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Ethiopia's Role and Foreign Policy in the Horn of Africa

Berouk Mesfin

Ethiopia is the pivotal power of the Horn of Africa where many dangerous conflicts are occurring simultaneously. Many of these conflicts tend to get out of hand and Ethiopia ends up being bogged down in these conflicts for many decades. The sheer number of variables including long histories of grievance and recrimination and the extent of uncertainties combine to undermine Ethiopia's capacity to effectively address these conflicts on its own. As a result, Ethiopia is forced to maintain constant vigilance, carefully observing all kinds of changes taking place in all parts of the Horn of Africa at all times. In the longer term, however, Ethiopia is bound to confront the hard reality that turmoil and conflict will most probably continue to threaten large portions of the Horn of Africa.

Introduction

This paper is designed to provide a more systematic examination of the political, economic and military role of Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa over the past decade. While the paper is written for an essentially African audience by an Ethiopian author¹ adhering to the realist perspective, it does not advocate in any way a Pax Ethiopiana and does not try to merely embellish and rationalise the foreign policy of the Ethiopian government.

The paper is also not inspired by a desire to expose the strategic vulnerabilities of Ethiopia but by the belief that Ethiopia would be better served if better understood, beyond expressions of good neighbourliness, by closer and more distant regional states as well as the wider international

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community. In other words, the paper is purely based on the assumption that bringing sustainable stability to the Horn of Africa should involve a better and deeper understanding of Ethiopia's long-established security concerns, vital interests, and historical continuity of its foreign relations.

Accordingly, the paper could be used to frame subsequent discussions about Ethiopia's regional foreign policy the success or failure of which simultaneously determines and depends on the stability or volatility of the Horn of Africa. It could also add value to the debate among scholars and practitioners on the course of both Ethiopian-Sudanese and Ethiopian-Eritrean relations. The paper will exclusively focus on these two bilateral relations which are currently Ethiopia's most challenging bilateral relations.

The paper derives from research and field trips conducted in the Horn of Africa by the author during the last five years. It also heavily draws on his numerous and interminable consultations and discussions with Ethiopian diplomats and military officers, several foreign officials, diplomats and leading analysts on regional security. The paper is also partially based on a review of the available literature on Ethiopia's foreign policy in the Horn of Africa.²

The paper is divided into three parts. Firstly, it defines, at its most basic, the geopolitical position of Ethiopia within the Horn of Africa. Then, the paper examines the increased economic and diplomatic cooperation that Ethiopia built with Sudan in order to ensure regional stability. Finally, the paper dwells on Ethiopia's containment of Eritrea which currently represents, apart from Somalia, the most difficult security problem in the Horn of Africa, directly aggravating and prolonging instability.

Ethiopia's geopolitical position in the Horn of Africa

Looking at any map of Africa, it is easy to understand that Ethiopia is geographically located at the center or, better, at the heart of the Horn of Africa.³ Despite it being land-locked since 1991 and from the standpoint of the elements of national power which scholars of international relations and strategy use to determine a state's position in geopolitical struggles, Ethiopia stands out as a state that can play a critical role in the region. It has a large population which backs the government in time of crisis and represents nearly half of the Horn of Africa's population with whom it retains historical and cultural ties.

According to the latest 2007 census data, the total population of Ethiopia has reached 73 million, with an unsustainably high growth rate of 2.7 per cent. If left unchecked, this growth will give Ethiopia 117 million people by 2025. Ethiopia's population is distributed among 80 ethnic groups influenced by centuries of migration and interaction but having distinct traditions and languages. The largest ethnic group, the Oromo (27 million) who are widely

diffused in the central and south-western parts, account for about 36 per cent of the population. The second largest group, the Amhara (17 million) who mainly live in the north-west, account for 23 per cent. The Somalis (4.4 million), who are mainly in the predominantly Muslim south-east, constitute 6 per cent and the third largest ethnic group of the population.

Moreover, according to the 2007 census, the population mostly lives in rural areas, nearly 85 per cent, and contains a significant Muslim community, with Christians and Muslims living in peace and harmony. Having the Horn of Africa's largest Muslim community, Ethiopia has largely remained untouched by inter-religious conflicts, with the exception of some tensions in its south-eastern and south-western parts. Ethiopian Muslims are generally not receptive to extreme religious ideas and have no difficulty in identifying first with their ethnic kin. They are geographically intermixed except for concentrations in the Somali and Afar-inhabited areas.⁴

Large in geographic size, Ethiopia is endowed with a militarily strategic hinterland constituted by high mountains serving as natural barriers to external military attacks. It is also well-endowed with a number of natural resources including water. Ethiopia is, for instance, a veritable watertower, with practically all states around it receiving its water in varying degree. It particularly contributes more than 85 per cent of the Nile.

There are tangible economic changes in Ethiopia including visible accumulation of wealth in both rural and urban areas, imposing buildings, better and more infrastructure, a burgeoning road system, dozens of universities, more bridges and more clinics, and more schools being built. The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front, which has continued to dominate Ethiopia's political landscape since 1991, has defined its fundamental task as transforming and expanding Ethiopia's economy in a way that satisfies the needs of a growing and youthful population⁵ and bolsters its internal legitimacy. The ruling party also hopes that Ethiopia's sustained economic growth in the agricultural, energy and other sectors could contribute to the entire region's economic growth, attracting foreign investment, credit and even more tourism.

Most meaningfully, Ethiopia has a significant influence in African international affairs as it is the seat of the African Union. It also has the region's most potent and best-equipped military. Understandably, Ethiopia's current military set-up, dispositions and operations are held in great secrecy with few official or independent figures available, hence the difficulty in establishing reliable military strength. Yet, estimates of the personnel strength of the Ethiopian military, or the Ethiopian National Defence Force as it is officially called, which is constituted by the Ground Force and the Air Force vary from 200,000 to 250,000. This is difficult to ascertain and some reports have suggested that the figure could be as low as 130,000.⁶

It should be noted that the battle-hardened Ethiopian military is led by seasoned officers and seems to have made the necessary organisational changes and appropriate hardware acquisitions. It currently fields an impressive and essentially Russian-built and Chinese-supplied order of battle with roughly: (1) 400 battle tanks including 200 T-72 tanks recently bought from Ukraine, 300 armoured vehicles and 300 artillery pieces; (2) 30 combat aircraft (even though the serviceability of most of these aircraft has fallen, the acquisition of Su-27 has boosted Ethiopian interception capability), 25 Mi-8/17 Hip and attack Mi-24/35 helicopters and also numerous missiles of all kinds. Estimates of the personnel strength of the Air Force range from 3,000 to 4,000.⁷

Ethiopia shares with all the states of the Horn of Africa porous borders which are very difficult to fully monitor. Indeed, Ethiopia is bordered in the east by Djibouti (349 km), in the south-east by Kenya (861 km), in the north by Eritrea (912 km), in the south-west by Somalia (1,600 km) and in the west by both Sudan and South Sudan⁸ (1,606 km). Thus, no part of the Horn of Africa is without Ethiopia's enduring presence and basic interests which include securing its borders, containing external threats and ensuring political stability in the region.

Its geopolitical location also means that Ethiopia is more affected by regional issues than any other state in the Horn of Africa. In light of Ethiopia's historical experience, this position has one significant disadvantage. The greater the number of states surrounding Ethiopia, the more it has had to deal with variegated and often contradictory interests and claims of numerous neighbouring states. The fact that Sudan's problem with Ethiopia is historical and hydrological rather than political whereas Eritrea's problem with Ethiopia is more psychological and personalised than political provides a dramatic illustration of this.

Thus, the decisions of these states to initiate active hostilities with Ethiopia or the emergence of hostile alliances were never and cannot be easily predicted. This, in turn, meant that Ethiopian decision-makers could not develop long-term policies and soberly measure possibilities. They could only react cautiously to circumstances as they arose because threats and opportunities changed too quickly in the Horn of Africa.

Moreover, Ethiopia has to deal with foreign powers competing to set up strategic outposts and spheres of influence for different geopolitical and economic purposes in the strategically significant Horn of Africa. As argued in a previous publication,

the region has always been allotted a relatively important strategic value owing to its proximity to the Red Sea which is an important and expeditious route of international trade and communications between Europe, the Middle East and the Far East as well as the

navigation route through which oil is transported from the Persian Gulf (in which the largest oil deposits of the world are located) to consumers in North America, Europe and Asia.⁹

Ethiopia's policy towards Sudan

Relations between Ethiopia and Sudan (1956-1998)

Ethiopia and Sudan have entertained relations since the latter's independence in 1956. These relations have been problematic as they were usually marred by deeply embedded suspicion and rivalry. Relations actually began on the wrong footing when Sudan signed an agreement with Egypt on the sharing of the Nile waters in 1959.¹⁰ Relations improved in the 1960s culminating in Emperor Haile Sellassie facilitating the agreement between the then Sudanese government and the Any-Any rebel group in Addis Ababa in 1972. Relations were again strained during the Ethiopian military government's tenure (1974-1991) because of ideological differences, support for rebel groups and interference from other external states.

Yet, during the turbulent 1956-1991 period in the Horn of Africa's history, Ethiopian decision-makers' recurrent view was that Sudan, Ethiopia's largest and most populous neighbouring state at the time, did not pose a direct military threat to Ethiopia. For instance, there was virtually no likelihood of direct war between the two states because the terrain is inhospitable for military operations, distances are great, full collaboration of the populations was improbable and the primary issues of contention between them including the Nile issue and religious differences were potential.

Nonetheless, Sudan did endanger Ethiopia's security and threatened its interests. Sudan, for instance, expanded its military forces from 1970s onwards to a significant degree, employing them to quell internal rebellions over an extended period of time and forcing thousands of refugees to flee the conflicts and reside in Ethiopia. Moreover, the different governments that surfaced in Sudan always claimed ascendancy in the Horn of Africa and tended to side persistently with Egypt against Ethiopia on the issue of the Nile River. Some have also promoted Islamist ideas, practices and institutions within and beyond Sudan.

This proselytising trend was accentuated after 1989 when a military government took power, backed by the National Islamic Front headed by Hassan al-Turabi who became the government's chief ideologue and actively attempted to export a radical version of Islam until he was unceremoniously sidelined in 2000.¹¹ More seriously, Sudan served as a meeting place and training hub for international terrorist groups including Al Qaeda. Between

December 1991 and May 1996, Sudan was notably Osama Bin Ladin's refuge, a transit point and a base from which Al Qaeda 'could seek to extend its influence throughout Africa'.¹²

Such a trend generally fueled a drawn-out armed conflict in southern Sudan. Moreover, Sudan always overtly or covertly sponsored subversive activities in Ethiopia. This support took the form of granting supply routes across Sudan, allowing its territory to be used as a safe haven for rebel training and military operations across the border into Ethiopia and providing weapons, ammunition and money to the major Ethiopian and Eritrean armed groups.

The Ethiopian government between 1974 and 1991 was especially convinced that the paramount strategy to effectively constrain the policy options and modify the politically challenging postures of Sudan was assisting the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.¹³ The Sudan People's Liberation Movement was allowed to use Ethiopian territory as a multi-purpose safe haven. It was supplied weapons and ammunition, including anti-tank guns, mortars and mortar shells. Military training was another important aspect of Ethiopian support.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement soldiers were trained in Ethiopian military facilities and were even sent to Cuba for advanced instruction. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement also operated a number of training centers in western Ethiopia, such as the Bonga and Pagak in the Gambela area. In addition, the soldiers of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement were supplied food and, when wounded, received medical treatment at Asosa's hospital. The Ethiopian regime also accorded the Sudan People's Liberation Front a financial support on quite generous terms, though the proportions of this support cannot be precisely estimated.

After 1991, relations between Sudan and Ethiopia, where political change occurred and led to a drastic transformation in foreign policy, began on a rather smooth path. Accordingly, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement was expelled from Ethiopian territory, bilateral agreements of cooperation were signed and technical committees that handle social, economic, political issues were established. However, the relations¹⁴ went sour in 1995 as Sudan became a hub of Islamist militancy. Indeed, Sudan used Ethiopia's new good neighbourly relations policy as a means of introducing Islamist politics in Ethiopia and offering direct assistance to Ethiopian armed groups and non-governmental organisations.

More gravely, the 1995 assassination attempt¹⁵ in Addis Ababa from which former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak narrowly escaped was obviously organised with the support of the Sudanese intelligence services. Ethiopian authorities arrested three surviving assailants from the attack who provided incriminating information about an active Sudanese role.

Indeed, the Egyptian Islamists planned the covert operation from Sudan over a two-year period and trained in structures belonging to the Sudanese military or paramilitary units. They travelled freely between Sudan and Ethiopia during the planning stage using Sudanese travel documents¹⁶ and shipped weapons for the operation from Khartoum. This information makes it probable that some Sudanese senior officials knew about the attack beforehand and may even have been involved in the strategic and operational levels. The fact that the attack was undertaken during an Organisation of African Unity summit, which the post-1991 Ethiopian government wanted to use in order to showcase Ethiopia's internal stability, further deepened its disappointment.¹⁷

Likewise, Sudan provided substantial financial and material support to Al Itihad Al Islamiya which was based in Somalia.¹⁸ Although it made its official appearance as an organised force in 1991, Al Itihad Al Islamiya, which means Islamic Unity, was probably set up secretly in the early 1980s. Al Itihad is said to have had hundreds of combatants at its disposal, though some estimates had even put the figure at 2,000.¹⁹

A new era of cooperation

Sudan and Ethiopia both invested a great deal of effort in order to normalise their relations after the 1998-2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean war. The war led both Ethiopia and Eritrea to solicit better relations with Sudan, which wanted to come out of its isolation in the international community and put an end to its southern conflict through the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development-led peace process. In particular, Ethiopia and Sudan enhanced their economic and diplomatic relations mainly because of their strategic interest in curbing the geopolitical appetites of Eritrea. Indeed, analysts and decision-makers in both states actually reasoned that 'there can never be regional stability as long as Issayas dominates the Eritrean state'.²⁰

The first step in the normalisation and strengthening of bilateral relations was the visit of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to Ethiopia in November 1999. During this visit, Ethiopia and Sudan reactivated the Joint Ministerial Commission, which convened in March 2000 in Khartoum. The Joint Ministerial Commission oversees two bodies, the Joint Political Committee and the Joint Border Development Commission as well as the different committees below them.

The Joint Political Committee basically guides the two states' relations and assesses the implementation of the many agreements that they have signed. The Joint Border Development Commission meets every six months and facilitates a smooth interaction between the peoples living along their common border and the fight against organised crime including cross-border trafficking of weapons and illegal migration.²¹

It is important to note that there are around one million Ethiopian refugees and migrants, mostly very young, living and working in Sudan, with only 140,000 having work permits. They do not find it difficult to integrate and are mostly employed in manual, domestic and commercial occupations. However, they complain about police harassment, exploitation by Sudanese employers and increasing competition for work. The sharp increase in the cost-of-living including skyrocketing rents in cities is putting pressure on the migrants as well. Most Ethiopians complain that, in the last three years, they are receiving daily or monthly income – an Ethiopian maid would get around 100 USD a month – which is far less than the required amount to provide food, shelter and other basic necessities.²²

In subsequent years, beyond bilateral meetings regularly held and frequent visits undertaken by high-level government officials,²³ the two states signed countless agreements, protocols and memorandums of understanding on transport and communication, the supply of oil, trade, water resources, port utilisation, harmonisation of standards and investment. Ethiopia was particularly interested in making use of Port Sudan²⁴ especially for its northern parts as almost the entirety of its foreign trade passes through the port of Djibouti after it totally lost access to Eritrean ports in 1998.

Moreover, trade noticeably grew between Sudan and Ethiopia, with three road networks linking them through Gedarif-Gelabat-Metema-Azezo, Alshowak-Allokdi-Humara and Kurmuk-Assossa-Nekemt-Addis Ababa rapidly built. A direct microwave link was also established. On the one hand, in September 2010, Sudan became Ethiopia's sole supplier of oil including benzene and liquid pressured gaz. During the course of 2010, for instance, Ethiopia imported around two million tons of oil that cost around 1.42 billion USD.²⁵

On the other hand, Sudan imports products including cement, sesame, beans and fruits from Ethiopia and has become one of the biggest importing states of Ethiopian products.²⁶ More significantly, Ethiopia will supply electricity power to Sudan, thereby earning much-needed hard currency. With the completion of the power projection projects with Djibouti and Kenya, the Ethiopia-Sudan interconnection could effectively establish the regional power market envisioned by Ethiopia and prove to be another milestone towards regional integration.²⁷ Indeed, Verhoeven contends that

Meles' vision is of a strong Ethiopia exporting hydropower to the east (Djibouti, Somaliland), south (Kenya, Uganda), west (Sudan) and north (Egypt). Addis expects to sell 4,000 MW of power to regional partners in the next decade.²⁸

Well-aware of the vast political problems currently plaguing Sudan and South Sudan and also of their ethnic sensibilities, Ethiopia offered its services as a mediator for a series of negotiations to bring some kind of a *détente* between the two states. Ethiopia understood all too well that differences could be discussed with mutual understanding and respect and that much can be lost by returning to the bad old days of confrontational policies. Such policies could ultimately lead to violence, detrimental to both states and the cohesion of the region.

Ethiopia's middle-of-the-road foreign policy, while consistent with its broader interest of ensuring regional stability, may please neither Sudan nor South Sudan. Yet, it undoubtedly provides the two sides the best possible opportunity to hold direct talks and reach durable agreements that could stabilise conflicts along their border in Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Recently, Ethiopia has intensified its behind-the-scenes diplomacy. For example, apart from his key role in assisting the High Level Implementation Panel led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki in creating a sustainable peace process, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi travelled to Khartoum in August 2011 in an attempt to defuse the conflicts in Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

Ethiopia has, beyond offering even-handed and more moderate counsel, deployed peacekeeping forces in Sudan by the thousands because a re-ignition of conflict will tremendously affect Ethiopia's security. Ethiopia also depends on Sudan for the critical supply of oil and fears that instability could lead to cutoff. Indeed, Ethiopia's contribution to the AU/UN hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) includes a battalion of 860 troops, one medium size heavy transport company of 125 troops, one reconnaissance company of 160 troops, multi-role logistics company of 300 troops, 29 staff officers and 9 military observers. Ethiopia also deployed 5 Mi-35 helicopters and a 200-member air force unit that plays a critical role for the hybrid force.

As part of its policy of equidistance vis-à-vis Khartoum and Juba in the hope of keeping both at safe distance, Ethiopia has also deployed troops in Abyei. The deployment occurred after Sudan and South Sudan signed an agreement on 22 June 2010 in Ethiopia to fully demilitarise Abyei. Following the agreement, the United Nations Security Council approved the deployment of a roughly 4,200-strong Ethiopian peace keeping force to monitor Abyei, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). UNISFA will have 3 infantry battalions with quick reaction, tank, artillery, engineering, demining, logistic and medical units. Lieutenant General Tadesse Worede Tesfaye was appointed as Head of Mission and Force Commander thereby merging 'the political and military leadership under one leadership'.²⁹ The Deputy Force Commander is Major General Adem Mohammed Mahmud.³⁰

Ethiopia's policy towards Eritrea

Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea after 1991

The two liberation movements, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which assumed power respectively in Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1991, were very close partners during the bitter armed struggle against the previous Ethiopian government.³¹ However, the relationship between the two liberation movements has always been one of tension and hostility rather than cooperation.³² There were serious differences on ideology and military strategy as well as on the issues of administrative system between the two liberation movements both before and after they came to power.³³

From 1991 to 1997, relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea which became officially independent after the 1993 referendum were reasonably amicable. These amicable relations were exemplified first by Ethiopia's full-hearted acceptance of the Eritrea's independence and then by the establishment of a Joint High Ministerial Commission. At the conclusion of the first meeting of the Joint High Ministerial Commission held in Asmara, Eritrea, in September 1993, the two states signed 25 protocol agreements.

The two states agreed to 'cooperate closely on all matters relating to international relations and [to] work towards adopting common strategies and common policies on important regional and international political and security issues to achieve common objectives'.³⁴ They also agreed that their security forces 'shall refrain from engaging in any act that threatens the peace and security of either party, including propaganda and any other subversive activities. Furthermore, they shall not allow or harbor within their territories hostile elements or groups engaged in destabilising the peace and security of either country'.³⁵ Moreover, Ethiopia used the port of Assab without paying taxes and duties³⁶ and had access to its oil refinery. And, two agreements on trade and movements of persons allowed for the free movement of goods and people between the two states.

Yet, a major source of conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea was the decision of Ethiopia to import oil and stop using the Assab refinery. Another factor that aggravated the conflict between the two states was the introduction by Eritrea in 1997 of a new currency, Nakfa. This was immediately followed by the issuance of a new Birr and the introduction of a new trade policy by Ethiopia. Until Nakfa was introduced, the two states had used the Ethiopian Birr as their common currency. The Eritrean government proposed for the two currencies to have equal value and to be used in both states. However, this proposal was rejected by the Ethiopian government that, instead, insisted on using hard currency as a medium of exchange.³⁷

More seriously, there were a series of border contentions between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The TPLF and the EPLF had agreed to settle the issue after the end of the armed struggle and the issue was not as such raised until 1997. In 1997, Eritrea claimed that Ethiopian military forces had invaded Eritrean territories. Both states, at first, agreed to settle the issue peacefully and established a joint border commission in November 1997. Before they could reach an agreement, in May 1998, Eritrea militarily moved with much apparent premeditation³⁸ into a town called Badme and its environs along its poorly defined border with Ethiopia.

Within a few months, what began as a small border dispute over a barren strip of land degenerated into a full-scale and prolonged war.³⁹ Both belligerents never envisaged war on such a scale, a war which 'generated considerable casualties and huge costs on both sides. An estimated 70,000 to 100,000 people were killed, 1 million were displaced and a generation of development opportunities was squandered'.⁴⁰ The war would only end in 2000 when the Ethiopian military repelled the Eritrean military and captured all the contested territories and key Eritrean towns. In June 2000, Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a cessation of hostilities agreement brokered by the Organisation of African Unity.

The two states agreed to establish a Temporary Security Zone that was patrolled by the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) from September 2000 up to July 2008. Subsequently, they signed the Algiers Peace Accord in December 2000 and agreed to establish a border commission to demarcate the border based on the colonial treaties and a claims commission to hear war compensation claims and investigate the causes of the war. Moreover, both states agreed that the decisions of the border commission will be final and binding.

The border commission passed its decision in April 2002 and provided clarifications in 2003. Badme, a flashpoint for the entire war,⁴¹ was awarded to Eritrea. Ethiopia refused to implement the decision of the commission and its repeated attempts to alter the decision were rejected by the commission because both states had agreed, at the outset, that the decision of the commission will be final and binding. Due to this fact, the Ethiopian government subsequently accepted the ruling in principle though it claimed that the ruling was both wrong and unjust and called for dialogue. Eritrea, however, refused to accept the call for dialogue and strongly affirmed that it will not consider an alternative to the border ruling and its implementation.⁴² Pratt gives emphasis to the fact that

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that primary responsibility for the current state of affairs must lie with the Ethiopian government. It may well be genuinely concerned about the impact of the boundary on the

lives of people who find themselves living on the wrong side of the line or who have lost access to farmland or other resources ... Whatever the justification, the fact remains that it has clearly gone against its commitment to accept the [border commission]'s decision as final and binding and to allow the commission to demarcate the boundary identified in its delimitation decision. However sympathetic one is to Ethiopia's position, it is very difficult to argue this fundamental breach away.⁴³

Ethiopia's post-war policy of containment

More than a decade after the end of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war, Eritrea clearly remains the primary source of concern for Ethiopia because of the nature of the militaristic regime in place including the authoritarian personality of its omnipotent leader⁴⁴ and also because of the clear cut menace that it represents for all the states of the Horn of Africa. These two points will both be discussed in detail in subsequent sections of the paper.

In its regional relations, Eritrea practices a nineteenth-century notion of power projection or 'militarised diplomacy',⁴⁵ without realising the gravity of its declaratory policies and concrete actions as well as their full ramifications. Starting from 1991, Eritrea strengthened its military and maintained conscription. It asserted itself in a confrontational manner vis-à-vis Sudan in 1994, Yemen in 1995 and even Djibouti in 1996. Then, as mentioned previously, Eritrea suddenly attacked frontier areas along its border with Ethiopia.⁴⁶ It must have thought that bullying Ethiopia would change the direction of Ethiopian-Eritrean relations, increase its influence and send a message to all other states that it was a regional power.

In strictly objective terms, it proved to be an act of folly for it caused an unexpected and immense expenditure of resources and manpower as well as a disproportionate commitment of prestige for newly independent Eritrea facing monumental challenges. Moreover and as mentioned previously in this report, both Ethiopia and Eritrea paid a terrible price in human suffering and material destruction. It was bad enough for Eritrea to lose that war. It was worse to lose it without admitting the fact⁴⁷ and worst to go on absurdly capturing geostrategic locations in northern Djibouti ten years later in 2008.⁴⁸

This led to Ethiopia boosting its military presence along the Ethiopian-Eritrean border. Ethiopia has upgraded airfields and its better-armed military performs routine training on a regular basis and carries out reconnaissance to know about possible Eritrean preparations and to identify the location of possible attacks. Such posturing seems to be a calculated move to deter the Eritrean military from short-term incursions against Ethiopian forward bases and to force Eritrea to think twice before risking a large-scale invasion.

Also, aided by the stubborn approach of the Eritrean leadership, Ethiopia has managed so far to expose Eritrea's destabilising actions in the Horn of Africa. It won the support of like-minded states in the region to which these actions posed a direct threat. Indeed, Somalia is battling an Eritrea-supported Islamist insurgency, Uganda has committed thousands of troops in Somalia and experienced a serious terrorist attack in July 2010,⁴⁹ Djibouti faces an Eritrea-supported Afar rebellion and Kenya feels the pressure of Somali Islamist bands operating within its territory.

Ethiopia then succeeded to mobilise the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union which supported the adoption of sanctions against Eritrea in May 2009 and in July 2009 respectively. The sanctions on Eritrea⁵⁰ were imposed in December 2009 and further expanded in December 2011 by the United Nations Security Council.⁵¹ The sanctions were imposed on Eritrea mainly for backing the Islamist rebels attempting to overthrow Somalia's internationally-backed Transitional Federal Government and battling the African Union peacekeeping force known as African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Moreover, on 15 March 2012, Ethiopia announced that its forces had attacked and overran three military bases inside south-eastern Eritrea, Ramid (18 km), Gelahbe (14 km) and Gimbi (17 km), and then withdrew. According to Ethiopia, the bases were used to train Ethiopian rebel groups including the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front. In January 2012, the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front had allegedly carried out inside Ethiopia an attack which led to the killing of five European tourists and the kidnapping of two others.⁵² The most obvious motivation for the Ethiopian attack, overt but limited both in its objectives and its geographical extent, was thus to retaliate and show that Ethiopia can and will protect the populations living and tourists visiting near the contested border area.

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had clearly told the Ethiopian parliament in February 2012 that military preparations were being finalised in order to reciprocate for the January attack, retrospectively a loud and clear warning of impending military action. Actually, in February 2012, there was an unprecedented troop and heavy equipment movement along the Ethiopia-Eritrea border. But, judging by post-attack official pronouncements⁵³ and unofficial analyses, the attack was also a calculated move to convince Eritrea that Ethiopia will employ force when necessary and that its military actions could hurt Eritrea. It is also accurate to say that Ethiopia also understood well that 'Eritrea, increasingly isolated from the international community and short of funds, is in no position to respond effectively'⁵⁴ and that there would be no risk of a full-fledged war. Eritrea indeed announced that it would resist being dragged into another conflict and that the Ethiopian attack was 'to divert

attention from the central issue of the [Ethiopian] regime's flagrant violation of international law and illegal occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories'.⁵⁵

Anatomy of the Eritrean regime

President Issayas Afeworki is a hardened survivor of decades-long guerrilla warfare who was trained at the Nanjing Army Command College between November 1966 and October 1967. He is incontestably the formulator of Eritrea's domestic and foreign policies. Mengisteab asserts, for instance, that

despite the formal existence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Eritrea's foreign policy is made essentially in the President's Office ... Eritrea suffers from a weak, underdeveloped bureaucratic infrastructure, and foreign policy-making is no exception. The concentration of power in the presidency, together with the formulation of foreign policy outside the bureaucracy, exacerbates policy problems in several ways. First, it narrows the circle of those who influence it and thereby makes policy more susceptible to errors and erratic changes. Secondly, over-centralisation deprives policy-making of the rigorous scrutiny of options and their implications that is possible under a properly functioning bureaucratic infrastructure.⁵⁶

Moreover, as an International Crisis Group report puts it,

it is little wonder that Isaias, who directs both foreign and domestic policies (often even at the micro level) and appoints everyone from high court judges, senior military commanders and cabinet ministers to middle-ranking officials, mesmerises Eritreans and foreigners alike.⁵⁷

To compound matters, President Issayas has been widely described as being extremely arrogant and holding contemptuous views for any criticism, no matter what happens.⁵⁸ It is said that he more and more resides in Massawa away from Asmara, the capital.⁵⁹ Many observers link his being more frequently in Massawa with the fact that Massawa has been identified as a transshipment center for weapons consignments including Semtex, light weapons, mines and grenades (AK 47, hand grenades, RPG 7 anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade launchers) and millions of rounds of ammunition. These weapons are provided mainly by Arab states⁶⁰ as well as private weapons dealers from Eastern Europe and are then used to equip Ethiopian, Somali, Djiboutian and Sudanese rebel groups.⁶¹

President Issayas has not been able to convince others that pursuing such a strategy will yield positive results.⁶² To the contrary, he has only managed to isolate Eritrea. This is a source of frustration because his ambition of regional pre-eminence has been irremediably curtailed.

While difficult to gauge the sentiment of the general populace, the behaviour of the regime added to economic shortages must be resulting in a quiet sense of dissent.⁶³ Most youth have given up on the regime and a substantial number, seeing 'neither peace nor prosperity',⁶⁴ are seeking refuge and a new life abroad. Leaving Eritrea requires paying off the military.⁶⁵ But, once outside, members of the Diaspora⁶⁶ are courted and pressed adroitly to contribute funds to keep Eritrea afloat. With hardly any alternatives in sight, most in the Diaspora are resigned to acquiesce.

The Eritrean opposition residing in the United States, Europe and Australia is ineffective and its leaders lack the skills and determination to organise. It is deeply divided along ethnic and religious lines and has subsequently failed to draw broad support within Eritrea. Moreover, the opposition does not have an effective intelligence-gathering and military presence on the ground. For instance, the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organisation and the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of the Eritrean Kunama that both receive Ethiopian assistance conduct hit-and-run raids but have been rather ineffective at sustaining military operations.

When elements of the opposition do organise inside Eritrea, they face a lack of resources and an array of oppressive tactics. These tactics include militarisation and political surveillance of virtually the entire population, curbing of the media and internet, tapping of phones, extensive use of informants, indiscriminate detention, summary executions, mafia-style assassinations, widespread torture, blackmail and surprise house searches.⁶⁷

The perennial menace from Eritrea

Since 1998 and despite potential long-term risks, Eritrea's top foreign policy objective is to deliberately surround and undermine the security of a visibly stronger, relatively more peaceful and potentially prosperous Ethiopia and create political and strategic discomfort for it in its various and delicate balancing acts in the Horn of Africa.⁶⁸ Anything that Ethiopia supports, Eritrea goes determinedly against it, a case in point being Ethiopia's support to Somalia's Transitional Federal Government and Eritrea's support to the Union of Islamic Courts and then Al Shabab Al Mujahedeen.⁶⁹

Avoiding direct confrontation, Eritrea backs these anti-Ethiopia armed groups in Somalia as proxies for its long-standing conflict with Ethiopia, with the express objective of making Somalia a second front. It may seem ironic that Eritrea is supporting Somalia's Islamist groups for Eritrea, where Muslims and Christians are about equal in number,⁷⁰ faced a serious Islamist threat after 1994. The Eritrean Islamic Jihad, using Sudan's territory as a sanctuary and training ground, launched guerrilla attacks that targeted Eritrea's military and administrative installations.⁷¹

However, the reason for the unorthodox alignment between Eritrea and Somali Islamists is strategically opportunistic. It reflects the 'simple goal of reducing Ethiopian influence... This, in turn, could enable Asmara to encourage or coerce the Ethiopian government to resolve the outstanding issues from their 1998-2000 war, namely border demarcation and the status of the town of Badme'.⁷² It also reflects the political myopia and strategic short-sightedness of the current Eritrean leadership, which 'functions in a permanent state of outrage'.⁷³

Eritrea has also been supplying weapons and giving training to Ethiopian rebel groups⁷⁴ in order to put additional pressure on Ethiopia. These included the Ogaden National Liberation Front, the Oromo Liberation Front and the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front.⁷⁵ More seriously, dozens of divisions from its military remain along the common border with Ethiopia. Eritrea has remained reluctant to demobilise its oversize military. In fact, all adults from 18 to 50 continue to be recruited by force.⁷⁶

The current overall Eritrean force level is less than 200,000. However, independent sources put Eritrean strength to somewhat higher, at 300,000 half of whom may be conscripts. The Eritrean military has an estimated 150 battle tanks, less than 100 armoured vehicles and 150 artillery pieces.

An accurate evaluation of the Eritrean Air Force mainly based in Asmara is difficult as there is no fool-proof information available. However, it is believed to have a personnel strength of around 300 and to operate around 8 operational aircraft including Mig-29 and Su-27 and 6 serviceable helicopters including transport Mi-8/17 Hip and attack Mi-24.⁷⁷ It is simply incredible that Eritrea's greatly weakened economy is paradoxically forced to support the world's largest per capita military.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Many observers critical of Ethiopian foreign policy tend to regard Ethiopia as a bully using its militarily predominant position in the Horn of Africa to its own advantage, regardless of and insensitive to the interests of the region's other states. This paper has tried to address the fundamental fallacy of this assumption, which fails to grasp the breadth of the Ethiopian conception of regional security that emerged after 1998. It has also tried to explain this conception through the assessment of two selected case studies, Eritrea and Sudan.⁷⁹

With the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent that, after the 1991 political change, Ethiopia built an idealistic foreign policy that hinged on the defining precept that peaceful and good relations should be established with all neighbouring states. As neatly summed up by Young, 'moving beyond rhetoric

to applying a policy of good neighbourly relations in a region as turbulent as the Horn of Africa was simply naïve'.⁸⁰

As made clear by this paper, the price paid by Ethiopia for this naivety was high. Ethiopia watched Sudan use the good neighbourly relations policy as an entry point to organise an attack on a serving Egyptian president in 1995 in Ethiopia. Also, blinded by the seemingly unique and exemplary relations it thought to have developed with Eritrea, Ethiopia watched the latter strengthen its military and attack it in 1998 without any fear of reprisal. This attack singlehandedly proved beyond reasonable doubt that Ethiopia's foreign policy before 1998 was utterly ineffective because it had no military power to back it up.

After 1998 and the highly destructive war with Eritrea that ensued, Ethiopia gradually ensured that military strength was expanded and became a basic and active component of its foreign policy. This has helped Ethiopia to deal with Eritrea which has not been willing and able to adopt a reasonable foreign policy that shows moderation⁸¹ and takes due regard of the interests of its neighbouring states, be they big or small. In fact, the foreign policy of Eritrea largely depends on the irrationality streak in President Issayas' personality and the unconventional methods that he uses to decide and implement his decisions.

Moreover, it is, according to Healy, 'a curious irony that the atrophy of Ethiopia's relations with its economically closest neighbour and most natural partner, Eritrea, has become a powerful, interest-based driver for deeper economic integration and closer cooperation with other IGAD [states]',⁸² especially with Sudan. In fact, a new period in which the areas of coincidence of interests were progressively extended seems to have taken hold between Ethiopia and Sudan. Relations between the two states have improved with few interludes of retrogression because of the expansion of the number of issues in which both states discern a community of interests. And, both Ethiopia and Sudan seem to approach each other carefully in the conviction that established patterns of cooperation are worth maintaining.

All in all, by containing Eritrea's subversive activities and offensive posture and by improving its relations with Sudan which are now characterised by growing shared interests and expanding exchanges, Ethiopia may have helped put in place the solid foundations for regional stability. It may not be too bold to suggest that, well into the twenty-first century, Ethiopia will surely continue to play the role of the sturdy guarantor of a more stable region.⁸³

Notes

1 The author is pleased to acknowledge very useful comments on the general approach, structure and contents of an earlier draft of this paper from Ambassador Olusegun Akinsanya, Ambassador Hiruy Ammanuel, Ambassador Abdi Dolala, Dr. Mehari Taddele Maru, Dr. Emmanuel Kisangani, Dr. Solomon Ayele Dersso, Alemayehu Behabtu, Belachew Mekuria, Kidist Mulugeta and Clarissa Podbielski. Other individuals also offered insights and suggested revisions that made the paper a better text.

2 The following is a suggestive, rather than exhaustive, list of scholarly works on issues and aspects of Ethiopia's foreign policy. Writings on the past two decades of Ethiopian foreign policy and diplomacy include: D Dehetz, Ethiopia: a hegemon in the Horn of Africa region?, Paper presented at the British International Studies Association annual conference, Exeter, United Kingdom, 2008; D Fantaye, Ethiopia's model of development and regional security, in *Third sub-regional consultation on peace and security challenges in the Horn of Africa*, Addis Ababa: Inter-Africa Group, 2009; A Weber, Will the phoenix rise again? commitment or containment in the Horn of Africa, Paper presented at the Fourth expert meeting on regional security policy at the Greater Horn of Africa, Cairo, Egypt, 2008; C Clapham, Ethiopia, in C Clapham, J Hebst and G Mills (eds), *Big African states*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2006; R Iyob, Foreign policies in the Horn: the clash between the old and the new, in G Khadiagala and T Lyons (eds), *African foreign policies: power and process*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001. The important recent works on Ethiopian-Eritrean relations include: J Abbink, Ethiopia-Eritrea: proxy wars and prospects for peace in the Horn of Africa, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21(3) (2003); T Lyons, The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict and the search for peace in the Horn of Africa, *Review of African Political Economy*, 36(120) (2009); R L Villicana and M Venkataraman, Public policy failure or historical debacle? a study of Eritrea's relations with Ethiopia since 1991, *Review of Policy Research*, 23(2) (2006); F Steves, Regime change and war: domestic politics and the escalation of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 16(1) (2003). Excellent works on Ethiopia's pre-1991 foreign policy include: T Lyons, Internal vulnerability and inter-state conflict: Ethiopia's regional foreign policy, in M Ottaway (ed), *The political economy of Ethiopia*, New York: Praeger, 1990; A Tekle, The determinants of the foreign policy of revolutionary Ethiopia, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27(3) (1989); C Clapham, Ethiopia, in T Shaw and O Aluko (eds), *The political economy of African foreign policy*, Aldershot: Gower, 1984; E Keller, The politics of state survival: continuity and change in Ethiopian foreign policy, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 489 (1987); N Ayele, The foreign policy of Ethiopia, in O Aluko (ed), *The foreign policies of African states*, London: Hodden and Stoughton, 1977.

3 According to Mesfin and in a geopolitical sense, the Horn of Africa primarily includes Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, (northern) Sudan and South Sudan. B Mesfin, The Horn of Africa security complex, in B Mesfin and R Sharamo (eds), *Regional security in the post-Cold War Horn of Africa*, Addis Ababa: Institute for Security Studies, 2011, 3.

4 S Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London: Frank Class, 1976; A Hussein, *Islam in 19th Century Wollo, Ethiopia: revival, reform and reaction*, Leiden: Brill, 2001; J Abbink, An historical-anthropological approach to Islam in Ethiopia: issues of identity and politics, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 11(2) (1998); H Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, Boulder: Rienner, 1994; D Robinson, Ethiopia: Muslims in a Christian nation, in *Muslim societies in African history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; S Hussein, Islam, Christianity and Ethiopia's foreign policy, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 17(1) (1996); T Carmichael, Contemporary Ethiopian discourse on Islamic history: the politics of

historical representation, *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, 11 (1997); M Tadesse, Religion, peace and the future of Ethiopia, Paper presented at the First national conference on federalism, conflict and peace building, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2003.

5 Fantaye maintains that 'the high rate of population growth and increase in population size has many consequences such as increased pressure on natural resources, rising demand for and pressure on amenities and services, fragmentation of land holdings in rural areas and high population density. Moreover, similar to many underdeveloped societies with an expanding population and high population growth, Ethiopia's population reflects a situation where the overwhelming majority of the population is in the age group below 15 or below age 18'. Fantaye, Ethiopia's model of development and regional security, 103.

6 P Ferras, L'Ethiopie: l'émergence sereine, Institut des Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, 11 November 2011, http://www.iris-france.org/docs/kfm_docs/docs/contributions-ext/2011-11-10-ethiopie.pdf (accessed 12 November 2011), 3.

7 For a more detailed discussion of Ethiopia's order of battle, see: Jane's Defence, Ethiopia armed forces, 2010; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The military balance 2010*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2010.

8 The key point is that Ethiopia shares a long border with both Sudan and the newly independent South Sudan. And, this border spans six out of Ethiopia's nine regions: Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Gambella, Benishangul Gumuz and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region.

9 Mesfin, The Horn of Africa security complex, 19.

10 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Foreign affairs and national security policy and strategy*, Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information, 2002, 84.

11 A Gallab, *The first Islamic republic: development and disintegration of Islamism in the Sudan*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008; A de Waal and A H Abdel Salam, Islamism, state power and jihad in Sudan, in A de Waal (ed), *Islamism and its enemies in the Horn of Africa*, Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2004; T Carney, The Sudan: political Islam and terrorism, in R Rotberg (ed), *Battling terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005; J Corbin, *The base: in search of Al Qaeda, the terror network that shook the world*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002; G Pirio, *The African jihad: Bin Laden's quest for the Horn of Africa*, Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2007; A Jamel, Funding fundamentalism: Sudan, *Review of African Political Economy*, 19(52) (1991); A Ibrahim, A theology of modernity: Hasan al-Turabi and Islamic revival in Sudan, *Africa Today*, 46(3/4) (1999); J Miller, Faces of fundamentalism: Hassan al-Turabi and Muhammed Fadlallah, *Foreign Affairs*, 73(6) (1994).

12 R Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda global network of terror*, London: Hurst, 2002, 156.

13 Mesfin, The Horn of Africa security complex, 16.

14 There are very few works on the relations between Ethiopia and Sudan. These include: M Ottaway, Ethiopian-Sudanese relations and the conflict in the Horn of Africa, Paper presented at the international symposium on the African Horn, Cairo, Egypt, 1985; R Marchal, Le Soudan au cœur du conflit Erythréo-Ethiopien, *Politique Africaine*, 74 (1999); J Young, Sudanese-Ethiopian relations in the post-Cold War era, Unpublished paper, nd; J Young, Sudan's changing relations with its neighbours and the implications for peace, Unpublished paper, nd; K Abraham, Ethio-Sudanese relations before, during and after the Ethio-Eritrean conflict, Paper presented at the Africa University of Khartoum, Khartoum, Sudan, 2006; D Shinn, Sudan and her neighbours, Institute for Security Studies Situation Report, 2003.

15 The aim of the assassination attempt was to overthrow the secular and pro-Western government, incite an Islamist uprising in Egypt and bolster other Islamist operations in the Middle East. Y Bodansky, *The Mubarak assassination attempt takes the Islamists' war to centre stage*, *Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, July-August 1995, 12-13.

16 Using Khartoum-provided documents, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the influential and long-time deputy and successor of Osama Bin Laden, 'made a brief and clandestine visit to Addis Ababa to see the sites of the planned attacks with his own eyes ... [Moreover,] the operational plan was finalised in Khartoum toward the end of Zawahiri's visit ... [And, the weapons delivered] leave no doubt about the direct involvement of the Sudanese government in the operation. Virtually all the weapons seized with the terrorists in Addis Ababa belonged to the Sudanese army. The serial numbers on the seized RPGs confirmed that these were part of a Sudanese arms deal with the People's Republic of China'. Bodansky, *The Mubarak assassination attempt takes the Islamists' war to centre stage*, 14-15. Wright corroborated this in his book: 'Zawahiri went to Ethiopia to inspect the killing ground ... Sudanese intelligence smuggled weapons into their embassy in Ethiopia ... The Ethiopian police quickly pieced together the plot, exposing the complicity of the Sudanese government'. L Wright, *The looming tower: Al Qaeda and the road to 9/11*, New York: Vintage Books, 2006, 243.

17 Young, *Sudanese-Ethiopian relations in the post-Cold War era*, 8.

18 Very few researchers have attempted to study exhaustively the origins, composition, motivations and methods of Al Itihad and written publicly available books or papers. For perceptive analysis and general account, the following have much to offer: M Tadesse, *Al-Itihad: political Islam and black economy in Somalia*, Addis Ababa: Mega Printing Enterprise, 2002; A Le Sage, *Prospects for Al Itihad and Islamic radicalism in Somalia*, *Review of African Political Economy*, 27(89) (2001); D Shinn, *Ethiopia: coping with Islamic fundamentalism before and after september 11*, Center for Strategic and International Studies Africa Notes, 7, 2002; K Menkhaus, *Political Islam in Somalia: implications for current and future conflict in the Horn of Africa*, *Middle East Policy*, 9(1) (2002).

19 Ministry of National Defence of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, *Al Itihad Al Islamiya in Somalia*, Background note, 2000, 2. Somalis who studied Islamic theology abroad seem to have formed the backbone of Al Itihad. This armed group sought to install a strictly Islamic Somali state governed by Sharia or Islamic law and the borders of which would have been defined by a Greater Somalia uniting all Somalis living in the Horn of Africa. It also aimed at expanding the religion of Islam, freeing Muslims from Western claims of hegemony and setting up a strong army to engage a jihad or holy war against, in its judgment, the Christian-dominated forms of rule in Ethiopia. Al Itihad undertook activities in the humanitarian and social realm, providing schooling, food and health care so as to obtain the support of a Somali population exasperated by perpetual lawlessness. Furthermore, as Sharia courts began to emerge, Al Itihad infiltrated and even controlled them in addition to existing Somali political structures and the business sector. The group had also maintained direct links with individuals, charities, relief organisations and other groups based in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Pakistan. These individuals and groups offered advice, training, finance and military equipment. Al Itihad undertook terrorist attacks in 1996 within Ethiopia, most notably an attempt to assassinate an Ethiopian minister and a series of hotel bombings in Ethiopian cities that caused many civilian deaths and injuries. It had also conducted military operations in 1994 and 1999. Nonetheless, after 1999, it lost the support of Sudan and experienced repeated military setbacks.

20 Young, *Sudanese-Ethiopian relations in the post-Cold War era*, 15. Young further argues that Sudan's deep antipathy towards Eritrea arises from its humiliation in 1994 when

the Sudanese embassy premises in Asmara were turned over to the Sudanese opposition and Eritrea sent its military deep inside Sudanese territory. Young, Sudanese-Ethiopian relations in the post-Cold War era, 11.

21 Interviews with officials of the Ethiopian Embassy, Khartoum, Sudan, August 2011.

22 Finding reliable and up-to-date information is difficult. However, during two trips to Khartoum in December 2009 and August 2011, the author of this paper met dozens of Ethiopians.

23 T Tekle, Ethiopia, Sudan border commission meeting ends with common agreement, Sudan

Tribune, 3 January 2010, <http://www.sudantribune.com/Ethiopia-Sudan-border-commission,33666> (accessed 20 October 2011); D Sisay, Ethiopia increases benzene supplies from Sudan, 20 January 2010; Meles hails Ethio-Sudan cooperation, Ethiopian News Agency, 21 April 2009; Ethiopia, Sudan vow to stop Eritrean terrorism in Horn of Africa, Ethiopian News Agency, 31 December 2009; Ethiopia renews gasoline imports from Sudan, Sudan Tribune, 17 January 2008, <http://www.sudantribune.com/Ethiopia-renews-gasoline-imports,25595> (accessed 18 October 2011).

24 Young, Sudan's changing relations with its neighbours, 9.

25 T Tekle, Sudan's oil giant to meet Ethiopia's annual fuel demand, Sudan Tribune, 8 August 2010, <http://www.sudantribune.com/Sudan-s-oil-giant-set-to-meet,35890> (accessed 18 October 2011), 1.

26 Interviews with officials of the Ethiopian Embassy, Khartoum, Sudan, August 2011.

27 H Verhoeven, Black gold for blue gold? Sudan's oil, Ethiopia's water and regional integration, Chatham House Briefing Paper, 2011; M Tadesse, Turning conflict to cooperation: towards an energy-led integration in the Horn of Africa, Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 2003; Sudan completes electricity linkage with Ethiopia, Sudan Tribune, 17 July 2009, <http://www.horntrade.com/news/sudan-completes-electricity-linkage-with-ethiopia/> (accessed 20 October 2011).

28 Verhoeven, Black gold for blue gold, 6.

29 M Taddele, Keeping peace in Abyei, ISS Today, 28 October 2011, 1.

30 Lieutenant General Tadesse was the commander of the 102nd Corps during the Ethiopian-Eritrean war of 1998-2000 and previously served as head of the Defence Training Main Department. Major General Adem was the deputy commander of the Ethiopian Air Force.

31 Spears talks about 'a natural kinship and merging of interests between the EPLF and the TPLF which neither had with other movements'. I Spears, *Civil war in African states: the search for security*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010, 69.

32 K Mulugeta, The Ethiopian-Eritrean war: an analysis of its causes, course, impacts and prospects, in B Mesfin and R Sharamo (eds), *Regional security in the post-Cold War Horn of Africa*, Addis Ababa: Institute for Security Studies, 2011, 32.

33 M Tadesse, *The Ethio-Eritrean war: retrospect and prospects: reflections on the making of conflicts in the Horn of Africa 1991-1998*, Addis Ababa: Mega Printing Enterprise, 1999, 80; J Young, The Tigray and Eritrean liberation fronts: a history of tension and pragmatism, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34(1) (1996).

34 Protocol Agreement of Cooperation on Foreign Relations between the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Eritrea, Article 1, 1.

35 Protocol Agreement on Cooperation in Security and Related Matters between the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Eritrea, Article 1, 1.

36 Transit and Port Services Agreement between the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Eritrea, Article 2, 1.

37 Mulugeta, The Ethiopian-Eritrean war, 37.

38 T Negash and K Tronvoll, *Brothers at war: making sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war*, Oxford: James Currey, 2000, 1.

39 Fielding describes the conflict as 'a dispute for which there seemed to be relatively little justification, at least to outsiders. It is a textbook example of a rapidly escalating conflict, originating in a local issue and then fought with means out of all proportion to the original bone of contention'. M Fielding, Bad times in Badme: bitter warfare continues along the Eritrea-Ethiopia border, *Boundary and Security Bulletin*, 1999, 89.

40 Lyons, The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, 168.

41 Pratt describes Badme as 'the location of the spark that ignited the conflagration'. M Pratt, A terminal crisis? examining the breakdown of the Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary dispute resolution process, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 23 (2006), 330.

42 Pratt, A terminal crisis; M Shaw, Title, control and closure? the experience of the Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary commission, *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 56 (2007); K Tronvoll and G Nystuen, The Eritrean-Ethiopian peace agreement: exploring the limits of law, *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, 26(1) (2008).

43 Pratt, A terminal crisis, 339.

44 It does not help that 'Eritrea's political culture has long been authoritarian, predicated upon secrecy and the arbitrary exercise of absolute power' and that there is an 'apparent conviction at the center of power that the people could not be trusted to rule themselves, especially in an unsettled regional environment where enemies and spies might manipulate them against their own interests'. D Connell, Eritrea: on a slow fuse, in R Rotberg (ed), *Battling terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005, 71 and 73.

45 R Reid, Eritrea's role and foreign policy in the Horn of Africa: past and present perspectives, in R Reid (ed), *Eritrea's external relations*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2009, 22.

46 Connell, Eritrea, 65.

47 'In Eritrea's official discourse, the end of the military phase is not interpreted as a military defeat but in fact a victory over Ethiopian aggression'. T Muller, State making in the Horn of Africa: notes on Eritrea and prospects for the end of violent conflict in the Horn, *Conflict, Security and Development*, 6(4) (2006), 524.

48 For Eritrea, Ethiopia is the former *colonial* power from which independence had to be gained the hard way. Moreover, even after independence, there is an Eritrean tendency to tangle with Ethiopia like an addiction or a way of political life. In fact, in the early 1990s and before the 1998-2000 war, Eritrean intelligence led by Petros Solomon established a committee to foretell Eritrea's long-term threats in the Horn of Africa. According to a source who was abreast of its substance and direction, the committee persisted in treating

Ethiopia as the source of Eritrea's greatest threat. Ethiopia was confidentially placed at the top of the external threat list and was really regarded as more dangerous than even Sudan. The committee's major contention was that Ethiopia would eventually expand its military establishment, with the view of restoring a favourable balance of power and wresting away Eritrea's wartime and peacetime gains.

49 Uganda is getting itself more and more immersed in Horn of Africa politics. Discussion with a Ugandan senior intelligence officer, Kampala, Uganda, in May 2010. That would be exactly two months before the Kampala bombings.

50 The 2009 United Nations sanctions include an arms embargo on Eritrea, travel bans on top political and military officials and the freezing of assets of some senior political and military officials. Ethiopia believes that these sanctions will not fundamentally change the course and behaviour of the Eritrean leadership which will continue its destabilising actions in the Horn of Africa. The sanctions could disrupt the volume of weapons reaching Al Shabab throughout the course of the present conflict. However, they would do little with regard to significantly cutting down the recruitment, training drive as well as the sophistication and military capacity of Al Shabab.

51 The fifteen-member council approved the expansion of the sanctions on Eritrea 13 to 0, with China and Russia abstaining. A senior official of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had told in November 2011 the author of this paper in Beijing, China, that China 'is very cautious about sanctions against Eritrea'. She voiced her concern about 'additional pressure and sanctions' and instead called for 'some flexibility when dealing with Eritrea'. She said that 'she, herself, had gone to Asmara with the Vice Minister [of Foreign Affairs of China, Zhai Jun, in August 2011]'. She added that 'the Foreign Minister [of China, Yang Jiechi] had met President Issayas in New York [on the sidelines of the annual United Nations General Assembly meetings in September 2011] and that the Eritrean Foreign Minister [Osman Saleh Mohammed] had visited China this year [June 2011]'. She said that 'Eritrea had made gestures of goodwill towards Djibouti and the United States and even tried to rejoin IGAD'.

52 S Tisdall, Eritrea is an easy target for Ethiopia, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/19/eritrea-ethiopia-isaias-afwerki> (accessed 20 March 2012); W Davidson, Ethiopian Army attacks Eritrean military post in retaliation for rebel violence, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 15 March 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2012/0315/Ethiopian-Army-attacks-Eritrean-military-post-in-retaliation-for-rebel-violence> (accessed 16 March 2012); L van Kemenade, Ethiopia carries out attacks against Eritrea, *Associated Press*, 15 March 2012, <http://news.yahoo.com/ethiopia-carries-attacks-against-eritrea-131407459.html> (accessed 16 March 2012); Al Jazeera, Ethiopia attacks rebel bases in Eritrea, 15 March 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/03/2012315143918662172.html> (accessed 16 March 2012).

53 No details about the nature of the military operations and type of military units used or any damage or casualties on either side were released.

54 M Plaut, Are Ethiopia and Eritrea heading back to war, *BBC*, 21 March 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17433871> (accessed 22 March 2012), 1.

55 A Maasho, Eritrea says Ethiopian attack won't entrap it, *Reuters*, 16 March 2012, <http://af.reuters.com/article/ethiopiaNews/idAFL5E8EG0N620120316> (Accessed 18 March 2011), 1.

56 K Mengisteab, What has gone wrong with Eritrea's foreign policy?, in R Reid (ed), *Eritrea's external relations*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2009, 49.

A serving Eritrean diplomat told the author of this paper in September 2008 in Berlin, Germany, that 'the [Eritrean] Ministry of Foreign Affairs is marginalised, if not excluded, from decision-making. It just performs protocol functions and executes and represents foreign policy rather than formulates it'.

57 International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: the siege state*, Africa Report, 163, 2010, 8.

58 In his memoirs, the chairman of the Constitutional Commission of Eritrea, Dr. Habte Selassie describes Issayas as a tough and heartless dictator, with a deceptive mind, who irrationally and arrogantly defies world opinion. He convincingly argues that 'Isaias Afeworki is addicted to power and will not relinquish it. As a dictator, he has absolute power, unrestrained by any constitutional limiting mechanisms of checks and balances. During the armed struggle, people accepted his dictatorship because of military necessity ... We hoped and expected that there would be changes with the coming of independence'. B Habte Selassie, *Wounded nation: how a once promising Eritrea was betrayed and its future compromised*, Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2011, 60.

59 R Reid, *The politics of silence: interpreting stasis in contemporary Eritrea*, *Review of African Political Economy*, 36(120) (2009), 214.

60 There are ample evidences to show that Eritrea received financial and military assistance from Gaddafi-led Libya, Mubarak-led Egypt and Qatar.

61 Information communicated by an astute Norwegian diplomat closely following developments in Eritrea, Oslo, Norway, October 2008.

62 Eng. Mahboub Maalim, the IGAD Executive Secretary, told in December 2009 in Djibouti city, Djibouti, the author of this paper that he had met the Eritrean president only once. He noted that 'all Eritreans are terrified of the president who has centralised decision-making'. The Executive Secretary had repeatedly tried to reengage Eritrea and bring it back to the fold of IGAD. However, his interlocutors in Eritrea had to refer every decision to the president. He said that their meeting lasted for three hours during which the Eritrean president uninterruptedly talked without giving Eng. Mahboub the opportunity to intervene and with his aides spontaneously nodding their heads in approval. Eng. Mahboub said that the Eritrean President 'was a handsome and tall man' and that 'he was extremely arrogant'. He went on to explain that the Eritrean president 'has only managed to isolate Eritrea and has proved unable to convey his message to the international community'. Increasingly and worryingly, President Issayas' decisions appear more and more unpredictable and devoid of coherence.

63 Reid, *The politics of silence*, 210. See also N Hirt, *Dreams do not come true in Eritrea: anomie and family disintegration due to the structural militarisation of society*, GIGA Working Paper, 119, 2010.

64 D Hedru, *Eritrea: transition to dictatorship*, *Review of African Political Economy*, 30(97) (2003), 438.

65 Reid, *The politics of silence*, 212; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea*, 10.

66 Many Eritreans in the Diaspora as well as in the political, civil and military elites look with extreme suspicion and fear at Ethiopia that seems to have returned to its pre-1991 peak of power and threat. They genuinely believe that Ethiopia's ambition is still to destroy Eritrea, turn it into a satellite or attack the port of Assab at the first given opportunity. They have not, however, embraced the central contradiction in the relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia which are naturally bound to have different ideologies, socio-economic bases, modes of behaviour, political institutions and conditions, international perceptions and foreign policy objectives. In the first place, the very basis of the separation of Eritrea from

Ethiopia had intensified rather than relieved long-standing tensions and lasting peace is not likely to come about any time soon. But, at the same time, only genuine peace and complete trust between Eritrea and Ethiopia could sort out all the conflictual issues which emerged as a result of the separation and could make a monumental difference for the Horn of Africa's stability in the twenty-first century. Moreover, Eritreans have failed to notice that the relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia have assumed a triangular shape, with the United States as a third party, and that anti-United States rhetoric and moves will carry far-reaching consequences for Eritrea. Finally and unfortunately, Eritreans do not question a short-sighted and power-hungry political and military leadership which had, without any doubt, ably prosecuted the pre-1991 armed struggle and carried principles of sacrifice into the lives of most Eritreans but is currently trying to camouflage its inability to open up politically and achieve equitable growth within and harmony outside the Eritrean state. Eritreans can also ill afford to notice that Ethiopia does not want a third neighbouring state after Somalia and Sudan thrown into turmoil, that it is already negatively affected by Eritrea's political and socio-economic fragility and that the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea only desire to live in peace and concentrate on getting rid of the oppressive impoverishment which has brought into question their very survival and future.

67 The serious human rights violations in Eritrea have been amply documented. See, for example: Human Rights Watch, Eritrea country summary, in Human Rights Watch (ed), *World report 2010: events of 2009*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010; Human Rights Watch, *Service for life: state repression and indefinite conscription*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009; K Tronvoll, *The cost of struggle for freedom in Eritrea: human rights and political development 1991-2009*, Study commissioned by The Oslo Center, Oslo, Norway, 2009; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: arbitrary detention of government critics and journalists*, 2002.

68 Healy held that, 'since 1998, Eritrea has placed at the centre of all its calculations strategies designed to weaken Ethiopia politically, whether domestically or in its regional goals'. S Healy, *Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute and the Somali conflict*, Paper presented at the conference on the prevailing interlocked peace and security conundrum in the Horn of Africa, Addis Ababa, 2008, 21. Reid also argues that, 'to a very real degree, Eritrea's regional foreign policy has one overriding aim, the undermining and eventual destruction of the regime in Addis Ababa'. Reid, *Eritrea's role and foreign policy in the Horn of Africa*, 20.

69 Abbink, *Ethiopia-Eritrea*, 414; B Mesfin, *The Eritrea-Djibouti border dispute*, Institute for Security Studies Situation Report 2008, 8-9; Healy, *Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute and the Somali conflict*, 15-19.

70 S J Hansen, *Eritrea's involvement in Somalia*, *Jane's Defence*, 7; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea*, 23; Healy, *Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute and the Somali conflict*, 18.

71 Connell, *Eritrea*, 77-79. Originally based in Khartoum, Sudan, the Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ) was formed in the early 1980s. Targeting the western lowlands of Eritrea near the Sudanese border, it claimed to represent the interests of Muslim Eritreans who make up approximately half of Eritrea's population. The EIJ is a product of a number of mergers and alliances and comprising the more religiously driven opponents of the Eritrean government including radical Islamists.

72 Hansen, *Eritrea's involvement in Somalia*, 7.

73 Reid, *Eritrea's role and foreign policy in the Horn of Africa*, 18.

74 Eritrea hosts the leaders of the Ogaden National Liberation Front, provides it with training as well as logistical and military support. It is widely claimed that Eritrean-

trained fighters in Eritrean-style military dress currently form the backbone of the rebel group's forces which have mostly relied on quick surprise attacks and guerrilla-style raids against Ethiopian military convoys, avoiding engaging in direct positional battles.

75 'Throughout its history, the Eritrean government is intimately acquainted with the stresses and strains among the communities that inhabit Ethiopia's periphery and has shown an inclination to instigate or revive insurgencies there as a means to destabilise Ethiopia'. S Healy, *Hostage to conflict: prospects for building regional economic cooperation in the Horn of Africa*, Chatham House Report, 2011, 3.

76 Human Rights Watch, *Service for life*, 43.

77 Jane's Defence, *Eritrea armed forces*; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The military balance 2010*.

78 Hansen, *Eritrea's involvement in Somalia*, 8. Eritrea's sustainable development 'would be subverted by maintaining a substantial military sector, owing of course to the resulting demands on the scarce material, financial and intellectual resources it so desperately needs in its civil sector'. A Westing, *Conflict versus cooperation in a regional setting: lessons from Eritrea*, in M Suleiman (ed), *Ecology, politics and violent conflict*, New York: Zed Books, 1999, 273.

79 Many of the people who read the paper asked why it did not focus on the relations of Ethiopia with Somalia, Djibouti and Kenya which simply cannot be treated comprehensively in such a necessarily compressed report.

80 J Young, *Post-civil war transitions in Ethiopia*, Unpublished paper, nd, 23.

81 'The Eritrean government failed to communicate its position effectively via diplomatic channels and seems uninterested in either winning friends or influencing anyone'. Reid, *Eritrea's role and foreign policy in the Horn of Africa*, 21. Isn't wanting to accelerate a confrontation with a stronger opponent with much greater resources self-defeating as the economic and political costs continue to mount far beyond what was anticipated? Isn't behaving in a way that furnishes ammunition to Ethiopia an obstacle not only to solving the two states' border dispute but to advancing Eritrea's own long-term interests? And, why outright discard the benefits of relaxation of tensions and improved relations with Ethiopia and even temporary accommodations and diplomatic dialogue?

82 Healy, *Hostage to conflict*, 41.

83 During the next several years, official rhetoric aside and given continued economic advance, Ethiopia can endure as the Horn of Africa's central pillar of stability. Its ever-increasing role in the region will not be challenged by any other regional state or combination of states. It currently lies between two states, Sudan and Somalia, which were previously its two most formidable, largest and most populous neighbouring rivals. Currently, both states are simultaneously struggling to overcome decades of lethal conflicts and to adjust to territorial dismemberment. Ethiopia is also bordered by three states which do not have the internal cohesion, the political organisation and the economic and military strength to effectively challenge its strategically critical role. Youngest and poorest South Sudan is grappling with its new national identity project vis-à-vis its northern neighbour. Djibouti is more economically dependent on Ethiopia than any other regional state and relies on extra-regional military forces for its security. Eritrea is already cornered by the folly of its own actions. Finally, Ethiopia has a consistently good working relationship with one state which has a traditionally inward focus and is more sensitive to Ethiopia's security concerns and even shares some of them, Kenya. Despite occasional misunderstandings regarding the activities of the Oromo Liberation Front along their common border, Ethiopia's healthiest

bilateral relationship is undoubtedly the one with the more economically advanced Kenya. This relationship is rooted in the problems that the two states commonly face especially with regard to Somalia. Kenya was the site of major terrorist attacks allegedly carried out by Al Qaeda: the 1998 attack on the United States embassy in Nairobi, the bombing of a Mombasa hotel and the missile attack on an Israeli commercial jetliner in 2002. Discussion with an official of the Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nairobi, Kenya, August 2008.