

SECURITY COUNCIL

Topic 2: The spillover of the Tigray War in Ethiopia

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1. Definition of Key Terms

Famine: an instance characterised by the absence or scarcity of food, usually when the amount of food is not sufficient to satisfy the needs of a larger group of people. Famine can easily expose individuals to the risk of illnesses or death.

Civil war: a violent, and oftentimes armed, conflict amongst a state or government and one or multiple organised non-governmental elements and organs. There can be different motives behind a civil war; hence, the typical way to identify a civil war is the presence of a fight between the nation and an actively replying, cohesive and cooperative entity.

Dominant-party system: an instance where a single political party wins and dominates multiple consecutive elections over any opposite party. The presence of this system does not automatically imply the repression of any opinion or party in the nation or government at all; however, it can be possible in certain settings.

Military spillover: a conflict which starts in one place, area or community but then begins to spread, impact or have an effect somewhere else. The expansion usually takes place in close or neighbouring entourages but is not strictly confined to it.

Ceasefire: the act of suspending any hostile, aggressive and/or military action from all entities involved. Ceasefires can be of different types, lengths and timing and can be intended for many purposes.

2. Introduction

The spillover of the Tigray war is a topic which concerns the alarming civil conflicts which have tormented Ethiopia's peace for the past few years, specifically the hostilities which concern the Ethiopian federal government on one side and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on the other; thus to be able to understand the causes and events of the spillover, the civil war must be contextualised.

The war began with the accusation from prime minister Abiy Ahmed against the TPLF stating that there had been an attack on the federal army near the region's capital, therefore a crime against the state had been committed; the offensive was promised to be short and effective, seen as the attackers believed that

the opposite forces could not keep up with the resistance and rhythm of the war, but to their surprise, the conflicts would be protracted for several months. In February 2021 it was first discovered that Eritrean forces were contributing to the conflict on the government side; this was bound to be one of the first determining factors of the spillover and spreading of the Tigray war in the neighbouring countries. Besides the very short unilateral ceasefire declared by the Ethiopian state, taking place in June 2021 during the retake of the regional capital Mekelle by the TLPF, the first real and most important ceasefire took place on March 24th 2022 to allow humanitarian aid to reach the Tigrayan area and for both parties involved to restore their forces; after a committee for negotiation was created by the Ethiopian government and a promise to the TLPF of allowing any food and humanitarian support into the area was made, the period of peace began.

This period was fundamental as it is extremely important to point out that one of the main horrible consequences that the war brought was a terrible famine which affected the population of the Tigrayan territory: the scarcity of food was so dramatic that multiple illnesses began to spread and an enormous number of people dying from lack of nutrition was raising incredibly fast.

After three whole months of suspensions, the fighting was resumed on August 24th 2022, but it was after little time that the TLPF announced that they were “[...] ready to abide by an immediate and mutually agreed cessation of hostilities to create a conducive atmosphere.” (September 11th 2022, Government of Tigray’s Stance on a Peaceful Resolution of the Current conflict). Despite the previous statement, it took almost two months for the fighting to decrease, for the ceasefire to be accepted and for peace to be established.

The truce was finally established on November 2nd 2022 and on November 12th both parties signed a deal to allow humanitarian aid in Tigray once again.

Although the war ended in recent times, the spillover appeared rather fast in multiple areas: we can see the effects that the conflicts had and the role that they have played, both inside Ethiopia itself and in other African countries.

Inside the original country, we can find confirmed effects in the Amhara and Oromia regions and there are hypotheses which assume that there are other regions where new consequences might take place in the near future.

Of the neighbouring foreign countries and areas, Somalia and Eritrea have been directly involved in the war and are involved in the spillover and consequences of the civil war, but overall, the most affected country is Sudan. This is a consequence of many factors, but mainly due to two main reasons partially connected: a large majority of refugees, caused by the Ethiopian internal conditions, have been continuously fleeing to Sudan in great numbers, however, partly because of old and historical disagreements and consequential fights, majorly for borders and territorial possessions, the dynamics between the two nations are not optimal and Sudan has openly rejected many refugees.

3. Background information

To better understand the reasoning behind the war, and therefore its spillover, it is needed to study the issue from its roots and analyse the political context and situation in the Ethiopian country, as these roots can be traced in the nation’s system of government.

Following the previous Civil War in Ethiopia, dated 1991, the country’s governmental and political situation presented a dominant-party state where, from the end of the first Civil War until 2019, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of four political parties, had been the organ with the most influence and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) had been one of the strongest exponents of this ethnic federalist political coalition.

Seen as the TPLF had always been extremely dominant in the Ethiopian political scene, it was no surprise that when in 2018 the recently-elected prime minister, with his new party named the Prosperity party, aimed to the peaceful resolution of the two decades-long border and territorial conflict with one of the front’s biggest rival, its reaction was not positive: TPLF declared and condemned the peace attempts, identifying them as “fundamental flaws” and affirming that the decision had been taken without considering the long-time TPLF members’ opinions.

The dynamics between the different parties can represent a parallelism and be compared to the ones characterising the relationship amongst the country's federal regions whose adversities are caused by the strong historical ethnic division. Consequently, after years of internal tensions, when the 2020 general elections were postponed to an unknown and undetermined date due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the region of Tigray declared that they viewed this action as unconstitutional and went against these regulations by holding their regional elections regardless on September 9th 2020, justifying their action by referring to the Article 62.9 of the Constitution of Ethiopia which states that any House of Federation has the right to "order Federal intervention if any State, in violation of the Constitution, endangers the constitutional order." Despite the politically correct references, these actions were considered as a morally challenging attitude towards its government, which then declared those elections to be illegal, denied the region of federal funding and announced that they were looking for a way to "strike out of existence the TPL" which Tigray's administration considered "as tantamount to a declaration of war". As a consequence of all these actions, the prime minister declared that "The federal government was therefore forced into a military confrontation,"

4. Major Parties Involved

Ethiopia

A lot of fighting has happened in Ethiopian regions, for example in the Afar region.

Another major conflict was the Oromia conflict: in March 2021 the Eritrean Defence Forces left the Tigray region to fight against the Oromo Liberation Army. On August 11 2021 OLA's leader announced that the group had allied with the Tigray's People Liberation Front, and on 31 October, the OLA took control of Kamisee in the Oromia Zone of the Amhara Region, at the same time as the Tigray Defense Forces took control of Kombolcha, about 50 kilometres to the north.

In November 2021, the TDF-OLA allied offensive took several towns in the Amhara region, along a major road leading south from Tigray Region to Addis Ababa, appearing to threaten a military attack on Addis Ababa.

Eritrea

Since the start of the Tigray war Eritrea has been heavily involved in the conflict supporting the Ethiopian government. Abiy Ahmed became Ethiopia's new Prime Minister in 2018, and despite the historical conflicts between the two nations, three months into his term he secured a peace summit between Eritrea and Ethiopia. With this Ethiopia accepted Eritrean claims over Badme and diplomatic relations have been reestablished after many decades.

Sudan

There have been many clashes on the border between Ethiopia and Sudan, as forces on both sides have fought to claim border regions. Sudan has also fought against Tigray forces that invaded the Sudanese region.

Over 50,000 Tigrayans have fled into Sudan as refugees because of the Tigray war, which led to an important aid operation in an impoverished region of the country. The United Nations operates several refugee camps in Sudan, including camps at Um Rakuba, Tunaydbah, and Hamdayet.

The refugees are mainly Tigrayan and Amharan.

Somalia

In late 2020 the African Mission to Somalia and Ethiopian troops started conflict when Ethiopian troops tried to disarm Tigrayan troops within their ranks.

21 Ethiopian soldiers of Tigrayan origin and 20 other Ethiopian soldiers were killed in the internal military mutiny.

Moreover, it was recently discovered that Somali soldiers were trained in Eritrean camps to take part in the Tigray War.

5. Timeline of Events

2020

On **December 28th**, Sudan retook 11 villages that were captured by Ethiopian militias. Fighting in the town of Lilli occurred after Amhara forces attacked, 1,000 farmers were displaced

On **December 31st**, Acting Sudanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Omer Ismail announced in a news conference that the Sudanese Armed Forces recaptured the remaining disputed territories of al-Fashqa district, which was previously settled by Amhara farmers.

2021

On **January 2nd** Sudan sent support to the Ethiopian border.

On **January 3rd** Sudan arrested 45 Tigray's People Liberation Forces fighters that crossed over into Sudan.

On **January 4th** Amhara militias from Ethiopia kidnapped and killed an unknown number of herders in Sudan.

On **January 9th** Ethiopia built a fence to stop refugees from crossing the border into Sudan.

On **January 11th** Ethiopian forces infiltrated 5 km into Sudanese territory, killing six civilians.

On **January 13th** A Sudanese Mil Mi-24 helicopter crashed near the Ethiopian border, an Ethiopian military aircraft crossed the Ethiopia–Sudan border and the Sudanese military captured nine Ethiopian Military camps inside their territory.

On **January 20th** an Ethiopian militia group attacked five kilometres into Sudan destroying a car and injuring a farmer; the attack displaced 25 people.

On **January 24th** Sudan responded with mortar shelling in eastern Al-Gadaref province after Ethiopia fired mortar shells at a Sudanese patrol.

On **January 28th** Ethiopia started deploying artillery, tanks, and anti-aircraft systems to the border with Sudan.

On **January 30th** Ethiopian militias kidnapped 3 merchants in the Basindah area causing Sudan to deploy military reinforcements to the area.

On **February 14th** Sudan said Ethiopian soldiers crossed into its territory. The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Sudan had been plundering and displacing Ethiopian citizens since 6 November 2020 and that the Sudanese army should evacuate the area that it has forcefully occupied.

On **February 20th** the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that Eritrean forces had entered the al-Fashaga region with Ethiopian forces.

On **February 23rd** Ethiopia asked Sudan to withdraw its troops from the disputed border area before peace talks could begin. The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson stated that Ethiopia does not want to enter into conflict with Sudan again. He also stated that Ethiopia wished to return to the 2008 compromise which would allow Ethiopian troops and civilians to enter the region undisturbed. Finally, he said there was a third party who pushed Sudan to enter into conflict with Ethiopia. On the same day, Sudan stated that it would not withdraw its militants from the border region and said the deployment of the Sudanese army on the border strip with Ethiopia is a final and irreversible decision.

On **March 2nd** the Sudanese army continued to push into the last Ethiopian stronghold of Bereket in the disputed border region of al-Fashaga against Ethiopian-backed forces.

On **April 3rd** Sudan closed the Gallabat-Metemma border crossing with Ethiopia.

On **April 8th** Walid Ahmad al-Sajjan, commander of the Fifth Brigade of the Sudanese Armed Forces in Umm Barakit, stated that the Sudanese military had retaken 95% of the disputed al-Fashaga region from Ethiopia.

On **July 23rd** Three children of the Fellata tribe were kidnapped by Ethiopian militias from an area near Gallabat and Metemma. Sudanese captain Bahaa El-Din Youssef was later captured while pursuing the militia behind the kidnapping.

Sudan closed the Gallabat border crossing again on **July 24th**.

On **November 27th** At least 20 Sudanese soldiers were killed in an ambush by Ethiopian forces near the border.

6. UN Involvement

The Tigray War and the consequent humanitarian catastrophe are being extensively covered by prominent global news outlets. According to the United Nations, the lives of 4.5 million Tigrayans are already endangered by the war and the dislocation it has caused. UN representatives, aid agencies and states have urged many times the Government of Ethiopia to restore the supply of electricity and other public services and to establish a humanitarian corridor for delivering aid. The Ethiopian government's response has not been encouraging. UN offices and officials have expressed their worries about the magnitude of this crisis time and again. Unfortunately, the political response has so far been disappointing.

Among many other human rights organisations, the Human Rights Watch has followed the situation in Tigray very closely: this has included registering the crimes that were and are committed, together with the times, places and those responsible. Recently, it has released reports which were prepared to assess the available satellite imagery, photographs and videos, and reports of forensic experts, journalists and aid workers. These reports list the cities where civilians were killed and injured in violation of the rules governing military operations. One of them mentions the places where the Ethiopian forces have “fired artillery into Tigray’s urban areas in a seemingly indiscriminate manner that was bound to cause civilian casualties and property damage”, displacing “thousands of people.” Their report states further that “Many of the artillery attacks did not appear aimed at specific military targets but struck generalised populated areas.” One of the consequences of these kinds of attacks is that well over 200,000 people are internally displaced, while tens of thousands have also fled to neighbouring Sudan. Compounding the problem facing those who remained in their homes is the lack of adequate access to food, fuel, water, and medicines and the widespread abuses, including apparent extrajudicial killings, pillage, and arbitrary detention by Ethiopian federal forces and special forces and youth militia known as ‘Fano’ from the neighbouring Amhara region as well as by Eritrean forces. “The situation is extremely grave in Tigray,” said the February 5th update of the UN Secretary General, Antonio Gutierrez, “and hundreds of thousands of people need life-saving assistance.”

The UN and other international aid agencies have shown both eagerness and readiness to save lives in Tigray by delivering the needed humanitarian assistance if they are allowed to enter this territory. Unfortunately, the regime of Mr Ahmed has not been keen or willing to cooperate.

UNICEF’s report of February 12th, entitled “Children in Tigray in acute need of protection and assistance”, paints a troubling picture that reveals the presence of severe and ongoing harm to children. The UNICEF team, which was allowed to visit Shire and a few other cities, observed bank services that were not operating, damaged or looted clinics, halted immunisation programs, damaged stock of vaccines due to power cuts, and severe acute malnutrition, an indicator of the terrible famine present in the area. They saw displaced people taking shelter in schools that were not equipped for that purpose. They found children separated from their families, many showing symptoms of deep psychosocial distress.

The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, expressed her disgust at the sexual violence to which Tigrayan girls and women are exposed. She

highlighted the disturbing reports of individuals allegedly forced to rape members of their own family, under threat of imminent violence, the practices of soldiers who demand to have sex in exchange for basic commodities as well as sexual violence against women and girls in a number of refugee camps.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi described what is now seen in some of these camps as a serious violation of international law. The Commissioner has repeatedly urged the Ethiopian Government to protect these refugees and to allow his office to visit all four refugee camps so that they may receive humanitarian assistance, but unsuccessfully.

A similar concern was echoed by the UN Secretary General, who was concerned about attacks on refugee camps. He denounced the forceful abduction of the refugees and stated that some of them were sent back to Eritrea by the Eritrean soldiers stationed around the refugee camps. Antonio Guterres also raised concerns by claiming that some of the refugees that escaped from the camps “have resorted to eating leaves because there was no other food available.”

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