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External Involvement and Tigray War of Ethiopia (2020–2022): The Impact of Differentiated Motives on a Civil War

Vnější zapojení a etiopská válka v Tigraji (2020–2022): vliv diferencovaných motivů na občanskou válku

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Abstract: This study analyzes the involvement of external actors in Ethiopia's civil war between 2020 and 2022, categorizing their behaviors and discourses based on the dominance of instrumental and affective motives. It argues that the convergence of objectives between instrumental motive-dominant actors, who seek to protect the stability and survival of the Ethiopian government, and affective motive-dominant actors, who address humanitarian crises, reached a point of overlap and consent which led the war to end in relatively short duration.

Abstrakt: Tato studie analyzuje zapojení vnějších aktérů do občanské války v Etiopii v letech 2020–2022 a kategorizuje jejich chování a diskurzy na základě dominance instrumentálních a afektivních motivů. Tvrdí, že konvergence cílů mezi aktéry s dominancí instrumentálních motivů, kteří se snaží chránit stabilitu a přežití etiopské vlády, a aktéry s dominancí afektivních motivů, kteří řeší humanitární krize, dosáhla bodu překrytí a shody, což vedlo k ukončení války v relativně krátké době.

Key words: Ethiopia; Tigray War; TPLF; External Involvement; Abiy Ahmed.

Klíčová slova: Etiopie; válka v Tigraji; TPLF; vnější zapojení; Abiy Ahmed.

INTRODUCTION

The civil war which occurred between the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces, led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Ethiopian National Defence Forces and various paramilitary forces, began in November 2020 and ended with a ceasefire signed between the parties in November 2022. Throughout the conflict, third parties had different levels of external involvement. This involvement ranged from direct military engagement against opposition armed organisation, as seen with the Eritrean army, to providing support the humanitarian efforts. In addition, diplomatic mediations were undertaken to facilitate dialogue between the conflicting parties, and the sale of drones to the central government was also observed.

First and foremost, the Tigray War is characterised an intrastate conflict as it occurs within the internal borders of a state, involving the ruling government and an opposition group capable of sustained resistance.¹ Furthermore, in light with the concepts of Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP), the Tigray War can be labeled as an „internationalized“ and/or „intrastate with foreign involvement“ conflict² due to the involvement of Eritrea and partially Sudan in military. By drawing attention to the TPLF's autonomy demands in the Tigray region, it can be said that the war in question emerged on the grounds of “incompatibility concerning territory”. However, it is not sufficient to rely on the UCDP concepts for the base as tracing the historical process and analysis of the Tigray War. Comprehending the nature of the war and its relatively short duration within Ethiopian history of civil wars, requires consideration of the various levels of involvement.

Several concepts have been employed to describe the nature and extent of third party involvement in conflicts. Concepts such as internationalisation, externalisation, foreign intervention, proxy war, third party intervention, external involvement³, outside intervention⁴, triangulation⁵, and transnational dimensions⁶ encompass a wide range of concepts. They span from direct military intervention by a third party in support of one side of the conflict diplomatic contacts and mediation efforts.

1 SMALL, Melvin & SINGER, J. David. *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars, 1816-1980*. California: Sage, 1980, p. 216. ISBN: 978-0803917767.

2 UCDP Definitions. Uppsala Universitet Department of Peace and Conflict Research [online]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3dpp3bz3>.

3 HERACLIDES, Alexis. *Secessionist Minorities and External Involvement*. *International Organization*. 1990, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 341-378.

4 COOPER, Robert & BERDAL, Mats. *Outside Intervention in Ethnic Conflicts*. *Survival*. 1993, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 118 – 142.

5 ZARTMANN, William I., Internationalization of Communal Strife: Temptations and Opportunities of Triangulation, MIDLARKSY, Manus I. (ed). *The Internationalization of Communal Strife*. London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 27 – 42. ISBN: 978-1138793194.

6 GLEDITSCH, Kristian Skrede. *Transnational Dimensions of Civil War*. *Journal of Peace Research*. 2007, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 293 – 309.

Instead of in-depth analysis of these concepts, this study takes an intellectual route that highlights the nature of involvement as the origin of this concept inflation. In this regard, Heraclides' distinction between instrumental and affective motives is insightful. It argues that third party involvement in conflicts should be explained not only by instrumental motives such as economic gains, strategic and military considerations, and domestic motives; but also by affective motives such as ethnicity, religion, humanitarian considerations, and reasons of justice or principle. In some cases, involvement may be driven by instrumental or affective motives, while in other cases a mixed form of intervention emerges where these motives are present in varying proportions.⁷

At this juncture, Khosla's categorisation⁸ of intervention types as diplomatic, military and economic, Regan and Aydin's adoption⁹ of the broad view on outside parties managing conflicts through military, economic and diplomatic initiatives, Regan's identification¹⁰ of ideological, human rights promotion and diplomatic interests as purposes of intervention, and Cooper's suggestion¹¹ that the dominant motives in intervention may be Realpolitik or peacekeeping, are all in line with Heraclides' distinction between instrumental and affective motives. It can be argued that affective motives are utilized by the intervenors because they believe in norms and/or because normative elements create the ability to establish a legitimate basis and persuade the international community.¹² What holds significance in this context is which of the instrumental and affective motives is emphasized as dominant.

There is another branch of the conflict studies literature that examines the relationship between civil wars and external involvement, focusing on the impact of third parties on the duration and outcome of wars.¹³ In this context, the impact of foreign intervention on the duration of wars and how it affects the outcome, especially when the favoured side is taken into account, is addressed. Many studies have demonstrated

⁷ See HERACLIDES, ref. 3.

⁸ KHOSLA, Deepa. Third World States as Intervenors in Ethnic Conflicts: Implications for Regional and International Security. *Third World Quarterly*. 1999. Vol. 20, No. 6, pp. 1143 – 1156.

⁹ REGAN, Patrick M. & AYDIN, Ayşegül. Diplomacy and Other Forms of Intervention in Civil Wars. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 2006, Vol. 50, No. 5, pp. 736 – 756.

¹⁰ REGAN, Patrick M. Conditions of Successful Third-Party Intervention in Intrastate Conflicts. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 1996, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 341.

¹¹ See COOPER, ref. 4, p. 134.

¹² FABRY, Mikulas. International Involvement in Secessionist Conflict: From 16th Century to the Present. PAVKOVIC, Aleksandar & RADAN, Peter (eds). *The Ashgate Research Companion to Secession*. 2016. London: Routledge, pp. 251 – 266. ISBN: 978-0754677024.

¹³ BALCH-LINDSAY, Dylan (et. al.). Third-Party Intervention and the Civil War Process. *Journal of Peace Research*. 2008, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 345 – 363.

that civil wars, in which multiple actors involve to support different parties, tend to be prolonged or shortened.¹⁴

Among these studies, there are multidimensional analyses that take into account the factors of internal order of the state, the nature of the civil war, the costs associated with the conflict, and the characteristics of the intervention itself.¹⁵ These studies provide valuable insights into analysis the duration and outcome of civil wars. Therefore, while holistic studies on conflicts can offer general inference, it is more meaningful to evaluate the variables emphasized in that multidimensional studies on a case-by-case basis.

In this study, firstly, the historical and contemporary causes of the Tigray War are addressed. The concept of „external involvement“ is used in the relationship between the war and third parties actors, while also assessing the motivations behind their engagement, whether instrumental, affective or a combination of both. Furthermore, it will be argued that the relatively short duration of the war, ended with a ceasefire within a span of twenty-four months, was the result of an optimum mutual consent/acceptance/agreement among the involved actors, regarding their differing dominant motives.

1 BACKGROUND AND COURSE OF THE WAR

1.1 TPLF/EPRDF Governmental Experience

Tigray region can be interpreted in both ways for Ethiopian history: On one hand, becoming the centre of prestigious Aksum Kingdom, her so-called junior partner¹⁶ of role in emerging Modern Ethiopia and resisting Italian invasion, Tigray entity is deeply engaged with Ethiopian unity in terms of historical symbolism. On the other hand,

¹⁴ See BALCH-LINDSAY, Dylan & ENTERLINE Andrew J. Killing Time: The World Politics of Civil War Duration, 1820-1992. *International Studies Quarterly*. 2000, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 615 – 642; REGAN, Patrick M. Third-Party Interventions and the Duration of Intrastate Conflicts. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 2002, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 55 – 73; ELBADAWI, Ibrahim A. & SAMBANIS, Nicholas. *External Interventions and the Duration of Civil Wars*. Policy Research Working Paper Series 2433, The World Bank, 2000; CUNNINGHAM, David E. Blocking Resolution: How External States Can Prolong Civil Wars. *Journal of Peace Research*. 2010, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 115 – 127.

¹⁵ For a literature review and analysis on relations among duration, motivations and outcomes of the intervenors; See LINEBARGER, Christopher & ENTERLINE, Andrew. Third Party Intervention and the Duration and Outcomes of Civil Wars. MASON, T. David & MITCHELL, Sara McLaughlin (eds). *What do we Know about Civil Wars?*. 2016. Lanham: Rowman&Littlefield, pp. 93 – 108. ISBN: 978-1442242241.

¹⁶ HARBESON, John W., Elections and Democratization in Post-Mengistu Ethiopia, KUMAR, Krishna (ed). *Postconflict Elections, Democratization and International Assistance*. Londra: Lynne Rienner, 1998, p. 113. ISBN: 978-1555877781.

history of Tigray can easily be argued as the history of separation and/or autonomy, due to Weyane Rebellion, opposition of Shewa-Amhara axis by claiming a right to rule as the purest nation in Ethiopia¹⁷ and practices of TPLF starting in mid-1970s. The fall of *Derg* junta in 1991 was another significant milestone for Tigray region, as TPLF took the power as the dominant element of the umbrella organization of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the multi-ethnic socialist opposition against the *Derg*.

TPLF, leading component of the EPRDF, became the prominent figure of the new regime and evolved from an armed organization into a political party, and the leader of the organization, Meles Zenawi, became the prime minister. Also, EPRDF evolved into a party with multi-ethnic components of different ethnicity such Oromo, Amhara, and Southern Ethiopians.

The EPRDF was the political apparatus of the minority power of the Tigray people, who made up six percent of the country's population. Undoubtedly, the most important source of the legitimacy for that minority power was the adoption of ethnic federalism, embellished with the „right to secession“ in the Article 39 of the constitution¹⁸. The EPRDF regime, which was shaped by the specific weight of the TPLF elite and the charismatic power of Zenawi, had a hybrid structure of pro-controlling political sphere and developmental state approaches. And, the regime has been described as one of the examples of competitive authoritarian governments.¹⁹

Hailemariam Desalegn, who was elected prime minister after Zenawi's death in 2012, remained mostly loyal to the methods of the Zenawi leadership. However, due to the Oromo and Amhara mass protests that broke out between 2014 and 2018, he had to leave his post in 2018 and was replaced by Abiy Ahmed, the leader of the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization, the other constituent of the EPRDF. These protests revealed that the TPLF-led EPRDF, which had lost Zenawi's personal legitimacy, should now give more active roles to other party constituents, that is to say the other ethnic-regional entities of the country.

17 SHINN, David H. & OFCANSKY, Thomas P. *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia*. Maryland: The Scarecrow, 2004. pp. 378 – 379. ISBN: 978-0810849105.

18 MICHEAU, Aaron P. The 1991 Transitional Charter of Ethiopia: A New Application of the Self-Determination Principle. *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*. 1996, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 367 – 394.

19 ABBINK, Jon. Paradoxes of Electoral Authoritarianism: The 2015 Ethiopian Elections as Hegemonic Performance. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. Vol. 35, No. 3, 2017, pp. 303 – 323; AALEN, Lovise & TRONVOLL, Kjetil. The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections: The Return of Electoral Authoritarianism. *African Affairs*. Vol. 108, No. 430, 2009, pp. 111 – 120.

1.2 Abiy Ahmed Period

Abiy Ahmed, who was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize by signing the treaty to end the Eritrean border war that has been going on for nearly two decades in 2018, stood out as a promising figure for Ethiopia.²⁰ His personal biography (Christian and Muslim family roots, becoming a former lieutenant colonel and public servant) could unite the country's two most populated peoples, the Amharas and the Oromos. Instead of favoring the Tigray people and region, Abiy Ahmed's leadership could lead to a pan-Ethiopian policy by resolving problems with neighbors and achieving internal peace.

In parallel of this overview, Abiy Ahmed aimed to reside the TPLF-based EPRDF policies with a more inclusive approach. To this end, the prime minister led a transformation with EPRDF constituents by establishing a new political entity, the Prosperity Party (PP) in December 2019. Thus, the historical past of TPLF hegemony would be erased and a new beginning would have been made for Ethiopia's new era. Predictably, all constituents of the EPRDF dissolved themselves and joined the PP, while the TPLF refused to take part in this new initiative.

Following the TPLF-PP separation, corruption and mistreatment of prisoners investigations were launched against public officials and business people, the majority of whom were Tigrayans. TPLF officials claimed that these investigations were instrumentalized in order to attack the Tigray region and its people. In particular, it was argued that the new structure of the PP was actually an attempt to transform the federal structure in the country into a more centralized and unitary one.

The global pandemic that broke out in March 2020 triggered events that would push the current political tension into a war. The elections, scheduled for August 2020, were postponed by the House of People's Representatives on April 2020 to an unspecified time, due to adverse conditions of pandemic. The Council of Tigray Regional State, which is dominated by TPLF members, did not accept the postponement of the election and decided to hold the elections of regional council. As a result of the elections defined as illegal by the Ethiopian government, 98% of the regional council members were owned by TPLF members.

²⁰ In this context, Labzae emphasizes the concept of 'Abiymania'. See LABZAE, Mehdi. *The War in Tigray (2020-2021)*. BACH, Jean-Nicholas (ed). *Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*. London & New York: Routledge, 2022, pp. 239 – 250. ISBN: 978-1138353992.

1.3 The Outbreak, the Course and The End of the War: A Brief Outline

The elections held in the Tigray region were interpreted as a revolt against the central authority. In other words, the local elections in Tigray became the symbol of the pro-autonomous history of region in the new era. The TPLF's rejection of the appointment of a brigadier general to command the Northern Command in the capital of the Tigray region in October 2020, was the most obvious manifestation of the conflict of authority between Addis Ababa and Mekelle. In November 2020, TDF, consisting of some members of the ENDF and militants affiliated with youth organizations/political parties in the Tigray region, especially the TPLF, became operational. The TDF attacked the Northern Command on 3 November. The organization announced that this attack was carried out within the scope of the right of preemptive self-defense against the increasing military activity of the Ethiopian army around the Tigray region.

The next day, the Abiy Ahmed government announced the declaration of a state of emergency in the Tigray region. Abiy criticized TPLF's uncompromising attitude and accused the party of criminal hubris and intransigence. On 7th of November, the House of Federation declared the foundation of Transitional Government of Tigray as the caretaker administrative institution of the region, and appointed a chief executive officer.

It could be argued that the Tigray War was more than a confrontation between the Ethiopian army and the Tigray forces from the very beginning. From the early stages of the war, it was claimed that the Eritrean army carried out military operations in the neighboring Tigray region against TDF, in retaliation of rocket attacks on Eritrea. Moreover, UAVs owned by United Arab Emirates from the Assab base in Eritrea were allegedly used in operations against Tigray. Likewise, the Tigray war led to the resurgence of the disputed border area (al-Fashaqa) between Sudan and Ethiopia. Moreover, it expanded with the active participation of the *Fano* armed organization operating in the Amhara region and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which claims to be representative of the Oromo people.

The turning point of the war, in which multiple actors faced off on the ground, was when the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces, led by TDF and OLA forces, came within about three hundred kilometers of Addis Ababa in the autumn of 2021. After this stage, when Abiy Ahmed started to take place directly on the battleground, ENDF started to recapture the places it lost. In December 2021, the TPLF called for a ceasefire. With the serious slowdown of the conflicts, the Ethiopian government declared an indefinite humanitarian truce in March 2022. Continuing negotiations under the auspices of the African Union and mediated by prestigious African politicians came to an end in the second year of the war. On November 2, 2022, a peace treaty was signed in Pretoria between the representatives Ethiopian government and the TPLF. An agreement was reached on a ceasefire, disarmament of the TDF, respect for the federal government of Tigray, and the establishment of humanitarian aid and basic services to the region. It was decided that the fulfillment of the treaty obligations would be monitored

by the a joint committee of Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union and warring parties.

2 INSTRUMENTAL AND AFFECTIVE: PARTIES OF EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT

The main criterion for categorizing the numerous external actors involved in the Tigray War would be based on their dominant motives. However, it may also be reasonable to classify these parties according to the UCDP's conceptualization to clarify their positions in the war. According to the UCDP's classification, Eritrea and Sudan can be categorized as „secondary warring parties“²¹. Moreover, although not widely publicised, it is also alleged that Somali military forces have entered the conflict against the TPLF in support of Eritrean forces. Therefore, it can be argued that Somalia could also fall into this category.

Another category, in addition to the secondary warring party, is the category of „secondary non-warring supporting parties“²². This term refers to countries that provide assistance to a primary party in the conflict without directly engaging in combat. These are majorly the countries that contributed to military operations by supplying drones of to Ethiopian government during the civil war. China, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and Iran played significant roles in the evolution of the civil war in favour of the central government.

Besides, it is deemed appropriate to categorize the external actors involved in the war due to the dominance of their instrumental and affective motives. Accordingly, actors such as the United States of America (US) and European countries, who highlight the humanitarian crises caused by the war and advocate for an immediate end to it, are categorised as of affective motive-dominant actors. And, actors engaged in involvement driven by primarily by which political, strategic and/or economic interests are labeled as instrumental motive-dominant actors. The varying positions of the actors along the spectrum between instrumental and affective motivations are elaborated in terms of their behaviour and discourse throughout the conflict process.

²¹ See UCDP Definitions, ref 2.

²² Ibid.

2.1 Instrumental Motive-Dominant External Involvement Parties I: Unpredictable Axis in the Region

Just prior to the Tigray War, there had been an unexpected development for the region, the 2018 agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which brought an end to the border issue that had persisted for nearly three decades. The agreement marked the beginning of close and highly personalized co-operation²³ between the Afwerki and Abiy Ahmed governments. This co-operation meant a new chapter for the tensions between the TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), regarding unfavourable relations at „no peace, no war“ stalemate²⁴ created by the Border War between 1998 and 2000. In a sense, Abiy governments and the EPLF were in agreement to cooperate against a common adversary. This co-operation signalled close relations between the two countries. Eventually, both Eritrean and Ethiopian forces began coordinating operations against the TDF.

Eritrean-Ethiopian co-operation and neighbouring the controversial al-Fashaqa has plunged Tigray into military isolation, as an island of resistance surrounded by enemies. International community, noting the isolation of the region, has therefore loudly voiced the authorisation of the flow of humanitarian aid as a major objective during the war.²⁵ Eritrea's military operations in the region are alleged to have been massacres leading to the deaths of a significant number of people.²⁶ It is also alleged that the operations were carried out after the November 2022 ceasefire.²⁷

Moreover, it is alleged that Somali troops are involved in the Eritrean forces and Somalia is indirectly taking sides with Addis Ababa through Eritrea.²⁸ An axis of cooperation between Ethiopia-Eritrea-Somalia is perhaps the most interesting frame of the regional alignment crystallised by the Tigray War. Taking into account that the progress of the war against the Addis Ababa government would lead to the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces in

²³ AWEKE, Amare K. & SEID, Mohammed. The Ethiopia–Eritrea rapprochement: highly personalised and less-institutionalised initiative. *Third World Quarterly*. 2022. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2022.2158079.

²⁴ TRONVOLL, Kjetil. 'Brothers at Peace': People-to-People Reconciliation in the Ethiopian–Eritrean Borderlands. *War & Society*. 2020, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 65.

²⁵ BORRELL, Josep. *We need humanitarian access to Tigray as urgent first step towards peace in Ethiopia*. EEAS [online]. [cited 2021-01-15]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3byjxva9>. ; ROTH, Kenneth. *Confronting Ethiopia's Abusive Siege*. HRW [online]. [cited 2022-08-31]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2wt7jvxs>.

²⁶ *Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians*. HRW [online]. [cited 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8u6v9h>.

²⁷ *News: Tigrayan officials say peace agreement aims to "rescue people of Tigray", accuse Eritrean forces of continued atrocities on civilians*. Addis Standard [online]. [cited 2022-11-21]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p94hwnw>.

²⁸ ODUOR, Michael. *UN report alleges Somalia troops fought in the Tigray war*. Africa News [online]. [cited 2021-06-09]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2382cxfx>.

Somalia as part of the AMISOM mission, the Mogadishu government supported the Abiy government in order to maintain its internal and regional stability.²⁹ The fact that another historical adversary, Somalia, did not take sides against it has put Abiy's government in a much more advantageous position in the war.

In conclusion, it would not be wrong to say that the close and regional reason why the war has led to such desperation and isolation for the people of Tigray, is the emergence of the unpredictable axis of alliance in the HoA, prompted by the 2018 developments. It could even be argued that Abiy Ahmed would not have risked launching such an operation against the TPLF/TDF without rapprochement with Eritrea.³⁰

Therefore, it can be argued that the involvement motives of the unpredictable axis in the region are instrumentalised by focusing on regional interests and aim to maintain strategic and political balance in the region.

2.2 Instrumental Motive-Dominant External Involvement Parties II: Regional and Global Actors Prioritising Support for the Central Government

In the last decade, HoA has increasingly become a region that regional emerging powers, as well as global powers, seek to influence. The US, Russia, China and European actors are shaping their policies towards Ethiopia in parallel with their policies in the Horn or the continent in general. In addition, many states in the Middle East, particularly the Gulf monarchies, have adopted HoA-specific policies.³¹ According to Verhoeven, the main reason for the growing interest of Middle Eastern countries in the Horn is the declining ability and willingness of the United States to safeguard it.³² Thus, regional tensions have risen and Middle Eastern polarisations have been reflected in the Horn. As Cannon and Donelli highlight, the regional security complexes of the Middle East and the HoA are intertwined and subsumed.³³

²⁹ NOR, Mohammed Sheikh. *What Somalia stands to gain from Ethiopia's ongoing Tigray war*. Africa Report [online]. [cited 2021-11-25]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/4cuk3ca9>.

³⁰ DEMISSIE, Abel Abate (et.al.). *Fragmented Transitions in the Context of Competitive Regionalism: The Case of Ethiopia*. Edinburg: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform, 2022, p. 15.

³¹ KABANDULA, Abigail & SHAW, Timothy M., Rising Powers and the Horn of Africa: Competing Regionalisms. *Third World Quarterly*. 2018, Vol. 39, No. 12.; DONELLI, Federico & DENTICE, Giuseppe, Fluctuating Saudi and Emirati Alignment Behaviors in the Horn of Africa. *The International Spectator*. 2020, Vol. 55, No. 1.

³² VERHOEVEN, Harry. The Gulf and the Horn: Changing Geographies of Security Interdependence and Competing Visions of Regional Order. *Civil Wars*. 2018, Vol. 20, No. 3, p. 334.

³³ CANNON, Brendon J. & DONELLI, Federico. Asymmetric alliances and high polarity: evaluating regional security complexes in the Middle East and Horn of Africa. *Third World Quarterly*. 2020, Vol. 41, No. 3.

Thus, instrumental motive-dominant external involvement to the Tigray War of the other regional and global actors can be analysed at two different levels. The first is the China-Russia duo, due to their blocisation³⁴ in the United Nations Security Council, its leading authoritarian tendencies and its increasing interest on Africa. The second level is the reassertion of regional rivalry on the scale of the Middle East over the Tigray War. Here, the emerging powers reflect the conflict among themselves in their relations with the actors in the Horn.

Starting at the first level, Russia and China have blocked UNSC mechanisms on several occasions, such as the Syria and Myanmar issues, arguing that the principles of humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect would violate the principle of national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. In 2021, a UNSC statement on ending the conflict in Tigray was withdrawn due to objections from Russia, China and India³⁵, regarding the politicisation of human rights issues.³⁶ China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that they interpret the issue as an „internal conflict“. And, he underlined that Ethiopia does not need an external force to impose its own political interests to resolve the Tigray issue.³⁷ Furthermore, China has attempted to increase its presence in the region by appointing a Special Envoy for the region to resolve issues³⁸, and by convening an international conference.³⁹

Russia has also focussed on improving its relations with the Ethiopian government concurrently with the Ukraine war, as well as the UN veto, which it implemented together with China. The blaming of both countries by Western states for the Tigray and Ukraine developments opened the door for such a rapprochement. The rapprochement of the two nations, subjected to similar accusations from the West, has even led some Ethiopians to apply to the Russian embassy to volunteer for the Ukrainian war.⁴⁰ Putin government, which seems to have taken the risk of damaging the relationship between

³⁴ SNETKOV, Aglaya & LANTAIGNE, Marc. ‚The Loud Dissenter and its Cautious Partner‘ - Russia, China, Global Governance and Humanitarian Intervention. *International Relations of Asia-Pacific*, 2015, Vol. 15, No. 1. p. 113.

³⁵ *Diplomats: UN fails to approve call to end Tigray violence*. Independent [online]. [cited 2021-03-06]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/yevt45ra>.

³⁶ NYABIAGE, Jevans. *China votes 'no' on Tigray abuses probe by UN team, calls it interference in Ethiopia's affairs*. SCMP [online]. [cited 2021-12-19]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/bde6k5zk>.

³⁷ *Ethiopia needs no foreign interference to end internal conflict: Top Chinese diplomat*. AA [online]. [cited 2021-12-01]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2nhvk23a>.

³⁸ AMAN, Ayah. *China appoints envoy for Horn of Africa*. Al Monitor [online]. [cited 2022-01-21]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/bdcn6a7p>.

³⁹ *Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Affairs of the Foreign Ministry Xue Bing Attends the Horn of Africa Peace Conference*. FMPRC [online]. [cited 2022-06-22]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3fmb4cnj>.

⁴⁰ ENDESHAW, Dawit. *Ethiopians queue up to volunteer for Russia's fight in Ukraine*. Reuters [online]. [cited 2022-04-21]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9cryhh>.

Russia and Egypt⁴¹, continues to strengthen bilateral relations by signing military agreements with Ethiopia. In return, Ethiopia continues to abstain in the votes to condemn Russia over Ukrainian operation.

The emerging powers in the Middle East have adopted different attitudes towards the war. The first position was taken by governments with interests in Ethiopia in line with their relations with different regional actors. For example, Türkiye's position in favour of the Abiy government should not be seen in isolation from the longstanding Egyptian-Turkish tensions. However, for powers seeking to consolidate their influence in the region or not relatively weaken their established ties, the war has also been an occasion to develop close relations with the Abiy regime.

The most obvious and blatant reflection of support for the Abiy government was the drones supplied to Ethiopia during the war. Apart from UAE-supplied Chinese drones taking off from bases in Eritrea, Turkish (TB-2) and Iranian (Mohajer-6) drones also played a crucial role in Ethiopia's repulsion of TDF forces.⁴²

Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which had a significant stake in the Eritrean-Ethiopian reconciliation in 2018⁴³, had to face a more complex picture. For these two countries, which have also established close relations with the TPLF governments, even if there is no question of taking a clear side between the warring parties, it is observed that they refrain from a political position by keeping themselves active with low-profile mediation options, not wanting to lose their position and influence, especially against the increasing activities of Türkiye and Iran in the region.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Saudi Arabia continues to argue in favour of Egypt on the GERD issue. The UAE's adoption of a more neutral stance on the GERD issue, in view of its special trade relations with the HoA, has created discontent in Saudi-Emirati relations.⁴⁵

It is evident that the countries discussed in this context have pursued actions and rhetoric at ensuring the survival of the Ethiopian central government and the territorial integrity of the country in the Tigray War, driven by their regional and national interests. In particular, drone supply is the most obvious manifestation of this policy. These instrumental motive-dominant activities have been accompanied by a normative discourse, particularly underlining the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in

41 RAMANI, Samuel. *Russia and the GERD: An uneasy balancing act*. MEI@75 [online]. [cited 2021-08-15]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/mu7nf9be>.

42 HARTER, Fred. *Ethiopia's drone wars: Iran, China and Turkey deliver the air power behind Abiy's resurgence*. Africa Report [online]. [cited 2022-01-26]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/wynwndh3>.

43 LONS, Camille. *Saudi Arabia and the UAE Look to Africa*. Carnegie [online]. [cited 2018-10-23]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9jnkzr>.

44 LUBOTZKY, Asher & MEHARI, Habtom. Is Ethiopia Collapsing? Implications for Israel and the Region from the Tigray War. *Strategic Assessment*. 2021, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 106 – 107.

45 MIKHAIL, George. *Saudis side with Egypt on Nile dam*. Al Monitor [online]. [cited 2022-06-29]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/mw8vzbnm>.

internal affairs. As a result, an affective motive flavour has supported the involvement of these parties.

2.3 Instrumental Motive-Dominant External Involvement Parties III: “The Unexpected” Egypt-Sudan Axis and The Question of GERD Dispute

Given their historical and regional rivalry, as well as the ongoing dispute over the GERD, Egypt and Sudan are two of the actors, or „usual suspects,“ who could be somehow involved in the war. The other historical-traditional element of this scepticism is the presence of Muslim groups’ opposition movements in Ethiopia, which have had interactions with the neighbouring Muslim countries. Therefore it is not surprising that Egypt and Sudan have adapted affective motive-dominant character in their approach to the war. As emphasized by Plaut, Egypt has supported opposition movements and states against Ethiopia, in a quiet but vigour manner.⁴⁶ In particular, Egypt regards Ethiopian control over GERD as an existential threat as an upstream country along the Nile.

Sisi’s statement in 2021: „*No one can take a single drop of Egypt’s waters and that the country’s share is untouchable*“⁴⁷ reflects Cairo’s determination and concerns. In 2022, Sisi reaffirmed his position by stating „*the need to reach for a fair, balanced and binding legal agreement on filling and operating the Dam, in accordance with the rules of international law and the outcomes of United Nations Security Council in this regard, within an appropriate timeframe without any unilateral measures.*“⁴⁸ In response, Abiy Ahmed stated that Ethiopia had no intention to harm Egypt and Sudan and had a commitment to address the concerns of neighbouring downstream countries.⁴⁹

Although it has been suggested by some sources that Ethiopian opposition armed organisations have links with Cairo and Khartoum, some Egyptian diplomatic and political sources, however, stated that the Sisi government was limited to closely observing the events rather than intervening directly or indirectly.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ PLAUT, Martin. *Understanding Eritrea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 70. ISBN: 978-0190669591.

⁴⁷ MAGDY, Samy. *In stark warning, Egypt leader says Nile water ‘untouchable’*. AP [online]. [cited 2021-03-30]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/yrk29aa4>.

⁴⁸ ABU ZAID, Mohammed. *Egypt slams Ethiopian power generation from Renaissance Dam*. Arab News [online]. [cited 2022-02-21]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/ybvua54e>.

⁴⁹ CHAMBRAUD, Tancrede. *Ethiopia has „no intention to harm“ Egypt and Sudan- PM Abiy Ahmed*. Africa News [online]. [cited 2020-09-26]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3vffk37y>.

⁵⁰ MAHMOUD, Khaled. *The Egyptian Hands in the Ethiopian Crisis*. Fanack [online]. [cited 2021-11-26]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/mryen9km>.

This is also the case for Sudan, which is more closely affected by the civil war compare to Egypt, given the refugee issue and border conflicts. Sudan seeks a bilateral and equitable resolution to the GERD dispute while striving to alleviate adverse outcomes of the civil war. Sudanese officials had called for co-operation to end the conflict, refuting allegations of Sudan's involvement in sabotaging the dam by supporting TPLF militants.⁵¹ Indeed, during Abiy Ahmed's official visit to Sudan in January 2023, military leader al-Burhan emphasised that the two countries were „aligned and in agreement“ on issues concerning the dam.⁵²

For these reasons, it would be appropriate to say that the Egyptian-Sudanese axis acted with the instrumental motive of a „crisis-free and stable Ethiopia“, aiming to resolve the effects of the civil war and the GERD dispute. This motive prevented them from forming an involvement intention in support of the opposition primary parties and pushed possible affective motives out of the agenda by subordinating them.

2.4 Affective-Motive Dominant External Involment: The Humanitarian-Oriented Stance of the West and International Organizations

Perhaps the only element on which the world community agreed during the Tigray War was the humanitarian tragedies in the region. It should be noted that the US and the European Union have also prioritized the humanitarian crisis during the civil war. Their efforts have been aimed at preventing further displacement, alleviating hunger, and addressing health issues affecting the population. It should also be stated that from the perspective of Ethiopia and Eritrea, it is alleged that the US is providing support to resuscitate the TPLF.⁵³ Therefore, from the perspective of the Ethiopia-Eritrea axis, it is argued that the intervention of the US and European powers cannot be adequately characterized as indirect or humanitarian.

Despite Sino-Russian Bloc, in November 2021, a joint statement by UNSC was issued calling for an end to the hate speech that led to the conflict, the delivery of humanitarian aid to the region, access to public services and the start of ceasefire negotiations.⁵⁴ However, between May and August 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Joint Investigation into

⁵¹ *Abu-Hajja; Sudan Army Does Not Interfere in Internal Issues of Ethiopia*. SUNA [online]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8v6beu>.

⁵² *Ethiopia's PM Abiy Ahmed in Sudan on first visit since 2021 coup*, Al Jazeera [online]. [cited 2023-01-26]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/mdevce6r>.

⁵³ *Eritrea Blames US Support for Tigray's Leaders for the War*. Independent [online]. [cited 2021-07-08]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/38rvcvr3>.

⁵⁴ *Security Council Press Statement on Ethiopia*. UN [online]. [cited 2021-11-05]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/svt9jkdX>.

allegations of human rights violations in the Tigray region found „reasonable grounds to believe“ that all parties to the conflict had carried out attacks against civilians, extra-judicial killings, torture and inhuman treatment.⁵⁵ Even if there was a consensus that the violations caused were reciprocal, the main focus over criticism of the Ethiopian government was the obstruction of the isolated Tigray region from basic humanitarian assistance and public services. Indeed, these criticisms were the main reason why the government declared a humanitarian truce in March 2022. Thus, the general rhetoric of the US and European powers emphasising the supremacy of human rights and liberal norms against the practices of authoritarian states has, in the specific case of the Tigray War, taken the form of criticism of the Ethiopian and Eritrean government's „humanitarian siege“⁵⁶ over the region.

In September 2021, noting the humanitarian crisis and famine caused by the conflict, US imposed sanctions on certain individuals in order to support ceasefire efforts, ensure the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from Ethiopia, and preserve the unity, territorial integrity and stability of Ethiopia.⁵⁷ In particular, Washington stated that defence trade restrictions were intended to halt the flow of arms and encourage the parties to negotiate a ceasefire. Biden underlined standing by the Ethiopian people by continuing humanitarian aid to the region. The sanctions were imposed only on certain Eritrean officials.⁵⁸ However, in January 2022, the Biden administration imposed trade sanctions that would prevent Ethiopia from engaging in duty-free trade under the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Furthermore, in April and June 2022, bills HR6600 and S3199, aimed at restricting defence support and economic and development aid to Ethiopia, were introduced to the US Congress and Senate, but were not voted on.⁵⁹

The US and the European Union's prioritisation of humanitarian-based appeals during the two-year conflict has led some to argue that the human rights and refugee issues

⁵⁵ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission /Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Geneva: UN - OHCHR. 03-11-2021.

⁵⁶ European Parliament. The recent humanitarian and human rights situation in Tigray, Ethiopia, notably that of children. P9 TA(2022)0351. Strasbourg. 06.11.2022; *News Alert: EU alarmed over "totally blocked" humanitarian access in Tigray, "greatly impeded" in affected areas in Amhara, Afar*. Addis Standard [online]. [cited 2021-09-30]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3vj4deny>.

⁵⁷ Executive Order 14046 of September 17, 2021, Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons With Respect to the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia. *Federal Register*. 2021, Vol. 86, No. 180. p. 52389.

⁵⁸ FACT SHEET: *Biden-Harris Administration Actions in Response to Ongoing Crisis in Northern Ethiopia*. The White House [online]. [cited 2021-09-17]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/ypjv3zjw>.

⁵⁹ S.3199 - *Ethiopia Peace and Stabilization Act of 2022*. [online], 2022. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2cdyekbr>. ; H.R.6600 - *Ethiopia Stabilization, Peace, and Democracy Act*. [online], 2022. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3h8yneyh>.

raised by the conflict are being weaponised to destabilise and manipulate Ethiopia.⁶⁰ Both the Ethiopian public and political/diplomatic circles have underlined and condemned the TPLF as a US or US and EU-backed organisation.⁶¹ The main objection was that by instrumentalising humanitarian conditions, ties with the Ethiopian opposition aimed at destabilising the country were legitimised. Ethiopian officialdom has not similarly accused the United States. Ahmed, on the other hand, stated that they were on Ethiopia's side in the US policy of war on terrorism and, accordingly, invited the US to fight together against the terrorist activities of the TPLF.⁶²

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is argued that categorising the third parties involved in the Tigray War according to their disposition in instrumental and affective motives is significant in understanding the course of the war and conducting a comprehensive conflict analysis. The support of secondary warring and non-warring parties to the Ethiopian government with instrumental motives played a vital role in halting the advancement of opposition forces and establishing stability and control in favor of the government in autumn 2021. Importantly, there was no overt, active and instrumental-motive dominant external involvement on the side of the opposition primary party. On the contrary, there was an affective motive-dominant involvement that prioritized addressing the emerging humanitarian crisis and seeking an immediate end to the war.

From this perspective, it seems meaningful to attribute the relatively short duration of the Tigray War and the outcome of the ceasefire by looking at the motives of external involvement. Thus, it seems possible to underline the literature that emphasises the objectives of intervenors in the relationship between civil war and third parties. The primary objective of instrumental-motive dominant involvement was to ensure stability and the survival of the Ethiopian government, while affective-motive dominant involvement addressed the end of the humanitarian crisis. Once the opposition forces' advancement was halted and survival of the regime was guaranteed, there was no longer a compelling reason to continue civil war with external involvement. Consequently, it can be argued that the Tigray War reached a point of mutual consent/acceptance/consensus, resulting a ceasefire after twenty four months, a resolution that would not have been pursued without the involvement of external parties.

⁶⁰ PRINCE, Rob. Washington's Ethiopia policy – hybrid warfare in the making (again). *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy*. 2021, No. 80.

⁶¹ *Ethiopians to protest United States' support to the TPLF rebels*. Borkena [online]. [cited 2022-09-05]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/bdf2nr97>. ; GUPTA, Piyush. *US unveils its military pact with TPLF terrorists to save them from Eritrea and Ethiopia*. TFI Global [online]. [cited 2022-10-31]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/ycypzv5a>. ; GETACHEW, Addis. *West behind continued fighting in northern Ethiopia: Scholar*. AA [online]. [cited 2022-09-04]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/5n7fn7wy>.

⁶² Twitter. 17.09.2021. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/mvc83sxf>.

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