# ROLE OF PROXY ACTORS AND FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER IN THE ETHIOPIA-ERITREA CONFLICT

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## Abstract

*The Ethiopia-Eritrea war started in 1998 and lasted for two years (1998-2000). The war was engendered by a border dispute. The post-war crisis lasted for 20 years. The primary motive of this paper is to identify the remote and immediate causes of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war. The study employs Samuel Huntington's The Clash of Civilisation theory and Konrad Lorenz and Edward Wilson modern Biological theories to explain the Ethiopia-Eritrea crisis. The paper relies largely on secondary data as a source of materials specifically, documents that are historical in nature. These include published and unpublished works, texts, periodicals, data from the net etc. The paper finds that with all the debilitating political and socio-economic conditions ensuing from the crisis, the two belligerents of the war have eventually become the victims of the crisis they created – the war thus becoming a Frankenstein Monster. The paper therefore recommends that post-colonial African states should as a matter of policy and protocol, explore the African option rather than the incessant involvement of erstwhile colonial masters in dispute resolution among African states.*

**Keywords:** Inter-state war; Horn of Africa; Proxy Actors; Frankenstein Monster

## Introduction

In Africa, inter-state war is not a common phenomenon. The Ethiopia-Eritrea war is perhaps one of the very few instances of interstate war in Africa. With regard to the incidences of inter-state wars in Africa, only two would qualify as interstate wars: the Ethiopian- Somali 1977-1978 conflict over the Ogaden and Haud regions, and the 1998-2000 Eritrean-Ethiopian war. Indeed, what seems to be particularly exceptional in Africa is the low-incidence of inter-state wars in the post-colonial period. Nevertheless, there exist a crisis of distinction between an inter-state war and a border dispute. Markus Komprobst (2002) distinguishes between border disputes and inter-state wars. He refers to border dispute as a conflict between two states arising from the claim of at least one of these states to a part of the territory or, in extreme cases, to an entire region within the territory administered by the other state.

In the case of Africa, it has become arduous and increasingly difficult to distinguish between an inter-state war and what is purely a border dispute. There

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seems to be a fusion or an interface of border disputes and inter-state wars. In other words, there are numerous instances where border disputes escalate and culminate in inter-state wars, and there are situations where inter-state wars snowball into border disputes. Instances where border disputes interfaced with interstate wars are the conflicts between Ethiopia and Somalia, 1977- 78; Libya and Chad over the Aozou Strip in 1987; Algeria and Morocco in 1963; Nigeria and Chad (over Lake Chad) in 1983; Nigeria and Cameroon (over the Bakassi Peninsula) in 1978-79 and in 1993-94; between Mali and Burkina Faso (over the Agacher Strip) in 1985; between Guinea Bissau and Senegal (over the Dome Flore) in 1991 and between Eritrea and Yemen (over the Hanish Islands) and Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998-2000 (Jacquin-Berdal, 2005).

Despite the high frequency of armed conflict in many parts of Africa, particularly in Central and Eastern Africa, few of the region's wars can be described as inter-state in the traditional sense of the word, i.e. wars fought between state governments. Similarly, it has also become increasingly difficult to classify conflict in the region as inter- or intra-state because in many of such conflicts, state actors have been the principal protagonists. Examples are the Uganda-Tanzania War 1979; and The Congo Wars, 1996-97 and 1998-2003. Meanwhile, a number of intra-state conflicts have also been recorded in countries like Sudan which had internal conflict between 1955-1972, 1983-2005, 2003; The Congo, between 1960-1965; Ugandan, between 1980-1986 and Rwandan, 1990-1994(Armed conflict: Interstate & intrastate conflict (n.d.).

Incidentally, the Ethiopia-Eritrea war was engendered by a border dispute; embedded within a set of domestic political conflicts in each state; linked further through proxy conflicts to instability in Somalia and the Ogaden region; and is skewed additionally by the application of Washington's global counter-terrorism policies to the region. Several authors and internal observers depicted the war as a war between 'Brothers'. These accounts suggested that the war only concerned the Tigrinya speaking factions within the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and within the Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). To this extent, the Ethiopia-Eritrea war has been tagged both a border war and an inter-state war. For example, the local people living in the disputed border area are closely related, as they are the Tigrinya speaking communities at the helm of affairs in the two warring countries (Gedamu, 2008).

Similarly, the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict attempts to air the silenced views of the local people living along the disputed boundary. To this extent, it has been argued that two ethnically related people inhabit the Ethiopian and Eritrean boundary and any solution to end the currently prevailing deadlock and resolve the border disagreement needs to be done with the participation and consultation of the local people. Any solution imposed on the local people is likely to face resistance, undermining the sustainability of the peace that could be achieved (Gedamu,

2008). Based on the foregoing, the study intends to identify and discuss the immediate and remote causes of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war; investigate the role played by proxy actors in the Ethiopia-Eritrea war; the emergence and activities of armed groups in both countries and the impact of these armed groups in the crisis. More so, the study evaluates the socio-economic and political effects of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war on the two countries and the entire Horn of Africa.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

The paper seek to clarify six major concepts that are cardinal to this study, which includes War, inter-state war, proxy actors, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Horn of Africa. The concept of war appears to enjoy a considerable level of consensus in its definition. The Collins Dictionary defines war as "a period of fighting or conflict between countries or states" (Definition of war, n.d.). The Lexico UK Dictionary refers to war "as a state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country" (Meaning of *war* in English, n.d.). However, van der Dennenenjoy (n.d.) explains the concept of war by listing the various types of war such as:

> *Limited war and total (or all-out) war, cold war and hot war, local war and world war, controlled and uncontrolled war, accidental war and premeditated war, conventional and nuclear war, declared and undeclared war, aggressive or offensive war and defensive war, general war and proxy war, international war and civil war, tribal and civilised war, preventive or pre-emptive war, protracted war, absolute war, war of liberation, war of conquest, war of commerce, war of plunder, revolutionary war, political war, economic war, social war, imperialist war, guerilla war, psychological war, strategic war, counter-insurgency war, dynastic war, monarchical war, ritual war, agonistic war, sacred war, instrumental war, genocidal war.*

In international law, it is believed that war, in principle, can only take place between sovereign political entities, that is, States. War in this case is perceived as a means for resolving differences between units of the highest order of political organisation. The school of political realism maintains that nation-States can only realise their national interests by demonstrating their willingness to fight and by making use of wars of various degrees of magnitude as an instrument of national policy to achieve legitimate ends. War therefore, is not only an act of violence but also, an instrument that can be put into use to compel our opponents to fulfil our will (van der Dennenenjoy, n.d.). In an effort to define war, some *Correlates of War* scholars established the requisite condition that qualifies a conflict to be a war; it must involve armed forces capable of 'effective resistance' on both sides. Unorganised individuals specifically utilised the effective resistance criteria to differentiate wars from massacres, which is a one-sided state killings, or general riots. Such one-sided violence is not considered to be the same phenomenon as war and is not included (Sarkees,Wayman & Singer, 2003). In other words, for a

war to take place there must be an aggressor and there should be an opposition to the aggressor.

Interstate war is a conflict between two or more states (both members of the international system), who use their respective national forces in the conflict. This is differentiated from intra-state violence which is the most common form of conflict today and which is characterised with sustained political violence that takes place between armed groups representing the state, and one or more non-state groups. Violence of this sort usually is confined within the borders of a single state, but usually has significant international dimensions and holds the risk of spilling over into bordering states. The current conflict in Syria would be described as an intrastate conflict.

However, conceptualising inter-state war is dependent on the typology and classification of the *Correlates of War* (COW) as laid down by Sarkees et al, (2003) that is based upon the status of territorial entities, in particular focusing on those that are classified as members of the inter-state system (referred to as "states"). Inter-state wars have also been defined by looking at the criteria of wars, whether they primarily take place between or among states, between a state(s) and a non-state entity, and within states. Within the COW war typology, an inter-state war must meet same definitional requirements of all wars in that the war must involve sustained combat, involving organised armed forces, resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related combatant fatalities within a twelve-month period.

The term war by proxy can be derived from the cold War period, which witnessed several wars between regional states that may be regarded as substitute for direct confrontation between the Superpowers. War by proxy is the result of the invention of nuclear weapons and of the consequent need for the Superpowers to avoid coming directly into the conflict with each other (Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov's, 1984). Within the purview of proxy war, there are local wars with or without external military interventions. The former is a war between regional states behind each of which – or behind only one – stands a Superpower who supplies the states by indirect military intervention i.e. without its own forces becoming involved in the war. In this case, arms supply can be a surrogate for direct Superpower intervention in a local conflict. The implication of proxy war is that a superpower may use a local war to advance its global and regional strategic or political interest without the need to intervene by its forces. On the other hand, every local war without direct Superpower intervention is a war by proxy if there is some relationship between local adversaries and the Superpowers. Examples are the Arab – Israeli wars, and the Indo-Pakistani wars, in which the United States of America and the Soviet Union played proxy roles for Israel and the Arab states respectively (Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, 1984).

Similarly, in the Ethiopia-Eritrea war, it was discovered that both Ethiopia and Eritrea, in addition to supporting each other's insurgents and opposition movements, both countries also competed against each other by supporting rival parties and armed groups in neighbouring states. While Addis Ababa allegedly supported Abdullahi Yusuf and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia against Eritrea. Eritrea was alleged to have provided assistance to the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC, now re-grouped as the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia based in Asmara) and Ethiopian opposition groups based in Somalia such as the ONLF and OLF, hoping to tie Ethiopian forces down in the East (Terrence, 2009). Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was quoted to have stated in parliament that his government would actively support groups trying to overthrow Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki. Mr. Meles's comment came after Ethiopia accused Eritrea of trying to stage high-profile bomb attacks in Addis Ababa during an African Union summit (Proxy War Stokes Tension between Ethiopia, Eritrea, 2012).

The present day Ethiopia, is officially the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a country in the north-eastern part of Africa, popularly known as the Horn of Africa. It shares borders with Eritrea to the north, Djibouti to the northeast, and Somalia to the east, Sudan to the northwest, South Sudan to the west, and Kenya to the south. With over 102 million inhabitants, Ethiopia is the most populous landlocked country in the world and the second-most populous nation on the African continent that covers a total area of 1,100,000 square kilometres (420,000 sq miles). Its capital and largest city is Addis Ababa, which lies a few miles west of the East African Rift that splits the country into the Nubian Plate and the Somali Plate (Africa: Ethiopia, *The World Factbook, 2020*)

During the late 19th-century Scramble for Africa, Ethiopia was one of two nations to retain its sovereignty from long-term colonialism by a European colonial power. Many newly independent nations on the continent subsequently adopted its flag colors. The country was occupied by Italy in 1936 and became Italian Ethiopia (part of the Italian East Africa) until 1941. Ethiopia was also the first independent member from Africa of the 20th-century League of Nations and the United Nations. In 1974, the Ethiopian monarchy under Haile Selassie was overthrown by the Derg, a communist military government backed by the Soviet Union. In 1987, the Derg established the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, but it was overthrown in 1991 by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, which has been the ruling political coalition since (Africa: Ethiopia, *The World Factbook, 2020*)

A majority of Ethiopian population adheres to Christianity (mainly the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and P'ent'ay) and the historical Kingdom of Aksum was one of the first states to officially adopt the religion, whereas around a third follows Islam (primarily Sunni). The country is the site of the Migration to

Abyssinia and the oldest Muslim settlement in Africa at Negash. A substantial population of Ethiopian Jews, known as Bete Israel, also resided in Ethiopia until the 1980s (Shalva, 2008).Ethiopia is a multilingual nation with around 80 ethno-linguistic groups, the four largest of which are the Oromo, Amhara, Somali and Tigrayans. Most people in the country speak Afroasiatic languages of the Cushitic or Semitic branches. Additionally, Omotic languages are spoken by ethnic minority groups inhabiting the southern regions. Nilo-Saharan languages are also spoken by the nation's Nilotic ethnic minorities. Oromo is the most populous language by native speakers, while Amharic is the most populous by number of total speakers and serves as the working language in the federal government and as the lingua franca of the country (Shalva, 2011).

Eritrea is one of the countries situated in the Horn of Africa, with its capital at Asmara. It is bordered by Sudan in the west, Ethiopia in the south, and Djibouti in the southeast. The northeastern and eastern parts of Eritrea have an extensive coastline along the Red Sea. The nation has a total area of approximately 117,600 km (45,406 sq miles), and includes the Dahlak Archipelago and several of the Hanish Islands (Africa: Eritrea, 2020). Eritrea is a multi-ethnic country, with nine recognised ethnic groups in its population of around 5 million. Most residents speak languages from the Afroasiatic family, either of the Ethiopian Semitic languages or Cushitic branches. Among these communities, the Tigrinyas make up about 55% of the population, with the Tigre people constituting around 30% of inhabitants. In addition, there are a number of Nilo-Saharan-speaking Nilotic ethnic minorities. Most people in the territory are predominantly adherents of the Christian and Islam religions. (Name change for Eritrea and other minor corrections, 2012).

The region referred to as the Horn of Africa is the easternmost projection of the African Continent. Referred to in ancient and medieval times as the land of the *Barbara* and *Habesha*, the Horn of Africa denotes the region containing the countries of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. It covers approximately 2 million km$^2$ (770 thousand sq miles) and is inhabited by roughly 115 million people (Ethiopia: 96.6 million, Somalia: 10.4 million, Eritrea: 6.4 million, and Djibouti: 0.81 million) (Stock, 2004). Essentially, the Horn of Africa is the region that is home to the countries of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, whose cultures have been linked throughout their long history. A broader definition of the Horn of Africa include all the countries mentioned above, but also including parts or all of Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. Part of the Horn of Africa region also include the area known as the Somali peninsula, a term typically used when referring to lands of Somalia and eastern Ethiopia. The Horn contains such diverse areas as the highlands of the Ethiopian Plateau, the Ogaden desert, and the Eritrean and Somalian coasts which is home to the Amhara, Tigray, Oromo, and Somali peoples, among others. Its coasts are washed by the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean, and it has long been in contact with the Arabian

Peninsula and southwestern Asia. Islam and Christianity are of ancient standing here, and the people speak Afro-Asiatic languages related to those of North Africa and the Middle East (Horn of Africa region, eastern Africa n.d.).

Based on the foregoing, it is clear that apart from the fact that both Eritrea and Ethiopia occupy the same region of the Horn of Africa, both countries share common features and affinities. For example, both Eritrea and Ethiopia used to be one country before Eritrea gained independence in April 1993. More so, both countries have common demographic features in the area of ethnicity, religions, economy and trade. Many small towns and villages, which lie along the disputed border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, have served as melting pot to the peoples of both countries. The towns of Badme and Zalmbessa have been very cardinal to the socio-economic relations of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Zalambessa particularly has been a key place for trade transactions between Eritreans and Ethiopians (Dias, 2008). Perhaps this is why the inter-state war between the two countries is still considered needless and incomprehensible.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The work is hinged on two complementary theories, which seek to explain the possible causes of war and inter-state wars. They are Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilisation* theory and Konrad Lorenz and Edward Wilson modern Biological theories. Whereas Samuel Huntington (1996) attributed the major cause of war to cultural differences, Lorenz and Wilson (n.d.) believe that aggression, which is a major cause of war, is inherent in man and it is present in humans for survival. While Huntington(1996) predicts that nation states will still remain the key international actors, he says that the sources of conflict in this new world era will not be ideological or economic, as it may have been in the past, but will instead be instigated by cultural differences. Because according to him, cultural differences are integral to human beings than any other qualifier.

According to Huntington (1996), one can change nearly anything about oneself, even citizenship is malleable; however, culture is one thing that does not change. Because of this, cultural differences have a powerful ability to generate interstate conflict, where the conflict is occurring between states and groups of states with different cultural affiliations. This difficulty to ameliorate differences between cultures is one possible cause of conflict between states. On the surface, Samuel Huntington's cultural theories may appear not applicable to the Ethiopia-Eritrea scenario, since many of the local people inhabiting the border towns separating Ethiopia and Eritrea have close cultural affinities. Nevertheless, it is believed that the crisis between the two countries is due to the tendency of Eritrea to recapture and possibly retain its pre-colonial cultural features on one hand, and the resolve of Ethiopia to retain the autocratic colonial legacy on the other hand. Eritrea was part of the Axumite civilisation of Ethiopia until 1890 when it became a separate entity under the supervision of Italy. After Italian colonialism, the United Nations

superintended over the annexation of Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1950. This was considered a contradiction because the annexation witnessed the welding together of the liberal oriented Eritrea and the feudal/authoritarian Ethiopia. This decision to merge the two territories with different political cultures is incapable of producing an organic society and it is a precipitating factor for the Ethiopia-Eritrea war.

Furthermore, the proponents of the Biological Theories of war, Konrad Lorenz and Edward O Wilson (Lorenz & Wilson, n.d.) are of the opinion that the incidents of war are attributable to the aggression, which is present and inherent in humans for survival. According to them, with the advent of modern technology and modern weapons, the tendency for violence has become Homosapiens' greatest danger, especially along with "militant enthusiasm" which is a form of communal aggression with a lack of restraint on violence.

Kenneth Waltz (2001), who claimed that war is a creation of human nature, further explored this theory. According to Waltz, man is by nature predisposed to war because war is a by-product of envy, selfishness, and self-preservation – these three are in innate in man and seem to form the basis for man to want to go to war. This point was re-echoed by Clausewitz et al (2008), when they claim, "in order for a state to wage war, "the passions which break forth in war must already have a latent existence in the people".

These two theories tend to conflate to explain the fundamental causes of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war. Nevertheless, in evaluating several theories of war, Cashman and Robinson (2007) raised a number of questions, which appear relevant to the Ethiopia-Eritrea scenario. Among the questions raised: Are humans aggressive by nature? Do individual differences among leaders matter? How might poor decision making procedures lead to war? Why do leaders engage in seemingly risky and irrational policies that end in war? Why do states with internal conflicts seem to become entangled in wars with their neighbours? What roles do nationalism and ethnicity play in international conflict? What kinds of countries are most likely to become involved in war? Why have certain pairs of countries been particularly war-prone over the centuries? Can strong states deter war? Can we find any patterns in the way that war breaks out? How do balances of power or changes in balances of power make war more likely? Do social scientists currently have an answer to the question of what causes war?

### *Ethiopia – Eritrea War and Roles of Proxy*

The Ethiopia-Eritrea war appears to have been engendered by a conflation of several related factors. According to Von Clausewitz & Howard (2008) cited in Barash (2000:39), states do not go to war for a single reason. States resort to war for multiple reasons. In analysing the causes of the Ethiopian and Eritrean war, we will adopt Joseph Nye's three levels of analysis i.e. System, State and Individual levels of analysis. According to Tekeste and Tronvoll, (2000); Viotti and Kauppi, 1987 cited in Gedamu (2008), system level analysis examines the distribution of political power or the structure of the international system. Nations feel compelled to go to war when their survival and independent role in the international system is threatened. States do not go to war for simple reasons that could be resolved peacefully but against threats on their survival and capacity to remain as a viable independent state.

The main source of dispute, it can be argued, that led Ethiopia and Eritrea to the devastating war of 1998-2000 was not their disagreement on the exact location of their common border. The border issue could best be regarded as an incidental factor; a mere disagreement that could have been resolved peacefully through technical demarcation. There were thus some other deep-rooted fundamental reasons, which forced the countries to resort to war in 1998. The impact of Italian colonial legacy on the making of Eritrea; the suffocating presence of the United States of America, its capricious interest in meddling in the Ethiopia-Eritrea suspicious relationship and its hegemonic role, its interest and policy of limited engagement in the Horn of Africa combined to make the Ethiopia-Eritrea war inevitable.

State level analysis focuses on the explanation of the domestic processes and dynamics that contributed in causing the war. It came to a point where Eritrea became obsessed and preoccupied with the project of creating a national identity for itself as a nation state, a recognised sovereign state. Moreover, in the process of trying to create an organic society, Eritrea adopted ideologies, methods and strategies that were in conflict with aspirations of its neighbours. According to Berhane in Gedamu (2008), the principal cause of the Ethiopian and Eritrean border war was the EPLF"s vision to achieve its second (the first being independence) objective of transforming and creating a new state of Eritrea on a Singaporean model. Towards this end, achieving national unity was put on top of the agenda of the EPLF. The armed clashes and wars that Eritrea conducted with Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen and Ethiopia were meant to enhance a unified national Eritrean identity as a prerequisite to establish a prosperous and developed Eritrean state. Eritrea has more than seven different ethnic groups and most of these ethnic groups have their kins across its borders. Eritrea's measured armed clashes with its neighbours and full-scale war with Ethiopia were conducted with the view to develop distinct and separate Eritrean identity by instigating animosities and divisions with similar ethnic groups across the border.

The individual level focuses on how the personalities of individual leaders contribute in the decision of states to go to war. The judgment, intelligence and personal characteristics of leaders matter in the decisions of states to go to war. The personality of Wilhelm II and Hitler contributed considerably in the causation of the First and the Second World Wars respectively (Nye, 2003:34). In the case of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, the role played by the leaders of both countries, perhaps informed by their personal idiosyncrasies and inherent acrimonious traits is overarching.

Both President Issaias of Eritrea and Prime Minster Meles of Ethiopia played considerable role in the outbreak of the Ethiopian and Eritrean war. Apart from the fact that both leaders are successful guerrilla leaders, Issaias is believed to be intolerant, autocratic, arbitrary, ambitious and egocentric. So centralised was his decision method that in May 1998, the Eritrean army was mobilised to Badme upon the personal order of the president, without consultation with the cabinet, the parliament or the political party. Meles on the other hand has been described as more tolerant, and has been criticised for being 'soft' and 'weak' in handling Ethiopia's relations with Eritrea. The free press in Ethiopia even went as far as to call the Prime Minister as 'Eritrea's ambassador in Ethiopia.' (Gedamu, 2008).

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the aforementioned three levels of analysis are complimentary to one another. The causes of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war can therefore be understood as interplay of all factors analysed, all three factors – the international system, the state system and the individual factor – all conflated to bring about the reality of the border dispute which many analysts today believe is the immediate cause of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war. Incidentally, due to the fundamental nature of the circumstances that engendered the Ethiopia-Eritrea war, the international community and some foreign powers were implicated. In addition, other countries within the region of the Horn of Africa were involved. While some of these countries played very profound and direct roles, others played obscure and proxy roles. Among the countries that played remarkable role in the conflict were Sudan, Somalia, Algeria, Egypt and the US. The Africa Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) also played major roles in the Ethio-Eritrean conflict.

From the outset, both Ethiopia and Eritrea have demonstrated the capacity and willingness to use proxy forces to undermine the other. Paradoxically, these two major belligerents at different circumstances have deployed proxy forces against each other thereby causing the war to become very pervasive within the Horn of Africa. For example, Armed Ethiopian insurgent groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and the Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front (EPPF) have received support from Asmara. Eritrea also has close relationships with Sudanese groups in Darfur and in

particular with factions operating in eastern Sudan (Young 2006). Similarly, Ethiopia has supported Eritrean opposition movements.

In addition to supporting each other's insurgents and opposition movements, both Ethiopia and Eritrea competed against each other by supporting rival parties in neighbouring states. Addis Ababa is the major supporter of Abdullahi Yusuf and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia. Consistent with a deeply ingrained pattern of giving support to the enemy of one's enemy, Eritrea has provided assistance to the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC, now re-grouped as the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia based in Asmara) and Ethiopian opposition groups based in Somalia such as the ONLF and OLF, hoping to tie Ethiopian forces down in the East (Terrence, 2009).

The Ethio-Eritrean war also gave rise to the two countries playing proxy roles in Djibouti. Djibouti has two main ethnic groups, the Afar and the Somali. Somalis have held the presidency since independence. Reports have it that low-level Afar-dominated rebellion has gained some military momentum since the outbreak of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war. Diplomatic relations between Djibouti and Eritrea broke down, while Ethiopia lost access to Eritrean ports. This not only portrays Eritrea as a common foe to both Djibouti and Ethiopia but also leaves Djibouti a tiny port state, both a diplomatic and strategic ally of Ethiopia. There were also speculations that there were contacts between Eritrea and Djiboutian rebels. Similar to the situation in Somalia, while Eritrea supported the Afar rebel group - Afar Front pour la Restauration de l'Uniteet la Democratie (FRUD) against the predominant and ruling Somali ethnic group, Ethiopia fought on the side of the Somali-led government of Hassan Gouled Aptidon. FRUD later split into two factions, one faction made peace and a coalition with the government, while the other, led by Ahmed Dini, remained committed to armed resistance. The Dini faction claimed Ethiopia has supplied arms to Djibouti and had stationed troops within Djiboutian territory in December 1998. Dini however, has claimed that FRUD-"combatant" had no support from Eritrea, but when asked if he had sought support from Asmara he said "yes and no"[1]

The role of the US in the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict and indeed in conflicts within the Horn of Africa has been quite profound and worthy of note. Washington had close ties with both Meles Zenawi and Isaias Afwerki who were characterised by the Clinton administration as part of a 'new generation of African leaders'. These links led the United States to play a major part in the Algiers talks. However, it was also obvious that the US tried to play the ostrich particularly with respect to the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, to the extent that both countries criticised Washington for its attempts to remain neutral during the process.

Ethiopia and Eritrea were both included in Washington's initial conception of a global alliance against terrorism in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks and

US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld visited both Asmara and Addis Ababa in December 2002. However, with Eritrea's close relations with the ULC, the US-Eritrean relationship quickly soured and Washington developed a very close strategic partnership on counterterrorism with Ethiopia. In 2006, Washington and Addis Ababa both opposed the Islamic Courts in Somalia, but for different reasons. Washington had concerns regarding links to al-Qaeda and other alleged extremist groups, and claimed that certain 'high value' targets (notably individuals

Washington linked to the bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dares Salaam) were in Mogadishu. What appeared to be the final sign of America's support for Ethiopia took place in late November 2006 when John Bolton, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, circulated a draft resolution authorising Ethiopia to send troops into Somalia in support of the TFG. Washington in particular became increasingly concerned about threats from radical Islamic groups operating in the Horn and looked to Addis Ababa for cooperation and intelligence. Ethiopian intransigence and US concerns about terrorism in Somalia led diplomats to accept a status quo they concluded would not change and to get on with other business (Terrence, 2009).

Like the United States and the UN, the Africa Union (AU), played critical roles in the Algiers talks and worked together closely to coordinate policy, prevent alternative processes from developing, and apply concentrated pressure on both parties to accept the agreement. Expectedly, the role of the AU was rather more mediating than apparently pitching tent with either of the warring parties. However, as usual and true to its characteristics, the AU's involvement and handling of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict was perfunctory. For example, after the high-level involvement to get the Algiers agreement signed, the international community paid little attention to the challenges of implementation (Terrence, 2009).

The climax of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war is such that eventually generated a snowball effect where both countries resolved to shop for allies by identifying their foes within the Horn of Africa.  This has led to several regional consequences. The main one has to do with Sudan, which was practically at war with both countries. After having at first shunned Sudanese overtures, Addis-Ababa later opened secret negotiations with Khartoum. As a result Sudanese opposition figures are not welcome anymore in Ethiopia and Ethiopian Airlines flights to Khartoum, which had stopped after Sudan's involvement in the attempted murder of President Hosni Mubarak in Addis-Ababa in 1995, have resumed. NDA military forces in Eritrea have now redeployed to be prepared to face a possible combined Ethio-Sudanese attack on the west of the country (WRITENET, 1998).

Eritrea, in its search for allies, has turned towards Egypt and the Arab League. Egypt has responded with interest, given the fact that it fears having to fight a war with Ethiopia sometime in the next century for the control of the waters of the Nile and is hoping to find allies in the region capable of helping its forces (WRITENET, 1998). From the foregoing, it does appear that the Ethio-Eritrea war was fought outside the domain of the two countries; the war had its battlefield in other countries situated particularly in the Horn of Africa. The proxy roles played by both Ethiopia and Eritrea and their desperate search for allies in countries like Sudan, Djibouti, Somali and Egypt gave the perception that the victor and the vanquished of the war depended on the strength of the allies and foes the two countries were able to acquire.

### *Pervading Effects of the War*

The Ethio-Eritrean war has far-reaching consequences, not only on the two belligerents but also on the entire Horn. The consequences of the war are of various dimensions – ranging from socio-economic, political to diplomatic ramifications. From the social and economic dimensions, the Ethiopia-Eritrea war was perceived as an opportunity to bring to the surface existing economic and social grievances created by Eritrea's independence. The economic resentments over Eritrea's introduction of a new currency, the nature of the trade agreements with Eritrea and the perception of a clear disadvantage in Ethiopia's terms of access to Assab had a clear impact on the conduct of the war. Indeed, the continuing polarisation of domestic public opinion in Ethiopia around the army's failure to capture Assab cannot be understood without taking into consideration economic/greed factors as incentives for armed violence. For Eritrea, Ethiopia's decision to divert all shipments due to Assab either to Djibouti or to Somaliland (to the port of Berbera) heightened resentments over Ethiopia's refusal to accept parity between the *Nakfa* and the *Birr* and for depriving Eritrea of one of the key sources of government revenue, i.e., the provision of the port services to Ethiopia. As a result, Eritrea started to record poor economic growth compared with its neighbours, sinking into economic and social isolation (Dias, 2008; Gebrekidan, 2018).

The fighting led to massive internal displacement in both countries as civilians fled the war zone. Ethiopia expelled 77,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin it deemed a security risk, thus compounding Eritrea's refugee problem. The majority of those considered well off by the Ethiopian standard of living were deported after their belongings had been confiscated (Klein, 1998). On the Eritrean side, around 7,500 Ethiopians living in Eritrea were interned, and thousands of others were deported. Thousands more remain in Eritrea, many of whom are unable to pay the 1,000 Birr tax.

The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict shattered family lives of millions of people on both sides of the border. More than 80,000 people lost their lives in the war and many

were displaced. The war led to endless military service and the exodus of young Eritreans in recent years. For example, Eritreans were among the largest group of people landing on Mediterranean shores during the height of Europe's migration crisis. Detainees on both sides were subject in some cases to torture, rape, or other degrading treatment (*Sudan Tribune*, 2007)

Because of the war, the economies of both countries, which were already weak because of decades of cold-war politics, civil war and drought. became exacerbated, resulting in food shortages. While Ethiopia was deprived access to Eritrean ports, Eritrea's access to the largest market in the region was cut off. Both countries diverted massive resources from their already meagre budgets for military activity and still have thousands of troops operating their borders. In pursuit of their respective interests, the two countries engaged in hostile activities against one another, making a rapprochement even more difficult (Allo, 2018; Gebrekidan, 2018).

Perhaps, another critical aspect of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war was the process of demobilising combatants into civilian life in both countries. The demobilisation processes in the two countries led to difficulties with regard to the re-integration of the demobilised combatants into civilian life. The process became daunting considering the fact that it needs to be assessed whether among this segment some may have found appeal in joining the call to arms in the absence of better alternatives in civilian life. This observation confirms that economic factors need to be taken into account as part of a complex interaction with other grievances related to cleavages in the social formations (Hansson, 2003).

Apart from the socio-economic effects of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, the war also took a toll on the political landscape of the two countries and by extension the entire Horn of Africa. The region became destabilized because of the protracted conflict between the two countries. Peace and stability in the Horn now depended on the resolution of the Ethiopian and Eritrean conflict. Although, the border dispute was presented as the official reason behind the outbreak of the war, there were other deeper and complex problems and hegemonic aspirations. In this regard, the Ethiopia-Eritrea war although officially an armed conflict between two sovereign nations, it was largely viewed as a conflict between the ruling elites belonging to Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), the two political movements which dominated the political space of the two countries at the time. At most, it is a conflict between the Tigrinya speaking people of the Eritrean highlands, and the Tigrayans of Ethiopia. Though the underlying political and economic differences were far from being insurmountable, the animosity, rage, scorn and bitterness between these two movements and their leadership made a political resolution impossible (Allo, 2018).

In the area of diplomacy, the war threw up a dramatic re-alignment of diplomatic relations within the Horn that saw Ethiopia not only reviving its relations with Sudan but also consolidating its relations with Djibouti. This diplomatic re-alignment was not only spiteful to Eritrea but was also meant to weaken, vitiate and deflate Eritrea's diplomatic ego within the Horn. As already pointed out above, Ethiopia's hitherto frosty relations with Sudan became intriguingly cordial while Ethiopia established a new diplomatic relations with Djibouti mainly for economic reasons, since the Assab sea port was closed to Ethiopia and Djibouti, which was nearly bankrupt after its civil war, is now being resuscitated due to the closure of Assab to Ethiopia-bound freight (Dias, 2008)

As a result of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war, diplomatic relations between the two countries broke down, embassies were closed down, and flights to both countries were cancelled (Gebrekidan, 2018). Diplomatic shuttles meant to restore relations between the two countries through the mediation efforts within the AU and other multilateral organisations were futile. The role played by these organisations culminated in the adoption of the Algiers Peace Agreement by Ethiopia and Eritrea. In June 2000, the two countries agreed to "permanently terminate military hostilities" and establish a "neutral Boundary Commission" that will have full authority to delimit and demarcate the boundaries. The peace treaty, which was also signed by the United States, the European Union, the African Union, and the United Nations, as guarantors, authorised the Commission to issue a "final and binding" decision. In April 2002, the Boundary Commission rendered its decision, ruling that the flashpoint town of Badme is part of Eritrea. Ethiopia refused to comply with the decision, setting the stage for a stalemate that still reverberates across the Horn of Africa (Allo, 2018).

Driven by both domestic and regional considerations, Ethiopia sought to build a reputation as a critical partner in the "global war on terror", becoming a key ally of the West and one of the top recipients of the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund and the Department of State's East Africa Regional Strategic Initiative. Ethiopian leaders used this alliance with the West to isolate and contain Eritrea, playing a key role in the 2009 US-sponsored UN arms sanction against Eritrea imposed for its alleged support of "terrorist" movements. Although a UN panel of experts found no evidence of Eritrean support and recommended the lifting of the sanctions, the Security Council extended the sanctions in November 2017 (Allo, 2018).

Although, the Ethiopia-Eritrea war lasted for only two years (1998 – 2000), the post war animosity and the crisis that accompanied the conflict lasted for about 18 years. Unarguably, the war which started as a drizzle snowballed into a torrential rain that later engulfed the entire Horn. This is because of the massive support rendered by both Ethiopia and Eritrea to various armed groups operating

within the Horn. The war saw both Ethiopia and Eritrea deploy massive resources in arming these armed groups to which they also became preys and victims. The war thus became a Frankenstein Monster.

**Conclusion**

The end of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war was formally declared on Monday July 4 2018, after a two-decade-long standoff that followed a brutal war over their shared border. The announcement came after Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, visited Eritrea's capital, Asmara, on Sunday July 3, where he embraced President Isaias Afwerki on an airport tarmac. The leaders agreed that the two countries would resume trade, economic and diplomatic ties, including reopening embassies and restarting flights. Later on Monday, Ethiopia asked the visiting secretary general of the United Nations, António Guterres, to lift sanctions against Eritrea. The United Nations had imposed an arms embargo and a partial travel ban on Eritrea, citing its disputes with neighbouring countries (Gebrekidan, 2018). This development is an indication of the preponderance of the influence western powers exert over disputing African countries

The Ethiopia-Eritrea war therefore confirms that most disputing African states rely heavily on foreign intervention (especially by their erstwhile colonial masters) in the resolution of their disputes. It therefore behoves African leaders to be more committed and exhibit better leadership in resolving their border disputes without recourse to foreign powers. In addition, they should be more disposed in seeking the expertise of African forums such as the African Union (AU) before calling for foreign intervention. It is believed that African leaders and the AU understand the problems of Africans better than anyone else does, and they are the ones mostly affected by the spill over effects of these disputes. Thus, African leaders need to evolve more pragmatic strategies in resolving wars and conflicts among African states. This will entail identifying and addressing the root causes of disputes in Africa in order to avoid them resurfacing, rather than seeking to merely halt the disputes (Gebrekidan, 2018). Although, there have been evidence of weakness and complacency and lack of will on the part of the AU in resolving conflicts among African states. It is intriguing to find many African countries who are supposed to superintend over conflict resolution pitching tents with a faction of the dispute.

Against this background, it is recommended that the AU like the Commonwealth should establish a replica of Eminent Person Group (EPG) to embark on fact-finding missions and mediate between the belligerents of conflicts among African states. For example, an EPG was established at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 1985 to investigate apartheid in South Africa, and reported ahead of the special Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 1986. They

recommended economic sanctions against South Africa. The latest was founded by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2009 at Trinidad and Tobago in November 2009 to report at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2011 (Eminent Persons Group, n.d.).

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