

Conflict in the Neo-Colonial Order in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia-Tigray

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ABSTRACT *This article analyzes the Tigray crisis in Ethiopia based on the policies of global and regional powers in the context of the African neo-colonial order. The study emphasizes that although the colonial system has ended in the international system, the power struggle in Africa continues through neo-colonialism. The article proceeds with the argument that changing the policies of global and regional actors may result in neo-colonial struggle and instability in Ethiopia. The study aims to define a variable of the approaches of global and regional actors, which is the cause of the instability and neo-colonial struggle experienced due to the crisis in Ethiopia. In this context, the study's most probable case study method was used and it assumed that the indirect involvement of global and regional actors in the Ethiopian-Tigray conflict has a neo-colonial purpose. Global actors have different interests in line with the regional power struggle and competition. It shows the existence of neo-colonialism as global and regional actors influence Ethiopia's economic and political systems. Ethiopia's exposure to neo-colonial interventions hinders these countries' economic growth and their political, social, and technological development. As a result, it has reached that the neo-colonial struggle has a destabilizing effect on Ethiopia.*

Keywords: Neo-Colonialism, Ethiopia, Tigray Crisis, Horn of Africa, TPLF

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Introduction

Ethiopia, which has more than eighty ethnic identities in the country, has conflicted with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Tigray for the past year. In the Tigray region, where approximately 7 million people live, the TPLF is one of the country's oldest and most influential actors. The TPLF, an influential separatist group in the Tigray region nowadays, has also caused problems in the country's political history. The TPLF, which struggled with Haile Selassie from 1930 to 1974, started to fight with Mengistu Haile Mariam while he ruled the country from 1974-1991 and now has begun to conflict with Abiy Ahmed from 2020-2022. These three periods mentioned have had different forms of government but with major similarities, including the constituencies from which they were drawn and their policies towards minority groups and neighboring states. The Ethiopian public opinion believes that evaluating the Ethiopian-Tigray conflict regarding Abiy Ahmed would be a delusion.

Ethiopia has a federal management approach. The elections, which were scheduled for August 2020 but had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were held independently in September 2020 in the Tigray region without following the government's decision. Furthermore, this situation caused the crisis to escalate to the dimension of civil war. In response to the TPLF's action, the Abiy Ahmed government annulled the elections, and the tension in the country escalated. According to the Federal Constitution in Ethiopia, which has a parliamentary and federal system divided into states depending on ethnicity, TPLF members and supporters state that in the parliament seats should be equally shared among ethnic groups rather than a population-based ratio in the distribution.

The study analyzes the process by considering the Abiy Ahmed period. The study states that the indirect involvement of global and regional powers in the fight against Tigray in Ethiopia destabilizes Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa and complicates the problems of global and regional power competition in Ethiopia. Concurrently, the study seeks an answer to the assumptions that the interventions of external actors in the conflict in Ethiopia may negatively affect Ethiopia's regional policies and relations with neighboring countries.

The study employed case analysis and process tracking methods. These methods offer the chance to test the arguments in research on the foreign policy choice of states. The process tracking method is one of the methods used in this study because it establishes a cause-effect relationship between the concepts, such as the actions and expectations of the states. While the presence of neo-colonialism and instability in Ethiopia has been used as the dependent variable in the study, the policies of global and regional actors were used as independent variables.

Neo-Colonialism in the 21st Century?

Although it is stated that colonialism ended after the colonial period in Africa, the current post-colonial period can be expressed as the neo-colonial period or colonialism 2.0 period. The concept of neo-colonialism, defined as the indirect control of underdeveloped countries by developed countries, was used to express the continuing dependence of former colonial countries on foreign countries in the post-Second World War period. The meaning of neo-colonialism has expanded to be applied generally. However, to understand neo-colonialism more clearly today, the concepts of imperialism and colonialism need to be explained. In general, colonialism refers to the direct rule, control, and exploitation of another country by one country; imperialism means the economic, political, and cultural rule and exploitation of another country or region. Neo-colonialism, on the other hand, refers to how a government controls and exploits other countries even after the end of colonialism.

The concept of imperialism forms the basis of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The theory, practice, and behavior of sovereign countries that govern geography far from a country's mainland can be defined as imperialism.¹ However, imperialism is also defined as the process or policy of establishing an empire.² On the other hand, according to Lenin, imperialism is defined as the way strong states obtain resources such as labor and raw materials from weak ones.³ Lenin describes imperialism as the last stage of capitalism, shown in global market monopoly, in which states try to use national economic and political power to protect state enterprises from competing with their foreign rivals.⁴ Nevertheless, there are two forms of imperialism: the relative sphere of informal economic control and the absolute realm of regional power or colonialism.⁵ In this context, colonialism emerged as a result of imperialism.⁶

The difference between these concepts is the different forms of influence of the colonial country over other countries in general. Colonialism encompasses countries under their control, while imperialism can provide a wider sphere of influence. Neo-colonialism is generally effective in economic fields, through which it tries to indirectly control other countries. In short, neo-colonialism relies on the dominance of the global economic system to ensure political, economic, and cultural control of countries. This includes a process by which rich countries manipulate other countries in their interests by lending, trading, investing, or transferring technology.

Indeed, colonialism emerges as the direct political control of sovereign nations over weaker states. European colonialism in Africa in the past is an exam-

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ple of this situation. The 1885 Berlin Conference established a set of guidelines for the purchase and control of African lands. Although colonialism was declared illegitimate by the United Nations in the 1960s, imperialism continues today in various ways. The new form of imperialism, “liberal imperialism,” has taken its place in international politics, arguing that less qualified people can never advance without the influence of more qualified people.⁷ However,

when the pre-colonial period in Africa is examined, it is already known that prosperity, diversity, and cultural differences existed historically.⁸

Neo-colonialism is a further development of capitalism that allows nations and corporations to dominate nations by utilizing international capitalism rather than through direct rule. Today, neo-colonialism has come to be seen as involving a coordinated effort by ex-colonial powers and other developed countries to curb growth in developing countries and to keep those countries supply of cheap raw materials and labor sources.⁹

The continuous control of sovereign nations over institutionally weak states after the decolonization process of Africa stands out as the beginning of the concept of neo-colonialism. This situation explains not only the permanent control of former colonial actors over Africa but also the political and economic efforts for the presence of new actors on the continent. Neo-colonialism provides the economy and policy from abroad, although the target state is theoretically independent.¹⁰ Neo-colonialism is replacing its former form. However, the approaches used in neo-colonialism are seen as more diverse, secretive, and resistant than colonialism. Neo-colonialism in Africa thoroughly permeates the economic and political systems of the continent’s states. This situation causes non-continental actors to be exposed to accusations of neo-colonialism in Africa. The exposure of African states with a colonial past to neo-colonial interventions prevented these countries’ economic growth and political, social, and technological development.

In the post-colonial era, governments in sovereign African countries are aware of their mandate to make laws, administer public services, control the governance process, and cooperate with different actors of the international system. However, states faced with neo-colonialism are also aware that they do not have adequate power over economic development, especially national development. Therefore, with the influence of neo-colonialism, it is understood by the continental countries that there is no question of complete independence in terms of economy.

The neo-colonial process was first carried out by actors with a colonial past, such as the UK, France, and Italy, European powers competing for African hegemony. Later, global actors such as the U.S., China, Russia, and regional actors such as India, UAE, and Saudi Arabia started to participate actively in the geopolitical landscape of Africa. Currently, most of the non-continental actors in Africa are implementing conservative policies. In other words, Africa is expected to remain weak by maintaining its current position in the global system. However, the concepts of ‘peace’, ‘freedom’ and ‘modernization’ African peoples accepted from the West were consciously tied to conditions that perpetuated slavery. Therefore, eliminating these problems in the short term is not possible in the current conjuncture.

The Ethiopian-Tigray Issue: A Proxy War in the Shadow of Neo-Colonialism

The history of Ethiopia’s independent and organized structure, one of the most ancient civilizations in the world, dates back to the Axum Kingdom, which was founded in the 1st century. When the Axum Kingdom reached its most expansive borders, it covered today’s Northern Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the part of Yemen located on the coast of the Red Sea in the Arabian Peninsula.¹¹ Named Ethiopia in the 4th century, the Kingdom maintained its independence from 1936 to 1941, except for five years when the Italians occupied it. Ethiopia, surrounded by Djibouti and Somalia in the East, Sudan, and Eritrea in the North, South Sudan in the West, and Somalia and Kenya in the South, has a population of nearly 120 million. Ethiopia began being governed by the Empire of Haile Selassie I in the middle of the 19th century.¹²

With the turmoil caused by separatist movements in Ethiopia in the 1960s, the country became fragile. Even after these years, internal instability in Ethiopia caused severe problems for the Derg regime that came to power in 1974. Many people’s liberation movements, based on ethnic origin and representing different regions of Ethiopia, emerged at the time that are still influential in the interior, such as the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).¹³ Therefore, these organizations are among the most critical problems needing to be solved.

The Empire, was ended in 1974 by the Derg junta, known as the “Red Terror,” which then continued to reign for seventeen years in an economically troubled and challenging period of Ethiopian history.¹⁴ However, in 1991, other people’s liberation fronts in Ethiopia, including the TPLF, took back the administration in the country, and a collective federal party, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), was formed.¹⁵ In this context, the peo-

Ethiopia reaches final stage in agreement to end bloody civil war

Nearly all articles of the November 2022 deal, which put an end to clashes between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian military, have been implemented

STEPS TAKEN UNDER THE AGREEMENT

-  The TPLF handed over its light and heavy arms to the Ethiopian army
-  Highways and airports were left to the control of the Addis Ababa government
-  Services including electricity, phone, and banking were restored in the region
-  The UN and international aid groups dispatched hundreds of trucks of humanitarian aid to the region
-  An African Union observer delegation started work in the region

STEPS TO BE TAKEN

-  Ethiopia's parliament will remove the TPLF from the country's terror list
-  An interim government will be formed, including representatives from the TPLF
-  Elections will be repeated in the region



Infographic of situation in the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict as of January 25, 2023.

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JAN. 25, 2023



ple's liberation fronts, which were formed according to the regions in Ethiopia, created a federal structure by protecting their autonomous regions. However, the EPRDF was terminated with a joint decision taken on 1 December 2019 by the Oromo Democratic Party, the Amhara Democratic Party, the Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Movement, and the five parties supporting the coalition.¹⁶ The Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM), Afar National Democratic Party, Benishangul-Gumuz Peoples Democratic Party (BGPDP), Somali Democratic Party (DPS), Gambela Peoples' Democratic Movement (GPDM) and Harar National League leaders, united in a meeting and formed the Prosperity Party.¹⁷

In the history of Ethiopian politics, especially in the post-Cold War period, the TPLF has significantly impacted almost all government mechanisms of the state. Meles Zenawi, the leader of the TPLF who overthrew the Derg junta in 1991, served as the President of Ethiopia until 1995 and the Prime Minister between 1995 and 2012. In addition, Tigray officials were in essential positions in Ethiopia's state and army management mechanisms. It has played an essential role in many issues, from the formation of state institutions in Ethiopia after 1991 to the shaping of the constitution. However, the majority of the population in Ethiopia, 34 percent Oromo and 27 percent Amhara, was disturbed by the fact that the Tigray population, which is only 6 percent, was so active in the administration of Ethiopia.¹⁸ This discomfort manifested itself more after Abiy Ahmed became the Prime Minister of Ethiopia. He

dismissed high-ranking Tigray officials, especially in the army and in different state institutions, by terminating their duties. With the change of power in Ethiopia, the discomfort of the Tigrays, who had had a significant say in the country's administration for many years and were at the top management levels, started the TPLF's rebellion movement. This was further fuelled by the postponement, due to COVID-19, of the elections planned to be held in 2020. In Ethiopia, the crisis escalated when the central government intervened militarily in the region in the face of this rebellion.¹⁹

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Ethiopia is a country that does not have a colonial past in history but was temporarily occupied by the European colonial powers, gaining its independence and freedom by fighting the occupiers. In the Tigray crisis, it is assumed that a war for neo-colonialism is being waged in Ethiopia through the Western media and the TPLF, which Western governments also support. Although the problem first affected the regions bordering Eritrea in the North of Ethiopia, it also affected different parts of the country, especially Amhara and Afar, in the process. In some periods, it was even possible for TPLF forces to come very close to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.²⁰ However, in the war between TPLF and the Ethiopian government, TPLF started to lose power, and Abiy Ahmed himself entered the fight at the front. On the other hand, after Abiy Ahmed joined the front, the TPLF showed strength by exhibiting the Ethiopian army soldiers taken prisoner in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray. The local public opinion, who claim that the TPLF received support from the U.S.-Israel-Egypt alliance in the Nile basin, started to show more solidarity and unity for the country's defense in the process.²¹ Shortly, the addressees of the crisis in Ethiopia are, in a sense, the conflict of visions of the government of the group that had a say in the country's administration in the previous periods and the new government that came to power through democratic means.

Shortly, the Ethiopian-Tigray issue, which has a historical background, is experienced in Northern Ethiopia. The Tigray region started gaining political power with the military coup in Ethiopia in 1974. In 1991, a coalition led by the TPLF played a significant role in overthrowing the Derg regime, which was a unitary state system in Ethiopia. The TPLF, along with other organizations, including the EPRDF, aimed to establish a more inclusive and decentralized political system that accommodates the diverse ethnic groups in the country. This transition resulted in the formation of a federal system in Ethiopia. In the following period, TPLF expanded its political and eco-

Negatively affecting the atmosphere of mutual understanding and cooperation in the Horn of Africa in recent years is seen as the agenda of neo-colonialism in Ethiopia

conomic power in the region and influenced Ethiopia's federal government. However, Abiy Ahmed was elected the new Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 2018, following the policies of reducing the influence of the TPLF in the federal government and strengthening the central government. Therefore, due to the TPLF's opposition to these policies, the tension with the federal government increased, and in 2020, the TPLF started a rebellion against the federal government.²²

When the factors that have caused the tension to emerge since November 2020 are examined, it is seen that the regional elections play an important role. The elections, which were supposed to occur in the Tigray region in September 2020 under normal conditions, were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the TPLF attempted to hold elections, and the crisis in Tigray caused tension between Ethiopia and the TPLF. As a result of the attempts of the TPLF to ignore the government's decision, Abiy Ahmed declared the elections invalid. The TPLF, on the other hand, stopped recognizing the Ethiopian government in response to this step of Abiy Ahmed. Then the Ethiopian government declared that it did not recognize the TPLF. After the TPLF was excluded from the system in Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed was accused of destabilizing the country by organizing ethnic violence.²³

After the election was deemed unconstitutional, the TPLF troops entered Mekele, the capital of the Tigray region, on November 4, 2020, using tanks, heavy weapons, and mortars. Furthermore, with the attack on an essential military headquarters in Sero, the tension between the parties turned into a conflict.²⁴ Those most affected by the armed conflicts in this process were the Tigray people living in the region. The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) claimed to have regained control of the Tigrayan capital on November 28, 2020. There are claims of human rights violations, such as mass murder of civilians, sexual violence, looting, and denial of access to humanitarian aid. In addition to these claims, another critical humanitarian situation that can be definitively confirmed in the region is the displacement of the people. However, there has been a long-term food security problem in Tigray.²⁵

Although significant efforts have been made to end the famine in the last thirty years with the international community's support, the current process has stopped all progress on food safety. In this process, the dimensions, impact area, and cost of the humanitarian crisis in the region are gradually increasing. In particular, the issue could affect the stability of the countries in the Horn of Africa. The displacement of approximately two million people and the loss

of thousands of lives in the region during the conflicts show the extent of the humanitarian disaster. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 56 thousand people took refuge in Sudan during the conflict in Tigray.²⁶

Considering the crisis environments and conflict areas in the global system in the 21st century, there are ongoing competition and power struggles in different continents, such as Ukraine, Syria, Venezuela, and Ethiopia.²⁷ There are competitions in line with the interests of regional actors, especially the power struggle between the dominant actors of the global system in these geographies. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar compete with various actors in the U.S., China, Russia, the EU, and Europe, especially in the Middle East and Africa.

In Africa, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea stand out in the context of regional power rivalry and economic rivalry. In the fight against Tigray in Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan may benefit from the instability of Ethiopia by not losing their power in the region due to the Renaissance Dam built by Ethiopia on the Blue Nile River. Ethiopia's instability will delay the Renaissance Dam from operating at total capacity, allowing Egypt and Sudan to benefit more from the Blue Nile Basin. In the case of Somalia and Eritrea, this situation differs. As a matter of fact, despite the support of Egypt and Sudan to the TPLF in the Tigray crisis, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed allied with then Somali President Mohammed Abdullah Mohammed (Farmajo) and Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki in Somalia. However, there are also claims that this alliance lost its function with the election of Hasan Sheikh Mahmud instead of Farmajo in the Presidential elections held on May 15, 2022.²⁸

Neo-Colonial Competition in the Shadow of the New Cold War

The instability of Ethiopia has the potential to affect the region significantly. Negatively affecting the atmosphere of mutual understanding and cooperation in the Horn of Africa in recent years is seen as the agenda of neo-colonialism in Ethiopia. In this context, countries such as the U.S., China, Egypt, Sudan, and Eritrea are actors that have the potential to influence the process in the conflict with the TPLF in Ethiopia. At the same time, Türkiye's existence as a country presents an alternative approach.

In this context, countries such as the U.S., China, Egypt, Sudan, and Eritrea are actors that have the potential to influence the process in the conflict with the TPLF in Ethiopia. At the same time, Türkiye's presence in the region is seen as an alternative approach. Therefore, the basis of the study is the inclusion of two global and three regional actors in the analysis. It will be possible for the U.S.

to take its place as the only Western country, as it had strong ties in Ethiopia when the TPLF dominated politics and is one of the main actors in the competition in the Horn of Africa in the current period. In addition, since one of the major areas which reflects the competition in the global system in Africa is the Horn of Africa, with Ethiopia in particular; the U.S. rather than the EU, is considered within the scope of the fight against China. Regarding regional actors, Sudan and Eritrea are included in the analysis as countries directly affected by the Tigray problem. Whereas, Egypt is included in the analysis as it is an actor in the continent and the regional power struggle with Ethiopia. On the other hand, Türkiye was excluded from neo-colonialism and included in the analysis as an alternative actor with a regional approach model.

The U.S.: A Complex Relationship

After taking office in 2018, the U.S. and the West referred to Abiy Ahmed as their close strategic partner and a cornerstone of security, close to shipping routes on the Red Sea. However, with the emergence of the Tigray crisis, relations with the U.S. and the West began to deteriorate, and the government was strongly criticized. On the other hand, there is a widespread international opinion that suggests the possibility of the U.S. using the TPLF as a proxy actor to undermine Ethiopia's stability.²⁹ Regarding the claim that the U.S. uses the TPLF as a proxy actor to destabilize Ethiopia, it is important to consider Ethiopia's historical role as an 'anchor state' in the Horn of Africa region. While it is acknowledged that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government enjoyed Western support between April 2018 and November 2020, the assertion that the U.S. actively worked to destabilize Ethiopia during this period is questionable. It is worth noting that Ethiopia has been a victim of U.S. destabilizing policies in the past, such as between 1977 and 1991.³⁰ There was U.S. support for the TPLF, which became effective in the country's administration in 1991.³¹ It is expected that the U.S. will gain advantages with the support given to the TPLF against the democratically elected government in Ethiopia.³² Considering the Balkanization of Ethiopia, which has a multi-ethnic element as in the case of Yugoslavia, destabilization of the country will trigger multi-element regional problems. Therefore, in the face of such a situation, ethnic issues will inevitably occur in neighboring countries to Ethiopia.

It is in question that the U.S. aims to dominate the Horn of Africa. However, at this point, since the U.S.' support for the TPLF did not reach the desired result, it is thought that it, wants to drag the Horn of Africa into an environment of turmoil and instability, so that China, one of its biggest rivals, loses influence in the region.³³ On the other hand, it is a fact that the U.S. and the West still need an alternative to China's Belt-Road Initiative (BRI). In short, when the instability in Ethiopia is considered together with the intertwined structure of the region, it will likely affect the Horn of Africa and the entire of East Africa. It is known that BRI's connection to Djibouti is of vital importance to Ethiopia.

Likewise, Ethiopia-Somalia and Ethiopia-Eritrea relations are in an essential position regarding regional stability when considering the local dynamics within the countries. Considering that the U.S. has no alternative to China's BRI project, the most likely policy that the U.S. will implement would be to destabilize the region and slow down China. This situation stands out with neo-colonialism in exerting influence and control over strategic regions to counter rival powers.

China's economic presence in Ethiopia, including infrastructure projects and financing, reflects a form of economic influence that aligns with the neo-colonialist tendencies of exploiting resources and maintaining economic dominance

Despite the support given to the TPLF in the Tigray crisis, the U.S. failed to achieve the desired result and promptly stated that there was a "grave violation of human rights" in Ethiopia. Ethiopia was then excluded from the customs trade regime provided under the U.S. Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).³⁴ Besides, if the Ethiopian government needs to carry out the necessary sensitivity and implementation regarding delivering humanitarian aid to the Tigray region, it seems possible to create a humanitarian corridor to Tigray via Sudan. However, in this case, if the aid sent to the Tigray region via Sudan is not adequately controlled, there is a risk of further destabilization of Ethiopia and the region and the resurgence of the conflict environment. Therefore, these actions can be seen as forms of economic and political pressure used by powerful nations to influence other countries, which align with the neo-colonial approach.

China: A Strategic Partner

China, which has strong and deep ties with Ethiopia, has an approach not to interfere in Ethiopia's internal affairs. However, it is in question to support the current government against the Tigray crisis. The Tigray crisis is crucial for China, which has more than four billion dollars worth of sectoral investments in Ethiopia today.³⁵ Ethiopia, which has strengthened its political ties with China, especially since the 2000s, became the first African country to host the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in 2003. In 2012, the center of the African Union (AU) was built in Addis Ababa with Chinese financing. However, there were also relations in which cooperation in the military field increased. Ethiopia and China signed a defense agreement in 2005, and Ethiopian officers were trained in China. In addition to the collaboration in the economic, political, and military fields, China's presence in the media sector in Ethiopia has expanded considerably. China's economic presence in Ethiopia, including infrastructure projects and financing, reflects a form of economic influence that aligns with the neo-colonialist tendencies of exploiting resources and maintaining economic dominance.

Although the influence of China is high in Ethiopia, it cannot prevent violence in issues such as the division caused by ethnic-based problems that seriously threaten Ethiopia

The support of the U.S. to the TPLF in Ethiopia indicates that the Ethiopian society has caused the U.S. to lose confidence in the Horn of Africa.³⁶ However, there is a growing strengthening of Ethiopian-Chinese relations and Ethiopia's increasing engagement with China. In this context, the meeting of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, Demeke Mekonnen, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, Wang Yi, points to this rapprochement. During the meeting, Wang Yi said that China and Ethiopia are each other's comprehensive strategic cooperation partners and that bilateral relations have passed the test and are getting stronger. In addition, he stated that China is ready to maintain close coordination and cooperation with Ethiopia in international relations and to protect the common interests of the two countries and other developing countries.³⁷

Against the U.S. and its allies, China has also stated that it will stick to its consistent position and will stand up to external powers that interfere in Ethiopia's internal affairs under the pretext of human rights. China hopes the international community will support the Ethiopian federal government's stance on achieving a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire and actively promoting national reconciliation. In response, Demeke said that Ethiopia is determined to take the Ethiopian-China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership to a new level, expressing that, like China, it firmly opposes the interference of the West in the internal affairs of other countries on the pretext of human rights, and that mutually spoke about their concerns.³⁸

In the Tigray issue, China acted in the context of the principle of non-intervention and emphasized that Ethiopia's sovereignty should be respected. However, China, which opposed the UN Security Council's sanctions against Ethiopia, used its veto card in this context.³⁹ The crisis in Ethiopia poses a serious disadvantage for China since China constantly emphasizes that there can only be development with security and stability. Therefore, considering China's policies in the context of its investments in Ethiopia, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) needs to end the instability and crisis environment in the country as soon as possible. This stance aligns with the neo-colonialist notion of maintaining the appearance of independence and respecting the country's sovereignty while exerting influence through economic and political means. Although the ineffectiveness of the U.S. towards a solution in the face of instabilities is an advantage for China, its interests are more likely to be realized



in regions where there are no unstable, fragile, or failed states in Africa, where China has allocated 150 billion dollars of funds for 2022. Although the influence of China is high in Ethiopia, it cannot prevent violence in issues such as the division caused by ethnic-based problems that seriously threaten Ethiopia. This situation reveals the limits of China's power in Africa, even though it has the image of being very powerful.

Eritrea: Once an Enemy, Now an Ally

Eritrea and Ethiopia are two important countries in the Horn of Africa regarding regional cohesion. The two countries, which had problems in the region for many years and signed peace with the initiative of Abiy Ahmed in 2019, are in alliance in the Tigray crisis. Ethiopia and Eritrea's military and political axis is an essential factor against the TPLF. Even though the Ethiopian government suppressed the rebellion and won its victory with the support of the air force, unsatisfactory performance on the ground will not bring long-term stability.

Eritrea, which sided with Ethiopia and China, is seen as a side of the Tigray issue.⁴⁰ Eritrea's recent involvement in the conflicts in the Tigray region is also interpreted as an attempt to reintroduce itself to the regional system after being diplomatically isolated from the international system for many years. Eritrea, which has a thousand-kilometer border with Ethiopia, sent thousands of its soldiers to the region to support Ethiopia's operations against the TPLF.⁴¹ After many years of troubled relations, the peace and regional stability order between Ethiopia and Eritrea, with the involvement of regional and global actors

The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile has caused a row between Ethiopia and the countries downstream, Sudan and Egypt.

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When the primary motivation of the UAE's intervention is examined, it indicates its desire to build a new ally in the Horn of Africa

in the Tigray crisis, prolonged the conflict process and caused the process to worsen.

Having dominated Ethiopian politics since 1991, the TPLF was also among Eritrea's biggest enemies because there were problematic relations between the TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) dating back to the 1970s.⁴² This hostility resulted in a war between Ethiopia and Eritrea between 1998-2000. For Isaias Afewerki, who sided with Abiy Ahmed, who consolidated his

power against the TPLF after he took office, the Tigray crisis brought along two opportunities. In this context, the first opportunity is ending Eritrea's long years of isolation from the international system; the second is re-influencing Ethiopia's internal affairs. Thus, the second opportunity also opened up Eritrea with an opportunity to take revenge on the TPLF. This suggests a desire for power and influence, which aligns with the neo-colonialist tendencies of powerful nations or actors.

Eritrea, which aimed to gain regional superiority despite the TPLF, which was supported by the U.S. and was in power in Ethiopia in the 2000s, tried to gain an advantage by taking a role in regional conflicts. In this context, Eritrea acted toward its regional interests and challenged the international consensus on Somalia in the early 2000s. At the same time, Ethiopian forces supported by the U.S. and the AU Peace Mission launched an attack against the terrorist organization al-Shabaab, which Eritrea is accused of supporting. In response to this situation, sanctions against Eritrea were in question in 2009, and Eritrea's interventions in Darfur and Eastern Sudan were in question.⁴³

In short, Eritrea's regional policies have been constantly influenced by Ethiopia. According to the periods, Ethiopia is sometimes an obstacle and sometimes an opportunity for Eritrea, currently the Tigray crisis is seen as an opportunity for Eritrea. The biggest obstacle to the EPLF regime in power in Eritrea was Ethiopia's re-emergence of an administration that would dominate the region diplomatically, militarily, and economically. However, one of the primary purposes of Eritrea's involvement in the crisis in Ethiopia is the elimination of the TPLF and its removal from Ethiopian politics. The TPLF's being the enemy of Eritrea, as it was in the post-1991 period, is evaluated in this context. Therefore, the possibility of Ethiopia's weakness and vulnerability is vital for Eritrea's interests. In this context, it is thought that Eritrea desires Ethiopian lands to become unstable so making them open to Eritrean intervention and influence when necessary. However, it should not be forgotten that this situation will likely bring significant risks. If the Ethiopian government and TPLF should come to an agreement and the conflict ends, it would be possible to isolate Er-

itrea again and start discussions on the legitimacy of Isaias Afewerki. In such a situation, Abiy Ahmed's success, in establishing peace with Eritrea when he took office, would be reversed. Therefore, interfering in the internal affairs of states in international relations is precarious. For this reason, the revenge of the enmity between the EPLF and TPLF, which was in power in Eritrea in the past, with revanchist feelings over the Tigray crisis in Ethiopia, carries the risk of being destructive both in terms of relations between the two countries and regionally.

Frenemies: Egypt and Sudan

Egypt's search for geopolitical hegemony on the Blue Nile River, which has problems with Ethiopia regarding the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), came into question due to its involvement in the Tigray crisis.⁴⁴ The continuation of the crisis in Ethiopia provides an advantage for Egypt. Because the whole capacity operation of the Renaissance Dam will inevitably negatively affect Egypt, in this context, the continuity of the instability in Ethiopia gained importance for Egypt. However, Ethiopia's accusation of Egypt's activities to support the instability in the country in this process increased the hostility between the two countries. This pursuit of dominance and control over the Nile River can be seen as a manifestation of neo-colonial tendencies, as it involves a powerful nation seeking to assert its influence over a neighboring country.

Ethiopia's moderate approach toward Sudan to strengthen its position in the negotiations in the context of the Nile basin creates a disadvantage for Egypt. In addition to the uncertainties in Sudan's current political situation and domestic policy, the crisis in its neighbor Ethiopia carries the risk of initiating an intense refugee influx to Sudan, and this situation has the potential to affect Sudan more. Therefore, Ethiopia's stability will keep Sudan from conflict zones, refugee influx, and human smuggling. However, from the perspective of the regional balance of power, Sudan's approach to the Tigray crisis, which had good relations with the TPLF in the past, will bring about a complex situation. This can be considered neo-colonial, as neo-colonialism often involves using divisions or conflicts within regions to advance an actor's interests and maintain control. If an agreement is reached between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, it will cause two opposing views toward Sudan in Ethiopia. In this context, if there is a consensus with the TPLF, it will be possible for the TPLF to be more engaged in Ethiopian politics. However, there is a risk of weakening the relations between the Ethiopian government and the Amharas. They have supported Abiy Ahmed in the Tigray crisis and are on the Sudanese border. Amharas came to the fore as the group opposed to reconciliation with Tigray and saw Sudan as an enemy. In such a case, while the government in Ethiopia is solving the Tigray crisis, it risks starting tensions with the Amhara and bringing Amhara groups to the point of armed conflict with Sudan. At this

point, the risk of conflict has emerged in recent months due to the disagreement between Sudan and Ethiopia over the Fashoda region.

The United Arab Emirates: Win-Win Relationship

The United Arab Emirates, which has increased its influence in the Horn of Africa in recent years and is an actor with high strategic flexibility, has intervened since the first days of the Tigray crisis. In November 2020, when the issue emerged in this manner, TPLF accused the UAE of targeting the Tigray forces with its unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) at the military base established in Eritrea/Assab in 2015.⁴⁵ The UAE is trying to establish political and security systems in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region. It can also be perceived as a sign of behavior in line with the neo-colonial tendency to exert control or influence over the region to advance its interests.

When the primary motivation of the UAE's intervention is examined, it indicates its desire to build a new ally in the Horn of Africa. The UAE, which has port operations in Somaliland and Puntland in the Horn of Africa and a military base in Eritrea, seeks to build a political and security system in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea. Since the beginning of the crisis, the accusatory statements of TPLF officials against the UAE have created a risk factor for the UAE's investments, regional interests, and long-term expectations. At this point, the possibility of the TPLF coming to power in Ethiopia poses a threat to the UAE. This shows that the UAE's interests and influence are concerned about potential changes in the political landscape being compromised or challenged. It reflects the defensive measures powerful actors took to protect their interests, often associated with neo-colonial tendencies.

The Future of the Ethiopia-Tigray Issue: Is Türkiye's Approach an Alternative?

Ethiopia's peace, stability, and integrity, which have a strategic location and importance in Africa, are essential for Türkiye. The principle of not interfering in Türkiye's internal affairs in international politics and the understanding of "African solutions to African problems" is also evident in the Tigray issue.⁴⁶ Türkiye, which has essential relations and investments in the Horn of Africa, will be adversely affected by the instability in the region, like any other country that wants the well-being of the region and Africa. Therefore, crises such as Tigray, Sudan, and al-Fashaga that Ethiopia faces will negatively affect Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and Africa regarding stability and security.

In the global system, the fact that the U.S., the UK, and other Western countries act for their interests rather than the region's interests and international pressure on Ethiopia leads it to different alternatives, such as Türkiye. At this point, it has struggled with the problem of terrorism for decades and has been involved in regional crisis scenes and solutions, especially with its breakthroughs in the defense industry in the recent period, it has acted confidently despite

its allies when necessary. Türkiye, which has significant experience in regional and global crises, has established military and financial cooperation with Ethiopia. Increasing the collaboration between the two countries strategically makes it possible for Türkiye to create a balance of power, especially as an essential player in the Horn of Africa.⁴⁷ Considering the historical and cultural ties between the two countries, Türkiye generally had good relations during the TPLF-led EPRDF period and with Abiy Ahmed during the Prosperity Party period, except the Derg regime that ruled Ethiopia until 1991. The main objective of Türkiye, the second-largest investor in Ethiopia after China, in the Tigray crisis, is to protect its investments in Ethiopia and ensure regional security.⁴⁸

Ethiopia's peace, stability, and integrity, which have a strategic location and importance in Africa, are essential for Türkiye

There are allegations that Türkiye has provided Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to Ethiopia for use in the Tigray region by the TPLF. There is no evidence for these claims, and the claims are rejected by the official authorities of the two countries. The recent increase in Türkiye's economic and political relations with Ethiopia reflects the desire of the two countries to increase their relations towards the level of strategic partnership. Türkiye's call for a 'peaceful solution' to the Tigray crisis and its willingness to mediate in the conflict between Sudan and Ethiopia shows that Türkiye is the actor with the strongest desire for stability in the region. In addition, Türkiye's alternative style policy finds a response as an approach to increase its influence against Egypt, which competes in Africa.

Conclusion and Evaluation

The reflections of global competition and the challenges of geopolitical gaps in the international system manifest in various regions. There are reflections of global power struggles in geographies such as the Middle East, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Africa. In this context, as in Azerbaijan, Libya, Ukraine, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Syria, Ethiopia has a global and regional power struggle. Although there are efforts for a solution to the power struggle in the context of the Tigray issue in Ethiopia, the fact that the problem has a multi-dimensional and multi-actor agenda causes the problem to be deadlocked.⁴⁹ Therefore, the Tigray issue has turned Ethiopia into a stage where many regional and global powers are active. The Tigray issue, which caused thousands of people to lose their lives and displaced millions in Ethiopia, can be defined as one of the most critical regional crises in the history of modern international relations. In addition to the process that resulted in the collapse of the state in Somalia in 1991, this crisis raises concerns that it could lead to the disintegra-

The recent increase in Türkiye's economic and political relations with Ethiopia reflects the desire of the two countries to increase their relations towards the level of strategic partnership

tion or collapse of another state in the Horn of Africa. Therefore, the current situation in Ethiopia, which has the second-largest population on the continent, has significant consequences for the stability and peace of the Horn of Africa, Africa, and the global system.

The neo-colonial struggle based on the Tigray crisis in Ethiopia will result in a zero-sum game for foreign actors. As for the problem's solution, the peace process will require intense diplomacy and mediation activities. The existence of neo-colonialism in the post-colonial era shows itself in the Tigray crisis in Ethiopia. It is crucial for the stability of the country and the region that foreign actors, unrelated to the conflict in Ethiopia but exerting political pressure on the Ethiopian government, cease to act through proxies. Of course, the international community's support is needed to end the crisis. 'African solutions to African problems' are essential for the continent. However, the structural problems caused by colonialism that Africa has been exposed to, the fragility of state institutions, the borders were drawn without considering ethnic structures and tribes, and the weak state culture can delay the solution to the problems. This situation affects the global system beyond the continent.

It serves a neo-colonial purpose for foreign actors to take advantage of instability to realize their interests in the region and the continent in the peaceful resolution of the Tigray issue in Ethiopia. In this context, instability is increasing in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, which are already fragile due to unsolved problems, intertwined structures, and complex regional relations. Global and regional actors have different effects on the resolution of the crisis. When these effects are used to influence regional interests or other competing actors, mainly through proxy actors, the issue becomes even more impasse. However, alternative actors, such as the AU and Türkiye, can contribute positively to the solution of the problem in the region. In this context, the AU expressed its concerns about the violence and human rights violations in Tigray and called for the start of negotiations between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray region administration. The AU also requested support from the international community to find a peaceful solution between the parties and to protect the civilian population. In short, the AU plays a role in solving the Tigray issue and works on topics such as initiating negotiations between the parties and providing humanitarian aid.

On the other hand, the existence of alternative actors such as Türkiye, who do not have a colonial past and are far from neo-colonial activities, taking steps toward the stability of the region and taking steps to protect the state struc-

ture and territorial integrity without interfering in internal affairs, can have a facilitating effect on the resolution of the crisis. Although Ethiopia has not been exposed to colonialism in the past, it is currently affected by the practices of neo-colonial actors and former colonial actors. In this context, the Tigray crisis is instrumentalized, a neo-colonial struggle continues in Ethiopia, and new challenges are experienced in the region of Ethiopia. ■

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