carefully follow (even sometimes interfere in) developments in Somalia. This was mainly due to the dynamics among the Somali factions and the increasing role of external actors. From the perspective of Ethiopia's national interest and security, it seemed no longer tenable to insist on not siding with anyone and not interfering in the internal affairs of Somalia. In addition to Egypt's gradually increasing meddling, the advent of *Al Ittihad Al Islamiyah* (hereafter AIAI) as well as some mujahidin from the Middle East and elsewhere was a wakeup call for Ethiopian officials (KII #1, personal communication). For instance, Seyoum Mesfin, in reference to the threat posed by AIAI said:

*...Since Ethiopia is a country of all religions and faiths, no one can expand his/her religion by force. Although they failed, extremists have been trying to operate in the Horn of Africa, particularly eastern Ethiopia....Using the anarchy in Somalia as an opportunity, a group called Al Ittihad Al Islami has been trying to destabilize eastern Ethiopia...the cross-border extremism in Ethiopia failed to succeed because religious equality and democratic rights are respected (Addis Zemen, August 17, 1994).*

Although Seyoum said that AIAI had failed, the Ethiopian government was preoccupied with repelling the threat posed by AIAI during much of the mid and late-1990s as statements by him and other officials indicate. AIAI's threat was dual: (a) exploiting the situation in Somalia to see the seeds of radical Islam, and (b) expansion in areas adjacent to and inside Ethiopia—particularly in the Somali Region of Ethiopia (*Ibid*). In addition, the refugee influx was also becoming

concerning as available resources were depleted (*Addis Zemen*, 10 December 1994). As a sign of a further worsening situation, the charge d'affaires of Ethiopia to Somalia, Mr Yamin Awdi, has been kidnapped from his house in Somalia by an armed group. The Ethiopian government demanded his immediate release. MFA disclosed that the diplomat was kidnapped by members of the Suleiman (Haber Gider) clan whose contraband items were seized by Ethiopia's border control. The charge d'affaires was one of the few diplomats who remained in Somalia even after the UN evacuated its staff. The diplomat was later released with the help of General Aideed (*Addis Zemen*, 11 April 1995) Therefore, the policy toward Somalia started to gradually change and become more focused on defensive engagements—if not offensive ones—in response to both the threats and vulnerabilities.

A major shift in Ethiopia's policy toward Somalia came mainly in the form of military responses to the threat posed by AIAI and its international jihadist allies inside Somalia (KII #1, personal communication). As one can expect, Ethiopia's military action was opposed by Somali factions to which the government responded by saying that "...the measures taken by Ethiopian National Defence Forces inside Somalia's territory were legal and aimed at defending Ethiopia's sovereignty. From a legal perspective, we have the right to defend our sovereignty....but we did not jump on this option because Somalia does not have a government. We have been tolerating the threats for a long time" (*Addis Zemen*, 25 August 1996).

In fact, by refraining from taking military measures, the government was too careful not to revive the animosities that dominated the Ethiopia-Somalia relations until 1991. However, amidst the AIAI threat, this happened to be very difficult to sustain because the government faced a serious dilemma: if it let the AIAI operate inside Somalia and across the Ethiopia-Somalia border as it pleases, the already fragile Somali region of Ethiopia would eventually become ungovernable

(Seyoum and Abdeta, 2018). If it takes military measures inside Somalia, it will be interpreted as an invasion and revival of Ethiopia's anti-Somalia policy. Making the situation worse, the AIAI was launching intermittent attacks inside Ethiopia. Combined with the absence of a central authority in Somalia, doing nothing in the name of respecting Somalia's nominal sovereignty became meaningless (KIIs #1, #2, personal communication). Hence, Meles said,

*...respecting Somalia's sovereignty, we have worked beyond our responsibility and tolerated the situation a lot. For instance, if we take Dollo [a Somali town along the Ethiopia-Somalia border], the Ethiopian army has been on the Ethiopian side for a long time. The terrorists are camping about 500 metres [inside Somalia]. Regardless, we waited for more than a year so as to avoid crossing Somalia's boundary...Under normal circumstances, there is something that is expected from Somalia: When Ethiopia respects Somalia's sovereignty, Somalia is also expected to do so. However, currently, no government represents Somalia internationally and effectively controls the country. Due to this reason, terrorist acts have not been prevented. Using Somalia's sovereignty as a cover and as a safe haven, multinational terrorist groups have committed terrorist acts in Ethiopia violating its sovereignty Therefore, our defence forces have taken action crossing the border to defend our sovereignty (Addis Zemen, 25 August 1996).*

Obviously, this affected Ethiopia's role as a host and facilitator of the peace and reconciliation conferences. The Ethiopian government also understood this and did little to revive the process. Rather, it was more concerned with the involvement of external actors which it actively opposed. That is why Meles said that "we believe that the measure taken against the organization [AIAI] should not be viewed as a measure against Somalis....our view is that we will help Somalis only if they believe that we can help them. If not, they should not be bothered. We will not bother them" (*Ibid*). This is a major shift considering the idealist commitment it demonstrated in the early 1990s. In all the situation in Somalia which is dominated by inter-clan rivalry and religious extremism

was neither permeable to the government's idealism nor positively disposed toward its cautious responses against the threats posed by the AIAI. Hence, the peace processes that used to be hosted by Sodere, Bahir Dar or Addis Ababa no longer take place in Ethiopia. They moved primarily to Kenya and in part to Djibouti.

### **7.3.3. Defence-Offence: the Delicate Balance**

From the perspective of its national security and interest, Ethiopia's policy toward Somalia could no longer be idealist or constrained by some intangible considerations of solidarity and indebtedness. Nor could it be constrained by the nominal sovereignty that Somali factions invoke time and again. Their inability to form a central authority, the proliferation of armed groups, the rise of local and international jihadists, and the dubious role of external actors (especially Ethiopia's strategic rivals) had made its policy of non-interference and not siding with any of the Somali faction practically irrelevant. In what appeared to be a revival of the 1980s, the security exigencies simply required it to have some allies inside Somalia. Therefore, Ethiopia pursued an active role in Somali affairs to have a say in who controls what, especially in the areas adjacent to Ethiopia. Therefore, Ethiopia's responses to the aforementioned threats were of three kinds: (a) military measures, (b) grooming and support for friendly Somali factions, and (c) seeking international backing, particularly from great powers like the US and regional organizations such as IGAD (KII #2, #3, personal communication).

One instance of this change was the consultative meetings organized in November 1997 by EIIPD (i.e., Ethiopian International Institute of Peace and Development)—a policy research institute under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As EIIPD disclosed “there have been efforts to individually meet and discuss the solution to Somalia's problems. The participants include General Ali Mahadi and were expected to bring about peace in Somalia” (*Addis Zemen*, November 15, 1996). The

whole purpose of consultative meetings like this one was to cultivate mutual understanding and shared interest as far as developments inside Somalia are concerned. This, in addition to other efforts of the government, made it possible for Ethiopia to recruit and groom future supporters and pro-Ethiopia factions inside Somalia. This shift in policy which was in part precipitated by the aforementioned factors was further intensified following the Ethio-Eritrea war of 1998-2000 (KII #2, #3, personal communication).

In connection with Eritrea, a senior MFA official and Director of International Organizations and Economic Cooperation, Berhanu Kebede, said that;

*By meddling in Somalia, Eritrea is trying to scare the international community that the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia is destabilizing the region....Eritrean leaders are smuggling weapons to Somalia and arming the extremist Al Ittihad to create terror when their effort in the northern front fails following their defeat....The main objective of their operations is to create an impression among the international community that the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea is spreading across the region. They, therefore, expect that the international community will help them stop the war (Addis Zemen, 11 June 1999).*

Eventually, Somalia became an arena where three major sources of threat against Ethiopia, namely Al Ittihad, Eritrean proxy war, and Ethiopian rebels (OLF and ONLF), met. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, therefore, Ethiopia intensified its triple responses (i.e. military measures, recruitment of and support for pro-Ethiopia Somali factions, and seeking international backing) to deal with the threats. In terms of the military responses, for instance, the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence stated that it has “decimated more than 1,100 Al Ittihad and OLF fighters” inside Somalia alleging that “these terrorists were armed and trained by Eritrea” (*Addis Zemen*, August 12, 1999). The Ministry said that Al Ittihad and OLF had been trying to infiltrate and attack Ethiopia through Somalia since May 1998. However, Ethiopia's defence forces were able to repel them (*Ibid*).

In addition to the military measures, which appeared to be successful, the government did put pressure on Somali faction leaders to refrain from supporting anti-Ethiopia/government forces. For instance, summoning one of the prominent faction leaders, Hussein Aideed, who granted safe haven to Al Ittihad and OLF, "...Ethiopian authorities have warned [him] to refrain from working with terrorists and to stop terrorists from launching attacks from territories under his control" (*Addis Zemen*, 27 October 1999). Following this, Aideed "disarmed members of the OLF and closed down their office" in Mogadishu. Considering the pressure he was under since the mid-1990s, Aideed's move was "aimed at improving the hitherto deteriorated relations between Ethiopia and his faction" and his spokesman Issa Mohammed said that he took this measure as part of "the implementation of last October's agreement with Ethiopia" (AFP cited in *Addis Zemen*, 30 November 1999).

As Ethiopia's responses increasingly focused on tackling the threats to its security, its role of hosting Somali peace processes moved to Djibouti and Kenya. Nevertheless, whether in Arta or Nairobi, Ethiopia's blessing was needed to have any semblance of authority in Somalia (KII #2, personal communication). As mentioned in the preceding section, by the mid-1990s, Ethiopia was already conducting military operations inside Somalia to counter security threats posed by the Al Ittihad. This intensified with the start of the war with Eritrea, as the rebel movements across the border also increased over time. Since then, Ethiopia's involvement in Somalia had deepened and so did the proxy war with Eritrea. As the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC)—mostly dominated by former leaders of the Al Ittihad Al Islamiyah—began to control some parts of Somalia, the proxy war further escalated alarming Ethiopian authorities. In all, from the early to mid-2000s, the formation of the UIC and its increasing control/influence over Somalia, its alleged link with Eritrea and the alleged presence of Ethiopian rebel forces in Somalia (which were also supported by

Eritrea) was enough reason for the government to change its policy and take coercive measures (KII #2, #3, personal communication). In justifying this, MFA Seyoum Mesfin said:

*The Ethiopian government does not have a secret agenda regarding Somalia. The agenda is clear for Somali forces, countries of the region, and the international community....the Ethiopian government believes that the lawlessness in Somalia has to change....Ethiopia wants, from the perspective of its national security and interest, to see the prevalence of order and stability in Somalia....Therefore, the only agenda we have is to see a stable and peaceful Somalia that has a government and a system. The interest of the Ethiopian people will be protected when this happens. ...In the last ten or eleven years, we have been doing our best. It is not something that we pursue when we please and quit when we lose hope. Ethiopia cannot ignore and abandon the Somalia issue. Because, as we benefit from the peace in Somalia, we also get negatively affected by the collapse of Somalia... [Regarding terrorists operating in Somalia], the Ethiopian government has made it abundantly clear to all the factions that it will not tolerate such links....We spent the last ten years chasing and fighting off terrorists. The same groups are now trying to operate in Somalia changing their tactics and strategies. If things get worse, we will fight them not for others but because it affects us. Therefore, it is inevitable that we will fight them to protect our security and peace (Addis Zemen, 19 December 2001).*

It was therefore a matter of time before Ethiopia confronted hostile actors that used the vacuum in Somalia to dictate terms in and around Somalia threatening its security and interests. This was particularly the case once the UIC established itself as an alternative force to clan leaders and other factions in the mid-2000s. It was further complicated when the UIC refused both to recognize and join the TFG (Transitional Federal Government led by Abdullahi Yusuf) that was established in Kenya in 2004. Not only did the UIC refuse and join the TFG, but it also started to agitate against Somalia's neighbour, particularly Ethiopia. Given the fact that the president of the TFG—Abdullahi Yusuf—was Ethiopia's favourite, UIC was a threat to both Ethiopia and Somalia (KII

#2, #3, personal communication). It was thus in the early days of his election that Meles assured Abdullahi Yusuf that “Ethiopia will consider it positively if it is requested by the concerned bodies to deploy peacekeeping forces” (*Addis Zemen*, 26 October 2004).

In the meantime, the tension in Somalia dramatically escalated leading to serious clashes between forces of the TFG and the UIC. While Ethiopia denies the allegation that it is behind the conflict, it simultaneously accuses the Eritrean government and other actors of being behind the escalation of the conflict (*Addis Zemen*, 26 June 2006). From the summer of 2006 on, tension was building up while the UIC was mixing its political rhetoric with religious undertones. Most importantly, the UIC resorted to reviving old animosity and irredentist claims against Ethiopia (KII #2, #3, personal communication). The Ethiopian government however did not view this as an isolated incident but a coordinated one involving multiple actors including Eritrea. In a press statement, Ethiopia’s Ministry of Information said,

*Having decided that they would not benefit from the prevalence of sustainable peace and security, the Eritrean government and the extremist forces of Mogadishu are coordinating anti-Ethiopia forces that are amassed in Somalia including ONLF, OLF and terrorists that came from various parts of the world. The extremist group that controls Mogadishu has aligned itself with that of Eritrea's vision to destabilize countries of the region and declared Jihad on Ethiopia by creating the sense that there are no followers of Islam in Ethiopia and propagating irredentist aspirations (*Addis Zemen*, 4 November 2006).*

Two months later, the Ethiopian government, alarmed by the escalation of tension across Somalia and along the Ethiopia-Somalia border, took the issue to the parliament. In briefing the MPs, Prime Minister Meles said that the UIC had posed a serious threat against Ethiopia and “the Ethiopian government is ready to tackle the clear and present danger posed by the frequent Jihad declared by the Union of Islamic Courts of Somalia” (*Addis Zemen*, 24 November 2006). In explaining why

the government views the recent developments in Somalia, Meles listed four reasons as to why his government thinks that the UIC posed a clear and present danger:

- a) *By declaring jihad against Ethiopia, the UIC declared war*
- b) *The UIC had declared its intent on bringing all Somali inhabited territories under its control*
- c) *The UIC is committing direct attacks by sheltering, training, arming and infiltrating armed groups in Ethiopia.*
- d) *It gets support from Eritrea and other Ethiopian rebels (Addis Zemen, 25 November 2006)*

As divisive as it was among MPs, especially between the ruling party's and the sizable opposition party members that won seats after the 2005 election, the parliament authorized the government to "take any action that is necessary and legal". The motion through which the decision was passed reads:

*Since the destructive and dangerous activity of the group [UIC] particularly targets our country, the following decisions are made based on the HPRs Members Code of Conduct Regulation Number 3/1998 Article 49 Sub-article 4:1) The group that calls itself Union of Islamic Courts (a) since it has repeatedly declared Jihad on Ethiopia; (b) Since it has posed a threat against our sovereignty by declaring to unite the Somali speaking areas of the Horn of Africa; (c) Since it has committed aggression against our country by arming, training, and providing safe-haven for armed groups that are bent on overthrowing our country's constitutional system by force; (d) since they have posed a threat against our peace and sovereignty aligning with the Eritrean Government and other anti-Ethiopia forces and committing aggression; in general, the House believes that this force has posed a clear and present danger to our country's sovereignty and peace. 2) Appreciating the FDRE Government's ongoing efforts to settle the issue peacefully, the House decides that this continues vigorously. 3) Besides the peaceful endeavour, the House decides that the FDRE Government takes any action that is necessary and legal in order to repel the aggression (Addis Zemen, 1 December 2006).*

Having secured this, the Ethiopian government went on with its plan to oust the UIC, tackle the security threat it posed and pave the way for the return of authority in Somalia—via the TFG. Hence, it sent the ENDF for an overt military action inside Somalia—a first of its kind in its relations with its neighbours. Within a week, it was able to accomplish the task and chased the UIC out of Mogadishu (KII #2, #3, personal communication). Interestingly, the international community made little noise against Ethiopia’s military action which some attribute to the successful diplomatic work done by the Prime Minister ahead of and during the intervention (KIIs #1, #2, #3, personal communication). Although the efficacy of the military intervention to tackle the “clear and present danger” posed by the UIC—given the rise of Al Shabab afterwards—remains contested, the Ethiopian government was able to tackle two problems. Firstly, it was able to dismantle the UIC which it believed was a serious threat. Secondly, it was able to pave the way for the relocation of the TFG from Kenya to Somalia (KIIs #2, #3, personal communication).

In all, as discussed above, Ethiopia’s engagement with Somalia has been a complicated one. This was worsened by the collapse of central authority in 1991. Although Ethiopia (the Ethiopian government) was of the view that it can attain good neighbourliness and adhere to non-interference, maintaining this policy simply proved to be impractical. Despite its criticism of its predecessors for being aggressive and harbouring a “siege mentality”, it could not also escape from the same trap of the Horn of Africa’s interstate relations: the long-standing and historical patterns of amity and enmity. The case of Somalia just proves that.

#### **7.4. Eritrea: from a Troubling Province to a Problematic Neighbour?**

The relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea has been intricate, influenced by their rich historical and social ties, Eritrea’s colonial past, the federation and its eventual breakup, and the prolonged civil war. Therefore, when the Derg government was overthrown on 28 May 1991, it was clear

that Eritrea's secession was inevitable due to two reasons: the effective control of Eritrea by the EPLF and the position of the TPLF/EPRDF regarding Eritrea. The first reason is clear: the EPLF's control and total collapse of the Ethiopian army in 1991 effectively made Eritrea *de facto* independent. Moreover, blaming it on previous regimes' "wrong policies", the incumbent (transitional) government was willing to let Eritrea go without any resistance or any precondition (KII #4, personal communication). As such, a thorough examination of the post-1991 government's engagement with Eritrea reveals that it was characterized by at least three major features: idealism/solidarity, duality (alliance vs. incompatibilities), hostilities.

#### **7.4.1. Idealism and Solidarity**

Like the case of Somalia, the TPLF/EPRDF government was of the view that the Eritrean problem is mainly the making of Ethiopian regimes' "wrong policies". Although the specifics of the "wrong policies" were not spelt out, indirect references were made to the denial of the right to self-determination, giving priority to access to the sea over the rights of the people, etc. These were viewed as the main causes of the civil war that raged for almost three decades (KII #2, personal communication). For instance, as early as 1992, the TGE, in a press statement, said that:

*The reactionary leaders of Ethiopia's previous regimes had been suppressing the democratic question of the Eritrean people by military force for about thirty years which claimed many lives from all sides. One of the fruits of the July 1991 conference was the decision to democratically settle the Eritrean issue which could have otherwise continued until this day (Addis Zemen, February 29, 1992).*

Obviously, the TPLF/EPRDF leadership was convinced that since it was up to Eritreans to decide whether they want to remain part of Ethiopia, any attempt to prevent Eritrea's referendum would be tantamount to "warmongering" which "all peace-loving people should condemn" (*Addis Zemen*, 23 December 1992). Therefore, the view was that Eritrea's problem would be solved by a

referendum once and for all and relations will continue in a different form albeit cordially (KIIs #2, #4, personal communication). Perhaps as a show of commitment to this conviction, it was even before the referendum was held that the authorities in Addis Ababa and Asmara started to enter into bilateral deals including trade and economic cooperation (*Addis Zemen*, 29 February 1992).

Interestingly, while those in the opposition were primarily concerned about the possibility of Ethiopia being landlocked, officials of the transitional government appeared completely oblivious to the consequences of the issue being raised. Or, as one of the most senior members of the leadership of the time later admitted, they were “ignorant and arrogant” (Abebe, 2007, p.2). Regardless, the leadership was preoccupied with idealist views of accepting Eritreans' right to self-determination and pursuing cooperation while avoiding the burning issue of the time—i.e. right to access to the sea—let alone the territorial integrity of the state. For instance, Meles asserted that:

*When it comes to Eritrea, there are two options: respecting the Eritreans' right to self-determination or continuing the war that started in the past. The second option, even if we want to do it, is not economically feasible. However, the best solution is to accept people's right to self-determination. Even if Eritreans decide to separate from Ethiopia, this does not mean that the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea will have no interaction. Let alone the two peoples, the aim should be to enhance the interaction among the people of the Horn of Africa (Addis Zemen, 10 March 1993).*

As such, the outcome of Eritrea’s referendum was a *fait accompli* and it has been something that permanently hurt Ethiopia’s national interest and security by making it dependent on Eritrea (KII #4, personal communication) which “granted Ethiopia free access to the sea” and for which the TGE was grateful (*Addis Zemen*, January 7, 1992). The TPLF/EPRDF leadership was obviously committed more to its solidarity with the Eritrean cause than the perennial quest of the Ethiopian state (i.e., access to the sea) on which it was about to preside over for decades (KII #4, personal

communication). Therefore, when the referendum was held in April 1993 and the result was announced, the government through the editorial of *Addis Zemen* triumphantly declared that “The Long Years of Civil War are Gone!” and rebuked those Ethiopian politicians and intellectuals who “used history, culture, religion as an excuse” against Eritrean referendum (*Addis Zemen*, 29 April 1993).

Within days, the TGE recognized Eritrea as a sovereign state and declared that “Eritrea's independence opens a new chapter in the relations between the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea” (*Addis Zemen*, 5 May 1993). With this, “the Ethiopian leaders thought that they closed a problematic chapter in Ethiopian history that was dominated by war which later proved not to be the case” (KII #4, personal communication).

#### **7.4.2. Dualism: Alliance and Incompatibilities**

From the very outset, the relation between Ethiopian and Eritrean leaders—by extension Ethiopia and Eritrea—was characterized by dualism. On the one hand, they were allies during and after the armed struggle. They collaborated on many national and regional issues. For instance, following the referendum, they signed several bilateral agreements and protocols, the first being in Addis Ababa in July 1993. The agreements focused on “national and international issues that are of common interest” and it was instrumental in post-war reconstruction and jointly tackling poverty and improving people’s lives (*Addis Zemen*, 31 July 1993).

It was expected that the agreement will be important as it would strengthen economic ties between the two and brings peace and stability as well as development and prosperity to the region. In addition, it focused on the utilization of the ports of Assab and Massawa and the modernization and administration of the ports as it requires joint efforts. It also covered a broad area of bilateral cooperation between the two countries including economic, trade, movement of people,

telecommunication, etc. To this end, the two sides have agreed to establish a joint ministerial commission. They even raised the possibility of security and defence cooperation (*Addis Zemen*, 31 July 1993).

On the other hand, while signing agreements and protocols that apparently aimed at economic integration starting with a free trade area agreement (*Addis Zemen*, April 8, 1995), they were heading toward divergent directions in terms of economic policies (KIIs #1, #2, personal communication). As their economic policies were becoming incompatible, some in the Ethiopian government were accusing the Eritrean leadership of aiming to unduly benefit from Ethiopia's market and resources (Gebru, 2014). The incompatibilities eventually became conspicuous in terms of the utilization of national and foreign currencies, customs and duties, and even the utilization of the ports (KIIs #1, #2, #4, personal communication). The culmination of the incompatibility became apparent when Ethiopia decided not to use the Port of Asab citing its "limited capacity to accommodate the size of Ethiopian economy" (*Addis Zemen*, 22 June 1997) and that trade between the two will be through "acceptable foreign currency" (*Addis Zemen*, 12 November 1997). Despite the growing rift and incompatibility, however, then Prime Minister Meles said that:

*There is no new strategic difference between Ethiopia and Eritrea....Let alone between countries, a difference of views is common within a family. There were differences on certain issues between Ethiopia and Eritrea which have common positions on fundamental issues. And, there still is a difference. Their relation has been strong not because there is no difference between them but because they have developed a culture of settling differences through discussion and negotiation* (*Addis Zemen*, 11 January 1998)

Obviously, Meles was downplaying the risk of conflict as he did not believe that differences in economic policies and directions would lead to serious problems in the two states' bilateral relations (Gebru, 2014; KIIs #1, #2, #4, personal communication). Others accuse him of being adamant to accept the fact that the relation between Ethiopia and Eritrea was fundamentally flawed (Gebru, 2014; (KII #4, personal communication). Moreover, some within his government were already disillusioned as far as the Eritrean leadership was concerned. They viewed it as “manipulative and selfishly exploiting the unhindered access” it had to Ethiopia’s economic sector (*Ibid*). Retrospectively, however, the government, via a statement made by the ruling party’s central committee, explicitly attributed the root cause of the conflict to the economy and related malpractices of Eritrea:

*the Eritrean regime, rather than depending on Eritrea's people and natural resources to develop the country, had been engaged in illicit trade in the Horn of Africa and sought to develop through parasitical dependence on its neighbours....The economic policies that Ethiopia and Eritrea followed were different to the extent of the fundamental difference between revolutionary democracy and dependence. This difference obstructed the Eritrean government's desire to gain undue benefit from Ethiopia. This has been the case since the transitional period, and Ethiopia has been able to build the capacity to tackle the Eritrean government's dependency and illicit trade. This shocked the Eritrean regime which was aiming to prosper by depending on and sucking on us, which it later tried to achieve by force by destroying our revolutionary democratic system (Addis Zemen, 9 July 2001).*

Beyond divergence in economic policies and orientations, they also believed that Eritrean leaders have some designs on Ethiopia in particular and the Horn of Africa in general. They were convinced that the Eritrean government wanted to dominate the Horn of Africa economically, politically and militarily. In Eritrea’s leadership, they simply saw “inherent incompatibilities”

between Ethiopian and Eritrean interests—a threat to Ethiopia’s interests and security (Gebru, 2014; KII #4, #5 personal communication).

### **7.4.3. Hostilities: War, Stalemate, and Deterrence**

The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has indeed been a topic of extensive scholarly research. Various books and articles have explored its causes and effects (see, for instance, Iyob, 2000; Leenco, 2003; Tekeste and Tronvoll, 2000). The purpose of this sub-section is, thus, not to repeat what was already said. Rather, it shows how the war affected/shaped Ethiopia’s national security in the broader context of the Horn of Africa’s regional security dynamics. As far as the causes of the war are concerned, it suffices to state that it is rooted in fundamental differences pertaining to the economic and political policies of the two governments (Iyob, 2000; Leenco, 2003; Tekeste and Tronvoll, 2000) as well as the complex interpersonal and inter-organizational relationship between the TPLF and EPLF (Trivelli, 1998). In short, the war, which was fought using boundary disputes as a pretext, had claimed tens of thousands of lives and fundamentally altered both people-to-people and interstate relations as both sides resorted to profiling and expulsion of each other’s citizens on grounds of national security (*Ibid*).

Although a peace agreement was signed in June 2000 in Algiers officially ending the war after two years and an arbitration commission (i.e., the Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission—EEBC) passed binding decisions over the contested borders, peace remained quite elusive. The outcome of the war and the peace agreement was particularly divisive among the Ethiopian senior leadership—particularly the TPLF (Gebru, 2014; KIIs #1, #2, personal communication). This resulted in a serious shake-up in the political and security apparatus—the assassination of the security chief and the forced retirement of the General Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (*Ibid*).

Therefore, following the peace agreement, what came was not peace but stalemate, proxy wars and mutual subversion (Abbink, 2003; Lyons, 2009).

From the perspective of security, in the context of stalemate and proxy war, the Ethiopian government was trying not to make the same mistake it did during the transitional period. Therefore, it made sure that the army was well-built and well-positioned to prevent further attacks. Nevertheless, it appeared to be perplexed by Eritrea's objectives. In his regular briefing of the parliament, Meles told MPs:

*When we tried all, the response we got from Eritrea was “we will not negotiate”. Not just this, what we see now is the tendency of the Eritrean government to destabilize the country by amalgamating political organizations from opposite ends of the political spectrum. On one extreme, it helps those who say ‘our border is the Red Sea’; those who reject the rights of nations and nationalities; those who say the inclusion of the right to secession is treason; and those who do not recognize Eritrea's sovereignty. It is trying to train, arm and send them back to Ethiopia. On the other hand, it is training and arming organizations such as the Ogaden Liberation Front and OLF that say that they want to liberate the Somali and Oromia regions. By organizing these together with those who say there should not be secession, it is pouring fire and gas against us (Addis Zemen, 22 October 2006).*

The government was in fact both annoyed by Eritrea's behaviour toward Ethiopia and the region—Horn of Africa. It still believed that it was the only entity in Ethiopia that unconditionally accepted Eritrea as a state (Gebru, 2014; KII #2, #4, personal communication). Perhaps, it is due to this reason that Meles lamented: “There is no other force that wholeheartedly accepted Eritrea's independence. This [Eritrean] government, if it cannot live with an EPRDF-led government, it cannot live with any other (Addis Zemen, 22 October 2006). Meles, therefore, concluded that if the Eritrean government cannot live side by side with the EPRDF-led government (which was

friendly to the Eritrean cause), then the reason it supports the aforementioned rival groups is “to destroy Ethiopia” (*Ibid*). Hence, Meles asserted, “we should seek [a] solution. We should thus demonstrate in practice that it cannot disintegrate and destabilize the country” (*Ibid*). Although what “in practice” exactly entails is not readily clear, a thorough analysis of his speeches and the government’s actions indicate that he was talking about deterring to the extent possible—or deterring another round of war while focusing on development (FANSPS, 2002).

The government, therefore, dealt with the threat posed by Eritrea using two interrelated policies. On the one hand, it made sure that the stalemate continued, albeit in favour of Ethiopia’s domestic and regional interests. On the other hand, it resorted to aggressively suppressing opposition movements in Ethiopia and neutralizing proxies in Somalia that it accused of having links with Eritrea (KII #2, #4 personal communication). The best example is how the Ethiopian government—as discussed in section 7.3.—established linkages between its military operation against the UIC in Somalia with its policies against Eritrea and the armed opposition it sponsors. By doing so, the Ethiopian government was able to portray Eritrea as a pariah state and a force of instability in the Horn of Africa. As such, through its strong ties with the US and some European and African states, the Ethiopian government was able to subject Eritrea to international sanctions and isolation (KIIs #1, #4, personal communication).

Despite the costs borne by both populations due to the prolonged stalemate, the Ethiopian government found satisfaction in its relative advantages over Eritrea. These advantages included better economic development, diplomatic positioning, and national/regional security. However, it’s crucial to recognize that the impact of the war extended beyond these factors, shaped by historical grievances and complex ethnic dynamics. Therefore, the government wanted to

maintain the status quo assuming that the Eritrean government would topple on its own (*Ibid*). In Meles's words:

*We are in good condition. We are getting stronger while Sha'ebia is becoming weaker. We have no reason to change this situation through peaceful means. Especially between us and the Sha'ebia, there will not be a war that will be limited. If it happens, it will only be a total war if we are to fight. Therefore, the choice is either the status quo or total war. We prefer the status quo. Even if we primarily prefer peace, the Sha'ebia path does not take us to peace. If we cannot find peace, the status quo is better than total war. Given the threat, we will remain cool-headed. We will continue until what we deemed important proves to be otherwise (Addis Zemen, 21 February 2007).*

## 7.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Ethiopia and its near neighbours are interlinked by domestic and external security exigencies. If the view that the Horn of Africa is a security complex (Berouk, 2011) is accurate, it is primarily because of the intermeshing threats and vulnerabilities that Ethiopia faces vis-à-vis its neighbours and vice versa. The patterns of amity and enmity—to use RSCT's key phrase—in Ethiopia's engagement with the near neighbours are so persistent that no analyst can justifiably ignore them. From the perspective of Ethiopia's national security, both Eritrea and Somalia have been tied to it through ideational and structural factors including conflicting state identity, power projection through proxy war and subversion as well as spillovers of domestic insecurities, and the responses thereof. As such, it is incomplete, if not impossible, to think of Ethiopia's national security without adequately understanding the developments and dynamics in and between these states.

Thus, multiple and complex factors including national, regional, and global developments account for the dynamics of Ethiopia's security policy vis-à-vis its near neighbours. However, these factors alone did not determine the trajectories followed by the country. The views, experiences, and

perceptions of the leadership/regime in power were also equally important in terms of defining how the Ethiopian state reacts to security issues in and outside its borders. It is the meaning attached to the structural or material factors and the reaction/outcome thereof that also defined how Ethiopia dealt with threats and vulnerabilities. As demonstrated by the extensive quotations—particularly public statements by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi—the changes in the leadership’s views, experiences and perceptions significantly transformed how the state/regime handled security issues vis-à-vis Eritrea and Somalia. For instance, the three phases/patterns—idealism/solidarity, defensive engagement, and the defence-offence balance—of Ethiopia’s policy toward Somalia correspond not just to actual developments but also changing views, perceptions, and experiences. The same applies to Ethiopia’s policy vis-à-vis Eritrea which evolved through idealism/solidarity, dualism, and hostilities.

## Chapter Eight

### Politics of the Nile and Beyond: Countering Egyptian Hegemony and Sudan's Bandwagoning

#### 8.1. Introduction

This chapter, like chapter seven, addresses the central thesis of the dissertation that *despite the domestic insecurity dilemma, the external dimension of Ethiopia's (in)security has also been important. And, the domestic insecurity dilemma does not always trump the external.* In doing so, the chapter examines the dynamics of Ethiopia's engagement with Egypt and Sudan from the perspective of Ethiopia's national security. As such, the overarching objective of the chapter is to elucidate how Ethiopia's policy, threat perception and vulnerability vis-à-vis Egypt and Sudan evolved overtime during the post-1991 era. This is done by analysing how the politics of the Nile River—or the hydro-politics of the Nile—ties Ethiopia's security concerns to that of Egypt and Sudan. The thrust of this chapter is not that Ethiopia's national security depending on the Nile but rather the two downstream states, especially Egypt, actively trying to make it a matter of their national security and Ethiopia's persistent and stiff resistance thereof. This has generated a hegemonic—counterhegemonic dynamics between Ethiopia and Egypt in which Sudan was mostly bandwagoning with the latter's policies and preferences. It is important to note from the outset that Ethio-Sudan engagement, unlike that of Ethiopia and Egypt, goes beyond the issue of the Nile.

For decades, Ethiopia has been accusing Egypt and Sudan of not just trying to monopolize the waters of the Nile River but also engaging in subversive activities—backing dissidents and rebels—in a bid to weaken and destabilize it. Doing so, the ultimate goal of Egypt and Sudan has been preventing Ethiopia from developing the capacity to use the waters of the Nile. This shaped

Ethiopia's threat perception and vulnerability vis-à-vis the two downstream states entangling the external dimension of its national security in the trilateral/triangular relations. Therefore, the politics of the Nile, for the purpose of this chapter, refers to the complex bilateral, trilateral and/or triangular politico-security entanglement of states of the Eastern Nile River Basin—i.e., Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. It refers to, to borrow Regional Security Complex Theory's important concept, the *patterns of amity and enmity* between Ethiopia and the two downstream states. At face value, it appears as if we are exclusively concerned about the waters of the Nile River which mainly—about 86%—flows from the high mountains of Ethiopia, waters Sudan's agricultural and energy sectors, sustains Egyptian economy and livelihood, and disappears in the Mediterranean Sea. In reality, however, it is just more than that. It is about interstate politics between Ethiopia and Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt, and Egypt and Sudan and its implications on the national security of each. Our concern here, however, is how it shapes Ethiopia's engagement with the two states from the perspective of the external dimension of Ethiopia's national security.

Thus, based on both primary and secondary data this chapter systematically analyses how Ethiopia—under the EPRDF rule—dealt with the politics of the Nile and the attendant disputes and tensions. The chapter is organized into five sections. The first section is this introduction. Section two provides a background to Ethiopia's relations with Egypt and Sudan which is predominantly characterized by disputes, rivalries, and mutual suspicion. The third section discusses Ethiopia's engagement with and policies toward Egypt under the EPRDF which developed through three phases: appeasement, confrontation, and countering Egypt's hegemonic projection. Section four deals with Ethiopia's engagement with and policies toward Sudan which went through three phases of idealism and cooperation, rivalry and subversion, and rapprochement and alliance. Underlying this chapter is that unlike its engagement with Eritrea and Somalia

discussed in the previous chapter, in which Ethiopia is a status quo state, Ethiopia has been a revisionist state in its engagement with Egypt and Sudan as it primarily sought to bring about change in the terms and nature of relations with the two states.

## **8.2. Background to Ethiopia's Relations with Egypt and Sudan**

As John Young aptly puts it “...relations between Ethiopia and Sudan have their own dynamic, but from ancient times they have been powerfully shaped by the two countries’ location on the Nile and their respective relations with Egypt” (Young, 2020, p. 3). Ethiopia’s engagements with Egypt and Sudan have, thus, generally been dominated by the hydro-politics of the Nile and the attendant disputes. The politics of the Nile—specifically the interplay of hegemony, bandwagoning, and counter-hegemony—shapes the nature of interstate relations and security policies among Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. These dynamics influence how each state navigates its interests, sovereignty, and water security in the context of the Nile basin. However, while Ethiopia’s engagement with Egypt has been solely—regardless of whether directly and indirectly—revolving around the waters of the Nile, its engagement with Sudan is influenced by additional factors including boundary disputes, licit and illicit cross-border activities, and rivalries rooted in historical differences with certain religious undertones. Yet, the politics of the Nile often overshadow these factors since Sudan is the main physical linkage as well as the buffer between Ethiopia and Egypt. As a result, and due to Egypt’s disproportionate influence over Sudan’s domestic politics and foreign relations, its policy toward Ethiopia often appears to be an extension of its relations with Egypt. In this section, we discuss the pre-1991 engagements.

### **8.2.1. Egypt: Water, Religion, War, and Mutual Suspicion**

Ethiopia’s relations with Egypt is one of the oldest that dates back to several centuries. In addition to being tied by the world’s longest river—the Nile—the two countries have been historically

connected through thousands of years of interaction through the Coptic church. Hence, Ethio-Egyptian ties used to have dual aspects until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That is why Haggai Erlich aptly summarized the dual aspect of Ethiopia-Egypt relations as follows: “If Ethiopia was the source of the Nile for Egypt, Egypt was the source of the *abun*, the Egyptian metropolitan bishop, for Ethiopia, the key to religious legitimacy for its whole political system” (Erlich, 2001, p.9). Both Egypt and Ethiopia alternately used these dual aspects of their ties to influence each other until the Ethiopian government decided to appoint its own *abun* (patriarch) in 1959. For instance, as much as being the source of the *abun* gave some soft power or leverage to Egypt in its engagement with Ethiopia, being the source of the Nile was used by Ethiopian monarchs as a leverage vis-à-vis Egypt. A good example that illustrates this is a 12<sup>th</sup> century incident in which “Ethiopian emperor Amda Syon threatened to divert the waters [of the Nile] unless the Egyptian Sultan stopped persecuting Coptic Christians” (Erlich, 2001, p. 26).

While Egypt’s importance for Ethiopia was mainly the fact that it being the source of the *abun*, Egypt’s main preoccupation at least since the 19<sup>th</sup> century throughout history has been controlling or having a direct influence over the sources of the Nile. Hence, the religious ties and the influence that comes with it did not prevent Egypt from pursuing its self-interest by force. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century alone, from 1840s to 1880s, Egypt had waged several wars against Ethiopia from Ethiopia’s northern and south-eastern frontiers via Massawa and Harrar. Although it was able to occupy Massawa until the Italians came to the area, Egypt’s pursuit to control the source of the Nile was met with fierce resistance from the Ethiopian side. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the wake of the end of the Second World War, it also attempted to have Eritrea, which was under Italian colonial administration, in its fold or at least under the trusteeship of the

Arab League hoping to have control over the Nile (Daniel, 1990). Ever since the incidents of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, Ethiopia's engagement with Egypt has been that of rivalry and mutual suspicion (Bahru, 2001; Erlich, 2001; Yacob, 2007).

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ethio-Egyptian relations started to become more complicated and tense following the signing of the 1959 agreement with Sudan which allocated 55.5 BCM and 18.5 BCM of the Nile's water for Egypt and Sudan respectively. The agreement not only allocated almost all of the outflow of the river only to Egypt and Sudan, it deliberately isolated Ethiopia which is the source of 86% of the Nile's water and the rest of upstream countries (Daniel, 1999; Yacob, 2007). Furthermore, Egypt continued to undertake unilateral development projects including the Aswan High Dam disregarding the upstream countries including Ethiopia. In fact, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser was not willing to recognize Ethiopia's stake and interest over the Nile. Despite the outwardly cordial relations he had with Emperor Haile Selassie, Nasser was mostly dismissive of Ethiopia's say on matters relating to the river (Erlich, 2001).

Moreover, Egypt encouraged and hosted disgruntled Eritrean dissidents and allowed them to use Cairo radio to disseminate anti-Ethiopia propaganda. In 1960, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was established in Cairo with the aim to secede Eritrea from Ethiopia (Erlich, 2001). Obviously, the rationale behind Egypt's hostile activities was mainly to destabilize Ethiopia so that it got distracted from matters pertaining to the utilization of waters of the Nile. In what seems to be a response to Egypt's unilateral actions, Ethiopia commissioned a study in the 1960s to assess the potential of the Nile with the help of the United States's Bureau of Reclamation (Aaron, 2013; Salman, 2016).

During the Derg period (1974-1991), the two states' relations further worsened as the mutual suspicion grew deeper not only due to the Nile but also Egypt's support for Ethiopia's main regional rival Somalia and Sudan's increasingly hostile posture. Coupled with its support for the Eritrean rebels, the Ethio-Egyptian relations were in its lowest state during that time. With Egypt's signing of the Camp David agreement in 1979 with Israel and its shift toward the West, Egypt became one of the main allies of the US in the MENA region. This coincided with Ethiopia's shift toward the Soviet camp which went full swing after the 1977/78 Ethiopia-Somalia war. This set a new context—as extension of the Cold War—in which Egypt was more emboldened to pursue its interest unilaterally and continue its destabilization by supporting Ethiopian rebels and regional adversaries. It was during this period that Egyptian leaders started to openly threaten to go to war if Egypt's share of the Nile water is affected and Ethiopian leaders rebuffed the threat (Daniel, 1999; Erlich, 2001; Yacob, 2007). Nevertheless, as Ethiopia was embroiled in its domestic security crises, including civil wars, and regional rivalries, it did not have the means to use the Nile for its own development (Yacob, 2007).

In all, although Ethiopia and Egypt did not go to war, their relations during the pre-1991 era was characterized by hostility and mutual suspicion. This was especially the case during the Derg period as Egypt was implicated in the domestic and external/regional threats to Ethiopia's security and interests. Notions of cooperation were simply absent and Egypt was engaged in a zero-sum game. Ethiopia, due to its domestic vulnerability, was not able to meaningfully counter Egypt's hegemonic projection other than releasing public statements and conveying diplomatic protests. This continued until the fall of the Derg in 1991.

### **8.2.2. Sudan: Rivalry, Boundary and Mutual Subversion**

Historically and in the pre-1991 context, Ethio-Sudan relations was that of both amity and enmity. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, their relations was influenced by regional/global developments of the time, i.e. the advent of the scramble for Africa in the region and bilateral rivalries with certain religious undertone. The Mahdist Movement which was resisting the British onslaught saw Ethiopia not only as a collaborator with the British but also as a Christian rival. Hence, the two had frequent border skirmishes that eventually developed into full scale war in 1889. The effect of that war, which claimed the life of Ethiopia's Emperor Yohannes IV, was shocking and still remembered in Ethiopia as one of the worst experiences in the two states bilateral relations (Bahru, 2001; Belete, 2013; 2016). Therefore, compared to Ethio-Egyptian relations, Ethiopia's relations with Sudan was deeper and intense as it also involved issues—other than the Nile—that directly and indirectly affect the security of both states.

Nevertheless, as stated above, the dynamics of the two states' relations had been shaped by Sudan's ties to Egypt and the influence that the latter had over the former. This was the case for the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At independence, in 1956, Ethiopia was keener to build cordial relations with Sudan and it fully supported its independence unlike Egypt which sought to forge some sort of union. Hence, Sudanese leaders were also initially positively disposed toward Ethiopia. In fact, Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie was instrumental in helping facilitate the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement that ended the Anya-nya secessionist insurgency (1955-1972), also known as the first civil war of Sudan. However, as Sudan's domestic politics grew complicated and unstable, Egypt's influence over Sudan continued to deepen. Egypt built close ties with the Sudanese military and security apparatuses and used Sudan's claim of being an Arab state and membership in the Arab

League as additional leverage to advance its interests via Sudan. This had direct and indirect bearings on Ethio-Sudan relations as Sudan's policy toward Ethiopia and the rest of the Nile basin countries mirrors Egypt's policy. The 1959 agreement on the utilization of the Nile water reflects this reality (Belete, 2013; 2016; Young, 2012; 2020).

With the coming into power of Gaafar el-Nimeri in 1969, relations seemed initially warm between the two states. It was during his early tenure that Ethiopia hosted the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972. As a result, Ethiopia expected Sudan to reciprocate this by ceasing support for Eritrean rebels and preventing them from using its territories. To Ethiopia's dismay, Sudan was not that cooperative and, in fact, their relations continued to sour after the 1974 revolution of Ethiopia. It was during this period that Ethiopia started to seriously consider supporting any dissident movement in Sudan as a retaliation. Therefore, following the start of Sudan's second civil war in 1983 which ensued after the Nimeri regime's decision to revoke the Addis Ababa agreement, impose Sharia Law in the South, and disregarded the autonomy of the South, Ethiopia started to gradually provide support for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) (Aalen, 2014; Belete, 2013; 2016; Young, 2012; 2020).

The Derg regime was, however, providing support to the SPLM on one important condition, i.e. SPLM's ultimate objective should be addressing the demands of the South within a united Sudan. This condition was predicated on Ethiopia's own struggle against Eritrean and Somali (Ogaden) secessionism. SPLM's leaders, including John Garang, accepted the Derg's condition in return for the significant logistical, material, and diplomatic support they received. By the mid-1980s, Ethiopia and Sudan were engaged in mutual subversion and destabilization, weakening each

other's domestic regimes.. Even the fall of Nimeri's regime which eventually brought Omar el-Bashir to power did not bring any change in their troubled bilateral relations. The situation temporarily changed only after the fall of the Derg in Addis Ababa and *de facto* secession of Eritrea in 1991 (Aalen, 2014; Belete, 2013; 2016; Young, 2012; 2020).

In general, Ethio-Sudan relations in the pre-1991 era, particularly in the context of the Cold War which made the Horn of Africa one of the flashpoints of regional rivalries in which the two superpowers provided support, was tense and mutually destructive. Both Ethiopia and Sudan were entangled in domestic insecurities and regional confrontations while Egypt, the main ally of Sudan, indirectly managed to keep Ethiopia's attention off the Nile and Sudan's bargaining power subordinate to that of Egypt's.

### **8.3. Ethiopia's Engagement with and Policies toward Egypt under EPRDF**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the starting point of Ethiopia's foreign policy and relations in the early 1990s was mainly based on the EPRDF-led government's conviction that the rivalry between Ethiopia and its near and distant neighbours was an outcome of the failure of pre-1991 regimes of Ethiopia. It accused its predecessors of having a "siege mentality", engaging in "warmongering", and desiring to externalize domestic problems. These factors led Ethiopia's neighbours to view it as a troublemaker. Like the case of Eritrea and Somalia, therefore, Ethiopia's engagement with and policies toward Egypt under the EPRDF was informed by good neighbourliness and non-interference, although it has its own unique features. This section discusses the three phases in which the engagement and policy evolved.

### 8.3.1. Appeasement and Goodwill

Ethiopia's transitional president, later Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi and Egypt's president Hosni Mubarak met for the first time as leaders of their respective countries at Bole International Airport when Mubarak was heading back to Egypt from Zimbabwe (*Addis Zemen*, 4 February 1992). It was a brief but important meeting that set the ground for next meetings at the ministerial and heads of state/government levels in which Egypt's Amr Musa and Ethiopia's Seyoum Mesfin played important roles in jumpstarting bilateral relations. Ethiopia's leaders were eager and willing to transform the relations from its lowest state to one that is based on mutual understanding and mutual interest. Hence, the approach looked more of an appeasement intending to signal good will to Egyptian leaders (KII #1, personal communication).

A key informant to this research, a senior diplomat who was privy to several meetings between Ethiopia's Prime Minister and Egypt's president, noted that Meles and his foreign minister Seyoum Mesfin focused on building trust between the two states. Therefore, one of the most important remarks that Meles made during the 1993 meeting in Cairo was telling. The diplomat recalled,

*Meles understood what Egyptians wanted. He knew that they were not ready and willing to change the status quo over the utilization of the Nile. But he also wants them to understand that Ethiopia wants to benefit from the water that flows out from within its territory. Therefore, in a reassuring manner he told Mubarak 'we understand that you cannot change your policies overnight. We understand that Egypt is a very big vessel and it needs time to change its direction. We are relatively smaller and we can wait a little' (KII #1, personal communication).*

Key informants believe that Egypt agreed to discuss on the Nile and finally signed the 1 July 1993 *Framework for General Cooperation between the Arab Republic of Egypt and Ethiopia* partly due

to Ethiopia's new approach. It was also partly due to Egypt's own understanding that the new regime was less hostile than the previous one. The Ethiopian government viewed the agreement as "...a document in which Egypt, for the first time, recognizes Ethiopia's right on the Nile Water" (*Addis Zemen*, 3 July 1993). The agreement, therefore, provided for the establishment of a "broad base of common interest", realization of the two states "full economic and resource potentials", "the Nile River with its basin as a centre of mutual interest" and adherence to "the principles of good neighbourliness, peaceful settlement of disputes, and non-interference in the internal affairs of states" (see the preamble and article 1). They also agreed to commit for "the consolidation of mutual trust and understanding" and recognized "the importance of their cooperation as an essential means to promote their economic and political interests as well as stability of the region" (see articles 2 and 3).

The most important provisions of the July 1993 agreement were, however, articles 4 and 5 which pertain to the Nile. Per article 4, Egypt and Ethiopia agreed that "...the issue of the Nile waters shall be worked out in detail through discussions by experts from both sides, on the basis of the rules and principles of international law". And, article 5 provided that "Each party shall refrain from engaging in any activity related to the Nile waters that may cause appreciable harm to the interests of the other party". On means of cooperation, the two have agreed to "...create mechanism for consultations on matters of mutual concern, including the Nile waters, in a manner that would enable them to work together for peace and stability in the region" (see article 7). This is, almost all informants agree, the first official instrument in the Ethio-Egyptian relations in which Egypt formally accepted Ethiopia as a legitimate actor that has a stake on the Nile. Although it was not binding, it was a very important agreement at that time (KII #1, personal communication). Scholars

who studied the two states' relations also consider this to be the case (Erlich, 2001 and Yacob, 2007).

However, senior diplomats and the scholars had also expressed their misgivings about some of the provisions of the agreement, particularly article 5 and 7. A former senior diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who currently works as a regional security consultant noted that “perhaps due to lack of competence or understanding of how complex the issue of the Nile is, Meles and his team made a grave mistake of inscribing Egyptian talking points in the agreement. For instance, the phrase “refraining from causing appreciable harm” in relation to the Nile was very problematic as Egyptians interpret this to mean not affecting the amount of water they allocated to themselves by the 1959 agreement” (KII #4, personal communication).

Yacob Arsano expressed a similar reservation about the phrase in article 5 as he considers it tantamount to agreeing “not to cause appreciable harm” on Egypt's claimed share. He also views article 7 as pledging to consult Egypt, which never consulted upstream countries, when planning to use the waters of the Nile. From his perspective, “For Egypt, the agreement may provide support for the country's long-term position, e.g. regarding prior notification. But for Ethiopia, some articles are inconsistent with Ethiopia's negotiation strategy prior to the agreement as well as in the present Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) process” (Yacob, 2007, p. 103). Nevertheless, the senior diplomats interviewed for the purpose of this dissertation, while conceding that the problematic nature of the provisions, note that given Egypt's intransigence over the Nile issue and condescending view toward Ethiopia, showing some good will that shows empathy was pragmatic. In fact, one senior diplomat noted that “had we continued the way the Derg approached Egyptians,

they would not have been interested to engage with Ethiopia the way they do after the EPRDF came to power” (KII #1, personal communication). As much as this argument is compelling, however, Egyptians have not yet accepted upstream country’s (including Ethiopia) demand to have a new legal framework that replaces the 1929 and 1959 treaties.

### **8.3.2. “Good Neighbourliness”: Mission Impossible?**

Although relations between Egypt and Ethiopia have been better than the pre-1991 era, they have not yet based their relations on mutual trust and benefit. The rivalry between them was not as intense as it used to be during the previous era. In fact, pleasantries of the diplomats and leaders of the two countries, as reported in the editorials and news pieces of Addis Zemen, creates an impression that the two were heading toward meaningful cooperation. The June 1995 attempted assassination on Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, which had a potential to damage the fledgling diplomatic ties, had also brought them closer in their furry against Sudan which was accused of being behind the attempt and harbouring the assassins. They even jointly initiated a UN resolution that calls for punitive sanctions against Sudan and its leaders who were suspected of being responsible for aiding and abetting those who carried out the assassination attempt (Young, 2012; 2020).

However, the cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt happened to be ephemeral as Egypt did not want Sudan to be significantly weakened. Its main concern was keeping its strategic interest on the Nile intact and not allowing Bashir’s government’s defeat by the SPLM which began to receive massive support from Ethiopia and other regional actors since mid-1995 (KII #4, personal communication; Young, 2012). However, unable to fully restore its ties with Sudan to their former state, Egypt had to seek alternative ways in the region to continue exploiting Ethiopia’s

vulnerabilities in various forms. For instance, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Ethiopian leaders were highly invested in resolving the crisis in Somalia, in addition to addressing Ethiopia's own post-war predicaments. Acting on behalf of Ethiopia's interest as a neighbour and on behalf of the OAU as a close observer, Ethiopia had hosted dozens of "peace and reconciliation conferences" to help Somalis settle their differences.

To the dismay of Ethiopian leaders, Egypt also started to host its own version of "Somali peace process" inviting rival warlords to Cairo. From the perspective of Ethiopian leaders, by inserting itself in the scene, Egypt was duplicitous and it was acting as a classic spoiler (KII #1, personal communication). In fact, Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly decried Egypt's involvement as "an obstacle to bring peace in Somalia" (*Addis Zemen*, 24 December 1997). However, Egypt's foreign minister Amr Mussa retorted that Egypt had no intention to sabotage Ethiopia's efforts. According to him, the Cairo agreement was built on the Sodere process. He said that "Like Ethiopia, Egypt also gives attention to Somalia's problems. The rumours that are circulating regarding the role of Egypt are simply untrue. The relation between Egypt and Ethiopia is way better than rumoured and I had fruitful discussions with both Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin" (*Addis Zemen*, 27 February 1998).

Nevertheless, contrary to Amr Mussa's statement, Ethiopia's foreign minister Seyoum Mesfin said that:

*...in addition to the emergence of several clan based factions and warlords, what complicated Somalia's problem is external actors and their undue interference. IGAD is willing to support those who are genuinely interested in helping the people of Somalia. The sad thing, however, is the result gained from the responsibility given to Ethiopia and IGAD's own effort has been derailed by the recent event in Cairo. Since actions taken by external meddling would multiply new agendas and complicate problems rather than*

*helping Somalis solving their problem, the best option is to align with IGAD's plans (Addis Zemen, 19 March 1998).*

Apparently, Ethiopian officials viewed Egypt's behaviour as a deliberate act of destabilizing the region and as a continuation of its pre-1991 policy toward Ethiopia. In their assessment, as Egypt's relations with Sudan was not as warm as it used to be and since Ethio-Sudan relations, except between 1995 and 1999, was not as hostile as it was, Somalia appeared to be the only available avenue through which Egypt can project its influence in the Horn. Hence, they believed that what Egypt did in relation to Somalia had a lot to do with Ethiopia than Somalia itself. In fact, based on their engagement with Egypt both in bilateral and multilateral channels aimed at addressing differences among riparian states, they understood that Egypt was interested in maintaining the status quo. They were also convinced that although Ethiopia, as Meles promised in the 1993 meeting with Mubarak, was willing to give time for Egypt to readjust its positions vis-à-vis the Nile issue, Egypt was not willing to do that (KIIs #1, #2, #4, personal communication).

Therefore, waiting for Egypt appeared to be a futile effort, especially given Egypt's readiness to exploit any of Ethiopia's vulnerabilities including Ethiopia's inability to finance development projects on the Nile. Like the pre-1991 era, Egypt used its strategic partnership with powerful states and access to multilateral financial institutions to deny any possibility of external funding for Ethiopia. From Nile 2002 to the Nile Basin Initiative as well as the Eastern Nile Joint Committee which aimed at harmonizing development aspirations of the Nile basin states, it became clear to Ethiopian leaders that Egypt's position was maintaining the 1929 and 1959 agreements intact (KIIs #1, #2, #4 personal communication). Hence, appeasement, good will, and "good neighbourliness" would not bring any meaningful change.

### 8.3.3. Countering Hegemonic Projection

By late 1990s, it was clear for Ethiopian leaders—to Meles Zenawi, Seyoum Mesfin, the then Minister of Water Resources Shiferaw Jarso and others—that the only way Ethiopia can use the Nile is only if it builds its own capacity to do so. This became very clear, particularly, to Meles and his government who viewed poverty as an existential threat to Ethiopia and accelerated development the solution (KIIs #1, #2, #4, personal communication). Although some, like Haggai Erlich (2001), view Egypt's post-1991 willingness to engage with Ethiopia and other upper riparian states through bilateral and multilateral channels as a positive development, there has been no substantive change in Egypt's position. Seyoum Mesfin, perhaps frustrated by Egypt's intransigence, asserted that “Egypt has used the Nile water alone since the biblical era and that should be enough” (*Addis Zemen*, 13 January 1998). And, when he was asked whether Egypt's stance that the Nile is existential issue would lead to a conflict, Seyoum responded that

*Ethiopia understands Egypt's interest on the Nile. Let alone Ethiopia anyone from afar can understand the importance of the Nile for Egypt. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Egypt should maintain its monopoly over the Nile. Egypt is doing this but this does not mean that it should continue like this. Fulfilling one's interest at the expense of others is an outdated approach* (*Addis Zemen*, 13 January 1998).

Similarly, in the lead up to a 1999 ministerial meeting of riparian states hosted by Ethiopia, Ethiopia's Minister of Water Resources, Shiferaw Jarso said that “we have to change the lives of Ethiopians by ending [Egypt's] desire to use the Nile waters exclusively and using it for irrigation and hydro-power to change the lives of Ethiopians” (*Addis Zemen*, 30 April 1999). He further noted that

*...the absence of any common agreement on the utilization of the Nile waters has complicated the utilization of the water among the riparian countries. And, since there is*

*a conviction that there must be just, shared and equitable utilization of the water, we are preparing for its realization. In order to use the water resources for the sake of our people, we have also completed preparation of an integrated plan (Addis Zemen, 30 April 1999).*

Thus, from the perspective of Ethiopian officials, as long as Egypt continues its hegemonic posturing and projection based on treaties rejected by upstream states, Ethiopia was forced to pursue two interrelated paths to ensure equitable utilization of the Nile. The first strategy involved constructing dams on Nile tributaries, such as the Tekeze and Tana Beles by raising local funds as international financiers were unwilling to support these projects due to pressure from Egypt and its allies. . This has been extremely challenging due to limited local capacity to fund the planned dams. As a country that still grapples with poverty and other national priorities, raising funds from local sources remained a bottleneck. Yet, the government determined that it has to do it anyway (KII #1, personal communication).

The second strategy, which has reshaped not only Ethio-Egyptian relations but also the entire upstream-downstream dynamics, involves fostering collaboration with other upstream states to develop a comprehensive treaty governing the utilization of the Nile. . Implied in the second path is ending Egypt's hegemonic projection and Sudan's bandwagoning both through bilateral and multilateral actions (KII #1, personal communication). Therefore, after ten years of negotiations through the NBI, in which both Egypt and Sudan had been dragging their feet, an agreement was drafted and tabled for signature in May 2010. The *Agreement on the Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework*, colloquially known as Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), was signed by six of the nine members of the NBI, namely; Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. This partially fulfils the 2/3 majority requirement. Nevertheless, it is yet to come into

effect since it has not been enacted by the parliaments of all the six signatories. Egypt, along with Sudan, have been trying everything so that this does not happen.

Regardless, the agreement has been seen as a historic milestone that marked “the beginning of the end of Egyptian hydro-political hegemony” (Abadir, 2011). However, Meles was pessimistic as far as Egypt was concerned. In a March 2011 interview, he said that

*...whether the agreement is enacted or not, I have no illusion that Egypt will change its position. I do not believe that Egyptians will support the fair utilization of the Nile water among riparian states. If they support this, Egyptians will benefit. If Ethiopia builds a dam, they will be built in deep valleys. They will not be exposed to evaporation. The water volume will also increase in billions of cubic meters. The Nile agenda is not about redistributing the water that Egypt uses but rather enabling the riparian states to use it scientifically. The CFA benefits Egyptians and does not violate their rights. Egypt's opposition to the agreement is, therefore, politically motivated (Addis Zemen, 13 March 2011).*

In fact, by 2010/2011, Meles was certain that the most effective way to deal with Egypt's intransigence was using the multilateral platform while preparing oneself to end its hegemony. From his perspective, “...when the upper riparian countries create a collective front to work for justice on this issue at the international level, the international balance will be improved....the imbalance will show slight improvements” (Addis Zemen, 14 March 2011). Hence, he did not waste the opportune moment created by the Arab spring that entangled Egypt in its domestic problems. Although preparation had been underway way before 2011, it was the right moment to kick off one of the largest dams on the Nile, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The commencement of building the GERD was thus announced in April 2011.

One can argue that if the signing of the CFA “marked the beginning of the end of Egypt’s hydro-political hegemony”, the commencement of the GERD and its inevitable completion will be the end of Egypt’s hydrohegemony hegemony in Northeast Africa including the Horn of Africa. It also erodes Egypt’s excuse to build/maintain an oversized army. This is perhaps the reason why Meles publicly said that “Egyptian political forces use the issue of the Nile as a drug to divert people’s attention from domestic politics” and to justify having “half a million army, 1.5 million police force, and a total of two to three million security forces” (*Addis Zemen*, 13 March 2011). Therefore, from Meles’s perspective maintaining such a security apparatus “...requires creating a huge enemy and it is easier if it is linked to the Nile water. That is why Egyptian politicians oppose negotiations over the Nile water” (*Addis Zemen*, 13 March 2011). Meles made the most defiant speech, however, during the ground breaking ceremony of the GERD:

*...there will be nothing that will prevent us from exercising our rights. Breaking the shackles of hegemony, the message we would like to convey is that we do not only want to exercise and benefit from our rights but also have the capacity to do so....Our effort to eradicate poverty using our rivers is to our benefit and our neighbours as well. It is not to harm anyone* (*Addis Zemen*, 3 April 2011).

In all, Ethiopia appears to be successful in countering Egypt’s hydro-hegemony and projection in the Horn of Africa. Despite the hegemonic posturing and securitization of the Nile by Egypt, it firmly insisted on keeping it in the development realm while presenting poverty as an existential threat. In addition, by rejecting those treaties that excluded upstream states and pushing for a new comprehensive treaty on the Nile, it positioned itself as a revisionist state vis-à-vis Egypt’s unflagging effort to maintain the status quo. Nevertheless, as the disputes over the Nile and the GERD continue unabated despite several rounds of negotiations, the dynamics of relations between the two states is likely to remain tense and acrimonious.

#### **8.4. Ethiopia's Engagement with and Policies toward Sudan under EPRDF**

At the beginning of the post-1991 era, the Ethio-Sudan relations appeared to be the most promising and cordial in the Horn of Africa. One interesting instance illustrates this claim. From the London Conference that preceded the fall of the Derg to the arrival of Meles and his comrades in Addis Ababa, the Government of Sudan was highly involved in Ethiopia's transition through its intelligence officers. In fact, "Sudanese intelligence officials Osman el-Sayid and Fatih Erwa [attended the London Conference] at the insistence of the TPLF. They were the only foreigners at the conference apart from the US representatives, which made clear their stature and the support that Sudan provided in the final phase of the war" (Young, 2020, p. 8). As mentioned elsewhere, it was also the Sudanese intelligence that helped locate some of the participants of the 1991 Peace and Democracy Conference, particularly the WSLF (Markakis, 1996). One of the officials, Osman el-Sayid, also later served as Sudan's ambassador to Ethiopia during much of the 1990s (Young, 2020). Nevertheless, Ethio-Sudan relations was so dynamic that it went from promising bilateral relations to armed confrontation and back again to very close ties and regional alliance. Several factors are responsible for this including Sudan's Islamist ideology, the Nile, and other common regional concerns. This section focuses on the dynamics of this engagement.

##### **8.4.1. Idealism and Cooperation**

Like its initial policy toward Eritrea and Somalia, EPRDF's government policy toward and engagement with Sudan was based on its conviction that relations should be based on good neighbourliness and non-interference. Leaders like Meles Zenawi blamed previous Ethiopian leaders for the adversarial relations between the two states. In a state dinner hosted at Menelik II's palace in honour of President Omar el-Bashir on 22 October 1991, Meles remarked:

*Dear brother Lieutenant General Omar el-Bashir, a new chapter has been opened regarding Ethiopia's relations with its neighbours. By eradicating the warmongering policies of the Derg, a conducive environment is created for a new form of relations built on peace, friendship, love, cooperation, and collaboration between the people of Ethiopia and their counterparts in the neighbouring countries. It gives me great pleasure to assure you that this policy will definitely replace Derg's hateful and warmongering policy which created a discord between Ethiopian and Sudanese people (Addis Zemen, 24 October 1991).*

In this particular speech, Meles did not only express his government's preparedness for a new bilateral relations but also rejected the previous Ethiopian government's accusation against Sudan's interference while blaming them for interfering in Sudan's internal affairs. He said that "previous Ethiopian leaders had been blaming neighbouring countries when the people of Ethiopia rebelled against the oppression imposed on them....the dictators had been meddling in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries derailing regional peace and stability" (*Addis Zemen*, 24 October 1991). Although one may argue that this was merely a statement to please or appeal for a new partnership with the guest of honour, Bashir, what Meles did was reflecting a shared aversion toward the previous regime. This was also reflected in Bashir's speech who welcomed the changes in Ethiopia and noted that "bilateral relation between the two [states] was not good due to the former regime's support for Sudanese rebels. From now onwards, Sudan and Ethiopia will not need to prepare for war" (*Addis Zemen*, 26 October 1991).

In addition to aversions toward previous regimes, Meles and other senior EPRDF officials owe Sudan even more than Somalia. Sudan was not only providing support to them during their time as rebel leaders, it was also the main transit route through which they communicate with the rest of the world beyond the Ethiopian border (KIIs #1, #2, personal communication). Sudanese

officials also did not hide their optimism toward the new reality in Ethiopia. Osman el-Sayid, who already became Sudan's ambassador to Ethiopia in 1991 said that "the ongoing transition in Ethiopia lays the foundation of peace for Ethiopia, and stability, cooperation and mutual understanding in the region ensuring the principle of non-interference" (*Addis Zemen*, 17 November 1991). It was in this spirit that Ethiopia and Sudan signed the 24 October 1991 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Hence, relations between Sudan and Ethiopia were on a good footing in the first four years.

As a result, the Ethiopian government took several measures including the expulsion of the SPLM from its bases in Gambella and handing over all SPLM-related documents in the hands of the Ethiopian government to the Government of Sudan (Young, 2012). They also collaborated in the effort to end the crises in Somalia and practice of interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring states (*Addis Zemen*, 25 November 1992). Through a Joint Ministerial Commission that meets alternately in Addis Ababa and Khartoum, they also attempted to widen the spheres of cooperation (KII #1, #4, personal communication). For instance, following the 1993 Joint Ministerial Commission's meeting, they signed agreements and protocols that expanded their cooperation to "foreign affairs, defence, planning and economic affairs, health, mining, energy generation, education, industry, regional environmental development and protection, transport and communication, etc." (*Addis Zemen*, 27 November 1992).

Ethiopia's engagement with Sudan continued more or less smoothly until the mid-1990s. During this period, only two issues appeared to bother Ethiopian officials. The first was cross border skirmishes between Ethiopian and Sudanese farmers along their non-demarcated borders which had long been a source of border dispute between the two states (Belete, 2013; 2016). The second pertains to Sudan's Islamist ideology and its regional repercussions. In a 1994 interview, Seyoum

Mesfin downplayed the first issue as “a minor boundary dispute” and stated that “except intermittent challenges posed by farmers and merchants competition over and incursions into fertile lands which are being settled through discussions, Ethio-Sudan relations is going well based on common interests” (*Addis Zemen*, 14 July 1994).

However, Seyoum did not hide his concern regarding the second issue, i.e. Sudan’s Islamist ideology. He said that “since the ideology of the Sudanese government sometimes crosses the boundaries of states, and since this is interference in the internal affairs of other states which will return us to the previously bad relations, it needs to be taken carefully”. Moreover, Seyoum noted that “the same problem had happened between Eritrea and Sudan. Sooner or later, as this will also have impacts on Ethiopia, Ethiopia believes that the situation has to be addressed early” (*Addis Zemen*, 14 July 1994). In hindsight, this was signalling what was to come in almost a year later, i.e. the attempted assassination on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995 and the ensued hostilities between Ethiopia and Sudan.

#### **8.4.2. Rivalry and Subversion**

In the 1990s, Omar el-Bashir’s government was under the influence of the National Islamic Front (NIF) which was in turn under the influence of its leader Hassan al-Turabi. The domestic and foreign policies of the Government of Sudan were thus defined by NIF’s views and regional aspirations. Al-Turabi and the NIF were already attempting to expand their ideology in and outside Sudan through NGOs, relief associations, and affiliated movements in the region. In areas that are adjacent to Sudan’s eastern borders, as in Benishangul Gumuz and western parts of Eritrea, they were also providing support to emerging Islamist movements. With Eritrea, relations had already been damaged due to the alleged support for Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ). The United States had also been accusing Sudan of sheltering international jihadists including Osama Bin Laden (Young,

2012; 2020). As mentioned above, Ethiopian officials were also concerned by Sudan's attempts to expand its ideology beyond its borders.

Amidst concerns about expansion of Islamist movements from Sudan to Ethiopia, Ethio-Sudan relations deteriorated following the attempted assassination of Hosni Mubarak in June 1995. The incident had also negatively, though temporarily, affected Ethiopia's image as the host of the Organization of African Unity's headquarters. Hence, the government had vigorously investigated the incident. Although it did not quickly accuse Sudan of being behind the assassination attempt, it called for punitive actions against Sudan once it established the facts. In a statement made on 1 September 1995, Ethiopia's ministry of Foreign Affairs squarely and publicly accused Sudan of being behind the assassination attempt, sheltering the fugitives, and failing to extradite them based on the Treaty of Friendship the two had signed in October 1991. The statement specifically asserted that

*...the good neighbourly relations that have been cultivated over the past four years have been endangered by extremists that are operating within the National Islamic Front. The Sudanese government, particularly NIF, is responsible for the deterioration of the two countries' relations. There is no doubt about this. The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, in order to protect and defend its peoples' interest and security, is forced to take all necessary measures and carefully look into alternative avenues (Addis Zemen, 2 September 1995).*

To this effect, and claiming that "it has become impossible to continue bilateral relations in a manner that has been progressing", the government took stringent measures against Sudanese missions and interests in Ethiopia. These included (a) shutting down Sudan's consular office in Gambella, all NGOs that are affiliated directly or indirectly to Sudan, etc. All Sudanese employees working in these organizations were also required to leave Ethiopia within a week; (b) the number

of diplomats in the Sudanese embassy to Ethiopia was required not to exceed four including the Ambassador. All other personnel were required to leave Ethiopia within seven days. Ethiopia also reduced the number of its diplomats who were stationed in Khartoum; (c) The Sudanese Airways have been suspected of being involved in “smuggling terrorists”. Therefore, employees working in its Addis Ababa office were also required to leave Ethiopia. Ethiopian Airlines also suspended its flights to Sudan; and (d) Any Sudanese citizen who wished to come to Ethiopia had to get an entry visa, the visa free privilege that was granted to neighbouring countries was made inapplicable to them (*Addis Zemen*, 2 September 1995). In addition, Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Meles warned Sudan that “We will not refrain from taking all necessary measures if there is anyone conspiring against and implementing actions contrary to our security and national interest” (*Addis Zemen*, 2 September 1995).<sup>122</sup>

Following the above, relations between the two further deteriorated and Sudan became increasingly isolated and subjected to concerted regional and international pressures. Ethiopia and Egypt, for the first time in the history of their bilateral relations, also collaborated on regional security issues and tabled a punitive resolution against Sudan to the United Nations. Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda poured support for the SPLM in a bid to topple the Sudanese government (KII #1, #2, #4, personal communication). The US government provided weapons amounting to 20 million dollars to Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda through its support for “frontline states against terrorism” fund (Young, 2012). Although the Ethiopian government at the time denied sending troops to Sudan in support of the SPLM (*Addis Zemen*, 16 January 1996), its forces had captured

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<sup>122</sup> A very senior diplomat who closely worked with the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told the present researcher that Meles never believed that Sudan’s president Omar el-Bashir was involved in the attempted assassination. He rather suspected the senior leadership of the NIF and Sudanese intelligence (KII #1, personal communication).

and handed over territories to SPLM fighters in areas adjacent to the Ethiopian borders (KII #1, personal communication; Young, 2012; 2020).

Given the above, it seemed that the Government of Ethiopia had learned an important lesson from its relations with Sudan, i.e. in foreign relations “it takes two to tango”. As the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Seyoum Mesfin noted, “...a desire to impose one’s view on others and lack of willingness to abide by international law makes it difficult not only to build friendship but also living side by side. From this perspective, it is conspicuously visible that the extremist government of Sudan has been an obstacle to friendship-cultivating foreign policy” (*Addis Zemen*, 16 January 1996). Seyoum further noted that “...two important lessons have been learned from the relationship with Sudan. First, a regime that does not try to solve its internal problems and does not believe in peoples’ equality cannot respect other states’ dignity and sovereignty. Secondly, without the cooperation of others, a lone effort for friendship and cooperation will not take us anywhere (*Addis Zemen*, 16 January 1996). This tells us one thing: the imminent change in Ethiopia’s foreign policy and engagement as its leaders realized that there is a gap between their conviction and how countries of the region behave.

In all, the new development after June 1995 brought back rivalries and mutual subversions of the old days between Ethiopia and Sudan. Ethiopia vigorously provided political and military assistance to the SPLM, while Sudan provided support to the weakened OLF and smaller rebel movements from Gambella and Benishangul Gumuz regions. Coupled with Eritrean and Ugandan support for Sudanese opposition and rebel movements, Ethiopia was in a better position in terms of weakening the regime in Khartoum. Given its refusal to extradite suspects, a call supported by the UN and major powers, and US’s labelling of Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, Bashir’s

government's days appeared to be numbered. The SPLM was gradually having the upper hand against the Sudanese government. However, the presumably imminent collapse of Bashir's government was interrupted by the "unexpected" war between Ethiopia and Eritrea (KII #1, #4, personal communication). The outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war in 1998 was indeed a blessing in disguise for Sudan as both Ethiopia and Eritrea scrambled to restore their relations with Sudan to secure their western borders (Young, 2012).

#### **8.4.3. Rapprochement and Alliance**

By 1997, Ethiopia and Sudan were trading accusations of provocation, military incursion and subversion. Ethiopia was particularly accusing Sudan of preparing for war. The then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Tamirat Layne said, in May 1996, that "Sudan has been amassing its soldiers near the border and is engaged in subversive actions despite Ethiopia's frequent demand that it stops such provocative activities." (*Addis Zemen*, 26 May 1996). War appeared to have loomed across the borders of the two states. Nevertheless, the Ethio-Eritrean war suddenly turned everything upside down. Within a short period of time, the Ethio-Eritrean alliance against Sudan was replaced by the Ethio-Sudan alliance against Eritrea and eventually became the San'a Forum in which Ethiopia, Sudan, and Yemen forged a united front against Eritrea. The Ethio-Sudan rapprochement was an important milestone not only for their bilateral relations but also for their own respective domestic security and the Horn of Africa's regional security dynamics as they have agreed to stop supporting each other's rebels. Both Ethiopia and Sudan were eager to restore their relations as it meant strengthening their standing both domestically and regionally (KII #1, personal communication).

In October 1998, Ethiopian Airlines resumed flights to Khartoum (*Addis Zemen*, 2 October 1998), and in 2000, Sudan and Ethiopia "agreed to speed up border developments" and established the

Joint Border Development Commission (*Addis Zemen*, 27 April 2000). In 2002, Ethiopia signed an agreement to buy oil from Sudan (*Addis Zemen*, 20 September 2001). In the following four years, they signed multiple agreements and protocols pertaining to demarcation of borders, cross border trade, energy supply, and security cooperation. Personal relations between Meles and Bashir improved a lot and paved ways for the improvement of relations between the two states. The expulsion of Al Turabi from Sudan and the increasingly closer personal relationship between Meles and Bashir further cemented ties between Ethiopia and Sudan. For Bashir, Meles became not just counterpart from a neighbouring state but also a close friend who helped him when he was internationally isolated due to the Darfur crisis and the indictment by the International Criminal Court (KIIs #1, #2, #4, personal communication).

Meles also eventually stopped to view Sudan as a major threat in Ethiopia's pursuit to use the Nile water and started to consider its intransigence as an outcome of its closeness to and influence from Egypt. For instance, in relation to the dispute over the Nile, Meles said that "Although Sudan does not have a view that is different from Egypt regarding the Nile issue, its position is different in terms of content. The main problem is not Sudan; it is Egyptian attitude" (*Addis Zemen*, 13 March 2011). Hence, he endeavoured to strengthen bilateral relations with Sudan and ensure that the two states support each other in common areas of concern. When the problem of South Sudan was set to be resolved through the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, he avoided siding with any of them and told Bashir that although he was against secession given Ethiopia's bad experience with Eritrea, he preferred not to publicly comment on the issue to avoid accusations of interference in internal affairs of Sudan. Plus the issue also appeared to be a matter of principle as Meles also believed in the right to self-determination (KII #4, personal communication; Young, 2012).

The growing positive relations between the two was attested by two occasions: the conflict over resource-rich Abiye between Sudan and South Sudan and the dispute over the Nile in general and the GERD in particular. In the case of the conflict over the Abiye, the international community was very much concerned that Sudan and South Sudan would return to violent conflict, derailing the hope that peace would finally prevail after South Sudan's independence. IGAD and AU also appeared to have no power to stop the looming escalation of the war between the two states which had already claimed the lives of several people and displaced hundreds of thousands on both sides of the border. What prevented this conflict from further destroying the two states and destabilizing the region was the trust that both Sudanese and South Sudanese leaders had that Ethiopia can help by sending peacekeepers until the two states settle their disputes peacefully.

It was a rare occasion in the Horn of Africa, if not in the world, that a neighbouring state was entrusted with bilateral security affairs of other states. Both Sudan and South Sudan agreed and Sudan was particularly very willing to accept Ethiopian peacekeepers as it wanted to avoid an international mission that looked like the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). Hence, Ethiopia deployed its troops as UNISFA (United Nations Interim Security Force for Abiye). This mission was unique as it was almost entirely staffed by Ethiopian military personnel. Ethiopian officials viewed this as “a commendation for its successful engagement with Sudan and its positive role in the region” (KII #1, personal communication).

The most interesting case that demonstrates the positive changes in the Ethio-Sudan relations, however, was Sudan's softening of its position on the issue of the Nile and its eventual support for the GERD. A senior diplomat noted that

*One of the most consequential diplomatic achievements in the post-1991 Ethiopia foreign relations was decoupling Egypt and Sudan vis-à-vis Ethiopia and the Nile. Everyone knows*

*that Sudan's foreign policy was under Egyptian influence. It is true that Sudan still sided with Egypt when it comes to the CFA. But, from the perspective of Ethiopia's national interest, the fact that Sudan did not oppose the construction of the GERD contrary to Egyptian pressure was a major policy shift (KII #2, personal communication).*

Other diplomats also agree with the above statement. Sudan had been bandwagoning with Egypt's hydro-hegemony since its independence in 1956. As discussed in the previous section, Egypt had not been committed to legal and political developments that would change the status quo. Nor was it that much interested to accommodate the demands of upstream states. Sudan was made part of this Egyptian policy and had at least benefited from the status quo compared to upstream states. Hence, it was not easy to change its position vis-à-vis the Nile altogether. However, Ethiopia, through the ever improving bilateral relations was able to convince Sudan that the GERD would not harm its interests. Thus, no opposition, let alone support, to the GERD from Sudan should be seen as a major diplomatic achievement (KIIs #1, #4, personal communication).

In all, Ethiopia's engagement with Sudan in the post-1991 era was so dynamic and deep. As states that share the longest border, the Nile water, and historical patterns of amity and enmity in the region, bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Egypt had seen their highest and lowest points over a period of more than two decades. Sudan is a very important neighbour not only because it shares the longest border with Ethiopia but also because it is a buffer between Egypt and Ethiopia. Its bandwagoning with Egypt had negatively affected its relations with Ethiopia both in the pre- and post-1991 era. The importance of the improved ties since the early 2000s cannot be overstated as it benefited the two states both domestically and in their foreign relations.

## **8.5. Conclusion**

By examining the dynamics of Ethiopia's engagement with and policies toward Egypt and Sudan, this chapter has shown how the politics of the Nile affects Ethiopia's national interest and security

and the region's stability. There are three most important dimensions to the politics of the Nile. The first is that, for Egypt, it is all about maintaining the status quo and enhancing its hydro-hegemonic positioning and projection. As such, it has made the Nile a national security issue and, doing so, it invested a lot in destabilizing upstream countries, particularly Ethiopia. It has also been successful in blocking Ethiopia from getting any funds from international financiers. As a result, it was able to prevent Ethiopia from using the waters of the Nile until early 2000s. It also ensured that Sudan accepted its hegemony and followed its position vis-à-vis the issue of the Nile.

Secondly, for Sudan, there is no doubt that the Nile is a very important natural resource as it waters its expansive agricultural sector and hydropower plants. As a signatory to the 1959 treaty with Egypt, it also benefits from the status quo compared to the upstream states that are excluded from the water allocated by the treaty. Hence, in addition to being under the influence of Egypt, Sudan had no compelling reason not to bandwagon with Egypt's hydro-hegemony. Despite other differences pertaining to Sudan's own domestic politics that sometimes negatively affect its relations with Egypt, Sudan shares the same concern with Egypt as a downstream state. However, unlike Egypt, its relations with Ethiopia and the other riparian states is not only limited to the issue of the Nile. It shares a long and porous border with Ethiopia and other cross border issues such as trade, illicit activities, etc. also matter to Sudan.

Finally, the third important dimension is that, for Ethiopia, the Nile per se has never been a security matter. It has mainly been a natural resource which has to be exploited for national development. However, the politics of the Nile has been directly and indirectly affecting its national security as the two downstream states interfered in its internal affairs in a bid to destabilize it and distract it from planning to use the Nile. The 1959 treaty and Egypt's diplomatic campaign virtually excluded it from using the Nile. Therefore, it has to counter not only Egypt's hydro-hegemony but also

Sudan's bandwagoning. This makes Ethiopia a state that pursues change in the legal and political modes of relation in the Nile valley. Unlike the traditionally understood position of Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa vis-à-vis Eritrea and Somalia, Ethiopia assumes the identity of a revisionist state in relation to the Nile issue. Furthermore, Ethiopia sought to expand its relations beyond the politics of the Nile and focus on common bilateral and regional concerns. Doing so, Ethiopia had successfully decoupled Egypt and Sudan on the issue of the GERD at least in 2018, although Sudan did not change its position on the overall issue of the Nile including the CFA.

## Chapter Nine

### Synthesis and Conclusion:

#### National Security, Domestic/External Insecurities and Their Interplay

##### 9.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is synthesizing the key findings of the dissertation with the broader body of knowledge and the theoretical framework in line with the research questions/objectives. It also concludes the dissertation by highlighting the theoretical arguments, empirical evidence and implications of the research. As stated in chapter one, the overarching objective of this dissertation is to examine Ethiopia's national security predicament in the context of the post-1991 political order and the Horn of Africa's security complex. In so doing, it specifically aimed to identify the major domestic and external vulnerabilities of and threats to Ethiopia's security as defined, framed, and dealt with by the state/regime; analyse the interplay of domestic and external vulnerabilities and threats, and; examine the efficacy of the state's (or the post-1991 regime's) responses. Based on the above, and in the statement of the problem, the dissertation is anchored on the following propositions or central theses: (a) Ethiopia's security predicament is generated by the low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and political legitimacy accompanied by recurrent internal political violence, and hence, domestic insecurity dilemma; (b) despite the above, the external dimension of (in)security has also been important, and the domestic insecurity dilemma does not always trump the external, and (c) the combination of (a) and (b) creates a pattern of interplays between the domestic and external dimensions of (in)security. This inextricably links Ethiopia's national security with that of the stability and security of its neighbours in particular and the region in general.

Methodologically, the dissertation adopted a constructivist research paradigm and used qualitative case studies to elucidate the threats and vulnerabilities that the Ethiopian state has been facing. The dissertation relied on both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected/generated through systematic extraction of data from more than two decades of *Addis Zemen's* publications, purposively selected key informant interviews, review of relevant documents. It also used secondary sources. The secondary sources include published and unpublished academic works and policy papers.

The constructivist research paradigm helped to examine and understand how Ethiopian leaders, decision makers, policy makers, and other pertinent actors define, describe, frame, and deal with or respond to vulnerabilities and threats. Indeed, the main goal of this dissertation was neither to discover indisputable facts nor uncover a hidden national secret. It was rather to thematically trace and analyze the social construction and/or deconstruction of vulnerabilities and threats by Ethiopian policymakers in their dealings with domestic and external security issues. In so doing, based on the theoretical framework discussed in chapter two and the empirical chapters from chapter four through chapter eight, the dissertation presented the major domestic and external vulnerabilities and threats. Furthermore, anchored on the overarching concept of state weakness or weak state, the dissertation relied on a theoretical framework which complements Mohammed Ayooob's (1995; 1997) Subaltern Realism by Buzan and Waever's (2003) Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). The key themes and concepts embedded in the four chapters were, thus, low level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, low level of legitimacy, low level of capacity, high level of recurrent political violence, and patterns of amity and enmity in the dynamics of Ethiopia's relations with its neighbours in the region.

Based on the above, the preceding chapters showed that while the politics of national liberation constitutes both the vulnerabilities of and threats to the Ethiopian state, the inability to build a non-partisan, professional and domestically legitimate national army exemplifies the challenge of building state institutions that ensure the national security of the Ethiopian state. These two cases are taken as important instances of vulnerabilities and threats in the domestic dimension. In terms of the external dimension, Ethiopia's policies and engagements with Eritrea and Somalia as its near neighbours on the one hand and with Egypt and Sudan on the other shows the dynamics of interstate relations in the regional security complex of the Horn of Africa. In this regard, the two chapters on the external dimension demonstrated that there have been real threats to Ethiopia's national security stemming from the aforementioned states and the government's responses evolved from self-imposed restraint to pragmatic regional activism.

Organized into six sections, this chapter analyses and synthesises these findings and concludes the dissertation. Section one is this introduction. Section two summarizes the key findings based on the research questions outlined in the first chapter. The third section interprets the findings by contextualizing or situating them in the broader literature and focusing on their significance and implications. Section four evaluates the theoretical framework in line with the findings of the dissertation. In doing so, it examines the dissertation's theoretical/conceptual contribution. The fifth section explicates the implications of the dissertation's findings to the current challenges and prospects of Ethiopia's national (in)security. Section six concludes the chapter by pointing out the major lessons and takeaways as well as potential areas of future research.

## **9.2. Summary of Key Findings**

This section summarizes the key findings of the dissertation based on the research questions and the four case studies discussed in the preceding four chapters. As may be recalled from the first

chapter, the overarching question of this dissertation is: What are the major sources of Ethiopia's security predicament as defined, framed, and addressed by the state/regime? And, why is Ethiopia's national security inextricably tied to the patterns of interstate relations in the region? The specific questions that are derived from the preceding questions are: what are the major domestic and external security threats to and vulnerabilities of Ethiopia? How has the interplay of internal and external security threats and vulnerabilities affected Ethiopia's national security? How has the state responded to the corresponding security threats and vulnerabilities? Are there observable patterns associated with the state's responses and what is the efficacy of the state's responses? The following subsections summarize the findings.

### **9.2.1. The Domestic Dimension**

From the perspective of security, the main preoccupation of the post-1991 regime has been addressing the "question of nationalities". The leaders and policy documents often argued that failure to do so would result in the disintegration of the Ethiopian state. The political and militarized expressions of the "question of nationalities" are viewed in this dissertation as the politics of national liberation. A theme thoroughly examined in chapter five, the politics of national liberation embodies major domestic vulnerabilities of and threats to the Ethiopian state. It is a manifestation of the Ethiopian state's perennial weakness and insecurity as a state since it targets the *ideational, territorial* , and *institutional expression* or foundation of the state.

Rooted in the controversy and conflict over the way the Ethiopian state was built and sustained, the politics of national liberation poses fundamental challenges not only against successive regimes in power but also the state *qua* state. The politics of national liberation—a supposedly "counter-hegemonic discourse" and a militarized political movement—rejects the legitimacy of both the state and the regimes that controlled state power. It violently confronts the state/regime

through armed insurgency and seeks to either transform or secede from the state. As such, at the heart of the politics of national liberation lies the incomplete and problematic state building process that is still marred by controversy and violence (see chapter five).

There are two dominant variants of the politics of national liberation in Ethiopia. The first—so-called the national oppression thesis—views the Ethiopian state as a “prison of nationalities” and seeks to fundamentally transform state-society relations within Ethiopian borders. The second and the extreme version—known in the scholarly discourse as the colonial thesis—views the Ethiopian state as “a black colonial empire” that is yet to relinquish its colonies. The latter aims for the “full realization of the right to self-determination of the oppressed people”—a euphemism for secession. Therefore, when movements and/or fronts advancing the colonial thesis call for self-determination via referendum, their ultimate goal is secession. However, the goal of movements and/or fronts advancing the national oppression thesis, who also claim that their struggle is for self-determination, has been mostly geared toward self-rule or autonomy, equality, and democracy—albeit the sincerity or lack thereof (see chapter five).

During the pre-1991 period, proponents of both theses resorted to insurgency or armed struggle against the regimes in power. In the post-1991 period, with a relative opening of the political space, most proponents of the national oppression thesis opted for “peaceful struggles”, while proponents of the colonial thesis continued to challenge the state/regime through the barrel of the gun. As mentioned in the fifth chapter, the post-1991 regime itself has been spearheaded by proponents of the national oppression thesis who defeated the pre-1991 military regime under the banner of the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)—the ruling party. The EPRDF-led government thus attempted to address the politics of national liberation through political, legal, and coercive mechanisms. The federalization of the state along ethno-linguistic lines based on the

principle of self-determination including secession appeared to be an incentive encouraging proponents of the national oppression thesis to opt for a peaceful struggle. Nevertheless, prominent proponents of the colonial thesis—particularly the OLF and the ONLF—continued to pose threats both to the regime and the state through armed conflict.

In chapter five, the cases of the OLF and ONLF were discussed as concrete examples of Ethiopia's vulnerabilities and threats. Claiming to struggle for the Oromo and the Ogaden (a Somali clan) peoples' right to self-determination respectively, they waged intermittent but unsettling insurgency against the state and the regime. They posed both political and military threats. In terms of the political threat, they rejected both the state and the regime as legitimate entities. Militarily, the two have—although not able to bring down the government—for more than two decades attempted to project themselves as serious contenders to the monopoly of violence that the regime has over the state. With the exception of a few instances—such as the intense fighting that followed the “Abole massacre” in Somali region and armed clashes with the ENDF in eastern, western and southern Oromia—the military threat was not as strong as the political (see chapter five).

Both in the context of the pre and post-1991 political order, insurgencies and organized movements have received financial and logistical support from external sources—mainly from Ethiopia's regional rivals. Thus, in the context of the post-1991 order, the OLF and ONLF have received significant support from Eritrea and Sudan and even from the warlords of Somalia. They had also been involved in the proxy wars Ethiopia had vis-à-vis its neighbours. A major example in this regard is the interstate rivalry between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the proxy war the two had waged both inside Ethiopia and in neighbouring Somalia. In a bid to weaken the other and have the upper hand at the regional level, the Eritrean government had been providing financial, political, and logistic support for the OLF and ONLF among others since 1998. Between 1995 and 1998,

Ethiopia and Sudan were also involved in mutual subversion by providing military and political support for the SPLM and OLF respectively. Ethiopia's response for the most part was making sure that its rebels and regional rivals do not succeed in destabilizing it (*Addis Zemen*, 22 October 2006). To this end, the EPRDF-led government used a combination of military and diplomatic approaches which was mostly successful in preventing its domestic and regional rivals from achieving their goals.

Another case study presented in this dissertation pertains to the challenge of building and sustaining a legitimate and capable state institution. Chapter six discusses the experience of building the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and the paradoxes associated with it. One of the major decisions made by the leaders of post-1991 Ethiopia was the complete dismantlement of the national army that went through several decades of building, rebuilding, and modernization. It was a battle-tested army that lost the civil war to a coalition of rebel forces—the EPRDF—which later became the ruling party of the post-1991 political order. As observers noted, the process of dismantling and replacing the national army with the new ENDF “...was as though Ethiopia had never had an armed force” before (Adejumobi and Binega, 2006, p.64). Although about 6, 000 members of the former army out of the more than 300,000 were eventually retained due to their special technical skills, the rest were demobilized in the name of post-conflict Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (*Addis Zemen*, 28 May 1995). This decision alone, however, made the new national army's legitimacy suspect in the eyes of many Ethiopians (see chapter six).

The reason for dismantling the entire Ethiopian army that existed until May 1991, according to the EPRDF leaders, was that it served as the instrument of the Derg—the military regime. Therefore, from their perspective, building the national army anew was a justified act—regardless of the economic and political costs of doing so. Nevertheless, what was touted as the new national army

(the ENDF) was also mainly the TPLF/EPRDF rebel forces plus new soldiers from the diverse ethnic groups of the country who were recruited after the ENDF's formal establishment in 1995/96. There have been two fundamental paradoxes characterizing the ENDF ever since its establishment: the legal-political paradox and the legitimacy-capacity paradox (Yonas, 2022).

From a legal perspective, the ENDF was established as a professional and non-partisan national army whose roles are defined by the Federal Constitution and the proclamation formally establishing the army and the regulations governing its members. As a national army, the ENDF and its members are precluded by law from getting involved in partisan political issues and activities. However, the ENDF has not only been a partisan army but also was entrusted with being the last fortress of revolutionary democracy—the ideology of the ruling EPRDF. As clearly inscribed in the various policy documents, manuals, and doctrines, the ENDF was trained and built to be the guardian of the regime in power. For instance, one of the most powerful documents that set out the political foundation of the ENDF—the *Red Book*—unequivocally stated that there is no difference between the state and EPRDF's political system (Building an Army, 2001; Yonas, 2022).

As a defence force, the *Red Book* asserts, the ENDF has to be loyal to and defend EPRDF's revolutionary democracy as much as it defends the state. As an army building manual that dictates how the ENDF should be organized and trained, the *Red Book* clearly takes sides in the political disputes and controversies in the country. Doing so, it requires that recruitment, training, and promotion in the ENDF must take loyalty to revolutionary democracy as mandatory (see chapter six).

In terms of the legitimacy-capacity paradox, we can point out two important issues. The first is the discrepancy between the ENDF's domestic and external legitimacy. That is, the ENDF has been

deployed in several international peace support/peacekeeping missions under the African Union and the United Nations mandates. In addition to putting Ethiopia on the map of the world as one of the largest troop contributing countries in the world, the ENDF was reputed as a disciplined army that “delivers excellently”. Through its participation in international peace support/peacekeeping missions, it also projected Ethiopia’s image as a force of peace and stability in the region. As a state institution, therefore, it had a commendable external legitimacy.

However, contrary to its external legitimacy, the ENDF had not been able to earn legitimacy domestically. With the exception of the pro-EPRDF camp, it had been seen as the instrument of EPRDF’s authoritarian rule and an institution that defends the regime’s security. The fact that the core of the ENDF was the EPRDF’s rebel army—of which the TPLF fighters disproportionately constitute the officer corps—also made it a subject of political controversy. Its role and participation in domestic political conflicts have also tarnished its image. As discussed in chapter five, the lack of a positive view toward the ENDF was reflected not only by observers outside the ENDF but also by officers from within. A sense of being dominated and instrumentalized by a particular political group—the TPLF and its former fighters—had been an issue that was discussed openly and behind closed doors among members of the ENDF (see chapter six).

Despite the above, the ENDF had been the instrument through which Ethiopia projected its influence regionally through unilateral and multilateral interventions. Since the 1990s, it had fought and effectively defended the state from threats that stem from neighbouring states and international and regional terrorists. In the war against Eritrea, it was able to reverse Eritrea’s invasion and contain it within its borders for decades (see chapter seven). In the dispute with Sudan in the 1990s, it took part in training and assisting the SPLM. It also fought inside Sudanese territory in support of the SPLM. In the war against AIAI in the 1990s, the UIC in 2006, and Al Shabaab

since 2009, it carried out major and complex military operations. Doing so, it proved itself to be a capable national army that protects the national interest and national security of Ethiopia. It also enabled Ethiopia—along with the non-military organs—to be considered as a regional hegemon—albeit an imperfect or a contested one. Therefore, while being a partisan national army that lacks domestic legitimacy, the ENDF continued to be a capable state institution that played a major role in Ethiopia’s domestic and regional security endeavours.

In all, the domestic dimension of Ethiopia’s national security predicament is a function of politico-military vulnerabilities and threats stemming primarily from within. The politics of national liberation has been a major source of Ethiopia’s vulnerabilities and threats as it fundamentally challenges not just the regimes in power but also the state *qua* state. The unity, territorial integrity and survival of the state has been endangered by the actions of proponents of national liberation, particularly those advancing the colonial thesis. This phenomenon has been exploited by Ethiopia’s regional rivals and/or archenemies. Therefore, it is both a vulnerability and a threat to both the state and the subsequent regimes. The experience of building a national army exposes Ethiopia’s vulnerability as well. It embodies the deep-rooted division within Ethiopia and the lack of trust on state institutions—no matter how effective they are externally. ENDF’s political partisanship—which is not by accident but by design—definitely blurs the boundary between state and regime security.

### **9.2.2. The External Dimension**

The external dimension of Ethiopia’s national security is an integral part of the Horn of Africa’s regional security complex. In fact, it would be incomplete, even inconceivable, to talk about regional security in the Horn of Africa without talking about the dynamics of Ethiopia’s relations with its near and distant neighbours. As a state geographically located at the centre of the region,

with Africa's second largest population and considerably larger territorial size, Ethiopia is the Horn of Africa's giant, albeit the poverty and insecurity. It is the only state in the region and in Africa that was never colonized except for the brief Italian occupation from 1936-1941. Like the domestic dimension, the way the Ethiopian state was built and sustained shapes how most of the region's states view and behave toward Ethiopia, particularly its near neighbours—Eritrea and Somalia. On the other hand, the rivalry and dispute over the utilization of the Nile River has been a major factor in the interstate relations between Ethiopia and its downstream neighbours—Egypt and Sudan (see chapters seven and eight).

As presented in chapter seven, the security dynamics and policy of Ethiopia's relations with Eritrea and Somalia have evolved through a period of very brief amity and recurring enmity. In the early 1990s, Ethiopian officials adopted a policy that very much reflected idealism and solidarity. They sought to transform the nature of relations between Ethiopia and its neighbours which was characterized by rivalry, mutual subversion, and war. In a bid to build the confidence of Ethiopia's neighbours, they blamed almost everything that went wrong on the pre-1991 regimes. They condemned them for harbouring siege mentality, warmongering, and interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring states. Hence, good neighbourliness and non-interference became the mantra of Ethiopia's engagement with Eritrea and Somalia. This, they thought, would help promote Ethiopia's national interest and security as well as regional stability.

However, despite the aforementioned positive disposition and after a brief period of cooperation, the dynamics of Ethiopia's engagement with the near neighbours—Eritrea and Somalia—started to face challenges. Ethiopian leaders were keen on helping Somalia and/or Somalis to form a central authority through dozens of reconciliation conferences that were held in Sodere and other cities of Ethiopia. They made a deliberate effort not to side with any of the Somali factions to be

accepted as a neutral facilitator/mediator and avoid being drawn into the conflict. However, the interference of extra-regional actors such as Egypt was seen by Ethiopian leaders as duplicitous and disruptive as it divided Somali factions and made Ethiopia's effort more difficult than it already was. Furthermore, the violent threat posed by AIAI from Somalia and some Somali clan leaders/warlords' negative disposition toward Ethiopia made it very difficult to maintain the policy (see chapter seven).

Regarding Eritrea, the EPRDF-led government was initially eager to accommodate the demands of Eritreans—or the EPLF to be specific. It unconditionally allowed Eritreans to hold a referendum. It did this at the expense of its domestic legitimacy. Nevertheless, five years after Eritrea's formal secession, strategic differences and rivalries emerged out of the bilateral relations. At the heart of this lies differences revolving around economic interests and the desire to maximize one's influence at the regional level. This diminished the efficacy of the policy that was based on idealism and solidarity. When, in May 1998, Eritrea invaded Ethiopia, their bilateral relations and cooperation was completely damaged. Therefore, since the late 1990s, Ethiopia's policies and engagement shifted from idealism and solidarity to defensive and offensive strategies, subversive and containment actions as well as regional activism through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms (mainly the IGAD—the region's intergovernmental organization). These came in response to the military threats posed by both the Eritrean regime and Somali factions, warlords and terrorists.

The other aspect of the external dimension is the politics of the Nile. This mainly relates to the hydro-politics of the Nile River in which Egypt maintains dominant and intransigent policy over the utilization of the waters of the Nile, Sudan's junior partnership with Egypt and Ethiopia's resistance thereof. Like the policies toward the near neighbours, the post-1991 Ethiopian government blamed the previous regimes for failing to build friendly relations with the two

countries and attributed this failure, as usual, to the siege mentality, warmongering and interference in the affairs of neighbouring states. It, therefore, pursued policies that are based on principles of good neighbourliness and non-interference.

The initial policy toward Egypt was characterized by appeasement and good will with the aim to build the confidence of Egyptians that there is a new government in Ethiopia willing and able to establish better bilateral relations. To this end, Ethiopia's leader Meles Zenawi went even to the extent of telling Egyptian leaders that he views Egypt as a big vessel that needs some time and space to change and readjust its positions and Ethiopia can wait a little. This appeasement and good will appeared to have worked initially because Egypt, for the first time in the two states' bilateral relations, signed a protocol that mainly focuses on the Nile. However, it eventually became apparent to Ethiopian leaders that Egypt's goal was to maintain the status quo, not to accommodate Ethiopia's and other upstream states' interests over the Nile. Hence, by late 1990s and early 2000s, Ethiopia started to challenge Egypt's hydro-hegemony rhetorically and by building dams over tributaries of the Nile such as Tekeze and Tana Beles. The culmination of Ethiopia's counter-hegemonic manoeuvre, however, came in the form of the NBI's CFA in 2010 and the commencement of building Ethiopia's mega dam, the GERD in 2011 (see chapter eight).

Regarding Sudan, like Somalia and Eritrea, engagements and policies were initially based on idealism and solidarity. In fact, between 1991 and 1995, Ethio-Sudan relations appeared so cordial and aimed to reverse the pre-1991 animosity between Ethiopia and Sudan. Officials of the two states had established close ties since the insurgency years of the TPLF/EPRDF. Unlike Ethio-Egypt relations, Ethio-Sudan relations were not solely limited to the issue of the Nile. There are several other issues including border disputes, legal and illegal cross-border activities, shared security concerns along their borders which includes controlling rebel movements, etc. Therefore,

although their bilateral relations are directly affected by the politics of the Nile and Egypt's influence over Sudan's domestic and foreign policy, Ethio-Sudan relations include issues beyond the politics of the Nile. That was the reason why even before the fateful incident of June 1995—in which Sudan was accused of being behind the attempted assassination on Egypt's Hosni Mubarak—Ethiopian leaders started to hint at two areas of concern: border disputes and Islamic fundamentalism.

The cross-border incidents including clashes between farmers along the borders of the two states and Sudan's (or to be specific the ruling NIF's) attempt to spread Islamic fundamentalism across the borders of its neighbours. Therefore, following the assassination attempt, Ethiopia's policy toward Sudan had changed and the two were involved in supporting each other's rebels and mutual subversion between 1995 and 1998. This continued until the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war which necessitated rapprochement between Ethiopia and Sudan. As discussed in chapter seven, their relations eventually became one of the strongest in the region in the 2000s. During this period, Ethiopia not only made Sudan an ally against Eritrea but also managed to a certain degree decouple Sudan and Sudan's policy from Egypt and Egypt's policy toward Ethiopia.

In all, the external dimensions of Ethiopia's national security and the threat thereof had been interconnected in one way or another. The policies and engagements started anew and with a commitment to good neighbourliness and non-interference. There were efforts to cultivate cooperation and integration at the bilateral and regional levels including through the revitalization of IGAD and the establishment the Eastern Nile Joint Committee (and the NBI) as the two sets of case studies evinced. However, well-meaning policies did not produce the desired outcome. This forced Ethiopian leaders to adopt a more assertive and regionally active role to protect Ethiopia's national interests and security. Therefore, Ethiopia positioned itself as a status quo state toward

Eritrea and Somalia to prevent any move that harms its interests and security. Conversely, perhaps as an exception to the rule, Ethiopia has been a revisionist state against the status quo mirroring Egypt's hydro-hegemony vis-à-vis the politics of the Nile. To this end, it pursued a counter-hegemonic policy that fundamentally challenges Egypt's longstanding policy over the Nile and Sudan's bandwagoning. The efficacy of the two sets of policies is beyond doubt as Ethiopia was able to isolate Eritrea regionally/internationally as a pariah state; install a friendly transitional government in Somalia; establish close ties with Sudan; and end Egyptian hegemony over the Nile as exemplified by the construction of the GERD.

### **9.3. Interpreting the Findings: Contextualization of the Results, Significance and Implications**

This section attempts to briefly contextualize the findings summarized above in light of the body of knowledge reviewed and the gaps identified thereof in chapter two. As indicated in the review of the related literature, scholarly works on the national security of weak or fragile states revolve around one central argument. That is, their national security is domestically oriented and/or domestically generated (Ayoob, 1997; Buzan 1991; Sorensen, 2007). This is primarily associated with the problematic and incomplete state building processes. The extant literature identifies four major factors/indicators that define weak states and their security predicament, namely: low level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, low level of legitimacy, low level of institutional capacity, and high level of recurrent political violence. These factors make the states not only weak but also insecure and vulnerable (Ayoob, 1997; Buzan 1991; Sorensen, 2007).

Furthermore, in a region where most or all the states are weak—which we called weak state-dense regions in chapter two—regional security is generally considered to be dull. The reason for this, according to the extant literature, is that the states in a weak state-dense region are overwhelmed by their respective domestic insecurities and they do not project meaningful influence/power to

animate the regional security dynamics (Buzan and Waever, 2003; Kelly, 2007). In short, the central argument of the scholarly works is that the domestic dimension of weak states' national security trumps the external. And, the external dimension becomes important to the security of weak states, if at all, primarily due to spillover effects of the domestic dimension. Hence, in such regions, regional cooperation mechanisms or inter-governmental organizations are established to tackle the internal insecurity dilemma collectively—i.e. to pool sovereignty, not to cede it. Their ultimate goal, just like their domestic endeavours, is primarily to protect both the state and the regime from internal rivals (Feraru, 2017; Kelly, 2007).

Based on the foregoing, the last section of chapter two has presented three pertinent and closely related gaps. Firstly, with regard to the national security of weak states, the lacuna in the body of literature is that although it may be true that weak states share most or all the attributes and sources of insecurities, little attention has been given to contextual variations, e.g. regional, geopolitical, historical, and patterns of relationships between and among weak states, etc. As the Ethiopian experience and the case studies discussed in this dissertation demonstrate, despite the shared traits, weak states may differ from each other in some or many respects.

While Ethiopia's security predicaments are in part domestically generated, it has also been externally threatened—militarily or otherwise—and its vulnerabilities have been exploited by its near and distant neighbours. Therefore, although the findings of this dissertation may not be generalizable since it is a qualitative case study, it at least tells us that we cannot conclude that weak states are not externally threatened. They are, in fact, externally (including militarily) threatened and their domestically generated vulnerabilities are exploited by other states (both weak and strong) from near and afar.

The above finding confirms the argument in a recent study by Noel Tawagiramungu, Allard Duursma, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe and Alex de Waal (2019). Their study indicates, for instance, that “the existing Africa conflict datasets have systematically underrepresent the extent of cross-border state support to belligerent parties in internal conflicts as well as the number of incidents of covert cross-border armed intervention and incidents using armed force to threaten a neighbouring state” (p. 1). The findings of this dissertation not only back their argument but also expose the systematic neglect of the external (transnational) dimension of insecurity faced by African states which are weak and fragile. Thus, the Ethiopian experience and the specific case studies in this dissertation engage and fill this gap in the existing body of knowledge.

Secondly, regarding the external dimension, the argument that regional security in a weak state-dense region is dominated by the shared internal (in)security dilemma is valid. However, as the Ethiopian experience and the specific case studies demonstrated, the claim that the internal (in)security dilemma—or the domestic dimension—trumps the external dimension is quite problematic for two reasons. On the one hand, it falls into the problematic argument of those that deductively applied mainstream theories and claimed that weak state-dense regions demonstrate little or no regional security dynamics, thus not worthy of security analysis at the regional level. As the dynamics of Ethiopia’s engagement with and policies toward four of its neighbours show, the Horn of Africa’s regional security—as a weak state-dense region—is not only dynamic but also complex and complicated (Berouk, 2011; Healy, 2011). If this is not worth investigating and analysing, what else?

On the other hand, the extant body of knowledge unduly generalizes and ignores variations among weak state-dense regions, which justified the need for systematically and inductively studying differences between regions in the first place. Although the primary focus of this dissertation is on

national security, its findings show how the external dimension of Ethiopia's national security is inextricably linked to the Horn of Africa—a dynamic regional security complex. This sheds some insight that the internal security dilemma does not always trump the external in weak state-dense regions. Rather, there is a pattern of an interplay between the two dimensions which, in turn, generate and reproduce threats and vulnerabilities both at the national and regional levels.

Finally, in terms of the empirical gap, there is little published and unpublished work that systematically investigated Ethiopia's national security. And, the available work takes the Ethiopian state for granted. Little attention has been given to the state *qua* state and how/whether its security predicaments relate to the effects and manifestations of low level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, high levels of internal political violence, low level of political legitimacy and capacity—i.e., state weakness. Furthermore, the available works are fragmented and do not give us a complete picture about Ethiopia's security predicament. The two pairs of case studies and the systematic examination of the domestic and external dimensions of Ethiopia's national (in)security fill this gap.

The analysis on whether and how the pattern of interstate relations in the Horn of Africa interplays with Ethiopia's domestic vulnerabilities/threats also sheds light on the importance of understanding the separate dynamics of and the linkage between the domestic and external dimensions. As such, the findings of this dissertation do not contradict the findings of the empirical literature. It rather builds on and expands the arguments advanced by them. That is, Ethiopia has been facing both domestic and external vulnerabilities and threats. There has often been an interplay between the two dimensions and the national/regional security in the Horn of Africa is inconceivable without understanding this complexity.

#### 9.4. Evaluating the Theoretical Framework

This section briefly evaluates the utility of the theoretical framework in light of the findings and analysis of this dissertation. As discussed in chapter two, mainstream theories such as neorealism are unhelpful to analyse and understand the national security of weak states due to at least two major reasons, namely: (a) their view of a state as a unitary actor and as a black box whose internal makeup is not considered relevant in security analysis; and (b) conceptualization of threats only as externally generated and militarily-oriented.

Cognizant of the limitations, which are also acknowledged in the relevant literature, this dissertation has adopted Mohammed Ayooob's (1995; 1997) Subaltern Realism which gives due emphasis to the domestic dimension without completely rejecting the external. Security, from the perspective of Subaltern Realism, is primarily conceptualized as vulnerabilities that are domestically generated and politically-oriented. As such, the security predicament of weak states (or as Ayooob calls them "Third World states") is rooted in the problematic and incomplete state building processes—the main reasons for the insecurity of the state and the regimes. Indicators/manifestations of the insecurity/vulnerability are lack of national integration (which is also known as low level of socio political cohesion), low level of legitimacy, and lack of capacity (Ayooob, 1995; Buzan and Waever, 2003).

Ayooob's Subaltern Realism has, however, one limitation. It gives little emphasis to the external dimension and when it does it mainly focuses on the spillover effects of the domestic dimension. Therefore, it is imperative, for the purpose of this dissertation, to complement Subaltern Realism by a theory that is compatible and gives due attention to the external dimension. Thus, it is mainly for this reason that the dissertation chose Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) (Buzan and Waever, 2003).

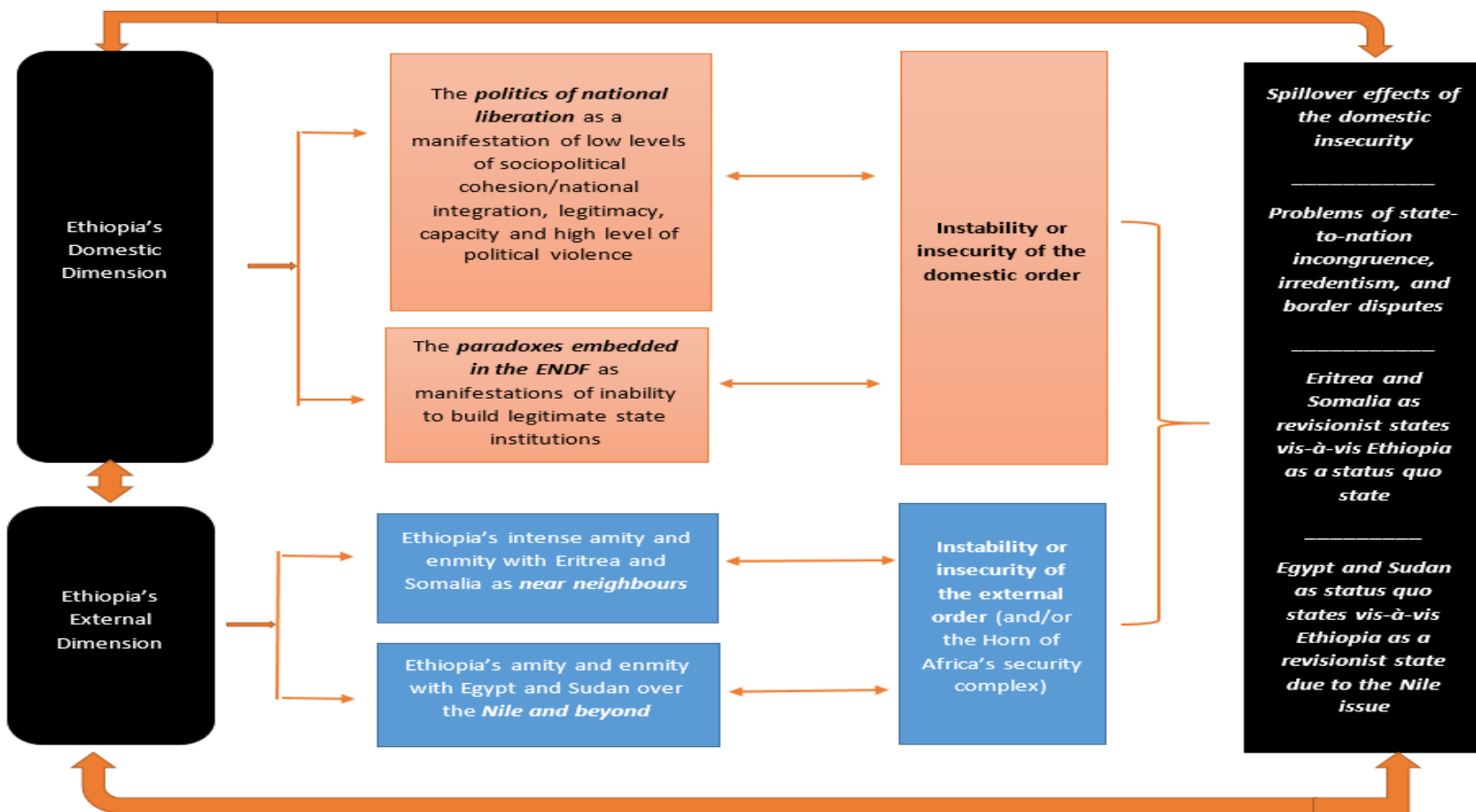
RSCT, although a theory for analysing regional security, emphasizes three important considerations. First, in a regional security complex, the national security of one state cannot be analysed without taking into account that state's neighbours. Secondly, unlike mainstream theories and in agreement with Ayoob's Subaltern Realism, it posits that the domestically generated vulnerabilities of a state determine the security of states within a region. And, thirdly, patterns of interstate relations among a region's states—i.e., amity and enmity—shape security dynamics of that region. RSCT does not ignore extra-regional actors and factors but considers them less important than the regional actors and factors (Buzan and Waver, 2003).

The advantage of complementing Subaltern Realism by RSCT, for this dissertation's purpose, is that the latter blends structural and constructivist perspectives. It recognizes the importance of, for instance, distribution of power but determines that its security implication depends on 'what states make of it'. Therefore, the concept of securitization (desecuritization)—following the Copenhagen School—serves as an important theoretical tool to analyse security (see chapter two). Unlike the objectivist mainstream theories, threats and vulnerabilities are not seen as merely a given phenomenon but socially constructed through discursive processes of securitization and desecuritization (Buzan et al., 1998; Buzan and Waever, 2003).

In light of the above and as discussed in the preceding sections, the patterns of interstate relations which constitute the Horn of Africa's security complex are the external dimensions of Ethiopia's national security calculus. The findings of this dissertation amply demonstrate that the patterns of Ethiopia's relations with its neighbours are not merely objectively given but also socially constructed through decisions and policies of leaders and regimes.

Therefore, the theoretical framework of this dissertation—which is Subaltern Realism complemented by RSCT—helps us analyse Ethiopia’s national security with sufficient emphasis on both the domestic and the external dimensions. This, as discussed in the preceding chapters and sections, is demonstrated in multiple ways. First, in line with the security perspective of Subaltern Realism, the vulnerabilities of and threats to the Ethiopian state and the regime are primarily domestically generated and politically oriented. The state, due to the controversy and dispute over the way it was built and sustained, has been facing counter-hegemonic discourses and militarized political movements that delegitimize its ideational, territorial and institutional foundations.

The politics of national liberation—in the form of armed insurgency or otherwise—has been Ethiopia’s vulnerability and threat. It has been a manifestation of the state’s lack of national integration, legitimacy, capacity, as well as the recurring political violence. The post-1991 regime of Ethiopia has recognized this as among the major issues that, if unaddressed, would lead to the disintegration of the state. Hence, the political, legal, and coercive responses discussed in chapter four are direct responses to the vulnerabilities and threats stemming from the problematic and incomplete state building process.



\*Figure 2: Ethiopia's National (In)security as a function of the domestic and the external dimension and the interplay thereof. The influence of extra-regional actors including great powers is not considered because it is beyond the scope of the dissertation.

The theoretical framework also helps us trace and examine the patterns of amity and enmity—an aspect of interstate relations per the RSCT—manifested in/by the dynamics of Ethiopia’s engagement and policy vis-à-vis the near neighbours and the politics of the Nile. At least in the context of the post-1991 era, Ethiopia’s relations with its neighbours—as the external dimension of its national security—has been characterized by the construction and deconstruction of vulnerabilities and threats as well as allies and enemies. That is, relations with neighbours have been desecuritized, securitized and sometimes desecuritized again. Both in the cases of the near neighbours and the politics of the Nile, post-1991 Ethiopian leaders attempted to discursively distance themselves from the pre-1991 rivalry between Ethiopia and its neighbours. For instance, Ethiopia’s head of government Melse Zenawi’s speech during a state dinner he hosted honouring Sudan’s President Omar Al Bashir and Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin’s frequent speeches on many occasions are cases in point. The decision to introduce visa free entry for citizens of neighbouring states, the commitment to revitalize IGAD and promote regional cooperation, the effort to bring Somali factions together to help them establish central authority in Somalia, and most importantly, the decision to unconditionally accept Eritrea’s secession were all aimed at building friendly ties.

Nevertheless, the same leaders also securitized Ethiopia’s engagements with the same neighbours when relations fall short of their expectations and confronted real and perceived threats. Sudan’s attempts to expand its Islamist ideology in Ethiopia and the Horn, the rise of AIAI and anti-Ethiopia warlords in Somalia, and Eritrea’s attempt at projecting some influence in Ethiopia and the Horn were also tackled both discursively and militarily. Engagements with Egypt, though not that securitized as was the case with the other neighbours, also changed and Egypt was considered as a threat once the policy of appeasement and good will failed. Ethiopian leaders have not been

interested in securitizing the Nile unlike Egypt which made the issue a matter of national security. As discussed in chapter eight Ethiopia's effort vis-à-vis the Nile has been keeping it in the development realm and countering Egypt's hegemony and Sudan's bandwagoning. This should not be construed as underestimating Egypt's threat to Ethiopia's interests and security. It was a rather deliberate attempt to desecuritize the Nile and deny Egypt a justification to continue its hegemonic preponderance over the issue.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the theoretical framework, the interplay of the domestic and external insecurities manifest through dual processes. The first process pertains to Ethiopia's neighbours meddling in and exploitation of Ethiopia's domestic vulnerabilities. The state's low level of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration and legitimacy, the incumbent regimes lack of legitimacy, and the recurrent political violence have been manipulated or exploited by almost all Ethiopia's neighbours. That is, they provide safe havens, training, logistical support and even passports. They also provide them with radio/television airtime so that they can disseminate their propaganda.

For instance, the two liberation movements—the OLF and the ONLF—have received such support from Eritrea, Sudan, Egypt, and even from Somali warlords. Ethiopia often retaliated against these subversive actions by providing safe havens, training, logistical support as well as passports to rebels and warlords from Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. In the context of the Horn of Africa, the practices of subversion and counter-subversion or mutual subversion persists until relations improve. They are cheaper and less risky than direct military confrontation or war. Hence, the practice of subversion can be construed as projection of power/influence by other means.

The second pertains to the insecurity that manifests in the form of direct and indirect military threats posed by neighbouring states, the domestic considerations (sources) of Ethiopia's actual

regional security approaches/activism and their consequences. Ethiopia's military campaign/intervention against the AIAI in the 1990s and against the UIC and Al Shabaab since 2006 have a lot to do with domestic concerns as much as they were direct military threats coming from the outside. Both the AIAI and the UIC had laid claims on Somali inhabited territories of Ethiopia. They both considered Ethiopia as a Christian neighbour with whom Somalis have historic enmity.

As discussed in chapter seven, the UIC, in particular, declared jihad and vowed to unite Somalis of the Horn of Africa. Sudan, under the NIF, had also posed a similar threat in the 1990s. Although it does not have a territorial claim like the Somalis, the border dispute between them and the skirmishes between Ethiopian and Sudanese farmers across the borders had destabilizing effects. In both cases, Ethiopia had responded firmly and militarily given the potential destabilizing effect at the domestic front. As the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's speech to the parliament in 2006 (see chapter seven) shows, the external threats were intertwined with the domestic vulnerabilities posing "clear and present danger" (*Addis Zemen*, 24 November 2006).

Ethiopia's rivalry with Eritrea had more or less the same effect. It did not only destabilise the Horn of Africa but also affected Ethiopia's domestic politics and security. Firstly, in the lead up to the war, Ethiopian leaders had divergent threat perceptions vis-à-vis Eritrea. Meles did not view Eritrea as a military threat until it eventually invaded Ethiopia in May 1998, while his compatriots in the ruling party/government view Eritrea and its leadership as hostile and arrogant. As multiple sources, including those who were at the leadership level back then, indicated, Ethiopia fought the two-year war against Eritrea with a divided leadership. The division was simply postponed until the war ended and resurfaced and split the regime a few months after the war was over. That division culminated in the assassination of the Chief of Ethiopia's national security agency, the

forced retirement of the General Chief of Staff of the ENDF—General Tsadkan G/Tensae—and the Chief of the Ethiopian Air Force—General Abebe T/Haimanot (*Addis Zemen*, 27 May 2001). It was also followed by policy and institutional reforms within the party and the government. Since then, the rivalry with Eritrea had been manifesting itself at the domestic, bilateral, and regional levels as a proxy war and mutual subversion.

### **9.5. Implications to Understand Ethiopia’s Current (In)security Predicament**

In concluding this dissertation, it is also worthwhile to explicate the implications of the findings and theoretical arguments to understand current developments (post-2018) and the prospect of the national (in)security of Ethiopia. Based on the dissertation’s core theoretical and empirical analysis and argument, this section very briefly discusses the two dimensions of national security, i.e. the domestic and external. It highlights on the four areas of concern: the politics of national liberation, building the national army, relations with the near neighbours, and the politics of the Nile. The aim is not to fully interrogate the contemporary security issues of Ethiopia; rather it is to establish that the framework and theoretical arguments apply outside the temporal scope of this dissertation research.

Ethiopia’s post-2018 security situation is shaped, directly and indirectly, by the decisions, policies, and state building process of the pre-2018 period as much it is an outcome of the transition that unfolded since April 2018. Ethnic federalism, the politicization of ethnicity or the institutionalization of ethnic politics, vertical and horizontal inequalities, authoritarianism and bad governance, the crises of legitimacy and leadership, the dynamics of relations with other states, etc. have contributed a lot to what we see today (Semir, 2019; and Zemelak, Fuller, & Raleigh, 2023). The death of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the succession of Hailemariam Dessalegn was simply an interlude between two periods—the Meles and post-Meles periods—

from the perspective of the security, political, and economic dynamics that unfolded at the domestic and external/regional levels. With the death of Meles, the EPRDF was beset by lack of cohesive leadership or in one of the then TPLF/EPRDF's Central Committee members' words, it was like "a cattle ranch without a herder" (Birhane, 2019). Hence, Hailemariam Dessalegn's premiership was a compromise between competing groups within the EPRDF, i.e. the Amhara, the Oromo, and Tigrayans. Hailing from a minority group, Hailemariam was possibly seen as a non-threatening placeholder (Mohammed and Hassen, 2018).

Between 2012 and 2018, Hailemariam's/EPRDF's reign was seriously challenged by intraparty/intra-government rivalries, lack of good governance, and the emergence of organized protests in Oromia and Amhara regions. The protests, which *prima facie* revolve around the Integrated Master Plan of Addis Ababa and its surrounding areas and the potential evictions of farmers, had intensified since 2015. By 2016, they have reached a critical point following the "Irrecha stampede" (some call it massacre) of October 2016 and the show of solidarity from other groups, particularly the Amharas (Mebratu, 2021). This paved ways for the so-called the *Oromara* coalition—an informal political coalition of the Oromo and Amhara elites against the EPRDF rule.<sup>123</sup> As a discursive political strategy, particularly the younger members of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), particularly the current Prime Minister, and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) had embraced the *Oromara* (Adugna, 2019; and Ezekiel, 2022). This tactical/ad hoc political coalition—despite the eventual polarization between the two—was instrumental in sustaining the protests and realising the eventual resignation of Hailemariam and

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<sup>123</sup> This ethnically exclusive political coalition primarily targeted the perceived and real dominance of the Tigrayan political elite in the country's political, security, and economic sectors. There are two views as far as the *Oromara* is concerned. Some view it as a spontaneous solidarity movement between the Amhara and Oromo against the EPRDF rule. Others view it as an outcome of the effort to overpower the TPLF/Tigrayans by the Amhara and Oromo members of the EPRDF (for more on this, see Ezekiel, 2022).

the selection of Abiy Ahmed as a Prime Minister. Having this in mind, let us briefly discuss the current dynamics and prospects of domestic and external vulnerabilities/threats and the interplay thereof:

9.5.1. *Further Erosion of Cohesion, Legitimacy, and Capacity*: In the post-2018 context, the domestic factors, i.e., low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, legitimacy, institutional capacity, and high level of recurrent violence continue to shape the domestic vulnerabilities and threats, albeit with extreme manifestations of insurgency and civil war since 2019. The TPLF has been at odds with the central government (and potentially with the state) once again after ruling the country using the EPRDF outfit for almost three decades. The OLA (Oromo Liberation Army)—OLF’s armed wing until 2018—has also been waging a violent insurgency since 2019. The violent conflict between these forces—two of the oldest proponents of the politics of national liberation—and the federal government have posed serious challenges to the state and the incumbent regime. The civil war of 2020-2022 in Tigray/Northern Ethiopia was not only catastrophic but also ironic as it was the core of the 1991-2018 regime—the TPLF—that posed a serious politico-military security challenge to the state and regime.

The emergent Amhara nationalism and its ongoing violent clashes with the regime since 2023 have also been adding a new dimension to the dynamics of vulnerabilities and threats. Despite its distinctiveness vis-à-vis the proponents of the politics of national liberation—i.e. straddling between ethno-nationalism and glorification of Ethiopia’s contested “Great Traditions”, meaning “pan-Ethiopianism”—the rise of Amhara nationalism and its clash with its counterparts (especially Oromo and Tigrayan nationalisms) and the incumbent regime has further destabilized the country.

The incumbent regime's coercive and repressive responses to the above to maximize its security (including by committing alleged atrocities against civilians), have also resulted in the deterioration of its and the state's security. Therefore, the effect of these is the continuation and deepening of the insecurity dilemma of the regime and the state for the foreseeable future.

9.5.2. *Political Violence and the Overstretching of the ENDF*: Despite the deteriorating domestic situation after 2018 that overstretched the army and tinted its reputation, the ENDF maintained its participation in international peace support missions. The UN ranked Ethiopia as the 5<sup>th</sup> largest troop contributing country in the world in 2022 for its peace support operations. In 2023, Global Fire Power also ranked the ENDF as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> powerful army in Africa and the world respectively (Global Fire Power, 2023).<sup>124</sup> However, it is one of the most challenging times for the ENDF today. As part of the multi-sector reforms of the post-2018 period, the ENDF has also been under a thorough defence review and reform (MoND, 2019). The reform takes place amidst tumultuous national political environment, sporadic violence, low-key insurgencies, and a major civil war.

It is too soon to assess the effects of the ongoing reform and the violent domestic conflicts on the ENDF. Suffice to state, however, that the reform focuses on three major areas. The first is de-linking the ENDF from the hitherto partisan political commitment to revolutionary democracy—the ideology of the former ruling party, the EPRDF. Secondly, it focuses on reviewing legal frameworks including the proclamation establishing the

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<sup>124</sup> 2023 Ethiopia Military Strength" ([https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country\\_id=ethiopia](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=ethiopia)) and See [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02\\_country\\_ranking\\_47\\_feb\\_2022.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02_country_ranking_47_feb_2022.pdf))

ENDF. The third is institution or capacity building aimed at improving the effectiveness of the army through administrative changes, organizational restructuring, and modernization (Interview with Senior Officers; MoND, 2019). Despite the reform and as a state institution, the ENDF has been facing grave institutional challenges—in terms of cohesion and organization—following TPLF’s attack on its Northern Command. The effect of the civil war and its role in the continued violent conflict in Amhara and Oromia may further erode ENDF’s institutional cohesion and legitimacy. Its role in the domestic crises, the allegations of war crimes/crimes against humanity levelled against it, and the country’s troubled relations with its neighbours have already tarnished its image. Hence, its hitherto external legitimacy and power projection capability are now questionable. As such, its international standing as one of the most sought national armies in Africa for regional and continental peace support operations may remain questionable until the domestic politico-security crises gets resolved.

9.5.3. ***More Troubles with the Near Neighbours:*** The external dimension has also been witnessing intensified animosity and rivalry entrenching the patterns of amity and enmity. Initially, especially after the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement in July 2018 for which Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019, it seemed that the region in general and Ethiopia in particular were about to have a profound respite from the Horn of Africa’s interstate rivalry. Yet, domestic and external factors have shattered expectations. The 2020-2022 civil war in Northern Ethiopia and the direct and indirect involvement of regional actors—including Eritrea becoming a party to the conflict—had a destabilizing effect on the region. Furthermore, the Al Fashga border dispute between Ethiopia and Sudan, the lack of progress on the GERD negotiation, and the flare up of tension between

Ethiopia and Somalia following the January 2024 Ethiopia-Somaliland Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concerning access to the sea have reset the region to a crisis mode.

Despite the initial rapprochement, euphoria, and temporary military alliance against the TPLF in the 2020-2022 civil war, the nature of Ethiopia's relations with Eritrea has since the Pretoria Agreement been unclear. It is, however, obvious that it is not as warm as it was between July 2018 and October 2022. Relations with Somalia has also been deteriorating following the signing of the MOU between Ethiopia and Somaliland—a breakaway region of Somalia and/or de facto state since January 1991. The latter is already affecting Ethiopia's bilateral and multilateral participation against Al Shabaab in Somalia as Somalia is trying to isolate Ethiopia from the potential deployment of multi-national African forces that replace ATMIS in 2025 (see Amani Africa, 2014 ).<sup>125</sup> Therefore, the *near neighbours* are once again entangled in rivalries that will further destabilize their enemy's, their own domestic order's and the region's overall security.

9.5.4. ***The Politics of the Nile Remains Unabated:*** The politics of the Nile as well as Ethiopia's relations with Egypt and Sudan has also been worsening in the post-2018 context. Ethiopia's success in decoupling Sudan's policy toward Ethiopia from that of Egypt has been undone due to domestic political changes in Ethiopia and Sudan. The Ethiopian government's embroilment in the post-2018 domestic crises has been grabbed as an opportune moment by both Sudan and Egypt. Sudan used Ethiopia's domestic crises—particularly the 2020-2022 civil war—as an opportunity to occupy disputed territories

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<sup>125</sup> See also VOA's report on Somalia's plan for ENDF's withdrawal by December 2024.  
<https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-wants-all-ethiopian-troops-to-leave-by-december/7641135.html>

along the two countries borders by force. Ethiopia also alleged that Sudan hosted thousands of TPLF fighters and facilitated the flow of arms to TPLF over the course of the civil war.

In fact, Egypt has been generally considered by Ethiopian leaders as the master manipulator in its bid to exert pressure on Ethiopia vis-à-vis the GERD dispute. As such, the dispute over the GERD is far from settled, and as the dam is set to be completed by 2025.<sup>126</sup> Egypt continued to exploit Ethiopia's vulnerabilities using various strategies including threats, soliciting diplomatic support from major actors such the US, EU, and the Arab League. There is nothing new in this strategy as this has been Egypt's approach since the start of the dam. It is also likely, as there are already some signs, that Egypt will try to exploit the renewed rivalry between Ethiopia and its *near neighbours* to put pressure on the already fragile Ethiopia.<sup>127</sup> In all, from the perspective of the politics of the Nile, Egypt is in a better position as both Ethiopia and Sudan are currently facing very serious security problems.

In all, we can argue that the prospect of Ethiopia's national (in)security will continue to be shaped by the improvement (or deterioration) of the factors discussed above. Domestically, Ethiopia—to be specific, the government—must effectively tackle problems associated with the lack of sociopolitical cohesion/national integration, legitimacy, and state capacity. The recurring and ongoing political violence needs to be stopped in a sincerely inclusive, transparent, and legitimate manner. Regarding relations with near and distant neighbours, the findings of this dissertation made it abundantly clear, as also shown in chapters seven and eight, the dynamics does not depend

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<sup>126</sup> GERD's project manager, Engineer Kifle Horo, told the local media that the construction of the dam will be completed next year. For more, see <https://ebc.et/english/newsdetails.aspx?newsid=6319>

<sup>127</sup> For example, regarding Ethiopia's dispute with Somalia over the January 2024 MOU, Egypt was very quick in showing solidarity toward Somalia and inviting the president of Somalia to Cairo.

solely on what Ethiopia does and does not. However, it behoves Ethiopian security decision/policymakers that, at least, the country should have a clear and well thought-out policy that responds to its fundamental vulnerabilities and threats. Moreover, the policies should match realities on the ground and should be free from idealistic and impractical convictions that cloud informed judgements and decisions.

## 9.6. Conclusion

In all, Ethiopia's domestic and external insecurities as well as the interplay thereof evince the fact that its security predicaments are not only domestically generated but also stem from the external. Moreover, the two dimensions of insecurity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They are interrelated or intermeshed as Ethiopia and its neighbours tend to meddle, exploit, and subvert each other's internal affairs and external/regional interests. As such, the interplay of the domestic and the external should not be seen as a unidirectional but rather a bidirectional process.

From a theoretical/conceptual point of view, Ethiopia's experience evinces the Subaltern Realist perspective of security that vulnerabilities of the state are rooted in its incomplete and problematic state building experiences and processes. The factors/indicators of state weakness and the insecurity therefore—i.e., low levels of sociopolitical cohesion or national integration, legitimacy, and capacity as well as recurring political violence—are integral to Ethiopia's national (in)security. The politics of national liberation and the challenge of building a professional legitimate national army are cases in point. Nevertheless, Subaltern Realism's limitation—i.e. its limited utility to analyse the external dimension—can be overcome by carefully complementing it by RSCT which helps us capture the patterns of interstate relations.

Therefore, Ethiopia's engagement with and policies toward its neighbours—from the perspective of the external dimension of its security—show what RSCT call patterns of amity and enmity. In

line with RSCT's claim, Ethiopia's relations with its neighbours are not mere outcomes of geographic proximity but dynamic interstate relations that are socially constructed through securitization/desecuritization and responses to structural factors such as distribution of power and lack of strong regional mechanisms.

Finally, future research on the topic(s) examined by this dissertation can focus on addressing the limitations mentioned in section 1.5 of chapter one. In terms of generalizability, future works can comparatively investigate the national security of weak/fragile states from each region of Africa or elsewhere. Such works may confirm or refine the findings of this dissertation and other similar works. Researchers may also adopt a different methodology—say quantitative or mixed method— or rely on different data sources such as archival sources and informants that were inaccessible for the purpose of dissertation. Doing so, they may refute, confirm, or refine the findings of this dissertation.

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[Following the convention in Ethiopia, Ethiopian authors are cited/listed using their first/given names.]

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## Data from Addis Zemen

The following entries are translated from Amharic by the researcher. Almost all pieces published in *Addis Zemen* and cited in this dissertation are not attributed to individual writers. Therefore, *Addis Zemen* is used in place of the author's name in the in-text citations.

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*Extremists Do Not Have Places in Ethiopia*, (*Addis Zemen*, August 17, 1994).

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A Statement Was Made on the Attempted Assassination on Hosni Mubarak: Relations with Sudan Will Not Continue as it was, (*Addis Zemen*, 2 September 1995).

Recruitment from All Ethnic Groups has been Completed, (*Addis Zemen*, 2 December 1995).

Sudan's Accusation against Ethiopia is Baseless, (*Addis Zemen*, 16 January 1996),

The Country's Defence Force is Expected to Demonstrate High Performance In A Low Cost, (*Addis Zemen*, 12 February 1996).

The Effort to Balance the Ethnic Composition of the Army is Successful. (*Addis Zemen*, 23 May 1996).

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Individual Discussion Started with Somali Factions, (*Addis Zemen*, 15 November 1996).

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The Decision Not to Use Assab Refineries is A Matter of Interest, (*Addis Zemen*, 22 June 1997).

Bureau of The Federal Police Stated That it Had Captured Terrorists, (*Addis Zemen*, 6 November 1997)

There is No New Strategic Difference between Ethiopia And Eritrea, (*Addis Zemen*, 12 November 1997).

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Trade Between Ethiopia and Eritrea Will be Through Foreign Currency As of Today, (*Addis Zemen*, 22 November 1997).

There Is No New Strategic Difference Between Ethiopia And Eritrea, (*Addis Zemen*, 11 January 1998).

A Just Platform Has to be Created for The Nile River, (*Addis Zemen*, 13 January 1998).

Egypt Said That It Wants To Use Nile Without Harming Others; Ethiopia Wants A New Agreement On Nile (*Addis Zemen*, 27 February 1998).

Somalia's Problem is Complicated by External Actors and Their Meddling, Mr Seyoum Mesfin  
(*Addis Zemen*, 19 March 1998).

The Effort to Build a National Army with [Ethnic] Balance has been Effective, (*Addis Zemen* 12  
May 1998).

Ethiopian Airline Will Start Flight to Khartoum, (*Addis Zemen*, 2 October 1998),

The Desire to Use The Nile Alone has to End; A Ministerial Meeting of the Riparian Countries  
Will be Held, (*Addis Zemen*, 30 April 1999)

The Objective of Eritrea is Creating Fear among The Internal Community, (*Addis Zemen*, 11 June  
1999).

More Than One Thousand and One Hundred OLF And Al Ittihad Terrorists Killed And Captured,  
(*Addis Zemen*, 12 August 1999).

Hussein Aideed is Told to Stop Collaborating with Terrorists, (*Addis Zemen*, 27 October 1999).

Aideed has Reportedly Disarmed OLF and Closed Down its Office; Gelassa Dilbo is Removed  
From His Position, (*Addis Zemen*, 30 November 1999).

Ethiopia and Sudan Agreed to Speed Up Border Development, (*Addis Zemen*, 27 April 2000).

Ethiopia And Eritrea Signed the Peace Agreement at The Heads Of State Level, (*Addis Zemen*, 12  
December 2000).

There is No Force That Can Deny Us Our Constitutional Right, (*Addis Zemen*, 19 May 2001).

Major General Samora Yenus Becomes Chief of Staff; Two Senior Defence Officers Removed  
From Their Posts, (*Addis Zemen*, 27 May 2001).

Our Defence Forces' Senior Leadership was Not Clean From Corruption and Anti-Democracy,  
(*Addis Zemen*, 19 June 2001).

Ministry of Finance Said That The Half a Billion Birr Reduced from Defence Budget has been  
Reallocated as Subsidy to Regions, (*Addis Zemen*, 25 June 2001).

A Statement by EPRDF's Central Council, (*Addis Zemen*, 9 July 2001).

Based on The Ethio-Sudan Agreement, Oil Purchases will Commence from the Coming January  
(*Addis Zemen*, 20 September 2001).

Our Defence Force Has The Capacity and Strength to Protect Our Border, (*Addis Zemen*, 19  
December 2001).

Measures have been Taken to Create the First National Reserve Force in the Country, (*Addis Zemen* 27 January 2003).

Prime Minister Meles Reaffirmed That Ethiopia is Ready to Provide Support That the Somali Government Requests, (*Addis Zemen*, 26 October 2004).

Having A Democratic Position on The Question of Nationalities is Standing for Sustainable Unity, (*Addis Zemen*, 16 March 2005).

Eritrea Supports the Terrorist Group to Export the Boundary Dispute to Somalia, (6 August 2006).

Squashing the Illegal Movement of Armed Groups Using Any Legal Means is Appropriate, (*Addis Zemen*, 22 October 2006).

Ethiopia will Continue its Effort for Peace in the Horn Of Africa, (*Addis Zemen*, 4 November 2006).

The Prime Minister Stated That the Government will Not Sit Idle Amidst the Extremist's Declaration Of War, (*Addis Zemen*, 24 November 2006).

Clear and Present Danger, (*Addis Zemen*, 25 November 2006).

The Motion was Endorsed by The HPRs on 30 November 2006, (*Addis Zemen*, 1 December 2006).

It Makes Me Happy That We have an Army That has Popular Character and Political Maturity, (*Addis Zemen*, 20 February 2007).

We are at the Bottom of the Mountain, Yet We have Started Climbing, (*Addis Zemen*, 21 February 2007).

Egyptian Politicians Use the Nile Issue as a Drug, (*Addis Zemen*, 13 March 2011).

Interview with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (*Addis Zemen*, 14 March 2011).

The Grand Millennium [Renaissance] Dam—Heralding A Bright Future, (*Addis Zemen*, 3 April 2011).

## List of Key Informants (KIIs)

Since most of the key informants preferred to remain anonymous, to be consistent, all are cited with codes assigned by the author. The codes are random and do not show any social, political, institutional, expertise, etc. status of the informant. Besides the formal interviews, the researcher benefited from the informal conversations with former and current officials, diplomats, and officers who are not cited/listed in this dissertation.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description of Key Informants (KIIs)</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
<b>KII #1</b>	Former State Minister and Senior diplomat	6 September 2022
<b>KII #2</b>	Senior diplomat, African Affairs Directorate	22 September 2022;
<b>KII #3</b>	Senior diplomat, African Affairs Directorate	30 August 2022
<b>KII #4</b>	Retired Senior diplomat and Horn of Africa Expert	28 September 2022
<b>KII #5</b>	Senior diplomat at African Affairs Directorate	22 September 2022
<b>KII #6</b>	Senior officer, served in the army since the armed struggle	11 December 2022
<b>KII #7</b>	Senior officer, Served in the army since 1996	July 2022
<b>KII #8</b>	Senior officer, served in the army since 1994	7 March 2023
<b>KII #9</b>	Senior officer, served in the army since 1994	7 March 2023
<b>KII #10</b>	Senior officer, served in the army since 1996	22 February 2023
<b>KII #11</b>	Senior officer, served in the army since 1997	9 March 2023
<b>KII #12</b>	Senior civilian staff at the Ministry of Defence, served since 1998	10 April 2023
<b>KII #13</b>	Senior leader, ONLF	13 August 2023
<b>KII #14</b>	Senior leader, ONLF	13 February 2023
<b>KII #15</b>	Former senior leader, OLF	21 August 2023
<b>KII #16</b>	Former senior leader, OLF	1 September 2023
<b>KII #17</b>	Senior leader, OFC	23 August 2023
<b>KII #18</b>	Former senior intelligence officer	10 March 2023
<b>KII #19</b>	Intelligence officer	15 July 2023

Table 4: List of Key Informants