



Unraveling the Political Motives of Eritrea in the Tigray Conflict

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Date received: 21 February 2024 Revision date: 20 March 2024 Date published: 01 May 2024</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords <i>Eritrea;</i> <i>political motive;</i> <i>Tigray War;</i> <i>national interest;</i> <i>geopolitical</i></p> <hr/> <p>Correspondence Email: septyantogalan@staff.uns.ac.id</p>	<p>Eritrea is one of the countries that has a significant influence in the Horn of Africa. In maintaining its influence and achieving its national interest, Eritrea has enrolled itself in the Tigray War. Participating in the Tigray War would drive themselves to be the regional superior in the Horns of Africa. This research will focus on how Eritrea's political motives in the Tigray War affected the achievement of its interests. This study will use the national interest concept and geopolitical theory to analyze the formulation of the problem that has been described. These theoretical frameworks will be suitable as these theoretical frameworks will be able to explain Eritrea's national interest in the African Region. This research will also use qualitative methods and literature study data collection techniques. The results of this study suggest that Eritrea has political motives to be able to escape its international isolation status and become a regional superior in the Horn of Africa region. Eritrea also wants to expand its influence in Ethiopian domestic politics and avenge itself on the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) through its involvement in the Tigray war. Eritrea used a hawkish approach offensively in its involvement in the Tigray conflict.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Eritrea, a Northeastern African country located within the Horns of Africa, has an interesting background when it comes to geopolitical matters and national interests as the country itself strives to become regional superior. However, understanding the history and events that led Eritrea to be a country to this day would be imperative. Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1991 through a de facto notion and in 1993 through a de jure notion following a referendum where the overwhelming majority of Eritreans voted for secession (MFA's Directorate for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2017). A great sense of national pride was felt by the nation when it emerged from the great sacrifices and adversities of the independence struggle. Significant hardships and sacrifices were made throughout the independence struggle, and the nation emerged with a tremendous sense of pride. Eritrea struggled to build a prosperous and stable country after gaining independence. Under President Isaias Afwerki's leadership, the government imposed a one-party system and restricted political liberties. Eritrea's record on human rights, particularly with press freedom and political opposition, has drawn criticism (MFA's Directorate for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2017).

In terms of ties with other nations, Eritrea has encountered conflict, especially with Ethiopia. The 1998–2000 Eritrean–Ethiopian War severely damaged relations between the two countries and had a huge effect on the region. The Eritrean–Ethiopian War broke out in 1998 as a result of ongoing tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia, mostly over border disputes. Tens of thousands of people died

as a result of the fighting, and both countries suffered severe economic losses. With the signing of the Algiers Agreement and the creation of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) to draw the border, the war was declared to have ended in 2000 (Bereketeab, 2019). Ethiopia refused to accept the border demarcation, resulting in a protracted impasse notwithstanding the 2002 ruling by the EEBC. The border's persistent tensions and sporadic conflicts were exacerbated by the absence of settlement. Unexpectedly, decades of hostilities came to an end in 2018 when Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed a historic peace pact. The two leaders carried out several symbolic and diplomatic actions, including resuming direct flights and reopening embassies (Bereketeab, 2019). Although the peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea was a major step in the direction of regional stability, there are still obstacles in the way of carrying out the agreement's provisions in full. The world community has applauded the two countries' reconciliation, but problems like boundary demarcation and regional geopolitics still have an effect on the relationship.

On November 2020, Ethiopia encountered an internal conflict with a separatist movement in one of their provinces. This separatist movement emerged in the province of Tigray, one of the Ethiopian provinces located in the northern territory. The separatist movement itself is called the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Up until 2018, the TPLF ruled Ethiopian politics for many years. Several things led to the conflict, chief among them the TPLF's denial of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's authority once he took office in 2018. When the Ethiopian government decided to postpone the August 2020 national elections due to the COVID-19 outbreak, tensions increased (International Crisis Group, 2022). Tigrayan regional elections were conducted by the TPLF against the wishes of the federal government. The conflict itself has led the region to have several setbacks, for instance, ongoing humanitarian crises and several devastating military offensives. In this distressing event, Eritrea has determined to participate. Eritrea sent thousands of troops to Tigray to back the Ethiopian side in a military intervention.

This paper seeks to unravel the intricacies of Eritrea's political motives in the Tigray conflict, employing a geopolitical lens to analyze the motivations, actions, and implications of the Eritrean government's role in the ongoing crisis. Through a comprehensive literature review, this study explores the dynamic interplay between Eritrea, Ethiopia, and the TPLF. The analysis reveals Eritrea's involvement in the Tigray War affects the achievement of its interests, shedding light on the complexities of regional geopolitics and the multifaceted dimensions of Eritrea's engagement. The geopolitical theoretical framework serves as a guiding lens, offering insights into the factors shaping Eritrea's decision-making process and its impact on the broader Horn of Africa region. This paper also delves into the national interest framework to interpret and contextualize Eritrea's actions, considering both the internal and external factors influencing the nation's stance. This research will be crucial because there is only a small amount of research that has been done in the Region of Africa, particularly in East Africa. Furthermore, this research will provide parameters or benchmarks for similar studies.

Redie Bereketeab, in his book entitled "The Ethiopia-Eritrea Rapprochement: Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa" (2019), views that peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia in the era of Abiy Ahmed's leadership is a thing that happened very suddenly and quickly. The rapprochement has two underlying factors, namely the objective (economic, military, diplomatic, and resource) and subjective (human will and feeling) conditions of Ethiopia and the existence of trust from Eritrea. In contrast, the authors argue that the rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia is an attempt to achieve the national interests of each country, especially Eritrea, which wants to become a regional superior. So the same interests and the same enemy, namely the TPLF, became the background for

the restoration of relations between the two countries. This book also contains the background of the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict and an explanation of the relationship between the two countries, so that the data from this book can be used to complete this paper (Bereketeab, 2019).

Europe External Programme with Africa, within their special briefing “Eritrean Involvement in the Conflict in Tigray”, stated that Eritrea has been charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity, and complicity in atrocities during the Tigrayan conflict (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021). The system of repression that currently exists in Eritrea provides the foundation for this one, earning the country the moniker "North Korea of Africa." Eritrea has viewed the TPLF as one of its main adversaries in the Horn of Africa since gaining its independence in 1991. Nonetheless, the TPLF leadership withdrew to Tigray once the TPLF was overthrown. The Eritrean government was given the chance to break its isolation and gain more clout in the Horn of Africa with the 2018 Peace Agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Concerns about Eritrea's human rights status have been raised by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea. He discovered that the nation still engages in a number of the procedures and breaches of human rights discovered in earlier years, such as arbitrary detention and unauthorized arrests. Prisons, shipping containers, and covert detention facilities are common sites for prisoners to be housed. The poor quality of food, shortage of restrooms, and absence of health services all contribute to the deplorable conditions of detainees in Eritrean jails. The National Service—which the UN has referred to as "slavery"—remains a significant aspect of Eritrean living and culture (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021). Conscripts are compelled to serve in the military for an unlimited period and may suffer severe punishment, torture, and prolonged imprisonment. Numerous conscripts receive low salaries or no pay at all, and they frequently endure beatings, sexual assault, and other cruel treatment. These two articles will strengthen the researcher's arguments on the matter.

RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that seeks to explore and understand complex phenomena in their natural context, providing in-depth insights into real-world problems. Unlike quantitative research which focuses on numerical data, qualitative research relies on non-numerical, descriptive data to gain a nuanced understanding of social phenomena (LP2M Admin, 2020). It involves a naturalistic approach, allowing researchers to delve into the intricacies of social, psychological, or cultural aspects within their natural setting. Qualitative research methods include various techniques such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and content analysis. These methods aim to uncover the underlying meanings, motivations, and patterns that might not be captured through quantitative approaches. This type of research is particularly suitable for answering questions related to the "why" and "how" of a phenomenon, providing a comprehensive view that goes beyond statistical measurements. Qualitative research is commonly applied in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, offering a rich and contextualized understanding of human behavior and societal dynamics. Researchers employing qualitative methods often emphasize flexibility, allowing the study design to evolve dynamically based on emerging insights. Overall, qualitative research plays a crucial role in enhancing our comprehension of complex social phenomena by delving into the qualitative aspects of human experiences (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019).

The qualitative method, as seen in the research paper, involves ethnographic research design and key informant interviews, providing a rich, contextualized understanding of the political dynamics. Complexity of Motives: Qualitative research allows researchers to delve into the multifaceted nature of political motives. Ethnographic research design, in particular, enables an

immersive study of the socio-cultural and political context, helping unravel intricate motivations that quantitative data might oversimplify. Insight from Key Informants: Utilizing key informant interviews adds a human dimension to the study. It provides perspectives and insights from individuals directly involved or knowledgeable about Eritrea's motives, offering a depth of information that statistical analysis alone cannot capture. The Tigray Conflict involves geopolitical complexities that demand a contextual understanding. Qualitative methods help in comprehending the historical, cultural, and regional factors influencing Eritrea's political decisions. In summary, qualitative research methods are essential for "Unraveling the political motives of Eritrea in the Tigray Conflict" as they enable a holistic exploration of the intricate dynamics surrounding Eritrea's involvement, going beyond mere numerical data to capture the depth and complexity of political motivations. In this paper, researchers used a literature study using online journal articles, books, reports, and news as data collection techniques, and for data analysis techniques, researchers used data reduction, data display, and conclusions drawing or verification.

In this research, the researchers are using a few theoretical frameworks, namely Hawkish Approach, National Interest Concept, and Geopolitics Theory. In International Relations, a hawkish approach refers to a stance or policy characterized by a strong inclination towards assertive and aggressive measures, particularly in the realm of foreign affairs and security. Individuals or governments with a hawkish stance are more prone to advocating for proactive and forceful actions, including military interventions, to safeguard national interests or address perceived threats (Kelly and Schmitt, 2023). The term "hawk" is derived from the bird of prey, symbolizing a readiness to use military force and a preference for robust and assertive foreign policies. Hawkish attitudes often prioritize military strength, national security, and a firm response to perceived challenges. This approach is contrasted with a dovish stance, which favors diplomatic solutions, negotiation, and peaceful means to resolve international conflicts. The hawkish approach in International Relations is relevant in discussions about geopolitical strategies, military interventions, and the use of force to achieve foreign policy objectives. It reflects a belief in the effectiveness of military power as a tool to secure national interests and maintain a strong position on the global stage (Clare, 2014).

Utilizing the international relations theory of the hawkish approach is essential when unraveling the political motives of Eritrea in the Tigray Conflict. The hawkish approach, characterized by a strong and assertive stance in foreign policy, aligns with Eritrea's perceived aggressive involvement in the conflict (Harter, 2023). The hawkish approach suggests a preference for military solutions over diplomatic ones. Analyzing Eritrea's actions through this lens allows for an exploration of the militaristic tendencies driving its involvement in the Tigray Conflict. Hawks prioritize national security and are inclined to take robust measures to protect their interests. Examining Eritrea's political motives through a hawkish lens involves considering how the conflict may be perceived as a threat to Eritrea's security, leading to a more assertive response.

Hawks often advocate for an aggressive stance in international relations. By applying the hawkish approach, one can assess whether Eritrea's actions align with a broader pattern of assertive foreign policy, potentially driven by strategic geopolitical considerations. Hawks are characterized by a willingness to use force to achieve their objectives. Exploring Eritrea's engagement in the Tigray Conflict through the hawkish approach involves evaluating the extent to which military force is employed to achieve political goals. In summary, employing the international relations theory of the hawkish approach provides a framework to understand Eritrea's political motives in the Tigray Conflict, considering factors such as militarism, national security concerns, an aggressive foreign policy stance, and the use of force.

National interest is the collection of objectives and priorities that a country determines are essential to its well. This can involve things like security, economic growth, upholding a positive image nationally and internationally, and defending the rights and welfare of its people (Metea, 2020). It is comparable to the overarching goals and objectives of a nation, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, to ensure that they are leading the nation on the proper path, leaders frequently compare their judgments to the standard of national interest. A nation's particular circumstances, history, and geopolitical location can all influence the precise components of national interest, which is a dynamic and ever-evolving concept. Governments evaluate and modify their policies regularly to conform to shifting domestic and international priorities.

Geopolitics theory, as conceptualized by Friedrich Ratzel, is rooted in the idea that the physical environment, particularly geography, plays a fundamental role in shaping the behavior and development of states. Ratzel, a German geographer and political theorist, introduced the concept of *Lebensraum*, emphasizing the connection between a nation's expansion and its need for territorial space. Key aspects of Ratzel's Geopolitical Theory include: Ratzel's theory is often referred to as the "organic theory" due to his assertion that states function similarly to living organisms. He believed that, like living organisms, states have a natural tendency to grow and expand. Ratzel was a determinist, arguing that the physical characteristics of the land shape the culture, behavior, and interests of the people living there (Hou and Liu, 2019). This deterministic perspective influenced his view that territorial expansion is a natural outcome of population growth.

Central to Ratzel's Geopolitical Theory is the concept of *Lebensraum*, which translates to "living space." Ratzel contended that as populations grow, states seek to expand their territory to fulfill resource needs, ensure national security, and achieve political and economic stability. Ratzel argued that territorial expansion is a vital aspect of a state's development and survival. He believed that the struggle for space and resources is inherent in the life of a nation. In summary, Friedrich Ratzel's Geopolitical Theory provides a framework for understanding the interplay between geography, territorial expansion, and the development of states, emphasizing the organic and deterministic aspects of this relationship (Stogiannos, 2019).

Ratzel's theory emphasizes the interplay between geography, state behavior, and territorial expansion, providing a framework that can offer insights into Eritrea's actions. Ratzel's Organic Theory asserts that states, like living organisms, have a natural tendency to expand territorially. Applying this to Eritrea's involvement in the Tigray Conflict allows for an examination of how territorial imperatives might influence its political motives. Ratzel's notion of *Lebensraum*, or living space, is relevant to understanding a state's need for resources and security through territorial expansion. Exploring whether Eritrea's actions align with a pursuit of *Lebensraum* can shed light on its political motives. Ratzel's belief in environmental determinism suggests that the physical characteristics of the land influence state behavior. Analyzing how the geography of the region shapes Eritrea's actions in the Tigray Conflict can provide valuable insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Horn of Africa, where Eritrea and Ethiopia are both situated, is a strategically significant area since it is close to important waterways like the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. It is strategically significant for international trade and maritime shipping to have control over these waterways. Nations in the area, such as Ethiopia and Eritrea, affect naval operations and trade lanes in these vital passageways. With its Red Sea coastline, Eritrea is home to the ports of Massawa and Assab (Müller, 2016). Ethiopia depends on these ports for its import and export operations because it is a landlocked

nation. Ethiopia's attempts to manage its marine trade and obtain dependable and effective access to Eritrean ports are part of the geopolitical dynamics.

Eritrea aims to influence regional affairs by utilizing its strategic location. Eritrea may influence the geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa and shape maritime trade patterns by holding critical access points to the Red Sea (Munene, 2022). National security is one of the main focuses of Eritrea's geopolitical policy. The Eritrean-Ethiopian War was one of the historical battles the nation experienced. A major component of Eritrea's strategic aims is maintaining security and stability both inside its borders and throughout the surrounding area. Eritrea tries to preserve some degree of autonomy in its decision-making while being aware of outside influences. To avoid becoming unduly dependent on any one external player and to balance competing interests, the nation may tread carefully when navigating diplomatic ties. Geopolitical policy in Eritrea is complex, taking into account diplomatic, security, and economic factors. Eritrea seeks to safeguard its interests and become the regional superior in the Horn of Africa by leveraging its strategic advantages and navigating regional complications.

The Tigray War, unfolding from November 3, 2020, to November 3, 2022, marked a pivotal chapter in Ethiopia's history, predominantly concentrated in the Tigray Region (Aljazeera and News Agencies, 2022). At its core, the conflict stemmed from escalating tensions between the Ethiopian government and regional forces situated in Tigray. These tensions were fueled by a complex interplay of political, ethnic, and historical factors, contributing to a volatile environment (BBC News, 2021). The seeds of discord were sown as long-standing grievances between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), once a dominant political force in Ethiopia, and the federal government came to a head. The power struggle between the TPLF and the administration of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed intensified, leading to heightened political animosities. The government's decision to postpone national elections due to the COVID-19 pandemic further strained relations, as it was perceived by some as a move to consolidate power (Al Jazeera and News Agencies, 2022). As tensions reached a boiling point, the conflict erupted into armed hostilities, plunging the Tigray Region into a maelstrom of violence and upheaval. The consequences were dire, not only for the warring factions but for the civilian population caught in the crossfire. The conflict's initiation on November 3, 2020, marked the beginning of a tumultuous period that would have far-reaching implications for Ethiopia and the broader Horn of Africa region (Tadesse, 2020).

The initial phases of the Tigray War, spanning from 2020 to 2021, marked a harrowing period characterized by an intensifying conflict that reverberated into a profound humanitarian crisis. The escalation of hostilities between the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan forces plunged the Tigray Region into a maelstrom of violence, triggering a chain reaction of devastating consequences. At the heart of this tragedy was the appalling massacre in Mai Kadra, a town that became synonymous with unspeakable brutality. The magnitude of the violence became shockingly evident as at least 600 civilians lost their lives in the Mai Kadra massacre (Houreld, Georgy and Aloisi, 2021). This gruesome event underscored the severity of the conflict, revealing the profound impact on innocent lives caught in the crossfire. Witnesses and survivors recounted horrific details, describing a scene of unprecedented brutality as Ethiopian government troops advanced in western Tigray (Zelalem, 2020). The atrocity left an indelible mark on the region, contributing to the displacement of thousands and exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. Beyond the immediate casualties, the Mai Kadra massacre became a symbol of the broader humanitarian crisis unfolding in Tigray. Reports of widespread human rights abuses, including sexual violence, displacement, and targeted attacks on civilians, painted a grim picture of the toll exacted by the conflict on the vulnerable population (CNN Editorial Research, 2023).

The international community, human rights organizations, and various stakeholders expressed deep concern over the deteriorating humanitarian conditions, prompting calls for urgent intervention to alleviate the suffering of the affected populace. The US and the EU have maintained a critical line that upholds principles of international humanitarian law and the responsibility to protect, while also treading carefully in the face of Ethiopia's sensitivities over its sovereignty. The African Union (AU) has played a role in mediating the conflict, and other countries such as Turkey, China, and Russia have also been involved in the conflict (Demissie, 2023). The UAE has provided military support to Ethiopia throughout the Tigray war, and it continues to mediate in tripartite negotiations on the Nile waters between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. The conflict has complicated Ethiopia's relations with regional and international partners, and there are concerns that the conflict could lead to regional instability. This dark chapter in the Tigray War's history serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of armed conflict and the imperative for concerted efforts to address the urgent humanitarian needs arising from such devastating events.

The Tigray peace process has been a significant development in the effort to end the conflict in Ethiopia. The peace agreement, signed on November 2, 2022, between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), is seen as a critical first step towards ending the brutal two-year war (United Nations News, 2022). The agreement, titled "Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities," was brokered by the African Union and mediated by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo (Plaut, 2022). It aims to achieve a permanent cessation of hostilities, restore the constitutional order in the Tigray region, and provide a framework for addressing matters arising out of the conflict. The peace agreement has been lauded as a promising start to finally stopping the fighting, which has destroyed many lives and livelihoods. It also includes provisions for the mobilization and expedited delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need (Anna, 2022). However, the implementation of the agreement is an ongoing process, and there are still outstanding issues that need to be addressed through negotiations.

The peace process has brought into focus the question of a stable distribution of power within Ethiopia and in the Horn of Africa. The Ethiopian government faces the challenge of integrating the TPLF and disengaging from the partnership with Eritrea, rebalancing the domestic relationship between the main political actors, and bringing together a society divided and impoverished by war. International partners have been called upon to support Ethiopia in addressing these challenges with conditional financial assistance and peacebuilding projects (Kurtz, 2023). Tigray peace process represents a significant step towards ending the conflict in Ethiopia. The peace agreement signed between the Ethiopian Government and the TPLF lays the foundation for a permanent cessation of hostilities and the restoration of the constitutional order in the Tigray region. However, the implementation of the agreement and the resolution of outstanding issues will require continued efforts and support from both the parties involved and the international community.

Since this conflict broke out in November 2020, Eritrea has been involved in it. Eritrea intervened militarily in Tigray by sending thousands of troops to support the Ethiopian side (Omer, 2023). Initially, the involvement of Eritrean forces was denied by Ethiopia and Eritrea, although many witnesses claimed that Eritrean forces had joined the Tigray conflict. However, after more than five months since the conflict began, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, acknowledged that there was involvement of troops from Eritrea in the conflict. Eritrean troops crossed the border and entered the Tigray region of Ethiopia to control the border because they felt threatened by their old enemy, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) which has dominated political conditions in Ethiopia (Aljazeera and News Agencies, 2021). Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki stated that the growing nationalism of the people of Tigray poses a threat to Eritrea.

The Eritrean government chose to use a hawkish approach in an offensive way to protect and achieve its national interests in Tigray. This can be seen from the Eritrean forces who were deployed directly into the conflict. They committed various war crimes in Tigray. Human Rights Watch reported that in November 2020, Eritrean forces carried out massacres on civil society in Tigray, including slaughtering children (Human Rights Watch, 2021). During the fighting in the city of Axum, Ethiopian forces along with Eritrean forces looted, shot, killed, and wounded civilians and occupied the city. The two alliances of forces have also damaged various public facilities, including health facilities, and carried out executions on male citizens in Axum after Tigray forces and Axum residents carried out retaliatory attacks (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Looting of houses, banks, pharmacies, jewelry, electronic equipment, and even hospitals was also carried out. Eritrean forces have been killing patients in hospitals and looting medicines there so that patients cannot get treatment (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Eritrean forces, in cooperation with Ethiopian forces, deliberately used starvation as a weapon against the TPLF and the people of Tigray. This was conveyed by Mark Lowcock, a top UN humanitarian official. The conflict broke out at harvest time, causing the people of Tigray to suffer crop failures. During the conflict, the food supply became very limited. Eritrean forces have restricted the entry of food supplies and also damaged and looted fields belonging to the Tigray community so that the community cannot meet its food needs. As a result of the restrictions, as many as 350,000 Tigray residents out of a population of 6 million are experiencing hunger conditions. A total of 3.3 million food and humanitarian aid was provided by the Ethiopian government, the United Nations, and other humanitarian organizations to the people of Tigray, but the aid supplies were only channeled to government-controlled areas, while non-government-controlled areas did not get the aid channels. In addition to the destruction and looting, Eritrean forces also banned Tigray residents from replanting their fields. The ban is aimed at blocking transport carrying agricultural necessities such as seeds from entering the Tigray region. Eritrean forces have also prevented vehicles carrying humanitarian aid, especially food, from entering the territory they control, and they have also executed 10 humanitarian volunteers (Paravicini and Houreld, 2021).

On November 2, 2022, the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) signed a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) aimed at ending the conflict along with all acts of war crimes and human rights violations. Nevertheless, Eritrean forces persisted in committing several war crimes and crimes against humanity after the accord was signed. Eritrean military has perpetrated several crimes against Tigray's civil society, such as sexual slavery, rape, extrajudicial executions, and looting (Amnesty International, 2023). All the acts of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Eritrean forces since the beginning of the conflict were their means to defeat the TPLF forces and maintain their power in the Tigray region. Eritrea took this action to fulfill its national interests. As a result, according to Ethiopia's finance minister, Ahmed Shide, the war has cost Ethiopia 28 billion dollars in damages and is estimated to cost 20 billion dollars for reconstruction (Schipani, 2023).

Eritrea and Ethiopia have been embroiled in a border conflict for 20 years. This conflict occurred in 1998 when the two countries fought over the Badme region. At the time, Eritrea conflicted with forces from the TPLF, which controlled politics in Ethiopia. In 2002, the Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission ruled that the Badme region should be ceded to Eritrea, but Ethiopia rejected the decision, which led to the two countries not going to peace (Allo, 2018). In 2018, Abiy Ahmed was elected Ethiopia's new Prime Minister and made a policy of making peace with Eritrea. Abiy Ahmed signed a peace declaration with Eritrea, which resulted in the approval of the decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission in 2002 to cede the Badme region to Eritrea, thus bringing

the long-running conflict between the two to an end (Setiani and Suleiman, 2021). In addition, the two countries agreed to open embassies and resume flights between the two countries.

Abiy Ahmed decided to reach a peace agreement with Eritrea since the TPLF was their shared enemy (Bruton, 2018). The TPLF has conducted separate elections to select Tigray's leader since it does not accept the legitimacy of Abiy Ahmed's government. It is considered as an act against the legitimate government. The TPLF also denounced Abiy Ahmed's closeness to Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki because Eritrea has been considered an enemy for a long time (BBC News, 2021). Because of this, Abiy Ahmed and Isaias Afwerki then worked together to fight the TPLF because the TPLF was considered a common enemy so the Tigray conflict broke out in 2020. Both seek to fight the TPLF to achieve their respective interests.

Eritrea, as a long-time enemy of the TPLF, took advantage of this Tigray conflict as a way to achieve its national interests. Eritrea's involvement in this conflict aims to end the international isolation experienced by Eritrea so that Eritrea can become a regional superior in the Horn of Africa region. In addition, this conflict could help Eritrea assert its influence in Ethiopia's internal affairs and become Eritrea's opportunity to take revenge on the TPLF. Eritrea seeks to leverage its influence by engaging in other countries' conflicts. Since 2009, Eritrea has been undergoing sanctions imposed by the United Nations due to its involvement in the conflict in Somalia, which led to Eritrea becoming a pariah state (Morello, 2018). Eritrea's international isolation has made it less influential in the region than Ethiopia, which is controlled by the TPLF. Ethiopia dominates the economic, military, and diplomatic sectors of the Horn of Africa region, so Eritrea faces the challenge of defeating a strong and united Ethiopia. The Tigray conflict provided an opportunity for Eritrea to achieve regional superiority. This is because this conflict makes Ethiopia divided and weakened. In addition, this conflict also makes the region unstable. Eritrean intervention and influence can make it easier to enter and dominate the region so that Eritrea can become the regional superior in the Horn of Africa region (Reid, 2022).

Eritrea's involvement in the Tigray conflict also served as an opportunity for Eritrea to incorporate its influence into Ethiopia's internal affairs. This is because Eritrea can intervene militarily in the TPLF-controlled Tigray region and carry out various actions to defeat TPLF forces, as the Ethiopian official government justifies it. This moment also became Eritrea's opportunity to take revenge on the TPLF forces, who had been their enemies for a long time.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Eritrea's involvement in the Tigray War revealed their political motives as well as their national interests. The larger geopolitical context of the Horn of Africa is reflected in the political motivations driving Eritrea's engagement in the Tigray Conflict. Eritrea's regional calculus is shaped by its strategic location along the Red Sea, control of important ports, and historical ties to Ethiopia. The intricate relationship between historical disputes, economic interests, and security considerations highlights Eritrea's political strategy's diversity.

Eritrea's geopolitical playbook is based on the pursuit of regional influence, national security, and diplomatic manipulation, as is clear when we analyze the country's activities in the Tigray Conflict. Without considering the conflict's dynamics in the larger context of Eritrea's past, regional alliances, and international entanglements, it is impossible to comprehend them completely. Through the analysis of geopolitical matters and national interests, Eritrea's political motives, which

include becoming regional superior, influencing Ethiopia's internal affairs, and taking revenge on TPLF, have been unveiled.

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First publication right:

[Andalas Journal of International Studies](https://doi.org/10.25077/ajis.13.1.19-30.2024)

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