



Ethio-Sudan Relations: Critical Probe on the Post-2018 Dynamisms

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Abstract

There were no significant changes in the features, focus of national interest and foreign policy behaving in the relationship between Ethiopia and Sudan. Since the independence of Sudan in 1956, the relations of them were characterized by cooperation and conflict or friendship and hostility. Bewildering issues such as disputes over their common border, Nile water, and practices of implicit and explicit interventions are persistent. This article employed qualitative approach and narrative research design to provide analytical pictures regarding the dynamisms of Ethio-Sudan relations in Post-2018. The post-2018 relationship of Ethiopia and Sudan has three distinct phases and features. These are the period of friendship, hostility and normalization. Following Tigray People Liberation Front's ouster in Addis Ababa; there was a warm and blooming relationship between the two countries. This was the first phase and in which Sudan's political forces recognized Ethiopia to mediate their domestic political divergences. In the second and third phases (from 2020 onward), confrontational and normalization were the respective features their relationships. During the second phase, the internal vulnerabilities of Ethiopia encouraged Sudan to enhance its pressures on Ethiopia's government. Sudan exacerbated row over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, border disputes, as well as engaged in proxy conflict through anti-government groups. Sudan also put international pressures over Ethiopia including the declaration of the withdrawal of Ethiopia's forces from Abyei Mission. The all-around pressures of Sudan on Ethiopia, the proactive-defensive diplomatic manoeuvring of Ethiopia and the involvement of the third bodies are the major points of the dynamism. Finally, the Nairobi Summit of 2022 was a watershed in the relationships of the two countries. Since this summit the intensified tension declined, and the normalization (third phase) process has started.

Keywords: Confrontation, Normalization, Dynamism, Proxy, Relations

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Introduction

Ethiopia and Sudan have historical relationships, and the people of the two nations have multifaceted ties over the years even before the independence of state of the Sudan. It is known that there is

a long historical relationship with the Sudan starting from the time of the states of Axum and Merowe (MOI, 2002). The people of these neighbouring countries have been living in one another's territory,

and there are socio-economic cohesions. The overall features of the relationship are characterized by both animosity and cooperation. During the imperial regime of Ethiopia, there were positive relationships between the two countries though they didn't establish lasting solutions for disputing issues related to water politics and border claims. Addis Ababa was a significant partner of Sudan to maintain Sudan's peace and stability. In early 1970s, Ethiopia played roles for the conclusion of the Addis Ababa peace agreement in 1972 between South Sudan rebel forces and the government of Sudan (Stevens, 1976). The emperor facilitated the peace process, provided office for negotiations, and mediated the parties in conflict. During the imperial period, the bilateral relationships ethos was relatively less confrontational. However, in general saying, since the end of World War II, when Sudan became independent, the relationship has not developed in a positive manner as much as it should have (MOI, 2002).

Later, in the aftermath of regime change in Ethiopia, the main manifestation of the relationships of the two nations was disagreements and conflicts. That means, during the reigns of Mengistu Hailemariam of Ethiopia and Jaafar

Nimeiry of Sudan they engaged in hostile relationships. They were encouraged by the contemporary state of 'security dilemma' to help the local dissidents of one another. Their bilateral hinged on mutual suspicion and readiness to discredit the other (Belete Belachew, 2016). Meanwhile, Sudan and its allies intervened in the prolonged armed conflicts of Ethiopia though supporting the rebels of Tigray, Eritrea and alike to threaten the Ethiopian regime. Ethiopia also used to provide both military and diplomatic supports to the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SPLM) to avenge Sudan's government. Finally, after the end of the Cold War period, both of them have faced unfortunate experiences. These were primarily driven by internal dynamics and amplified by a pattern of mutual intervention between states (Cliffe, 1999). The protracted civil wars accompanied by mutual interventions culminated with the secession of Eritrea and South Sudan from Ethiopia and Sudan in 1993 and 2011 respectively.

After the 1991 change of government in Ethiopia, the relations of Sudan and Ethiopia strained by the assassination attempt on Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa. In addition, Sudan reinforced its territorial claims and

took military actions against Ethiopia in 1998. As a result, short-lived war happened because of Ethiopia's overt reprisal measures. After this war, Ethiopia and Sudan revived long-dormant talks to settle the exact location of their 744 km-long boundaries (de Waal, 2021). They also managed to avoid violent confrontations nearly for two decades until 2019. During this relative peaceful period, they didn't establish sustainable solutions for the persistent problems related to the border claim and the 1959 water sharing agreement of the two lower riparian countries as well as the historic mutual mistrusts.

For sometimes after 2018, the relationship between the two countries showed positive progresses. Short after his Premiership, Abiy Ahmed attempted to help the peace process in Sudan. Following Bashir's ouster, Sudan's new leaders have also praised Abiy for his role in their country's transition as he intervened to ease tensions between the military and civilian bodies (ICG, 24 June 2021). Later, when Ethiopia faced local political chaos, the glimmer of a peaceful relationship vanished, and an increase in mutual hostility ensued.

This diplomatic hostility has also accompanied by military confrontation and clashes. When the Ethiopian government

occupied with the local politico-security crisis, the Sudanese authorities continuously accused Ethiopia for the military clashes in the disputing border areas. At the hallmark of the crisis in the relationships of the two countries, in December 2020, Sudan troops have deployed into the disputed borders and controlled farm lands of Ethiopian farmers. It seems that the reiterated accusations of Sudan on Ethiopia were the pretexts for its military deployment of 2020. Still, the clashes in the occupied lands were between Sudan's forces and the local Ethiopian militiamen who always react to any military raids to protect their life and farmlands. In 2022, the armed clashes resulted in injury and death of Sudanese troops and as a result, Sudan amplified the accusation against Ethiopia. In response, Ethiopian Ministry Foreign Affairs (MoFA) stated that the killing of Sudanese soldiers by the militiamen that took place inside the Ethiopian territory following an attack carried out by Sudanese troops with the support of "elements of the 'terrorist' Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF)" (Sudan Tribune, 2022). This official statement asserted that the provocative attack was started by Sudan's troops that were deployed inside Ethiopia, and the military actors of Ethiopia the local militiamen. According

to the statement, the other actor was the fighters of TPLF who participated to support Sudanese invasion.

Such dynamism shows that, the relations between Sudan and Ethiopia became hostile more than ever, and resulted in military confrontations. Corollary, the violent action of Sudan and militarization of the border areas affected the entire socio-economic ties of the people of the two nations.

By the way of summing up, Sudan has employed all-rounded instruments to weaken Ethiopia's government. Diplomatically, Sudan negated the deployment of Ethiopian forces in Abyei Mission, obstructed the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD as indicated in Figure 1), and summoned Ethiopian diplomats in Khartoum. Deterrence and military incursion into the territory of Ethiopia, harbouring and assisting rebels of Tigray and other guerrilla fighters were some of the overt military actions of Sudanese government. Throughout the crisis period, Ethiopia has been in defensive diplomatic positions though Sudan used to apply any possible instruments to squeeze the bargaining power and politico-military strength of Ethiopia. Based on these backdrops, the article tries to probe the

foreign policy behaviours of actors, the major issues of the interactions, and the turning points of the dynamism of the post-2018 Ethio-Sudan relations. The major decisions and actions of the respective countries are the subject of the discussion. The justifying reason to focus on the post-2018 relationship of Ethiopia and Sudan is that the local political changes (in both countries) that have direct impact on the relations of them have emerged in 2018 and 2019 respectively. The absence of comprehensive investigations on the post-2018 dynamism of the relationships is a research gap that this article attempted to fill through principled and analytical investigation. Methodologically, the discussion employed qualitative approach and narrative research design to provide analytical pictures regarding the dynamisms of Ethio-Sudan relations in Post-2018.

Major issues in the dynamisms of Ethio-Sudan relations in post-2018

Since the independence of Sudan in 1956, there were no significant changes in the fluctuating features, basis of national interest and foreign policy behaving in the relationship between Ethiopia and Sudan. According to the Foreign Affairs, National Security Policy and Strategy (MOI, 2002),

after the end of the second World War, the two countries relationship has not developed in a positive manner as much as it should have. According to this policy document, the issue such as the unfair Nile water usage, and religious extremism, as well as Sudan`s supports to various forces that aimed at disrupting the peace of Ethiopia are the causes of the unhealthy relationships of the two biggest countries of the Horn of Africa. Such issues are also the major sources of conflict between the two nations in pre-1991.

But, the practices of mutual intervention and reciprocal proxy war have declined along with the fall of Derg regime in 1991. This was because of those Ethiopian rebels groups namely TPLF and Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF) that were supported by Sudan controlled the state power in Ethiopia and Eritrea respectively. Few years after this change, two major events have strained the relations of the two states. First, the relation of Sudan and Ethiopia has started to be deteriorated as a result of the 1995 assassination attempt on Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa. According to Hussien Sherif (2018), some elements of Sudanese intelligence have allegedly involved in logistical and financial support for the Terrorist group called al-Jamaah al-

Islamiyya-who had claimed credit for the attempted attack. As a result, Ethiopian blamed Sudan for the assassination plot and this resulted in diplomatic stalemates. Second, in 1998, Sudan took military actions in the disputed border areas. The short-lived war happened because of Ethiopia`s overt reprisal measures against Sudanese troops. After this event, Ethiopia and Sudan revived long-dormant talks to settle the exact location of their 744 km-long boundaries (de Waal, 2021). They also managed to avoid violent confrontations nearly for two decades until 2019. During this relative peaceful period, they didn`t establish sustainable solutions for the causes of unhealthy relationships such as the 1959 water sharing agreement of the two lower riparian countries, and border claims.

In 2018, the relationships between these countries have shown positive progresses, and they have engaged in warm diplomatic communication and reciprocal support to the maintenance of peace. In early 2019, Ethiopia`s Prime Minister recognized as an impartial mediator because of Ethiopia`s neutral role. Vividly, both the military wing-Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the civilian coalitions legitimized Ethiopia`s new Prime Minister as an impartial mediator (ICG, 2021), and there

were many gathering and warm diplomatic communications between the leaders of the two neighbouring countries. This peaceful relationship was changed immediately after the eruption of security and political chaos in Northern Ethiopia. Meanwhile, Sudan elevated the tone and scope of the disputes that are related to boarder claims and the construction of the GERD. Sudan followed aggressive and violent approaches. One of the alleged immediate factors for Sudan`s exacerbation of tension with Ethiopia was ‘attention diversion.’ By confronting with Ethiopia, Sudan`s military leaders attempted to shift the attention of Sudanese from the local crisis issues to the international concerns. For this short-term objective, the sovereign military council exploited the local vulnerability of Ethiopia and invaded the disputed border areas. Weakening Ethiopia`s regional strength to have a dominant position in the region to influence the former in their dealing with the issues of border and water politics are the decades old ploy of Sudan. Since 2019, Sudan continued to realize this decades old ploy to challenge Ethiopia. These were some of the key reasons of Sudan to exploit the domestic security crisis of Ethiopia as an opportunity. On the other hand, observers argued that the shift in relations between Abiy Ahmed and

Abdella Hamdok in particular is partly due to a lack of communication between them (ICG, 2021). In the midst of the Ethiopia`s crisis, Abiy had disregarded for the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional bloc currently chaired by Sudan, to help resolve the Tigray conflict (Ibid). Indeed, the deterioration of the relations of the two countries has fundamental and immediate causes, and thus the lack of communication between the leaders can be one of the immediate causes.

To wand up, the disputes over the construction of the GERD (Figure 1), the settlement related to border claim and proxy conflicts were escalated more than ever. The withdrawal of Ethiopia`s Mission from Abyei and the exacerbated reciprocal accusations were the phenomenon of the contentious relations the two nations. These phenomena and issues are also the vertex of the relations of them (the details are discussed at length below).

Row over the GERD

The GERD (Figure 1) is being established on the Blue Nile at the Benishangul-Gumuz region, approximately 40km east of Sudan, upstream of the Ethiopian-Sudanese border and 500 KM north-west of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa

(Abteu and Dessu, 2018). Ethiopia has long opposed Egypt's hegemony of Nile water which was stated in the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty during the British colonial period and which was the major motivation for Ethiopia to take an individual step towards constructing the GERD (ElBarbary, 2021). The construction of the GERD (Figure 1) is Ethiopia's decision to exercise its natural right in line with the doctrine of 'limited territorial sovereignty' and 'Non-harm Rule'. Limited territorial sovereignty is a balanced doctrine stipulates that 'all watercourse States enjoy an equal right to the utilisation of a shared resource, and each Watercourse State must respect the sovereignty and reciprocal rights of other Watercourse States' (UN, 2012). On the other hand, according to the principle of Non-harm Rule, watercourse States shall, in utilizing an international watercourse in their territories, take all appropriate measures to prevent the causing of significant harm to other watercourse States (UN Watercourses Convention Art. 7). Hence, we can understand that Ethiopia's decision was an exercise of the legal rights stipulated under international law.

In relation with the GERD, General al-Burhan's Sudan is differing from Umar Al-Beshir's Sudan. During Al-Beshir rule

Sudan did not negate the construction of the dam. According to Relieweb (2012), in 2012, Sudan President pledged to provide the necessary support towards the success of construction of the GERD. International Crisis Group Report (2019) stated that in 2012, Sudan government was convinced by Sudanese water experts and some officials of the Ethiopian government that the GERD can benefit Sudan and therefore, Sudan joined the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) again in November 2012.

In fact, the Ethiopian government had worked to convince the lower riparian states with scientific explanations regarding the mutual benefit of the Dam. First, Ethiopia decided to supply electric power to Sudan upon the production of energy and this decision later enshrined in the Declaration Principle of 2015. Geographically, Ethiopia has better position to produce electric power than the lower basin countries, and no one question this fact. Second, the reservoir of Ethiopian dam has proved to reduce the rate of evaporation of water in the dry seasons and heavy floods in Sudan during the rainy seasons. Third, the energy infrastructure of the dam is also a powerful instrument to integrate and initiate economic networking in the Horn of African region. Indeed, understanding of

these benefits could convince Sudanese experts and their leaders to support the construction of the dam. On the other hand, Ethiopia's support to Sudan's president in the face of accusation by International Criminal Court was an imperative factor for Bashir's government to deepen its friendship with Ethiopia by supporting Ethiopia's right to utilize the Nile water. Furthermore, there were disputes between Sudan and Egypt due to the military deployment of Cairo in Hala'ib triangle, a territory claimed by both Cairo and Khartoum. As a result of this spat, the historic unity of voices of Egypt and Sudan over Nile, and the tone of 1959 agreement had been temporarily drained.

After the overthrow of Al Bashir's government in 2019, the government Sudan considered the GERD as a threat to Sudan and Egypt, argued that the filling of the GERD limits and hurts the amount of water flow and the life people respectively. In 2021, Sudanese official stated that, the filling of the GERD without agreement would directly threaten Sudan and endanger the lives of 20 million citizens living below the dam (Dababga TV, 8 April 2021). Many of officials of Sudan have propagated an alleged water shortage on the reserves of the Roseires Dam and

other water bodies of Sudan. Conversely, Sudan had been suffering from floods due to the heavy rain in Ethiopia. In July and August 2022 some provinces of Sudan destroyed by flood and over flow of seasonal water. Similar economic and humanitarian crisis had happened in earlier times such as in 2019 (UNICEF, August 24 2019) and 2021. For instance, according to UNICEF (2019), flooding in Sudan affected over 190,000 people due to the heavy rains. During the high rainy season, Ethiopia has undertaken the third phase of filling of the GERD in August 2022. The first and second phases were completed in July 2020 and July 2021 respectively. Note that months such as June, July and August are rainy season in Ethiopia and during this season flood is common inside Sudan. Such undeniable natural facts are evidences that the construction and the filling of the GERD have nothing to do with the reduction of the water flowing to the downstream countries.

Still, the two countries have failed to agree on many issues related to the construction and the filling of the dam. Although both of them called for the implementation of the 'Agreement on Declaration of Principles of 2015', there were no commitment to abrogate the tone and

legacy of the 1959 bilateral agreement that denied Ethiopians right to make use of its natural potential. Lack of uniformity in the interpretation of the principles is another challenge of the implementation. Concerning the row of the dam, together with Egypt, Sudan insisted the intervention of US, EU and the UN Security Council. But, Ethiopia preferred African diplomatic solutions and the involvements of AU as mediator. The objective of employing diverse form of diplomatic manoeuvrings and pressures by the lower riparian

countries seems not only to conclude binding agreement on the GRED but also to maintain the statues-quo of the 1959 bilateral agreement. Ethiopia has been insisting to reverse the bilateral agreement and install binding agreements of equitable utilization of the Nile water through multilateral negotiations. However, the issue is still unsolved though the relationships between the two countries are in normalizing processes since the late 2022.



Figure 1. Photo of GRED (*REUTERS/Tiksa Negeri/File Photo, September 26, 2019*)

Exacerbating boundary dispute and military violence

The armed clashes along the border between Sudan and Ethiopia are the latest twist in a decades-old history of rivalry between the two countries, though it is rare for the two armies to fight one another directly over territory (de Waal, 2021).

According to de Waal, and other senior researchers of the Horn region, although Ethio-Sudan relation was fluctuating and unstable, they had limited engagement in direct war. The post-2020 animosity of the two nations was accompanied by frequent clashes in the disputing border areas. According to International Crisis Group

(2021), in December 2020, when Ethiopia distracted by the Tigray conflict, Sudan took control of al-Fashaga borderland, disregarding a relatively amicable land-use arrangement that had been governed by Ethiopia for many years and evicting thousands of farmers. Sudanese forces also admitted its military incursion into Ethiopia and capturing of vast farming lands as well as its military enforcement in border areas by the pretext of safeguarding the international border of Sudan (Al Jezeera, 2022). Sudan army shelled the disputed border with heavy artilleries. Sudan also pronounced its aggressive action to seek the attention of the local oppositions.

According to many commentators of the issue, the relations between Ethiopia and Sudan have connection with the conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region and Ethiopia's construction of a hydropower dam. But, one can argue that the Ethiopia's war with TPLF, and the unsolved disputes of the hydropower dam could not be taken as a reasonable pretext to invade Ethiopia or deploy military forces into Ethiopian territory. Realistically, inter alia, the conflicts in northern Ethiopia provided Sudan the moral impetus to conquer the border areas with the help of TPLF's troops. This evinces that Sudan exploited

Ethiopia's internal vulnerabilities. Corollary, such current experience informs the Ethiopian government to stick on the inward-looking foreign policy principles that emphasized on the reduction of internal vulnerabilities and strengthening defensive capacity.

Khartoum's military deployment was a disregard to the former diplomatic processes of the two countries; and the post-2020 military action in the disputed border was an antithesis of regional peace and security. Such aggressive deployed of troops inside the disputed border areas caused multifaceted crisis on the local people. Even, in aftermath of Nairobi summit, there was no institutionalized remedial action taken to alleviate the humanitarian crisis related to Sudanese military action. The border related contentions and tensions are still persistent. And it is also the agenda of the future generations of the two nations.

Proxy conflict

It is a given that, external threats are extensions of the national or domestic challenges that we face. External threats are either coupled with domestic challenges or they exploit our vulnerabilities caused by internal difficulties (MOI, 2002:34). 'Another reason for the poor

relations has been, on the one hand, the support- Sudan provided-also because of the influence of others-to various opposing forces that aimed at

disrupting the peace of Ethiopia, and on the other hand, Ethiopia's retaliation through the support it gave to Sudanese opposition forces. Unable to address the root causes of their problem, the two nations have been suspicious and wary of each other over the years' (Ibid: 86).

The above points are the policy positions of Ethiopian government stated in the foreign policy documents. In this document Ethiopia believes that internal vulnerabilities and external influences have connection. In addition, the policy argues that Sudan`s support to forces that disrupt Ethiopian stability strains Ethio-Sudan relations. Indeed, the current action of Sudan was the exact attribution of the word of the policy. Immediately after the outbreak of war in northern Ethiopia, the relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia deteriorated more than ever due to that Sudanese Sovereign Military Council exploited Ethiopia`s crisis as an opportunity to pursue its ploy to disrupt Ethiopia`s peace. Sudan used to harbour and assist TPLF, TPLF affiliated Kimant Gorilla fighters, Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLMB), Gumuz Rebels and others. Tigrean militant group called Samri, who allegedly committed a Massacre in Maikadra was also sheltered in Sudan.

Ethiopian authorities allege – and UN officials and foreign diplomats in the region confirm – that the Sudanese military is supporting Gumuz militiamen to stage attacks in Metekel Zone, part of a restive Ethiopian region that borders Sudan (ICG interview, European diplomat, 17 March 2021). Gumuz forces opposed to the federal government reportedly crossed into Ethiopia from Sudan`s Kadalo area in the first half of January (ICG, 2021). Sudan also hosted the defected Ethiopian soldiers from peacekeeping Mission of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). The defected soldiers were identified themselves as pro-TPLF unit. It was also not known that whether they joined the combatant forces of TPLF (particularly the Samri group) that stationed in Sudan.

Before the Nairobi truce, Spokesperson of Ethiopian Foreign Affairs Dina Musfti and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Demeke Mekonen briefed that although Sudan has been threatening the national interest of Ethiopia, Ethiopian government was trying to search for peaceful solutions for the deteriorated diplomatic relations. Several times during the course of the local conflict, TPLF and its affiliates waged war against Ethiopia from Sudan border. According to Western

diplomats, Sections of Sudan's military establishment, however, retain links to senior TPLF figures (Ibid). Thus, the war in Tigray was an opportunity to this and other foreign entities to undertake proxy war. With the knowledge of this connection, Ethiopia did not choose overt and offensive responses against Sudan to limit the scope of the conflict. Military supplies were proved to reach TPLF through Sudan territories.

On the other hand, in mid-March 2021, Sudan accused Ethiopia of supporting a rebel faction, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North of Abdel Aziz al-Hilu (ICG, 2021). But, there were no neutral sources that can substantiate the above accusation of Sudan. As a matter of fact, the political conditions in Sudan are volatile and there are many dissent armed groups such as Darfur rebels, Baja dissidents, and Blue Nile armed movements. Although Ethiopian knows that supporting these groups to disturb Sudan's government is an easy task, it is unlikely that Ethiopia to engage in such practice. This is because that the external relation principle of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution (Article 86) disregards interference in the internal affairs of other states. Concerning Sudan's

accusation, there were no neutral sources of information including the western intelligence agencies speak about Ethiopia's involvement in aiding Abdel Aziz al-Hilu's group.

The case of the air plane: The extension of the proxy conflicts

Clearly, the territory of Sudan served as a home and transit for TPLF fighters and other anti-government groups. After the Nairobi deal in August 2022, Ethiopia announced that her defence system shot down a foreign air plane entering into its territory through crossing Sudan (Fasika and Simon, 2022). Both the political and military officials of Ethiopia reiterated that the plane that believed to be the property of historical enemies who want Ethiopia's weakness was shot down by the Ethiopian Air Force while entering into Ethiopia's airspace from the direction of Sudan. According to Maj. General Tesfaye Ayalew the plane that had encroached Ethiopian airspace was heading to Tigray through Northern Humera to supply weapons to the rebels (The Defensepost, 2022). Ethiopian government refrained from mentioning the owner of the air plane as well as hesitated to condemn Sudan for her failure to deter the transit of the enemies' air plane. However, although the name of the

'historic enemies' of Ethiopia who send the airplane was not mentioned, many open sources intelligence information speculated that the shot down air plane believed to be from Egypt. More importantly, allowing territory or air space for the transit of weapons is an antithesis of neutrality principle and thus, no possibility to make Sudan's government unquestioned.

The surprising thing related to the alleged downed plane was Sudan's reaction of summoning Ethiopia's ambassador to Sudan to negate the statement released in a press conference held in Ethiopian embassy in Khartoum. According to Sudan Tribune (2022), in his statement Ambassador Yibeltal echoed (Figure 2) the accuracy of the statement issued by the Ethiopian air force about a plane that violated the Ethiopian air space after crossing the border from Sudan. The Ambassador was summoned to denounce his statements to the local media, where he claimed that the Ethiopian army downed this unidentified plane (Ibid). It was Ethiopia who has reasons to summon Sudan's diplomat for briefs on how the historic enemies' air plane crossed Sudanese air space. But, Ethiopian government was very cautious to avoid diplomatic confrontations that arise from

misinterpretation and disinformation. The following statement released immediately after Sudan's reaction was a typical manifestation of Ethiopia's tolerant position.



Figure 2. Press statement of The Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The statement was released by the Embassy of Ethiopia in Sudan to clarify the misunderstandings relating to a press conference given by the ambassador, H.E. Yibeltal Aemero, on 30 August 2022. The statement informs us that Ethiopia intentionally want to deescalate the diplomatic deadlock with Sudan. The statement also showed Ethiopia's dedication for the normalization of the relationships of the two countries. in other saying, it was a signal of Ethiopia's commitment to the truce of the 5th August

Nairobi Summit (discussed at length below).

Negation on the Ethiopia's forces in Abyei Mission

Ethiopia has significant role in maintaining peace and security of the international communities through participating in peacekeeping, upholding international law and undertaking multilateral diplomacies. Regionally, Ethiopian mission has played paramount role through peace-making and peacekeeping missions in Darfur and

Abyei. According to Endalkachew Girma and et al., (2021), Ethiopia's impartial involvement in Sudan's peace processes contributed to regional stability, for border security, people to people relations, and increasing understanding on hydro-politics. One of the recent successful missions that undertaken primarily by Ethiopia's peacekeepers was Abyei mission. Unlike other peacekeeping missions, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) was entirely composed of Ethiopia's troops (Figure 3). According to Mehari Tadele (2022), UNISFA in the disputed area of Abyei is unique in the history of peacekeeping due to that 4250 troops deployed in Abyei were Ethiopians; and the participations it has been guided by international military disciplines. The deployed was also done upon the full consent of the disputants: Juba and Khartoum.

In 2021, Ethiopia's mission in UNISFA was negated by Sudan's ruling military government due to the shift of the two counties relations from cooperation to conflict. This Sudan's position has linked with the stalemate over the GERD and the dispute of Ethiopia with the Sudan regarding the Fashaqah area. Sudan devised to put pressure on Ethiopia by disregarding Ethiopia's mission in

UNISFA, and requested the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Abyei peacekeeping mission. The details read as follow:

'Sudan has demanded that the United Nations to replace the Ethiopian soldiers deployed in the UN Interim security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in the disputed Abyei region on the Sudan South Sudan border with other soldiers, 'because it is not reasonable to have Ethiopian forces in the strategic depth of Sudan at a time when the Ethiopian forces are gathering on the eastern borders of Sudan,' Minister of Foreign affairs El Sadig El Mahdi confirmed... El Mahdi stated that Ethiopia has shown intransigence in the Renaissance Dam negotiations and that its decision to fill the Renaissance Dam again is contrary to International Law' (Dababga TV, 8 April 2021:1).

This was a hostile approach that exacerbated the row in the relationships of the two countries. In principle, when one of the parties in a conflict disregards the partiality of peacekeeping forces, the UN has no reason to maintain the deployment the forces under question. Sudan's request for the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces considered as a reason for the UN to decide on the issue under question. This doesn't mean that the consent of South Sudan had nothing to do with the response of UN regarding the said mission. Ethiopia also stated that, as the mission was established following the joint agreement of the Sudan and South Sudan, its drawdown should be agreed by both parties (Antonio Guterres, 2021). UN

Secretary General understood that the contemporary Sudan's position could negatively affect the mission. Guterres's (2021) letter to the Security Council indicated that the reluctance of Sudan in certain issues such as the timely issuance of visas for UNISFA personnel, authorization for UNISFA to use the Athony airstrip and approval of the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission could affect the mission's efficiency. This was a threat to the performance of UNISFA and a reason to

consider the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Abyei as well.

Finally, according to a military officer of Ethiopia, due to Sudan's influence Ethiopian forces withdrawn from Abyei Mission from March to June 2022. As a result, the UN substituted the outgoing Ethiopian mission by the security forces of Ghana, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. This and other related phenomenon evince that republic of Sudan employed any possible instruments to discredit, avenge and weaken Ethiopia's diplomatic weights.



Figure 3. Ethiopia UNISFA troops in Abyei (file photo: UNISFA)

Nairobi Summit as a watershed

The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) summit marked the beginning of the normalization processes of the Ethio-Sudan relations. On 5th July 2022, the 39th extraordinary summit of IGAD convened in Nairobi, Kenya. It was

the assembly of the Heads of State and Government (allAfrica, 2022). After the talk in Nairobi, the multifaceted confrontations and tensions between Ethiopian and Sudan have relaxed. The summit was chaired by Lt-Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of Transitional

Sovereign Council of Republic of Sudan; and attended by Ismail Umar Guelleh, President of Republic of Djibouti; Uhuru Kenyatta, president of Kenya; Dr James Wani Igga, Vice president of South Sudan; Mahdi Mohammed Gulaid, Deputy Prime Minister of Somalia; Dr Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of Ethiopia; and Vincent Bamulakangi Ssempijja Minister of Defence of republic of Uganda.

One of the Agenda of the Nairobi gathering was the issue of peace and security of the IGAD region. The summit was against the backdrop of escalating tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia (The East African, 2022). Ahead from the summit, IGAD Executive Secretary Workneh Gebeyehu visited Sudan, and met with the head of the Sovereignty Council president Lt-Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (Ibid). It is expected that his visit was not only to serve the mission of IGAD, but also to treat Ethiopia's interest in relations with Sudan.

The Nairobi IGAD summit provided opportunities for the bilateral meetings between al-Burhan and Prime Minister Abiy. During the side-line meeting, the two leaders agreed to form a joint committee to settle the border dispute between the two countries. According to Tofe (2022), this diplomatic negotiating

resulted in the normalization of the heightened tensions due to the killing of Sudanese soldiers in late June. The agreement of the two leaders resulted in the re-opening of the Gallabat crossing point starting from 17 July 2022. Corollary, it enabled resumption economic activities along the common border mainly to facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services. Following the diplomatic normalization, there were serious of bilateral talks between two leaders. These were the side-line talks in Bahir Dar during the 'Tana High-Level Forum Summit and the meeting of Abiy and in Addis Ababa upon the visit of General al-Burhan to Addis Ababa. On 15th October 2022, the discussion of the two leaders in Bahir Dar during the Tana Furum summit emphasized on the major focus of bilateral relations such as the issues of border, the GERD, and economic and trade integration between the two countries. After this summit, Ethiopian government increased its curiosity of mentioning Sudan as supporter of TPLF though previously Addis Ababa forwarded accusations against Khartoum of sheltering and aiding TPLF fighters. Hence, we can state that Al-Burhan possibly used the meeting to convince Ethiopia's Prime minister that Sudan's restraint to support anti federal government rebels.

Moreover, in November, the high-level diplomatic communications were continued and there was also progress in the diplomatic relationships of the two countries. On 21 November 2022, there was discussion on bilateral and issues of mutual concerns between Abiy Ahmed and the visiting Sudanese delegation led by General Gabir (Figure 4). The visit of Ethiopian intelligence chief, Temesgen Tiruneh to Khartoum as well as the side-line talk on Climatic Change Conference in Egypt between al Burhan and Abiy Ahmed was the major manifestation of the continuation and progress of the diplomatic communication. In November, in his visit to Khartoum Temesgen Tiruneh met with Ahmed Ibrahim Mufadal, Director of General Intelligence Service

(GIS) and concluded agreements to increase intelligence sharing on counter-terrorism and crime between of the two countries` spy agencies. In 24 December 2022, the Ethiopian defence intelligence and Sudan`s counterpart discussed to boost cooperation and operations to ensure security and stability in East African region (FBC, 2022). This was the latest progress of the normalization phase.

Many of the discussions were to end tension and facilitate trust building and further discussion on mutual relations. Especially, the meeting between Ethiopian Prime minister and the chairman Transitional Sovereign Council emphasised on a range of bilateral relationships and regional issues of common concern.



Figure 4. Ethiopian PM Abiy & al-Burhan meet on the side-lines of the Tana Forum held in Bahir Dar city on 15 October 2015; and Ethiopian PM & Sudanese diplomats talk on 21 November, 2022

The gradual normalization process of the relationships of the two countries after Nairobi summit has coincided with the declination of TPLF's military might that culminated in November 2022 by the Peace agreement concluded in south Africa. In fact, the weakening of TPLF forces and the advancements of the federal forces into the proper Tigray region has certain value in lubricating the positive progress of the normalization of Ehiio-Sudan relationships.

By the end of 2022, Ethiopia concluded another peace deal with BPLMB that was hosted in Sudan. In accordance with the peace deal, BPLMB returned to Ethiopia and agreed to be disarmed and demobilized. Throughout the normalization process, Ethiopia refrained from blaming Sudan, and showed diplomatic supports Sudan's moves to settle its internal problems. For instance, Ethiopian government issued a statement to express its support to the agreement signed between civilian political forces and the military institution in Sudan. On the other hand, Sudan also reiterated its dedication to search for diplomatic solution for the disputing with Ethiopia. This shows that the change in the instruments of Sudan's government in pursuing is national interest in relation

with Ethiopia. In general expression, the whole story of the dynamism informs us that the improvements of the entire diplomacy and the current normalizing relationship of Ethiopia and Sudan are dependent on the level of influence and internal strength of Ethiopia.

Concluding Remarks

The historical relations of Ethiopia and Sudan have characterized by competition and cooperation. The features of the relations between the two countries have been determined by regime changes, regime types and local political conditions. In many instances, rivalries and reciprocal interventions have intensified during and after regime changes and political turbulences. The causes of their contentious relationships were a blend dispute over their common border and Nile water, and the persistent practices of exploiting internal vulnerabilities of each other. The history of the socio-economic relationship was deep-rooted to the societies and a potential for peaceful co-existence. Unlike the political relations of the two governments, there were century old socio-economic bondages and interdependence between the people of these countries. Ethiopia's trade volume with Sudan is also higher than other neighbouring countries of the horn and

which is a potential to lessen the diplomatic animosity.

In post-2018, both Sudan and Ethiopia experienced regime change and political turbulences. As stated above, the dynamisms of the relations between the two nations are conditioned by regime changes, regime types and local political status, and thus the focus of this paper is the post-2018 dynamism of Ethio-Sudan relationships. The paper finds that, the 2018 onward relationships of the two countries have three distinct phases. The first phase manifested by warm friendship, and during this time Ethiopia played roles to maintain peace in Sudan. Meanwhile, both the military wing and the civilian groups of Sudan recognized of Ethiopia's Prime Minister as impartial mediator. later, in the second phase, Sudan employed covert and overt instruments to subdue Ethiopia's government. Immediately after the outbreak of war in Northern Ethiopia the relationship of Sudan and Ethiopia changed into conflict and military confrontation. In the midst of this escalating animosity, Khartoum's military government deployed troops inside the disputed border areas; and harboured diverse anti-Ethiopia military groups such as TPLF fighters, Benishangul People's Liberation Movement, and other Gorilla fighters. Sudan also disregarded

Ethiopian's interest and international posture through systemic international pressure for the withdrawal of Ethiopian peacekeeping forces from Abyei mission as well as to procrastinate the construction process of the GERD.

The current state of Ethio-Sudan relations is in a process tension-relaxation. The deteriorated relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia has taken a new turn following the conclusion of the war in northern Ethiopia with a peace treaty. This was the period of the normalization process mainly facilitated and formalized by the Nairobi summit and associated side-line talks of the leaders of the two countries. Following this, serious of dialogues have been undertaken in Addis Ababa, Khartoum, Bahir Dar and Egypt to improve the bilateral relationships. But, the discussions of the normalization phase were not able to diagnose the major vortexes of the persistent antagonism related to water politics and border claims. This article proves that Ethio-Sudan relationship is highly fickle and mainly conditioned by regime types and the internal strength as well as the bargaining power of Ethiopia. Thus, the apparent foreign policy behaving of Sudan to use Ethiopian's crisis as an opportunity to pursue its national interest dictates to

recommend the government of Ethiopia to stick on its foreign policy directions that emphasized on the necessity of reducing internal vulnerability and promoting deterrence capacity.

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