ERITREAN SOVEREIGNTY AND ETHIOPIA'S QUEST FOR SEA ACCESS

The Red Sea Task Force

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ERITREAN SOVEREIGNTY AND ETHIOPIA'S QUEST FOR SEA ACCESS

Work Product of the Red Sea Task Force

The Red Sea Task Force is an independent body created by the following Eritrean Scholars, listed in the order of their appearance in the text of the report:

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PREFACE

After half a century of peaceful political activities and an arduous armed struggle, Eritrea was liberated in 1991, and its independence was legalized through a United Nations (UN)-supported referendum in 1993. Eritreans overwhelmingly voted for independence and Eritrea became a sovereign state and a member of the UN on May 28, 1993.

At the time of the writing of this publication, war drums are beating in the background, mainly driven by the fixation of Ethiopia's elites and government officials with ownership and access to the Red Sea. The inflammatory, and at times, hostile rhetoric surrounding this geopolitical ambition is growing louder, raising tensions in the region. The immediate motivation for this project emanated from Prime Minister (PM) Abiy Ahmed's address to the Ethiopian parliament, on October 13, 2023, claiming the Red Sea as "the natural border of Ethiopia," and described ownership of the Red Sea as "an existential issue." Such a statement goes counter to international laws and norms. It is an affront to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea and the other littoral countries in the region. The Prime Minister's posture endangers the peace, security and integrity of the Horn of Africa. Notable Ethiopian political elites used, and are still using statements such as, "bringing back Assab to Ethiopia," in their political campaigns. As if the scars on the peoples of the two countries, inflicted by decades-long bloody and costly wars are not enough, Ethiopia's PM Abiy Ahmed asserted that, if not during his tenure or the current generation, the next generation will make ownership of the Red Sea a reality. This "burdening the next generation" is dangerous, tantamount to planting a time bomb. Such dangerous narratives and threats should not go unchallenged.

When politicians distort facts, scholars should assume professional and citizenry responsibilities to straighten the record by presenting historical and legal facts, and dispelling myths and inaccurate narratives. Several Eritrean scholars, including some members of this task force, attempted to rebut Ethiopia's claims at individual capacities. However, the scopes and impacts of their endeavors were very limited. Hence, I envisaged the relevance of concerted and coordinated efforts to holistically and systematically address the issue of access to the sea. Assuming the roles of coordinating and overseeing the project, I identified and contacted individual Eritrean scholars who can address the issue of access to the sea from different angles, and established a task force, *The Red Sea Task Force*. Out of a dozen scholars approached, eight graciously accepted my invitation and completed their respective chapters, for which I am grateful. The task force is comprised of nine scholars, five residing in the US, three in Europe and one in Canada. They possess diverse educational and professional backgrounds. The membership is based merely on the individual's merit of possessing relevant expertise and having direct or indirect involvement in the subject matter.

Before launching the project, I drafted terms of reference and convened a Zoom meeting on November 25th, 2023. During the meeting, the task force discussed the terms of reference and identified four areas for analysis: (a) history, (b) geography, demography and ethnicity, (c) law (of the sea), and (d) economy, to correspond with the bases of Ethiopia's claim of ownership of the Red Sea. Task force members were assigned into four corresponding groups based on their

expertise and interest. Overseeing such a project and coordinating the four groups with different priorities and residing in different continents with varied time zones was challenging. Moreover, time constraints of the members delayed the project, which was initially anticipated to be completed by early 2024. The writers finally came through with their respective essays comprising the project's four chapters. Each of the four chapters covers a broad topic that deserves extensive coverage. However, a short and succinct coverage focusing on the issue at hand, was preferred for the purpose here. The four essays needed to be integrated and edited. Thus, I asked Gebre H. Tesfagiorgis to edit and integrate them, which he kindly accepted and produced an integrated product. The integrated and edited versions were thoroughly reviewed and agreed upon by all members of the task force.

The purpose of establishing this task force and undertaking the project is to conduct objective studies and perform in-depth analyses on the different aspects of Ethiopia's claim of ownership and access to the Red Sea as well as disseminate the outcomes through publications and other platforms.

The project's intended audiences are the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia, particularly the youth, as well as the peoples and governments of the Horn of Africa. To benefit the wider audiences in the region and provide broader access to the information, we will explore the possibility of translating the publication into the main languages in the area. We hope this project can serve as a tool for engagement and promote peace, stability, and development in the Horn of Africa, particularly between the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey my heartfelt gratitude to the members of the task force who demonstrated their expertise in the subjects, upheld their scholarly responsibilities, and diligently contributed to the chapters compiled in this project. I also thank Biniam Eyasu for his support in designing the cover page and layout of the document.

Finally, as can be learned from the brief bios of the members of the task force, we are affiliated with various institutions. The opinions expressed in this publication are our own, and do not reflect the policy or position of our respective institutions.

Yohannes Haile
Coordinator of the Red Sea Task Force

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Yohannes Haile

In addressing the Ethiopian Parliament on October 13, 2023, Ethiopia's Prime Minister (PM), Abiy Ahmed, declared the Red Sea as "the natural border of Ethiopia" and described ownership of the Red Sea as "an existential issue." The Ethiopian PM's assertion of owning and/or accessing the Red Sea was based on history, geography, demography, ethnicity, law, and economic factors. Moreover, the PM asserted that, if not during his tenure in power or the current generation, the next generation should make ownership of the Red Sea a reality, which is tantamount to seeding a time bomb. Such a declaration goes against international law, and undermines the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea and the other coastal countries in the region. It also endangers the Horn of Africa's peace, security, and integrity.

The Red Sea Task Force was established in response to such declarations with the purpose of conducting objective studies and performing in-depth analyses on the different aspects of Ethiopia's claim of ownership and access to the Red Sea, and disseminating the outcomes through publications and other platforms. The task force is comprised of nine independent Eritrean scholars with no

affiliation to any political entity. Its membership is based only on the individual scholar's merit of possessing relevant expertise and interest, and having direct or indirect involvement in the subject matter. Corresponding to the bases of Ethiopia's claim to the ownership of the Red Sea, the task force investigated four areas: (1) history, (2) geography, demography and ethnicity, (3) law of the sea, and (4) economy.

First, we investigated the historical basis of Ethiopia's claim to ownership of the Red Sea. We explored ancient history, including the Aksumite Kingdom era, to establish the common heritage of the communities in the region. We continued to the more relevant modern history, especially the advent of European colonialism, which shaped the current state borders. Eritrea was established as an Italian colony in 1890 after accords with Afar chiefs and occupying other parts. A series of agreements between colonial Italy and Ethiopia established the currently recognized borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia. After the defeat of Italy in 1941 and the installation of the British Military Administration, Eritrean intellectuals formed political parties, some proponents of independence, others of unification with Ethiopia. The UN-established federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia eventually led to the illegal annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia. Subsequently, Eritreans commenced an armed struggle in 1961, which resulted in de facto independence of Eritrea in 1991. A United Nations (UN)-supported referendum was held in 1993 that formalized Eritrea's independence, becoming a member of the UN as a sovereign state on May 28, 1993.

Second, we examined the two interlinked issues of geography and demography as well as ethnicity arguments Ethiopia uses to support its claim for ownership of and/or access to the sea. Our analysis revealed that socio-political and socio-economic isolations exist within and between countries in the Horn of Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular. Moreover, we showed three interrelated historical developments that aggravate the socio-natural isolation driven by the physical-climatic conditions: (1) the social distance triggered by the expansion of Islam in the lowlands and coastal areas of the region, forcing the central Abyssinian empire south and westwards, (2) the occupation of coastal areas by Europeans in the 19th Century, creating new political entities

and borderlands and (3) misguided development policies followed during the post-colonial period, including recent interaction with globalization. On the ethnic Afar-based Ethiopia's claim of ownership of the sea, our analysis unveiled the Afar population played crucial roles in the anti-colonial struggle and throughout Eritrea's struggle for independence. Arguments claiming that Afar-inhabited lands in Eritrea should belong to Ethiopia, solely because the majority of the Afar people reside in Ethiopia, reflect selective convenience in a region where numerous ethnic groups transcend national borders. It also contravenes the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Eritrea and Djibouti, and contradicts with the African Union (AU) policy and international norms.

Third, in the legal area, the Law of the Sea, we establish that Ethiopia has the right of access to the sea, but not ownership. Any claim of ownership of the Eritrean Red Sea coast or its ports and/or a threat of using force is a direct affront to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea. It contravenes two established international laws: (1) the 1964 African *uti possidetis*, which declared "*sovereignty and inviolability of colonially inherited boundaries* …," and (2) Article 4 of the UN Charter which prohibits "*the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state*." International Law, specifically Article 125 of the UN Law of the Sea provides landlocked Ethiopia the right of access to the sea through Eritrea and the other transit states in the Horn of Africa. But that right is not absolute. The landlocked state's right is contingent on an agreement with the transit state. Thus, Ethiopia's right of access to the sea should be implemented through a good-faith, bilateral agreement between the landlocked State of Ethiopia and the transit State of Eritrea in a way that does not violate Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Fourth, regarding economic and security considerations, our analytical investigation does not indicate that Ethiopia faces an existential threat due to its landlocked status. On the contrary, Ethiopia enjoyed double-digit economic growth from 1998 to 2018, without using Eritrean ports. Ethiopia benefits from relatively short distances to multiple ports in neighboring littoral states. For instance, the distance from Addis Ababa to the port of Djibouti is slightly shorter than to Eritrea's port of Assab. Unlike many other landlocked nations, Ethiopia's proximity to these ports helps keep transit costs comparatively low.

Moreover, as stipulated in the international law of the sea, neighboring littoral states never denied Ethiopia it's right to access the sea. Our findings further suggest that the absence of a naval base has not posed any security risk to Ethiopia's maritime trade. Instead, Ethiopia's current security threats stem more from internal rather than external forces. These domestic challenges far outweigh the strategic disadvantages of lacking direct coastal control. Among these internal hurdles, the complexities of Ethiopia's on-going nation-building stands tall, which entails perpetual chronic internal conflicts that threaten the country's unity and integrity. Such fundamental problems warrant due attention and resolution for Ethiopia to achieve its long-term development ambitions.

Overall, our comprehensive analysis unveiled that the premises on which Ethiopia's Prime Minister and other Ethiopian elites claimed ownership of the Red Sea are inaccurate and unsubstantiated.

Finally, we concluded our study with a few recommendations: (1) Ethiopians need to reconcile with Eritrea's independence and sovereignty, (2) Eritrea and other concerned coastal states should acknowledge and uphold Ethiopia's legitimate right to access the sea and transit, in accordance with international maritime law, (3) Eritrea and Ethiopia should engage in good-faith negotiations to establish a bilateral agreement that ensures mutually beneficial, win-win outcomes, (4) Ethiopia should refrain from posing military threats and playing the ethnic Afar card in its pursuit for ownership of the Red Sea, and (5) Regional states should explore possibilities for sustainable win-win solution such as negotiating multilateral agreements to foster regional economic integration and collective security arrangement. These recommendations are elucidated in the "Summary and Conclusion" section of the project. Our recommendations underscore peaceful bilateral and/or multilateral negotiations and cooperation amongst states in general and between Eritrea and Ethiopia in particular. We sincerely believe that implementing these recommendations would promote peace, stability and development in the Horn of Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Gebre Hiwet Tesfagiorgis

This publication is the work product of the Red Sea Task Force, comprised of Eritrean scholars who have expertise and/or interest in different aspects of the issue of access to the sea. It was established to carry out a study addressing Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Ethiopia's quest for ownership and access to the sea, particularly Eritrea's Red Sea coast. The task force is independent, with no affiliation to any political entity. Its membership is based only on the individual participant's merit of possessing relevant expertise, interest and having direct or indirect involvement in the subject matter.

Credit goes to Yohannes Haile, as noted in the Preface, who conceived and oversaw the project, identified and contacted the scholars from different fields of study and different geographic locations -- some residing in North America and others in Europe -- to volunteer to undertake the four essays comprising the project.

The goal of this project was to conduct objective studies based on facts and perform an in-depth analysis on different aspects of Ethiopia's claim of ownership of and access to the Red Sea, especially Eritrea's sovereign territories, and disseminate the outcomes through publications and various media outlets.

The issues of ownership of and access to the Red Sea have been an obsession with Ethiopian scholars, elites and government officials. The issues were brought to the forefront when Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, in addressing his legislative body (parliament) in October 2023, asserted that the Red Sea is "the natural border of Ethiopia," and described ownership of access to the sea as "an existential threat" for his country. He added that Ethiopia must acquire a coastal outlet in the Red Sea by any means – legally if possible and by force if necessary.

Such an assertion goes counter to international laws and norms. It is an affront to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea and the other littoral countries in the region. The PM's posture poses a threat and endangers the peace, security and integrity of the Horn of Africa. Following the Prime Minister's address, and subsequent posturing through military parades, several Ethiopian scholars and media outlets continued to echo his false narrative about ownership of and access to the Red Sea. This dangerous false narrative, expressed with the timing and in the manner articulated by the Prime Minister, poses a direct threat to Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and therefore, should not go unchallenged. This task force was established to address the false assertions by conducting objective studies.

The basis of Ethiopia's claim of ownership of and access to the Red Sea can be categorized into four broad areas: (1) history, (2) geography and demography, (3) law and (4) economy.

The historical basis of Ethiopia's claim is that the Red Sea coastal areas were historically, including during the great Aksumite Kingdom era, integral parts of Ethiopia, and that the colonization of Eritrea was an interruption of such a long history. The defeat of colonial Italy, and eventual federation, followed by

the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia represented the return of "the lost child coming to her mother."

The geographic argument is that being landlocked has rendered Ethiopia a prisoner of geography, limiting its regional and global interactions. The demographic argument is that Ethiopia, with a population of over 120 million, faces extreme demographic pressure, and being landlocked exacerbates the population burden. An extension of the demographic argument is the ethnic argument asserting that the ethnic Afar people, straddling the countries of Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia, most of whom reside on the Ethiopian side, make Ethiopia the true home of the Afar people. By extension, the Red Sea coasts, especially Assab and its environs, should be part of Ethiopia.

The legal argument asserts that Ethiopia has the right of access to the sea, as was a recognized factor in the disposition of the Italian colony of Eritrea, which resulted in the UN resolution to federate it with Ethiopia. Failing to make a distinction between *ownership* of coastal areas and *right of access* to the sea, Ethiopians simply assert that international law gives Ethiopia the right to own and control the Red Sea coast, focussing particularly on Assab and its environs.

The economic argument is that Ethiopia, with a population of over 120 million, deserves control of a sea outlet. Being landlocked is a handicap to economic development and is thus an existential threat to Ethiopia.

These four broad areas collectively have become the basis for structuring this project into four chapters, each undertaken by Eritrean scholars with fields of study and background corresponding to their respective areas.

In Chapter 1, the duo, Mohamed Kheir Omer and Mebrahtu Ateweberhan, explore the historical basis of Ethiopia's claim to ownership of the Red Sea, especially the port of Assab and its environs. They outline ancient history, including the Aksumite Kingdom era, which is shared by the mosaic of ethnic and cultural entities residing in current Eritrea and Ethiopia. The ancient history represents a common heritage for the diverse communities in the area. Continuing into the modern history, they describe how Italy established Eritrea

as its colony beginning with a series of treaties with local Afar sultanates while Ethiopia's Emperor Menelik expanded Ethiopia's territory to the south. Treaties in the early 1990s, concluded between Italy, the colonizer of Eritrea, and Ethiopia's Emperor Menelik, established the current boundaries between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the most relevant aspect of history for the purpose here.

The same duo, Mebrahtu Ateweberhan and Mohamed Kheir Omer, take up the geographic and demographic/ethnic aspects of Ethiopia's demand for access to the Red Sea in Chapter 2. They outline geographic and demographic factors underlying Ethiopia's isolation and argue that those factors are more important determinants for Ethiopia's development than access to the sea. They describe the historical independence of the Afar sultanates, the ardent participation of the Eritrean Afar in Eritrea's long struggle for independence, and dispel the contention that Assab is Ethiopian, as the land of ethnic Afar, the majority of whom reside in Ethiopia.

In Chapter three, the trio, Gebre H. Tesfagiorgis, Paulos Tesfagiorgis and Teame Tewolde-Berhan, deal with the legal aspects of access to the sea as it relates to Eritrea and Ethiopia. They contend that confusion is prevalent among Ethiopians between *ownership* of coastal area and *the right of* access to the sea. By referring to the specific provisions of the UN Law of the Sea, they point out that Ethiopia has a legal right of access to, but not ownership of, the Eritrean Red Sea. However, that right is not absolute and can only be implemented through a peacefully negotiated bilateral agreement between the transit state of Eritrea and landlocked Ethiopia.

Finally, in Chapter 4, another trio, Kidane Mengisteab, Sengal Woldetensae and Mengesteab Tesfayohannes, take up the economic and security aspects of access to the sea. They start with a discussion on global and African landlocked countries as a background to place Ethiopia's landlocked status in a broader context. They argue that economic performance is influenced more by factors such as governance, state fragility, geographic constraints and ethnic conflicts rather than access to the sea. They emphasize the mutual economic and other developmental benefits that can be gained through peacefully negotiated bilateral and/or multilateral agreements.

In the Summary and Conclusion section, Gebre H. Tesfagiorgis summarizes the salient points of the four chapters and concludes with some thoughtful recommendations. If implemented, it can lead to peace, stability and economic development not only in Eritrea and Ethiopia but the whole region of the Horn of Africa.

Each chapter of the project can be viewed as a stand-alone essay, but collectively, as a project, we believe, the document provides a solid argument against Ethiopia's false claims for ownership of the Red Sea, especially the Port of Assab and its environs. Thus, it presents a sound defence of Eritrea's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Ethiopia's expansionist claims.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR ACCESS TO THE RED SEA

Mohamed Kheir Omer and Mebrahtu Ateweberhan

Background

Situated in the northeastern part of Africa, Eritrea is a country enriched with a vast cultural heritage and historical depth and is home to no fewer than nine officially recognized ethnic groups. It has a population of about four million people. Eritrea stands out for its ancient human settlements, including untapped archaeological sites. Notably, human remains dating back one million years ago[1] were found in the Danakil Depression. For the purpose of this chapter, the history of Eritrea is divided into ancient and modern periods, with the significant aspects of each period discussed. The ancient history is merely explored to show the heritage and commonality of the various ethnic and cultural entities residing in current Eritrea and Ethiopia.

[1] Abbate, E., et al., *A one-million-year-old Homo cranium from the Danakil (Afar) Depression of Eritrea.* Nature, 1998. **393**(6684): p. 458-60.

The modern history, on the other hand, shaped the current boundaries of the two countries, and is therefore more relevant for the purpose here.

1.0 Ancient History

Ancient History, for the purpose here, covers pre-Aksumite periods, the Aksumite Kingdom period, the decline of the Aksumite Kingdom, and the pre-European colonial period. Following is a brief coverage of each period.

1.1 The Pre-Aksumite Period

In 1994, the National Eritrean Museum undertook archaeological digs near Mount Kokan, Agordat, and Western Eritrea. It unearthed significant insights into the historical significance of the area suggesting that around 2,300 BCE, it was a crucial hub in the trade networks that connected the Nile Valley to the highlands of what is now Eritrea and Ethiopia, continuing until the Pre-Aksumite period around 400 BCE. Further studies in the Asmara Basin[2] point to the presence of early urban-like settlements in the Horn of Africa. These communities existed both before and during the same period as the Pre-Aksumite settlements in the southern highlands of Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. The settlements near Asmara came to be known as the Ona Settlements[3].

The agropastoral communities in the vicinity of Asmara played a crucial role in the evolution of urban development in the region. They were integral to the emergence of urban centres in the southern highlands of Eritrea during the late 1st millennium BCE and early 1st millennium CE, particularly in areas such as Keskese, Matara, and Qohaito. These findings underscore the area's historical significance as a hub of early human settlement and development in the region.

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[2] Schmidt, P. R., M. C. Curtis and Z. Teka (2008). The archaeology of ancient Eritrea. Trenton, NJ, Red Sea Press

[3] Schmidt PR, Curtis MC. Urban precursors in the Horn: early 1st-millennium BC communities in Eritrea. Antiquity. 2001;75(290):849-859.

The Red Sea and Gulf of Aden side of Africa is known as one of the oldest maritime trade routes linking with ancient Egypt, the Mediterranean region, Arabia, India and the Far East. The historic Land of Punt (God's Land), known to cover areas of modern Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia connected the Horn of Africa hinterland with ancient Egypt. The major exports of the region were gold, slaves, and various animal and plant products; imports included various agricultural and household tools and ornamental products.

1.2 The Aksumite Kingdom

The interaction between African Kushitic and Middle Eastern Semitic cultures across the Red Sea was crucial for the rise of complex societies, leading to the formation of the Aksumite Empire. Aksum's strategic location enabled its transformation into a powerful regional entity, controlling trade and benefitting from agricultural surplus facilitated by the introduction of the plow (Boardman 1999). The empire's economy was bolstered by its control over resource-rich western provinces, providing slaves, gold, and several natural products. Aksum engaged in long-distance trade, developed written literature, used coinage, and facilitated the introduction and spread of Christianity and Islam (Phillipson 2012).

The Aksumite Kingdom (c. 50 BC–650/700 CE) was the main commercial partner of the Roman and Byzantine empires in the early to mid-first millennium CE. In the fourth century CE, it adopted Christianity as the state religion. The kingdom, which was one of the strongest in Africa, was centred in current Tigray and Southern Eritrea.

Aksum's power was driven mainly by surplus feudal extraction supported by domination over resource-rich regions in the Nile Basin. Whether Aksum was a maritime power is an unresolved debate, but there is no doubt that it had a closer interaction with the sea. While some sources suggest that it had a direct

control, including levying tax on passing ships,[4] others indicate that its influence was mainly indirect and through the close ties it had with powers afar[5]. The Akumite Kingdom even invaded Yemen with Byzantine providing her with a fleet of ships to carry Aksumite soldiers to the west coast of Yemen.

1.21 The Ancient Port of Adulis

The ancient port of Adulis lies in the current Eritrea where pre-Aksumite civilization has been uncovered. It was established by the Ptolemaic Dynasty that controlled Egypt for almost three centuries (305-30 BCE), eventually falling to the Romans. The Aksumite Kingdom and ancient kingdoms in Sudan, such as Merowe, used the port for commercial purposes. One of the earliest recorded histories about Adulis is found in *"The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean"* believed to be written in 60 CE by a Greek historian and traveller.[6] Adulis is mentioned 31 times in the book. Some excerpts from the book include the following:

> "Below Ptolemais of the Hunts, at a distance of about three thousand stadia, there is Adulis, a port established by law, situated at the inner end of a bay that runs in toward the south. Before the harbour is the so-called Mountain Island, about two hundred stadia seaward from the

[4] Considering the geographical challenge in connecting Aksum with Adulis in the Gulf of Zula, the first argument seems more plausible. Taking the relatively recent Napier Expedition against the forces of Emperor Tewodros II as a reference, it took four months for the expedition of 13,000 combatants and 8,000 support crews to reach Maqdela, the Emperor's fortress. The expedition involved construction of a small railway between the coast and the highland foothills and Indian transportation of elephants. The collapse of supply-side factors in the western regions was the most probable factor for decline in the 8th century as coastal connection in that direction remained intact until the Ottoman Occupation of Massawa in the Middle Ages. The already weakened state was probably unable to maintain maritime control and sea access against the emerging adversaries on the Red Sea.

[5] Al-Shami, Al-Manhal Fi Tarikh Wa Akhbar al-Afar (Al-Danakil), 124–32.

[6] 'The periplus of the Erythraean Sea' was translated to English and published by Wilfred Harvey Schoff in 1912 and can be accessed at: https://hedgait.blogspot.com/2017/01/the-periplus-of-erythrean-sea.html

> very head of the bay, with the shores of the mainland close on both sides. Ships bound for this port now anchor here …. Opposite Mountain Island, on the mainland twenty stadia from shore, was Adulis, a fair-sized village, from which it was a three-day journey to Coloe, an inland town and the first market for ivory. From that place to the city of the people called Auxumites was a five-day journey more. All the ivory was brought to that place from the country beyond the Nile through the district called Cyeneum, and thence to Adulis. …. Before the harbour of that market town, out at sea on the right are a great many little sandy islands called Alalaei. They yield tortoiseshell, which is brought to market there by the Fish-Eaters[7,8].

Adulis is located about 30 km south of the modern port of Massawa and lies near the mouth of the Gulf of Zula. J. Theodore Bent describes Adulis in the following way: "Adulis was one of the colonies of Ptolemy Philadelphus and was always of commercial importance because it was the natural port for Abyssinia and the Sudan[9].

1.22. The Decline of Aksum

Aksum's decline was partly due to coastal occupation by Muslim caliphates and Beja tribes, leading to a significant dissociation from the sea. It was also cut out from the resource-rich areas in the west due to the uprising of various Beja tribes and internal invasion by the Agaw people. The collapse of Aksum in the late first millennium CE led to a southward shift of power, first to Lalibela under the Zagwe Dynasty (1137-1270) and then to Showa with the rise of the Solomonic Dynasty, which lasted until 1974. The decentralized system introduced by the latter maintained significant coastal links, with Adulis replaced by Massawa and Hirghigo as key sea outlets. The southward

[7] Same book as above, p.22

[8] Mountainn Island: Desse Island; Diodorus: Delemme or Ingel; Alalaei: Dahalak Islands; Coloe: the historic market town of Qohaito.

[9] Wilfred Harvey Schoff, The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), 60.

movement of power also connected the empire to seaports like Zeila and Berbera, facilitating trade through caravan routes.

The coastal polities were organized as caliphates and/or sultanates and were ideologically more closely connected with the Islamic centres in the Middle East (Trimingham 1952). The resulting isolation, completed with the spread of Islam in the coastal areas, led to shifting allegiances. This religious difference and the skewed Christian-Muslim ratio between the highlands and lowlands continues to define current politics in the region (Abbink 2014).

The rivalry between the various Sultanates in the eastern lowlands and coastal areas and the Abyssinian State[10] culminated in the Gragn Wars, heavily influenced by Middle Eastern support for Gragn and Portuguese military aid for the Abyssinian State. Following several military incursions into and invasions of extensive lands, Gragn was later defeated with the help of a Portuguese expedition in 1542. Gragn's Adal Sultanate gradually became weaker, which led to the establishment of Awsa as a prominent Afar Sultanate. The Afar lost more area to the hegemony of the Turks as in Dahlak and Zeila, albeit without relinquishing day-to-day local rule until the time the Italians gained foothold in Assab (1870s), the French in Obock, Djibouti (1862), and the Turks in Zeila. The Afar power became extremely diminished by the end of the eighteenth century, and they disintegrated into smaller sultanates, chiefdoms, and independent tribes. The independent Afar Sultanates signed 19 agreements with various European colonial powers, copies of which are included in A-Shami's *Al Manhal*, 2018 (pp. 512-663).

The "Gragn" wars also led to the Oromo Migration and the establishment of Gondar as the government's seat. Despite isolation from coastal areas, this period saw stable power consolidation, transformation of land ownership in Abyssinia, and improved coastal relations, especially with Massawa.

[10] Abyssinia is a term frequently used to refer to the early history of the core region of modern Ethiopia.

The disruptive Era of the Princes followed the relative stability during Gondar's pre-eminence. With Dejatch Kahsai Merach's rise as Yohannes IV, the Abyssinian Empire's center briefly came close to the Red Sea. However, during the Scramble for Africa, the British secretly encouraged the Italians to occupy Massawa to curb French advances, breaking promises to Yohannes. The elites of Massawa, fearing Yohannes' reputation as anti-Muslim, tacitly accepted Italian encroachment. Consequently, Italian expansion into Eritrea faced little resistance from communities exhausted from Abyssinian interference.

When Yohannes IV took power, the highlands of Eritrea were autonomous regions ruled by local families under customary laws. Rasi Woldemikael Solomon, ruler of Hamasein (1841 – 1879) from Hazega replaced Rasi Hailu Tecle Haimanot of Tsatzega, who was appointed by Emperor Tedros II. Ras Alula, on behalf of Emperor Yohannes IV, raided and pillaged several parts of Eritrea at different times and undermined the traditional structure before and after his appointment as Governor of Mereb-Melash (Seraye, Hamassein and Akle Guzai) on October 9, 1876. Despite registering impressive victories against the Egyptians (Gundet, 1875; GuraE, 1876), the Mahdists (Kufit, Kessela, 1885) and the Ambush of Dogali (1887), Alula never succeeded in having complete control of Eritrea. Rasi Woldemikael, Bahta Hagos, Kifleyesus and the Tigrian renegade Dabbab, with his Assaworta fighters, resisted his presence (Erlich 1997, 11-16, 25, 32) and was forced to withdraw his forces to join the fight against the Mahdists where Yohannes IV was killed. The Italians could control most parts of Eritrea without significant resistance, as the people were fed up with Abyssinian incursions.

Yohannes' death in a battle against the Sudan's Mahdists allowed Menelik to become King of Kings in Ethiopia. Menelik's rise was aided by his astute tactical manoeuvres in exploiting local conditions and the rivalry among foreign powers. It was also facilitated by Yohannes' isolated rule and the distance between Tigray and Showa. When Menelik assumed power, European colonial powers were already established along the coast. Unlike Yohannes, Menelik expanded southward, taking advantage of the geo-climatic barriers to

fend off Europeans. Following the Battle of Adwa (1896), he signed several treaties with the Italians, French and British that defined the present national boundaries in the Horn of Africa. Contrary to the views expressed by some Ethiopian elites that Menelik signed the border treaties under duress, he had an upper hand after his victorious battle of Adwa and willingly participated in the treaties. The three treaties signed between Eritrea's colonizer Italy and Ethiopia's Menelik in the early 1990s established the boundaries between current Eritrea and Ethiopia.

2.0 Modern History

The modern state dynamics in the Horn of Africa (HoA) have been impacted by colonial history and post-colonial state-building, shaped by the unique geo-climatic conditions. The separation of the same ethnic communities in some instances, and the merging of less related ones into single political economies in others, are key consequences of European colonialism and state-building models that followed. Colonialism also profoundly impacted the HoA by triggering the formation of independent states from existing autonomous and semi-autonomous polities and establishing new borderlands. It is the modern colonial history that shaped territorial definitions of current Eritrea and Ethiopia and thus, the relevant history for the purpose of this project.

For the purpose here, "modern history," covers the following periods: early Italian colonization, the consolidation of Italian colonization, the British Military Administration in Eritrea, the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia, and the armed struggle for the independence of Eritrea. Each period is briefly discussed in the following sections.

2.1 Early Italian Colonization

The contemporary history of Eritrea traces back to the unification of various independent entities and sultanates in the area, and Italy declared it as a colony on January 1, 1890.[11] Italy's initial move in the process of its colonization was to establish a presence in Assab, which involved three key steps: The first was,

[11] More details on Italian colonialism can be read in T. Negash, Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941: Policies, Praxis, and Impact.

when on November 15, 1869, Giuseppe Sapeto, acting on behalf of the Italian Government, secured a land agreement with the local Afar (Ankala tribe) chiefs in Assab. The second step, on March 11, 1870, involved another agreement between the Italian Soreta Rubattino shipping company and the chief of the Ankala Afar tribe, facilitated by the approval of Sultan Mohamed Hanfare of Awsa, the Afar's spiritual leader, for a bunkering station in Assab. The third step, on March 16, 1870, saw the acquisition of several islands and additional territories in the Assab area through agreements with the Afar Sultanate of Rahayta, also endorsed by Sultan Hanfare.

Following these agreements, the Italian shipping company transferred the lands and islands acquired in Assab and the Afar Rahayta Sultanate to the Italian government on March 10, 1882. Subsequently, Italy declared Assab a colony on July 10, 1882, culminating in the establishment of a strategic foothold in the region. Notwithstanding the expansionist Ethiopian claims over Assab and Dankalia, no Abyssinian ruler was involved in those agreements; they were between the Afar Sultanates, who had sovereignty over the land and sea, and the Italian government.[12]

2.2. Consolidation of Italian Colonialism

Abyssinia had no historical jurisdiction on Massawa and its environs either.[13] Roughly a century after Ozdemir Pasha's capture of the Massawa and Hirgigo ports in 1557, the Ottoman Empire delegated authority to a locally influential Beja-descended family, the Balaws, nominating its leader as their *na'ib*, or 'deputy.' By the mid-1700s, these deputies had solidified their political influence, asserted their dominance, and effectively became the preeminent

[12] Hashim A-shami 2018. Al Manhal: The Sources In The History And Narrative Of The Afar (Danaki), pp.503-703. (Copies of the agreement were in Arabic and Italian and are available in Dr. Hashim Al Shami's book on the Afar)
[13] MK Omer, 2020. The Dynamics of An Unfinished African Dream, pp. 41-46

rulers over a broad region that spanned from the Red Sea coast to the highland plateau[14].

In 1846, control of Massawa shifted to the Egyptian Khedive when the Ottoman Empire transferred its rights over the port city and its surrounding territories to Egypt. This handover included areas stretching from south of the Egyptian border to Zeila, encompassing the entire western Red Sea coast and parts of the Gulf of Aden. These territories had been under the nominal control of the Ottoman Empire, with its actual presence limited to Massawa and a strategic position in Zeila.

Italy capitalized on Egypt's waning influence along the Red Sea coastline, attributed to its internal instability and engagements in conflicts on several fronts, including areas now known as Eritrea and Sudan. Recognizing its vulnerable state, Egypt signed a confidential agreement with Italy on January 25, 1885, consenting to evacuate Beilul, where it had military presence. This agreement enabled Italy to rapidly occupy Beilul and other coastal villages up to Massawa, receiving a warm reception from local tribal leaders following directives from Sultan Mohamed Hanfare. This sequence of events led to Italy's successful occupation of Massawa by February 1885,

Until the late 19th century, the Ottoman Empire maintained a superficial control over the western coast of the Red Sea. This period saw the region destabilized by several factors: the rise of the Mahdist movement in Sudan (1881–98), conflict between Ethiopia's Emperor Yohannes IV and the Mahdists, internal disputes within Tigray and the Eritrean highlands, and the rivalry between Menelik II, the ruler of Showa, and Emperor Yohannes IV. For the Italians, expanding their territory north and south of Massawa into areas predominantly Muslim, proved more straightforward than their efforts to conquer the central highlands (*Kebesa*: comprised of Akele Guzai, Hamasien, and Serae) because people in the lowlands were fed up with Abyssinian and Sudanese incursions. Historically and functionally, the highlands were more

[14] Jonathan Miran 2007. "Power without Pashas: the anatomy of Na'ib autonomy in Ottoman Eritrea (17th-19th
Eritrean Studies Review 5, No. 1 (2007): 33-88.

integrated into the fabric of the Abyssinian Empire. The campaign to assert control over this region demanded significantly more resources, power, and effort than previous Italian endeavours to secure the stretch from the Rahayta sultanate's border to Massawa and its adjacent plains.

Once Italy expanded its control from Assab and its environs to the Massawa region, and eventually to the highland (*kebesa*) areas, it consolidated its colonization of Eritrea which lasted for over 60 years. Over those years, Italian colonialism had a substantial socio-political impact. Most significantly, it brought together disparate communities under one rule and territory that shared a common experience and was the main catalyst for the development Eritrean nationalism.

2.3 The British Military Administration

After the defeat of Italy in World War II in 1941, the British came to control Eritrea in the name of trusteeship under the rule of the British Military Administration (BMA). Eritrean intellectuals at that time started to engage in politics, taking advantage of the political atmosphere created by the BMA. They met regularly to discuss the future of the country in 1941 and formed the patriotic society known as Society for the Love of the Country (SLC) (*Mahber Feqri Hager Eretra* in Tigrinya, or *Jemiyat Hub al-Watan* in Arabic).

When the British Administration opened the political space in 1946, Eritreans took the opportunity to form about 10 political parties. Of those parties, the most important and influential were the Eritrean Muslim League (EML), The Eritrean Liberal Progressive Party (ELPP) and the Unionist Party (UP). The political parties developed into two main blocs, one bloc, that called for the independence of Eritrea, was mainly comprised of the EML, headed by Ibrahim Sultan and the ELPP, headed by Raesi Tessema Asberom. The other bloc, led by the UP, initially headed by Tedla Bairu, called for Eritrea's unity with Ethiopia and was fully supported by the latter. Thus, the Eritrean struggle for self-determination and independence started effectively in the 1940s.

Combined with Ethiopia's quest for ownership of the Red Sea, geo-political interest of global powers, the division and infighting among Eritreans and their failure to reach consensus on the future of their country contributed to the Eritrean question becoming internationalized and discussed in the United Nations. The external actors failed to reach any consensus on how to dispose Eritrea due to their divergent interests. Nevertheless, Eritreans showed unity in aborting the cynical British attempt to partition Eritrea between Sudan and Ethiopia (supported by the US and accepted by Ethiopia). A compromise solution was reached at the United Nations to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1950.

2.4. The Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia

The Eritrea–Ethiopia Federation, the first of its kind in Africa, was a compromise to the internal Eritrean division between those who wanted independence and those who wanted unity with Ethiopia. It was also a compromise for the world powers, between those who favored Eritrea's independence and those who wanted to unite Eritrea to Ethiopia. Access to the Red Sea sought by Ethiopia was one of the central points in the discussions and political manoeuvres. Following the federal act, the Eritrean parties favouring independence accepted it as a compromise and the Independence Bloc was changed to the Democratic Front to safeguard it. However, the federation was born lame and became an easy prey for Ethiopia's expansionist desires which coincided with the superpowers' interests and intrigues. Nevertheless, the federal arrangement provided Eritrea with a democratic constitution, a legislative body, the National Assembly, with broad democratic rights, including the provision to hold elections of its members. It also provided Eritrea with its own flag, coat of arms and official seals. Such provisions conflicted with Ethiopia's imperial rule, and Ethiopia's reformative constitution of 1955 undermined the federal arrangement. Ethiopia gradually dismantled the Eritrean institutional provisions one by one and illegally annexed Eritrea declaring it a province of Ethiopia, while the prominent world powers and the UN itself turned a blind eye to this development.

2.5. The Armed Struggle and Independence of Eritrea

Eritreans, having exhausted all available peaceful means to restore their rights, resorted to armed struggle in 1961, fought for over 30 years, culminating in the liberation of Eritrea in 1991. Eritrean independence was legalized by holding a referendum, organized with the support of the UN in April 1993 in which Eritreans voted overwhelmingly for independence, resulting in recognition by Ethiopia itself and other countries. Thus, Eritrea became an independent, sovereign member state of the world community of nations on May 28, 1993.

Ethiopia enjoyed direct access to the Red Sea as the federation member (1952-1962) and by illegally occupying Eritrea (1962-1991). During the latter period, the region was embroiled in the expensive Eritrean war of liberation. Even after its independence, Eritrea had allowed Ethiopia free access to the Red Sea via Assab and Massawa until 1998 when a border dispute broke, and Ethiopia boycotted the ports, thinking the action would hurt Eritrea more than it would Ethiopia.

The initial border dispute escalated into a full-blown armed conflict from 1998 to 2000, ending up with the Algiers Agreement that established the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). The Commission rendered its decision on the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia in April 2002. The Commission's decision, stipulated to be "final and binding" by the Algiers Agreement, re-affirmed Eritrea's borders and territories that included the Red Sea coastal areas, including Massawa, Assab and its islands.

Ethiopia, although hesitantly accepted the commission's decision two years later, it showed reluctance to implement the decision by employing various delaying tactics, forcing the EEBC to demarcate the boundaries only virtually and close its office. This led to a prolonged period of tension that lasted until Ethiopia's new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, assumed power in 2018. Unlike Ethiopia's prevarications over the Algiers Agreement, Eritrea accepted the Commission's decision despite its displeasure with certain aspects of the

outcome. When Abiy Ahmed came to power in Ethiopia, his acceptance of the Algiers Agreement was one of the developments that enabled his rapprochement with Eritrea and his award of the Nobel Peace Prize, only to renege five years later demanding ownership of and access to the Red Sea in the manner he did.

3.0. Summary and Conclusion

Eritrea, situated in the Horn of Africa, and comprised of nine ethnic groups, is of substantial cultural and historical importance. It shares significant ancient history with neighboring communities in the area.

Excavations have uncovered Eritrea's function as a commerce nexus from 2300 BCE, connecting the Nile Valley and the Ethiopian highlands during pre-Aksumite era. Preliminary urban settlements, called Ona, along with agropastoral communities next to Asmara, established the region's urbanization foundation.

The Aksumite Kingdom flourished between approximately 50 BCE to 700 CE. It encompassed considerable portions of current Eritrea and Tigray and was a significant trade ally of Rome and Byzantium. The historic Port of Adulis linked the Aksumite and Roman empires.

The purpose of covering ancient history here is to merely indicate that people in the territory now comprising current Eritrea do share a common history and culture with the other communities in the region, as is true with several countries in Africa. However, it is the modern history, especially the advent of European colonialism, which shaped the current state borders, that is most relevant for the purpose here.

Eritrea was established as an Italian colony in 1890 following accords with local Afar chieftains. A series of agreements between colonial Italy and Ethiopia established the currently recognized borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Following Italy's defeat in 1941, Eritrean intellectuals established political parties under British rule, promoting either independence or

unification with Ethiopia. The 1950 UN–declaration of federation with Ethiopia led to the eventual absorption of Eritrea by Ethiopia.

Following Ethiopia's dissolution of the federation and annexation of Eritrea, Eritreans commenced an armed campaign in 1961, which resulted in de facto independence in 1991. A vote in a referendum held in 1993 formalized its independence, and Eritrea became a member of the United Nations as an independent sovereign state on May 28, 1993.

A border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000 led to the Algiers Agreement, which affirmed the colonially established borders between the two countries. Ethiopia experienced economic growth from 1998 to 2018 despite losing access to Eritrean ports. After a brief mending of relations between the two countries when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018, Ethiopia's quest for Red Sea access and claims on Eritrea have strongly resurfaced, adversely impacting the relations between the two countries and the peace of the region.

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CHAPTER 2

ISSUES OF GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY RELATED TO ACCESS TO THE SEA IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Mebrahtu Ateweberhan and Mohamed Kheir Omer

Background

As outlined in the main Introduction section, the arguments put forward by Ethiopian elites to bolster the quest for ownership and/or access to the sea touch on four broad areas: history, geography/demography, law, and economy. This chapter focuses on the geography/demography aspect, as well as the closely related, ethnic aspect, as outlined below:

- **The geography argument** – Ethiopia's landlockedness has rendered it a prisoner of geography, limiting its interactions in the region and globally. This has impacted its security in a region that is becoming

increasingly militarized. It has also increased transportation costs, including payments for port services, which will affect consumer prices.

- **The demography argument** - With a population of more than 120 million people, Ethiopia faces extreme population pressure, and its landlocked status exacerbates the population burden.
- **The Ethnic argument –** An extension of the demography argument is that the Afar people, straddling the borders of Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia, are predominantly found in Ethiopia. The prominence of the Awsa Sultanate makes Ethiopia the true home of the Afar. Thus, the Red Sea coasts bordering the "Afar Land," the southern section of the Eritrean and the northern section of the Djiboutian coasts, should be part of Ethiopia.

In this analysis, the first two (geography and demography) are treated together as inseparable components of political geography. The ethnic dimension is considered separately because (a) some of its particulars imply an infringement on the sovereignty of neighboring countries and (b) falsified historical narratives are used to manipulate the position of cross-border communities.

The main goals of this study are: (1) to improve understanding and provide a broader perspective about the type and degree of isolation existing in the Horn of Africa and to emphasize that the challenge of sea access is only one of many manifestations of the isolation affecting all states and communities in the region; (2) to outline recommendations on reducing inter- and intra-state isolation and improving sea access within the context of regional cooperation.

Despite a broad question of political geography and deserving a comprehensive outlook, Ethiopia's quest for sea access, has been looked at in isolation and mainly in terms of developmental challenges. It has also been used as a political tool to build public perception that resolving the issue of sea access is a panacea that would answer all of Ethiopia's challenges. To demonstrate that the issue of sea access is a consequence and not a causal factor, we combine key elements of physical and social geography and underline that sea access falls short of providing a silver bullet.

Our analysis and recommendations are guided by the core principle that respect for international laws and norms, and sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations should be the foundation for regional peace and stability.

1.0 Geo-Climatic Conditions and Coastal-Hinterland Dynamics Driving Isolation

Is Ethiopia a prisoner of geography and, if so, to what extent, and what does it have to do with sea access? To answer these and related questions, in this section, we attempt to look at geographical isolation in its broader context and explore its determinants and how it manifests in the Horn of Africa. We also investigate the interlink between geography and demography which are part of the main arguments used by Ethiopian elites regarding equitable sea access in the Horn of Africa.

In this section, we briefly describe the geo-climatic environment of the Horn of Africa, which sets the foundation for the main socio-natural differentiations existing in the region.

The Horn of Africa forms the easternmost extension of the African continent with the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden separating it from the Arabian Peninsula. It forms a peninsula hugged by the coastal areas of the modern state of Somalia in the south (Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden) and the Red Sea in its northern section. It is shaped by two great geographic features: the Nile River Valley and the Great (African) Rift Valley (GRV). The high plateaus and rugged volcanic mountains in Ethiopia and extending to Eritrea are sandwiched between these great features. In south-central Ethiopia, the GRV rises almost to 2000m above sea level. It drops well below sea level in parts of the Danakil depression funnelling into the Red Sea and forming the Afar Triangle.

The region is mainly under the influence of the Monsoon climate system. In combination with the topographic features described above, it underpins the

ecology and way of life of the peoples of the Horn of Africa. The east-west separation marks a climatic barrier. The arid lowlands stretching to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and North-Western Indian Ocean (RS-NWIO) coastal areas form one of the most inhospitable places on earth. On the other hand, the south and south-western sections register the highest amount of rainfall and are well known for their fertile soils and diverse fauna and flora. The high-altitude mountainous regions and plateaus in the north and northwest also enjoy moderate to high levels of rainfall. The southern GRV areas have the highest population density while the eastern lowlands and coastal areas (Afar and Somali regions) are very sparsely populated. Except for the southern equatorial regions, the southeastern section covering most areas occupied by the different Somali clans shares similar physiography and climatic conditions as the Afar lowlands.

Geo-climatic separation is the primary driver of the different modes of traditional production practiced in the region. Most of the highlands' people are settled agrarian while those occupying the lowlands largely depend on livestock (and to a lesser extent on fishing) for survival. The great geo-climatic diversity is also reflected in the diversity of cultures, marked by the variety of languages (over 200) and dialects. The high diversity of ethnic groups that are further broken down into tribes and clans has created various, some deeply divided, loyalties.

On these interactive foundations of the geo-climatic and primordial social arena the major historical socio-political developments take hold and define the regional socio-political differentiations witnessed to this day. They in turn drive isolation, cooperation, and resource sharing or lack of it. The critical geo-strategic position along the RS-NWIO means they can catalyse broader cooperation as well as inviting conflicts involving external competing powers.

The geo-climatic barrier remains a formidable physical challenge and a key driver of the socio-political dynamics defining competition and cooperation, particularly between the various coastal and lowland polities and the

Abyssinian State. It also resulted in the constant retraction of the Abyssinian centers of power through the centuries (Table 1 below).

2.0 Brief Historical Context of Isolation

The isolation is also defined by three historical phases that compound the physico-climatic isolation: (a) the social distance triggered by the expansion of Islam in the lowlands and coastal areas that forced the retraction of the central Abyssinian Empire southward, (b) the occupation of coastal areas by Europeans in the late 19th century that fostered nationalist tendencies and solidified the pre-existing socio-political distance, and (c) further concretization of the coastal-hinterland separation resulting from the misguided development policies followed during the post-colonial period and its interaction with globalization in recent times. Table 1 shows the distance of the center of the Ethiopian empire to the closest ports through key periods in history. Addis Ababa, the current government seat and regional hub, is the furthest away in history.

Table 1
Abyssinian/Ethiopian Seats of Power and Distance (km) from Major Ports

Seat of Power	Ports					
	Adulis	Massawa	Assab	Zeila	Berbera	Djibouti
Aksum	338					
Lalibela		730				
Debre Berhan				794	884	
Gondar		641				
Mekelle	400					
Ankober			718	777	842	736
Addis Ababa			880	873	948	867

Note: Distance was calculated based on modern road networks and does not consider the change in the mode of transportation used at the time. (Modern freight trains and trucks carry more loads and take a shorter time to reach destinations than the draft

animal transportation used during the Aksumite Period). (Source: Google Earth and Google Maps).

3.0 The Modern Post-Colonial State and Coastal-Hinterland Dynamics

The view on the center-periphery dynamics regarding the modern state in the Horn of Africa (HoA) has been widely shaped by colonial history and post-colonial state building (Markakis et al. 2021). Colonial undertakings in the HoA were themselves shaped by the unique geo-climatic conditions described in the previous section, which had reinforcing impacts on the colonial isolationist tactics and marginalizations resulting from post-colonial state-building. Thus, the post-colonial state in the HoA could be considered more of a special case than the typical Sub-Saharan Africa where the concentration of political and economic power in specific regions, especially capital cities, is adequately explained in terms of links with European markets. Ethiopia, although not directly colonized, its development has been drastically shaped by the way it reacted to European colonialism and its modern state-building is not significantly different from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. One of the key consequences of European colonialism and the state-building model pursued based on it is that ethnic communities straddling national boundaries have been separated from each other. In some instances, some of them have even faced each other in national wars. At the same time, remotely related groups were brought together to form a single political economy.

3.1. Establishment of Addis Ababa as the Capital and Center of Power

In the HoA, colonialism had two profound impacts. First, parts of the former centers of the Ethiopian Empire became either independent states (e.g. Eritrea) or new borderlands (e.g. Tigray) and most of the previous borderlands remained as such (e.g. Afar, Somali). Second, the Ethiopian Empire expanded southward, and Addis Ababa was firmly established as the capital and the center of power. Based on these facts, various studies have used the distance between Addis Ababa and regional ports to underline the level of isolation and

the paramountcy of sea access for Ethiopia's economic well-being (Kahsai 2007, Begashaw 2010; Hailemariam 2011). However, such calculations are misleading as the longest stretches of the distance between Addis Ababa and regional ports occur inside Ethiopia (Table 2). Considering the four closest ports to Addis Ababa (Assab, Djibouti, Zeila and Berbera), 84% of the transportation cost would be incurred inside Ethiopia. The only major population center closer to the border and the ocean is Dire Dawa, with Djijiga an emerging one. Most of the densely populated areas and economic centers in the states of Oromiya, Amhara and Southern Ethiopia also share this remoteness from the sea. This suggests that significant components of the concerns of sea access are found in Ethiopia and the solutions lie there. Hence, distance from the sea as such is not the main barrier to Ethiopia's development.

Table 2.
Distance from Addis Ababa and Nearest Ethiopian Border to Regional Ports (in kilometers)

	Assab	Zeila	Berbera	Djibouti	Lamu	Mogadishu
Total distance from Addis Ababa	880	814	929	867	1,669	1,588
Distance from the nearest Ethiopian border	74.1	139	179	163	990	372
Percentage of distance inside Ethiopia	91.6	82.9	80.7	81.2	40.7	76.6

As Table 2 indicates, Addis Ababa is almost at an equidistant position from the Djiboutian, Eritrean and the two northern Somali ports (Zeila and Berbera). At the same time, the distance to Mogadishu and Lamu is almost double. Except for Lamu, most of the distance between Addis Ababa and the regional ports occurs inside Ethiopia. After considering the total distance, there is no significant difference in the distance between Addis Ababa and the four ports closer to it (Assab, Zeila, Berbera, and Djibouti).

3.2. Factors Other than Sea Access Are More Important Determinants of Economic Fate

The flawed conclusion about the isolation from sea access in the HoA originates from the generalized assessments that ignore its multidimensional nature (wealth, stability and their covariates) and blanket comparison of countries as landlocked vs. coastal. Furthermore, the geographic isolation thesis overlooks that coastalization has not yet set foot in the HoA. The existing intense anisotropic situation in the HoA is unique by African and global standards. For example, unlike in West Africa and the rest of the world, in the HoA coastal countries are not in a better economic state than inland areas, if not worse. Unbalanced development has turned even Djibouti, the smallest nation in the region, into a mere city-state. The port-rail system the Port of Djibouti and Addis Ababa dominates the country's economy, making it an extension of the Ethiopian political economy. Eritrea has two major ports and the furthest population center (Tessenei) is less than 500 km from the coast, and the distance between Asmara and Massawa is around 100 km. The relatively short highland-coast distance presents a great potential to develop a diversified and balanced economy in Eritrea, but the country has not fared better. With its expansive coastal areas, Somalia remains one of the least stable countries in the world. It is widely identified as a conflictual state where the dominance of the clan-based traditional system and the nation-building centered on unitary politics have contradicted each other. The absence of coastal-landlocked differentiation suggests that the problem lies outside the issue of sea access. This observation supports the thesis that the economic fate of landlocked countries is determined mainly by neighborhood (stability and wealth of neighboring nations) (Mehdi 2016), pointing to the fact that landlockeness is a multidimensional issue that cannot be explained by distance from the sea alone.

The preceding paragraphs have highlighted the economic component of political geography and the defunct distance-based isolation argument. If that isolation component is primarily an Ethiopian concern, the security side is probably more important. This is because relationships among countries in the Horn remain predisposed to the centuries-old socio-political differentiations and colonial and post-colonial politics that made Ethiopia perceived as a hegemon and a threat in the eyes of most of the coastal states. In that regard, the economic obligation for cooperation and regional integration appears to be dwarfed by the impulsive forces of socio-natural differentiations described in previous sections. In recent years, the region has seen some improvement in that respect, partly backed by the growing mutual dependence between Djibouti and Ethiopia and the latter's enhanced image arising from its positive engagement in the region, e.g. peace missions in Sudan and Somalia. In contrast, the twenty-year no-peace no-war stalemate with Eritrea remained a major stumbling block to regional peace. Recent developments suggest that notwithstanding the early promise, Prime Minister Abiy's adventurous ways, demonstrated by his departure from the pro-poor policies inside Ethiopia to expansionist rhetoric directed at Eritrea and Somalia, seem to be nurturing mistrust. Equally, the ongoing internal conflicts in the country and the involvement of regional forces will have long-lasting negative consequences.

4.0. The Ethnic Dimension

The post-colonial state in the HoA is characterized by the presence of various ethnic groups divided between at least two countries. These are also subdivided into various clans and tribes. Ethiopia shares the largest number of ethnic groups with its neighbors due to its unique geographic position described in the first section. All the coastal states in the region have at least one ethnic group that is shared with Ethiopia. For example, the Afar, Kunama[15], Saho and Tigrinya are found in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. Historically, the ethnic

[15] Despite the colonial period agreements between Ethiopia and Italy clearly stipulating that all Kunama must be in Eritrea, a small enclave of Kunama community remains in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

dimension of the sea access argument has focused on two communities – the Afar and Tigrinya. They have been at the center of the Eritrea-Ethiopia relationship at two recent historical junctures – the discussions of the 1940s leading to the federal arrangement and the ongoing quest for sea access by Ethiopia triggered by Eritrea's emergence as a sovereign country. Except for the muted voice within the minority Greater Tigrinya section, presently the Tigrinya-centered argument has no palpable support.

4.1. The Afar-Centered Argument[16]

The ongoing Ethiopian ethnic discourse, driven by the country's elites, has now shifted its focus to an Afar-centered narrative. If cajoling the Tigrinya to join "the motherland" and undermining separatist efforts, including through terrorist means, was the main ploy used by Ethiopia in the 1940s and 50s, now the focus has shifted towards the Afar ethnic group. The manoeuvres employed include coaxing disenfranchised Eritrean Afar and instilling expansionist ambitions amongst Ethiopian Afar elites (as owners of Assab).

The Afar-centered 'ethnic affiliation' argument has various versions: First, Assab was historically Ethiopian;[17] Second, most Afar are in Ethiopia, hence, all Afar are Ethiopian, and by extension, the southern section of the Eritrean coast must belong to Ethiopia.[18] Third, the Awsa Sultanate and its Sultan, located in Ethiopia, are the most prominent, and the other Afar Sultanates are

[16] The first author is greatly indebted to Dr. Makunun A-Shami for the open discussion on the political economy of the Afar.

[17] According to Yakob Hailemariam (2011), Assab refers not to the port city only but to the Eritrean coast from the Gulf of Zula to the border with Djibouti. It is not clear why this is the case as the northern section of Djibouti is historically part of Afar territory passed to France in a similar way to Assab.

[18] This argument also applies to Djibouti where Afar and Isa Somali tribes are found. However, the claim over Djibouti has significantly subsided following the recognition of Djiboutian independence (1976) by Ethiopia and because of the strong political and military protection afforded to Djibouti, especially from France. Ethiopia's strong dependence on the Port of Djibouti has probably contributed toward stabilizing the relationship between the two countries (Yihun 2013).

subordinates or feudatory to Awsa. The following statement allegedly attributed to Sultan Ali MiraH is repeatedly posed to assert the 'Ethiopianness' of the Afar: "Every Afar knows that his/her border extends to the Red Sea; let alone the people (Afar), even our camels recognize the Ethiopian flag." However, the great Sultan was pragmatic enough to recognize regional and global changes at the time. The radical stance he took during the latter parts of the Imperial Ethiopian Government and the early years of the *Derg* reveals a great level of dissatisfaction he had with the centralized Ethiopian system. There are testimonials by Eritrean fighters, especially senior leaders of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) that Eritreans liberation fighters traversed Awsa territories and met with Awsa representatives abroad with tacit recognition of the Sultan.[19] Afar movements, including The Afar Liberation Front, founded by the same sultan himself, also had close cooperation with Eritrean liberation fronts. As indicated in the history section, Sultan Hanfare fully endorsed the agreements between Italy and local Red Sea Afar chiefs.

4.2. Afar, Traditionally Organized into Independent Sultanates

The Afar occupy a very strategic area in the HoA spanning from the coastal areas of Djibouti and Eritrea to the eastern rims of the Abyssinian plateau and sections of the Awash Valley. In Ethiopia, they share borders with various ethnic groups (Tigrayans in the north, Amhara (north-west), Oromo (south-west) and Isa Somalis (south and south-east)). The center of the Afar moved through the centuries from place to place reflecting its dynamic nature (Pankhurst 1997). For centuries, the Afar have exhibited both cooperation and rivalry, including conflicts and deadly wars with neighboring communities and polities, and mostly with the center of the Abyssinian Empire in Showa (Pankhurst 1997; Markakis 2021). None more so than their collaboration in the devastating wars of Imam Gragn[20] against the central authorities describes the intensity of the rivalry (Beckingham and Huntingford 1961). They also had an

[19] Personal communication with Hirui T. Bairu, member of ELF Polit Bureau.

[20] Ahmed Ibn Al-Ghazi (famously known as Gragn by the Abyssinians) was an Imam and head of the Adal Sultanate. Economic reasons fuelled by religious fanaticism were believed to be the main cause of the Wars. Although the name Adal is commonly used to refer to the Afar, the location of the Adal Sultanate was further from the areas occupied by the Afar. Nevertheless, the Gragn War's profoundly religious nature involved various groups including the Afar, as it did attract the Portuguese (Christians) to support the Abyssinian monarchs.

uneasy relationship with the Tigray *Shums* (chiefs) of Hantalo and Wejerat (Beckingham and Huntigford 1961; Kassa 2001). The foundational geo-climatic and socio-political barriers described in the first section influenced the competition expressed mainly in terms of control over key natural resources and trade routes. Unlike other sultanates (e.g. Ifat), the Afar remained insulated from the Abyssinian Empire by the considerable distance between them and stayed relatively autonomous (Trimingham 1952; Pankhurst 1997).

Traditionally, the Afar, also known as Dankel, were organized into Sultanates and ruled by independent Sultans. Therefore, the claim that other Afar sultanates were feudatory or subordinate to the Sultan of Awsa is farfetched. However, although autonomous, they have shown cooperation and rivalry with each other as they did with neighboring communities and cross-sultanate interactions were common. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that in all the countries the traditional authority of the sultans has diminished, and their involvement has become more symbolic and limited to traditional conflict resolution according to customary laws. Some of the sultanates have ceased to exist. Currently, in all three countries where the Afar are found (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti), elected or appointed provincial or local state leaders wield more power.

4.3. No Evidence that Abyssinia Historically Controlled Assab

There is no evidence that Abyssinia historically controlled the Assab area or any of the areas under the Afar (Trimingham 1952; Markakis 2021, A-Shami 2018)[21]. There were indeed claims and counterclaims, including military expeditions by famous Abyssinian leaders that reached coastal areas. Contrary to the claims, the Afar remained autonomous for centuries and part of the Afar

[21] Al Shami, H. 2018. Al Manhal, The Source in the History and Narratives of the Afar (Danakil). A more than 700 pages book was published in Egypt in 2018 and is the English translation of the Arabic edition that appeared in 1997 in Egypt. An earlier Arabic edition (Saudi Arabia, 1994) and an Amharic translation (2007) exist as well. The book includes copies of 19 original agreements (with original translations in Italian, French and Arabic) that were signed between various Afar Sultanates and the then western powers of Italy, and France.

land was brought under the Ethiopian flag only during the expansion of the Ethiopian Empire under Emperor Menelik II. Then, Eritrea and Djibouti were firmly established as Italian and French colonies, respectively. Assab itself did not come into the picture until its purchase, as was noted in Chapter 1, by the Italian Rubattino Company in 1869. Until then nearby Beilul was the local port used primarily by the Afar. As mentioned earlier, Massawa in the north, Zeyla and Berbera and to some extent, Tadjura (Djibouti) were the main outlets connecting the hinterland. Remarkably, some of the dubious claims over Assab include legal loopholes in the agreements between Afar Sultans and Rubattino[22]. First, the basis of the claim is shaky as the agreements have nothing to do with Ethiopia in the first place. As indicated above, the country had no official control over the area. There were no countries known as Eritrea or Ethiopia in their present geopolitical positions and borders. Second, the agreements were made redundant by the border agreements between Italy and Emperor Menelik II, defining the current political geography of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Those are the same agreements used in the UN Resolution (1950) to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia, adopted by the Eritrean Federal Constitution ratified by Emperor Haile Selassie (1952), upheld by the Eritrean Referendum of 1993, and the basis for the Algiers Agreement (2000).

4.4. The Argument that the Afar Must Stay in One Country

One of the key arguments used by Ethiopian elites in their attempt to legitimize the 'Red Sea ownership' claim is that the Afar people are one and must stay in one country under one flag, and that country must be Ethiopia. A related claim is that most ethnic Afar are found in Ethiopia, which makes Ethiopia the home of the Afar, and thus, the Afar of Eritrea and Djibouti and their land and coastal areas should be part of Ethiopia. These Afar-centered claims represent a biased consideration in a region where cross-border ethnic relations are common. They also represent a flagrant violation of Eritrean and Djiboutian sovereignty and territorial integrity. In spirit and content, the proposition is not dissimilar to the Bevin-Sforza plan concocted by Great

[22] One such argument was made by General Tsadkan, the former Ethiopian Chief of Army, in an interview with Ethio Forum (https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=Tcp3YIa9BrU).

Britain and the USA in the 1940s, aiming at ceding the highlands and eastern parts of Eritrea to Ethiopia and the western lowlands to Sudan, which all Eritreans, unionists and independentists soundly rejected (United Nations 1996). Some historians have suggested that Ethiopia's claim over Eritrea was not focused on sea access only but was a genuine attempt at bringing together Ethiopia and Eritrea (e.g. Reta 2000; Sishane 2007). In contradiction to the claims, Ethiopia had accepted the dismemberment of Eritrea after initial reluctance (Haile 1988; Tesfay 2002). Ethnic-based border claims and counterclaims, contradicting colonially established agreements could lead to devastating wars as witnessed in the Ethiopia-Somali wars of 1964 and 1977-78.

The claims that the Sultan of Awsa was and is the sole leader of the Afar people and that his claim of the Red Sea being Ethiopian underestimates the role of Eritrean Afar and their leaders in the Eritrean anti-colonial struggle and the struggle for Independence. The Afar, like the other nationalities in Eritrea, played a prominent role in the political struggle of the 1940s and 1950s and in the armed struggle that followed. Their knowledge of seafaring (especially night navigation) and extensive network in the Middle East was critical. The landmark vote in the UN-observed and verified Eritrean Referendum of 1993 by the people of the then Dankalia Province, which at the time was predominantly Afar, was not different from the rest of the country (99.65% vs. 99.82%, respectively) and was a clear testament of allegiance. Equally, when the Eritrean case was presented to the UN in the 1950s, most Eritrean Afar elites at the time were members of the Muslim League of Eritrea, the New Eritrea Pro-Italia Party and the Italo-Eritrean Association which all were for independence, either immediately or following a period of custody under the UN or Italy. Records of the UN Commission that visited Eritrea in 1950 and held more than seventy public and private meetings in the country to ascertain the wishes of the people show that the Eritrean Afar overwhelmingly supported independence.

5.0. Sea Access and the Demographic Pressure

A common tendency of the sea access/ownership claim school is a narrow focus on the "Malthusian Trap" and neglecting the role of structural and socio-political factors that are more fundamental to development. The population burden is only one of many symptoms. If previous authors used the issue of sea access as a tool of methodological nationalism, Prime Minister Abiy's remarks: "Where there are hungry people, the laws will not work," is extreme. His assertion about the enormity of the population burden and the lack of capacity of neighboring countries to assist Ethiopia in absorbing the pressure may be correct, but the fact that the issue is a shared domain of all developing countries, especially in Africa, suggests that the answers lie outside sea access. In the Horn of Africa, all states, large and small, coastal and landlocked are not only isolated from each other but also marginalization is a common internal feature. Thus, an outlook on the issue of sea access in the context of extractive economic policies that have led to a long history of extreme poverty, internal and regional conflicts and harmful foreign interventions deeply ingrained in the national and regional politics could be beneficial. So far, the claims put forward by Ethiopian elites do not consider the specific characteristics of Ethiopia and the HoA. They tend to invite conflict with maritime countries, especially Eritrea, because they are mainly driven by the perception of "handicap" reinforced by historical obsession. It is an expansionist view passed from imperialists to nationalists (ethnic and Ethiopianist).

The most fundamental question is whether it is possible to overcome the geo-climatic barrier, and the socio-political distance built up over the centuries. Spatial diversification of the economy as suggested by the growth of regional capitals in Ethiopia may provide some clue but expanding the economy to historically marginalized areas remains a critical challenge. We agree with Prime Minister Abiy about the inability of other HoA countries to support Ethiopia in absorbing the increasing population pressure. Where we differ is the reason used to explain the problem resulting from an imbalance in the economy of the HoA and has little to do with sea access. Specifically, coastal areas are less developed to help absorb the increasing human pressure.

6. Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, we analyzed the two interlinked issues of geography and demography that are part of Ethiopia's main arguments to support its demand for ownership of and access to the sea. We explored the role of physical geography and key periods in history defining the evolution of socio-economic isolation between and within countries in the Horn of Africa. Countries in the Horn of Africa are not only socio-politically isolated from each other but also marked isolation exists within the countries, particularly in Ethiopia.

The physico-climatic isolation is exacerbated by three interrelated historical developments: (a) the social distance triggered by the expansion of Islam to the lowlands and coastal areas of the region, forcing the central Abyssinian empire south and westwards, (b) the occupation of coastal areas by Europeans in the 19th Century, and (c) misguided development policies followed during the post-colonial period, including recent interaction with globalization.

Ethiopian elites' geographic and demographic arguments oversimplify the social and economic problems at hand. Without institutional restructuring, the significant spatial difference will not be overcome, even with free access to sea. The current Ethiopian expansionist rhetoric, sometimes advocating forceful ownership of a sea outlet, will compound mistrust among states and reinforce the existing isolation.

Regarding the ethnic argument centered on the ethnic Afar, we have shown that in the struggle for Eritrea's self-determination and independence, commencing in the 1940s, and throughout the armed struggle phase, its Afar population played a critical role. The argument by Ethiopians that the majority of ethnic Afar reside in Ethiopia, and therefore, the Afar lands straddling Eritrea and Djibouti should belong to Ethiopia, violates the territorial integrity of the independent states of Eritrea and Djibouti and goes contrary to the African Union (AU) policy and international norms.

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CHAPTER 3

INTERNATIONAL LAW ON ACCESS TO THE SEA, ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA

Gebre H. Tesfagiorgis, Paulos Tesfagiorgis and Teame Tewelde-Berhan

Introduction

Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, in addressing his legislative body and the nation, asserted the Red Sea as "the natural border of Ethiopia," and described ownership of access to the sea as "an existential issue." He based his assertion on historical, cultural, geographic and demographic factors.[23]

This chapter aims to address the issue of access to the sea from the perspective of international law. Specifically, three international laws, pertinent to the issue in varying degrees, are addressed in this chapter: (1) The African *utis possidetis,*

[23] Delivered on October 13, 2024, in Amharic titled, *keTebta weha eske baHr weha*, which loosely translates into, "from a drop of water to sea water."

that established the inviolability of colonially established boundaries, (2) Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter that prohibits "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state," and (3) the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Law of the Sea, for short), now considered the customary international law governing issues related to the sea.

1.0 Territorial Definition of Eritrea

Before delving into the legal issues outlined above, it is essential to establish the territorial definition of Eritrea. Eritrea has been an internationally recognized sovereign State for over thirty years. Its internationally recognized territory has been defined by the colonial treaties (between colonial Italy and Ethiopia, France (Djibouti) and Britain (Sudan)). The borders with Ethiopia were established in 1900, 1902 and 1908 including the Red Sea coast and its ports. It is the exact definition that the U.N. took up for disposal, as one of three former Italian colonies, following Italy's defeat in World War II. When Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia, based on the UN Resolution 390 (V), the Constitution of Eritrea, drafted at the time, and ratified by the then Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, in its Article 2, defines Eritrea as, "The territory of Eritrea, including the islands, is that of the former Italian colony of Eritrea." The costly war of independence and political struggles for self-determination conducted for over five decades were for the same Eritrea. When the internationally observed referendum of 1993 was conducted, resulting in formal independence supported by a vote of 99.8%, it was with the exact territorial definition in mind. When subsequently, recognition was extended to Eritrea as an independent, sovereign state by the international community (including Ethiopia itself), it was for the exact territorial definition. Finally, when the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC) took up the border case between Eritrea and Ethiopia, following the border war between the two countries, it used the colonially defined territory of Eritrea as the basis for adjudicating the border conflict in 2001. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed himself

agreed with and accepted the Commission's decision in 2018 when he initiated the *rapprochement* with Eritrea.

2.0. Violations of International Law

The territorial definition of Eritrea described in the preceding section is consistent with what has come to be known as the African *uti possidetis*. It refers to the principle adopted in 1964 (Eritrea's war of independence started in 1961), by the then Organization of African Unity (OAU) which declared sovereignty and inviolability of colonially inherited boundaries regardless of pre-colonial territorial configurations. The assembly of heads of State and Government of OAU in its ordinary session in Cairo, on July 17-26, 1964, declared that all member states pledge "to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence."[24] The principle of African *uti possidetis* has acquired the status of international law.

So, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed openly claims Ethiopia's right to the Red Sea in addressing his legislative body and the nation, based on cultural, historical, geographic and demographic factors, he is breaching the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea, and thus, violating international law by going contrary to the principle of the African *uti possidetis*.

In his statement, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed quotes historical figures who claimed the Red Sea as the natural border of Ethiopia and described the current lack of access an "existential threat" to the country. He added that if acquiring access through peaceful means is not possible, resorting to force will be necessary. Such a veiled threat to a neighboring sovereign state, thrown around in a cavalier and irresponsible manner by a head of state, violates the United Nations Charter. Article 4 of the UN Charter prohibits "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state." Following the Prime Minister's address, and subsequent posturing through a military parade, several Ethiopian scholars and media outlets continued to echo his false narrative about ownership of access to the Red Sea.

[24] *See*, 1964 OAU Cairo Declaration, Article 2, Resolution 16(1).

This false narrative has created a dangerous atmosphere threatening the peace and security of not only Eritrea and Ethiopia but the whole region of the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopian elites often refer to the UN federal Resolution 390 which mentions "Ethiopia's legitimate need for adequate access to the sea," as one of the important factors the world organization considered. They assert this fact gives Ethiopia a legal right of ownership of Eritrea itself or a coastal area thereof.[25] They also fault the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), especially the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), for "granting" Eritrea its independence without demanding at least Assab.[26]

The problem with the first claim is that it confuses "ownership" with "right of access." Yes, the UN recognized Ethiopia's right of access to the sea. As detailed below, international law also provides that right. None of the coastal states in the region, including Eritrea, denies Ethiopia's right of access to the sea, but not the right to own any part of their territories. Regarding the second assertion, EPRDF did not grant Eritrea its independence. Eritreans earned their country's independence through their sweat and blood over a long period of a costly armed struggle. EPRDF was presented with a de facto independence and the best it could do at the time was agree with the newly independent country to have access to the Red Sea through the Eritrean ports, mainly of Assab.

It must be emphasized that Ethiopia's claim of ownership of any part of Eritrea, including its Red Sea coast and ports, is an affront to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea. It is also tantamount to declaration of war, as Ethiopia has no right, whatsoever, to any Eritrean territory. Claims based on historical, cultural, geographic and demographic factors, in the manner and timing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed did, violate international law as represented in the African *uti possidetis*, and Article 4 of the UN Charter. The right Ethiopia

[25] *See*, for example, W. Giorgis, Dawit, "Eritrea and Ethiopia-Part Four in BORKENA, Ethiopian News and Informed Opinion, January 31, 2025. *Also*, Hailemariam, Yacob, book in Amharic, *Assab yemn nat,* Addis Ababa, 2010.

[26] The EPRDF was the coalition party dominated by the TPLF that ascended to power when Eritrea became formally independent *de facto* in 1991 and *de jure* in 1993.

legitimately has, and is entitled to claim, as detailed below, is the right of access to the sea and freedom of transit. Landlocked Ethiopia's right of access to the sea is recognized by all its neighboring transit states, including Eritrea.

3.0. Right of Access to the Sea and Freedom of Transition

Globally, there are 44 landlocked states, 16 of them, including Ethiopia, located in Africa.[27] The right of access to the sea and freedom of transition is a legitimate issue for landlocked countries. A brief history of the concept and how it developed into an internationally recognized principle and right will be helpful.

3.1. History of Right of Access to the Sea

The history of the issue of access to the sea is marked by, on the one hand, landlocked states desiring and pushing for unrestricted right of free access, and on the other, transit states pushing back, claiming the supremacy of territorial sovereignty. Historically, several conventions were held to reconcile the two competing principles. The following are the significant ones.

In 1804, The Convention of Vienna adopted the principle of the freedom of navigation on the Rhine, an important international river in Europe. That convention laid the foundation for the Vienna Congress of 1814 that established the freedom of navigation without discrimination in international rivers and their tributaries.[28]

The Barcelona Convention of April 20, 1921, established the principle of freedom of transit by requiring "all contracting states to facilitate freedom of transit by rail or international navigable waterway." However, it added,

[27] The landlocked countries in Africa are Botswana, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Eswatini (Lesotho), Malawi, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, South Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. *See* Thought Co., part of Dotdash Publishing family, June 22, 2019.

[28] *See* Statute on Freedom of Transit, adopted by the Convention of Vienna, April 20, 1921, 7 L.N.T.S. 11

"provided the security and vital interests of the transit country are not adversely affected."[29]

The New York Convention of 1965 (which came into force in 1967) adopted a resolution "advocating the necessity of recognizing the right of free transit to the sea" for landlocked states. However, it added that such a right is "permitted under mutually acceptable means."[30] The New York Convention is significant on two counts: one, it was the first international agreement that dealt exclusively with the specific issue of transit trade; and two, and more importantly, it recognized the access issue as "right," as opposed to "need," described in previous conventions. Its provisions attempted to establish a balance between the principles of freedom of transport and that of sovereignty.

A series of conventions and discussions held by the United Nations (U.N.) and its specialized agencies in the 1970s and early 1980s, led to the emergence of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, now considered the international law governing the right of a landlocked state's access to the sea and free transition.

3.2. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (often called "The Law of the Sea," for short), an international agreement adopted in 1982, which came into force in 1994, establishes a legal framework for maritime activities. Part X of the convention, covering Articles 124-132, deals with the rights of access of landlocked states.

Article 124 (1) of the Law of the Sea defines two important terms that appear throughout its text: "Landlocked State" means a state which has no seacoast,

[29] *See* The Statute of Barcelona on Freedom of Transit, April 20, 1921, reported in the League of Nations, Treaty Series, Vol. VII, at 37.
[30] *See* Convention on Transit Trade of Landlocked States, held in New York, July 8, 1965, 597 U.N.T.S. 42.

and "Transit State" means a state situated between a landlocked State and the sea, through whose territory traffic in transit passes.

Article 125 of the Law is the one that addresses specifically the right of access to and from the sea and freedom of transit. It is instructive to look at its text verbatim:

> *Article 125 (1). Landlocked states shall have the right of access to and from the sea for the purpose of exercising the rights provided in this Convention including those relating to the freedom of the high seas and the common heritage of mankind. To this end, landlocked States shall enjoy freedom of transit through the territory of transit States by all means of transport.*
>
> *Article 125 (2). The terms and modalities for exercising the freedom of transit shall be agreed between the landlocked States and transit States concerned through bilateral, subregional or regional agreements.*
>
> *Article 125 (3). Transit States, in the exercise of their full sovereignty over their territory, shall have the right to take all measures necessary to ensure that the rights and facilities provided for in this Part for the landlocked States shall in no way infringe their legitimate interests.*

Landlocked states, including Ethiopia, typically invoke just 125 (1), ignoring 125 (2) and 125 (3), to assert their right of access to the sea. However, invoking Paragraph 1 alone is incomplete. Paragraph 2 of the Article makes it clear that the landlocked state's right is contingent on an agreement between the landlocked and transit states. Further, Paragraph 3 of the Article reiterates that the transit state exercises its full sovereignty over its territory in executing the landlocked state's rights. Thus, a landlocked state's right of access to the sea and freedom of transit, as articulated in Article 125, is not absolute. In other words, when viewed in its totality, Article 125 of the U.N. Law of the Sea balances the right of the landlocked state with the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the transit state.

3.3. Landlocked State Ethiopia and Transit State Eritrea

Given the above-described UN Law of the Sea provisions, Ethiopia, as one of the sixteen African states that do not have access to the sea, can invoke its right of access to the Red Sea through the transit State of Eritrea (as well as Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya and Sudan). Moreover, Eritrea should recognize that right, as should the other transit states in the Horn region of Africa. This should have been the correct and responsible approach for the Ethiopian Prime Minister instead of the belligerent territorial ownership argument described above.

As was emphasized above, that right of access can only be exercised through a bilateral agreement between the two States, Eritrea and Ethiopia, covering such areas as port facilities and warehousing, customs free zones and procedures, transportation, jurisdiction, etc. There is, in fact, a precedent. The Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1928 (also known as The Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration) where Italy (then colonizer of the transit Eritrea) and landlocked Ethiopia concluded an agreement addressing Ethiopia's access to the sea. Italy granted to Ethiopia a free zone in the Port of Assab and allowed it to construct warehouses in that zone. Further, the agreement provided for both parties to cooperate in the construction of a road linking Assab to the City of Dessie in Ethiopia.[31] Post-independence, Eritrea had also granted Ethiopia access to the Red Sea through the ports of Assab and Massawa until Ethiopia decided to boycott the ports when the border war between the two countries erupted in 1998, reasoning the boycott will hurt Eritrea more than Ethiopia.

[31] *See* Report of the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa, Transition Problems of Eastern African Landlocked States, at 14, UN Doc. E/CN 14/INR/44 (1963).

4.0 Examples of Agreements between Landlocked and Transit States

Following are examples of other agreements signed between landlocked and transit states from which lessons can be drawn.[32]

A Protocol was signed between landlocked Rwanda and Kenya on February 26, 1992, allowing Rwanda to construct warehousing facilities at Kenya's port of Mombasa. More generally, the states of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda belong to the East African Community (EAC), a regional economic integration bloc. The Community facilitates access to the sea, among other things, for the landlocked States of Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda through the territories of the transit States of Kenya and Tanzania.[33]

A Treaty of Commerce exists between Nepal and India, signed on July 31, 1950. The State of India recognizes Nepal's "full and unrestricted right of transit of all goods and manufactures through the territory of India. Further, goods and merchandise originating from Nepal, in transition through India, are exempt from excise and import duties."[34]

Mali and Senegal signed an agreement on June 8, 1963, which created a free zone for landlocked Mali at the two ports of the transit State of Senegal, Dakar and Kaolack.[35]

Bolivia and Chile signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship on October 20, 1904, that granted Bolivia a complete right of transit of trade on Chile's territory and authorized Bolivia to establish customs offices in Chile's ports.[36]

The International Court of Justice case between Bolivia and Chile provides a good lesson on what can happen when a bilateral agreement between a

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[32] For a more detailed examples, see Tesfagiorgis, Gebre H, "Access to the Sea in the Context of Eritrea and Ethiopia," in ERITREAN STUDIES JOURNAL, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 79-92.
[33] Nkusi, Fred, "Being Landlocked Country," Opinion in The New Times, Rwanda's daily, January 14, 2019.
[34] Articles 1 and 2 of the Treaty of Commerce between India and Nepal of 31 July 1950.
[35] Upreti, Kishor, *supra* note 13, at 455.
[36] Treaty of Commerce, Aug. 6, 1912, Bol.-Chile, art 7, 4 B.O.T.V. 463 (Bolivia), cited in Upreti, Kishor, *supra note 13, at 456*.

landlocked state and a transit state does not work, or when the landlocked state becomes overzealous. Bolivia was not satisfied with the existing agreement and petitioned the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on April 24, 2013, asking the Court to obligate Chile to negotiate to reach an agreement that grants Bolivia "a fully sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean." On October 1, 2018, the Court issued its verdict and concluded that Chile has no obligation to negotiate Bolivia's sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean. However, the Court added that its finding does not "preclude the parties from continuing their dialogue and exchanges, in a spirit of good neighbourliness, to address the issues relating to the landlocked situation of Bolivia, the situation to which both had recognized to be a matter of mutual interest."[37]

5.0. Summary and Conclusion

To summarize, any claim of ownership of the Red Sea coast portion of Eritrea or ownership of the Port of Assab, in the manner articulated by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, or in any other threatening way, is a direct affront to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea. It is a violation of two important and very relevant international laws: the 1964 African *uti possidetis*, that declared "sovereignty and inviolability of colonially inherited boundaries …," and Article 4 of the UN Charter which prohibits "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

Ethiopian claims on Eritrea (or any territorial pieces thereof), based on historical, geographic, demographic factors or cultural similarities, were already litigated, and settled when Eritrea emerged as an independent sovereign state in 1993 with internationally recognized boundaries. What remains to be amicably resolved is landlocked Ethiopia's right of access to the sea, which transit Eritrea, as well as the other transit states in the Horn of Africa, recognize. According to international law, this right should be implemented through a bilateral agreement between the landlocked State of Ethiopia and

[37] International Court of Justice (ICJ), Obligation to Negotiate Access to the Pacific Ocean (Bolivia v. Chile), Https://www.icj.org/en/case/153.

the transit State of Eritrea in the spirit of good neighborliness, cooperation and peace.

Eritrea and Ethiopia should formally negotiate for a bilateral agreement that provides Ethiopia access to the sea and freedom of transit of its goods in a way that does not infringe on Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The precedent of the 1928 agreement between colonial Italy and Ethiopia was already mentioned. A formal and mutually beneficial agreement between the two states can be reached if approached in good faith. Eritrea is not the only transit State for Ethiopia's trade and commerce. Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan and Kenya, also are transit States for landlocked Ethiopia. This fact places Ethiopia in a better bargaining position than otherwise. Further, the establishment of a regional economic bloc should be explored covering at least Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia, which can facilitate Ethiopia's access to sea and transit of goods, like how the East African Community (EAC) facilitates for the landlocked States of Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda.

The potential economic and social benefits the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia can gain from a mutually beneficial agreement, negotiated in good faith, is limitless. That aspect is taken up in the next chapter (Chapter 4).

CHAPTER 4

ECONOMIC AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF ETHIOPIA'S QUEST FOR ACCESS TO THE SEA

Kidane Mengisteab, Sengal Woldetensae, Mengsteab Tesfayohannes

Introduction

Approximately one-fifth of the world's nations—44 countries with a combined population exceeding 500 million—are landlocked. The United Nations classifies 32 of them as Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), encompassing all landlocked nations in Africa, Asia, and South America. In the Greater Horn of Africa, three of the eight countries — Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda—are landlocked.

One key challenge LLDCs face is the high cost of transit due to their physical distance from seaports. For instance, Kazakhstan is the most geographically remote landlocked nation, located 3,750 kilometers from the nearest coastline.

Similarly, countries like Afghanistan, Chad, Niger, Zambia, and Zimbabwe face substantial distances exceeding 2,000 kilometers from the sea.

This geographic remoteness results in longer transit times for goods and significantly higher transportation costs, which can retard economic growth and reduce the appeal of LLDCs to foreign investors. Despite these challenges, many landlocked countries—both in developed and developing regions—have demonstrated that being landlocked does not predetermine their economic outcomes. Through effective strategies, innovative approaches, and well-executed action plans, they have overcome conventional barriers and disproven the notion that landlocked status inherently hinders development.

There is some evidence that supports this narrative of success. Switzerland, Kazakhstan, and Botswana, for example, have thriving economies. Additionally, five LLDCs—Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—attracted over 70% of the total of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to this group in 2021. Such achievements highlight that with strategic planning and execution, landlocked countries can achieve sustainable socio-economic development by overcoming geographic constraints.

The principal objectives of this chapter are: (a) to analyze Ethiopia's demand for control of a coastland and its economic and security implications to the littoral neighbors, and (b) to explore pathways for peaceful resolution of the issue of access to the sea focussing on accommodating the crucial economic and security interests of all stakeholders through bilateral and multilateral cooperation arrangements.

1.0. Is Ethiopia's Landlocked Status Detrimental to Its Economy?

Among the landlocked nations in the Horn of Africa, South Sudan faces the longest distance to seaports, followed by Uganda. From Juba, South Sudan's capital, the distance to Sudan's Port Sudan is 2,425 kilometers, while the distance to Kenya's Lamu port is 1,303 kilometers. Uganda has slightly shorter distances: Its capital, Kampala is 968 kilometers from Lamu and 1,139

kilometers from Mombasa. Ethiopia, however, benefits from relatively closer proximity to seaports. Eritrea's Assab is only 74 kilometers from Ethiopia's border and 880 kilometers from Addis Ababa. Djibouti is 139 kilometers from Ethiopia's border and 867 kilometers from Addis Ababa. Despite these distances, landlocked countries in the Horn of Africa are not presently poorer than their coastal neighbors, as measured by GDP per capita (see, Table 1). The coastal countries of Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan, along with landlocked South Sudan are the poorer countries of the region.

Table 1: GDP and GDP Per Capita of IGAD Countries (2024 and 2023)

Country	GDP in Current US$ in Millions 2024	GDP per capita (PPP) 2023
Djibouti	4,099	7,103
Eritrea	2,065	1,742
Ethiopia	163,698	3,058
Kenya	108038.6	6,307
Somalia	10,968.5	1,556
South Sudan	11,997.8	1,155
Sudan	109,265.5	2,740
Uganda	48,768.9	3,097

Sources: World Bank Group, GDP Dataset 2024
https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD

World Bank Group: GDP Per Capita Dataset; World Bank Group: GDP Dataset, 2023. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD

In the Horn of Africa, economic performance is influenced less by geographic constraints than by factors such as governance, ethnic conflicts and rivalries, and state fragility, which affect all the countries of the region, albeit with different magnitudes. The poorest countries in the region, Somalia, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Sudan, have endured decades of conflict and governance failures. Ethiopia is not among the region's poorest nations, although, like its neighbors, it faces problems of poor governance, state fragility, chronic ethnic rivalries, and destructive civil wars. Ethiopia, along with Somalia, South Sudan,

and Sudan, ranks among the top 12 most fragile countries in the world (Fund for Peace, 2024 Report).[38]

While Table 1 shows that there is no relationship between access to the sea and GDP per capita among the countries of the region, Table 2 shows the performance of the countries of the region on Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), in terms of political and economic transformation, and governance index, has positive relationship with performance as measured by GDP per capita. Four countries, namely Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and especially Uganda, show relatively higher performance on the indices. These same countries also have higher GDP per capita relative to the other countries of the region.

[38] The other members of the top 12 most fragile countries in the world are Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, and Haiti. Five of the most fragile countries are landlocked while seven are coastal countries indicating that state fragility does not correlate with lack of access to the sea.

Table 2: Bertelsmann Transformation Index of IGAD Countries (Horn of Africa), Report 2024

Country	Political Transformation	Economic Transformation	Governance Index	Overall Score (Rank)	Rank (Out of 137)
Djibouti	3.62 (Hardline Autocracy)	4.25 (Very Limited)	5.17 (Moderate)	3.93	106
Eritrea	2.02 (Hardline Autocracy)	1.21 (Rudimentary)	1.04 (Failed)	1.62	135
Ethiopia	3.72 (Hardline Autocracy)	3.82 (Very Limited)	4.15 (Weak)	3.77	110
Kenya	5.85 (Highly Defective Democracy)	5.82 (Limited)	4.94 (Moderate)	5.84	51
Somalia	1.68 (Hardline Autocracy)	1.75 (Rudimentary)	2.58 (Failed)	1.72	134
South Sudan	2.62 (Hardline Autocracy)	1.93 (Rudimentary)	2.09 (Failed)	2.27	128
Sudan	2.05 (Hardline Autocracy)	1.79 (Rudimentary)	1.30 (Failed)	1.92	132
Uganda	4.53 (Moderate Autocracy)	5.09 (Limited)	4.24 (Weak)	4.80	80

Source: Compiled from Bertelsmann Transformation Index.

According to Table 1 and 2, neither GDP per capita nor performance on the BTI indices seem to be impacted by lack of access to the sea in the case of the countries in the Horn of Africa. Under such conditions, it is hardly convincing that Ethiopian economy's primary problem is lack of access to the sea and the resulting allegedly high port service fees. Ethiopia's distance is modest compared to the region's other landlocked countries. Its transit costs are also not likely to change even if it succeeds to control a seaport. What might change if the country obtains a port that it controls is the rate of port-service fees that it currently pays. However, the savings from port-service payments is also likely to be offset by lease payments for the port.

2.0. Ethiopia's Right of Access to the Sea

As discussed in Chapter 3, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, adopted by the General Assembly in 1986, grants landlocked countries the right of access to and from the sea. However, this convention does not extend the right to control the coastal territories of transit countries, which amounts to a violation of territorial integrity, which is sacred to any sovereign nation.[39] Such unlawful actions would cause continuous conflicts and significant disruptions to diplomatic and economic relations. Other costs, such as service fees, remain subject to bilateral agreements between coastal and landlocked states. A transit country may also lease or sell a coastland to any country, provided mutual agreement exists. Such a voluntary transaction, however, is normally conducted through bilateral negotiations rather than through a unilateral declaration in parliament that threatens the transit countries.

Ethiopia, which became landlocked after Eritrea's independence in 1993, was granted free access to Eritrea's ports of Massawa and Assab, as well as to Djibouti and other regional ports. However, complications arose in 1998 when an unexpected border war broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia when the latter decided to boycott Eritrean ports. Ethiopian leaders at the time believed that Eritrea would suffer more from losing of Ethiopian trade than Ethiopia from not accessing Eritrean ports.[40] Ethiopia could still rely on Djibouti's ports and those of other coastal nations in the region. In contrast, Eritrea's ports would see much reduced activity without Ethiopian trade, and Assab has since remained significantly underutilized. Following the boycott, Ethiopia became increasingly dependent on Djibouti's port, which has become the country's primary maritime gateway. Ethiopia also potentially has access to Port Sudan in the Sudan and Berbera in Somaliland/Somalia, the distances of 1,822 kilometers and 922 kilometers from Addis Ababa, respectively, along with

[39] Based on the social media discussions on the issue, the Ethiopian public does not fully understand that the UN Convention Law of the sea grants the country the right of access to use the ports of coastal neighbors and not to control any of their coastland.

[40] At the time, Ethiopia's then Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, reportedly remarked that Eritrea could use Assab "to water its camels," suggesting that without Ethiopian trade, the port would see little activity.

higher transportation costs, however, have made these alternatives less attractive. As Ethiopia's reliance on Djibouti deepened, concerns occasionally arose over allegedly high service costs Ethiopia paid to Djibouti. In response, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, declared that Ethiopia cannot sustain the payment of the service fees, and he has sought to secure access to a seacoast under Ethiopian control, signalling the country's ongoing strategic priority to end its landlocked status.

3.0.The Nature of Ethiopia's Demand

In addressing the parliament, Abiy Ahmed declared Ethiopia's lack of access to the sea as an "existential threat." He emphasized that Ethiopia, with a population of over 120 million, must control a coastline to establish a port and a naval base to safeguard it. While advocating for peaceful solutions, his rhetoric hinted at the possibility of force if diplomacy failed. His speech, underscoring Ethiopia's military strength and large population, could be perceived as a veiled threat to smaller coastal neighboring states. The framing of a lack of a seacoast as "an existential threat" also suggests that Ethiopia might consider extreme measures to address the issue.

Ethiopia has consistently enjoyed access to its neighbors' ports, including Djibouti, which has become its primary trade gateway. Despite Prime Minister Abiy's complaints about high service fees, costs hardly justify Ethiopia's obsession with acquiring a port it controls. Ethiopia can foster competition among regional ports to obtain optimal port-service fees. More importantly, obtaining a port that it controls is not likely to change its costs significantly, as already noted.

The claim that Ethiopia is at risk because it is overly dependent on its coastal neighbors is also unconvincing as it conflates dependence with interdependence and complementarity. Ethiopia's trade is, for example, a critical driver for Djibouti's economy, contributing significantly through port service fees and imports, including essential resources like water. Similarly,

Eritrea's ports benefited from Ethiopian trade until the 1998 border war prompted Ethiopia to boycott them. In this context, Ethiopia's relationships with its coastal neighbors are better understood as mutual and complementary rather than one-sided dependence.

A parallel narrative has emerged among Prime Minister Abiy's supporters, asserting that Eritrea's port of Assab should belong to Ethiopia, arguing that Ethiopia has a legal entitlement. For example, in a 2018 paper, Yacob Hailemariam criticized the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), established by the Algiers' Agreement of 2000, for not addressing Ethiopia's "right of access" to the sea through Assab, even though Ethiopia's government at the time recognized Eritrean sovereignty over the port based on colonial boundaries and in line with the 1964 principle of the Organization of African Unity (now African Union) that colonial boundaries are sacrosanct.[41] The EEBC was also charged with demarcating the boundary on the basis of the colonial boundaries, which the two countries agreed on. The narrative of "Assab belongs to us" is currently booming in Ethiopia's social media and Eritrean social media is reacting in equal measure, heating up the conflict temperature.

3.1. Economic and Security Implications

The Prime Minister's rhetoric of an "existential threat" risks undermining regional stability. This posture has already fuelled an arms race and spurred the formation of defensive alliances among neighboring countries, further straining relations in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia's internal civil wars, coupled with Eritrea's protracted and arduous jr's ambition to position Ethiopia as a great power with a strong navy, as implied in his parliamentary speech referencing

[41] See Dr. Yacob Hailemariam's interview on Assab || ከዶ/ር ያዕቆብ ኃይለማሪያም ጋር የተደረገ ቃለ ምልልስ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHpF1pVALeg. Yacob's arguments are essentially based on nationalist fervor rather than sound legal rational and would not merit to be presented in any international court.

Ethiopia's historical maritime strength. Making Ethiopia a great power will, however, require addressing the country's nation-building crisis first.

When Prime Minister Abiy signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) with Somaliland (an autonomous region within Somalia) for the latter to give Ethiopia a coastal strip in exchange for its recognition of Somaliland's independence, he appeared to have achieved his goal. However, with Somalia's strong objections, and improved relations with Somalia with Turkey's mediation, the MOU has stalled. Based on the emerging rhetoric in Ethiopia, Abiy's target appears to have shifted to the Eritrean port of Assab.

Regardless of his objectives or target, the prime minister's claim that Ethiopia faces existential threat due to its lack of access to the sea is highly exaggerated. Ethiopia has never been denied access to regional ports, and its current challenges—governance failures, ethnic fragmentation, and chronic conflicts—pose far greater threats to its stability. Addressing such critical problems is far more important in enhancing its economy and security than building a navy. Good neighborly relations with coastal countries would be more effective in fostering regional stability and addressing Ethiopia's short- and long-term trade and security concerns. The notion of an existential threat is, thus, a populist narrative that may lead the region to perpetual conflicts it can hardly afford. A focus on fostering interdependence, economic integration, and regional cooperation, rather than aggressive unilateral approaches, would better serve Ethiopia's interests and contribute to the stability of the Horn of Africa.

4.1. Implications of Ethiopia's Control of Coastland on Coastal Countries

Not surprisingly, the coastal nations of Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia reacted negatively to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's parliamentary speech demanding control of a coastline. Somaliland, however, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Ethiopia to lease a 20-kilometer coastline in

exchange for Ethiopian recognition of Somaliland's independence. As already noted, that MoU has now stalled, and its fate remains unclear.

If Ethiopia secures sea access, the economic and security dynamics of the region will likely shift, at least in the short and intermediate terms. **Djibouti** could suffer significant revenue losses if Ethiopia redirects its trade through a port that is under its control. For instance, if Ethiopia's new port supplants Djibouti's as a primary trade hub, Djibouti's revenue from port fees would decline. In the long run, with economic development, the region might need more ports than it currently does, and Djibouti's port earnings might stabilize. Djibouti may be able to lease a coastal strip to Ethiopia, however, the revenue it gets from lease fee and other charges compensate the loss of revenue from the port services it currently collects from Ethiopia. Under such conditions, however, Ethiopia's gains from leasing a port might be undermined.

Eritrea would bear no economic losses from Ethiopia acquiring a port elsewhere, as Eritrean ports are not currently in use by Ethiopia. Given their decades long hostilities, Eritrea will unlikely allow Ethiopia to establish a naval base on its territory, as that would pose significant security risks. Ethiopia's rhetoric about claiming Assab further strains relations, complicating potential reconciliation. Eritrea might obtain some economic benefits by leasing a coastal strip to Ethiopia to build a port. The benefits would be from activities, such as fees levied for road charges, lodging and meals for drivers and transit agents, and from the lease of the coastal strip. An agreement is, however, unlikely under the prevailing hostile environment.

Somaliland could offer a workable solution for Ethiopia's sea outlet problem if the Republic of Somalia's sovereignty concerns are resolved. However, as noted above, this would increase competition for Djibouti, which could lose significant trade revenue. Additionally, Somaliland's ports may be too distant to effectively serve Ethiopia's northern regions, which might still rely on ports in Djibouti, or Eritrea if relations improve.

For Ethiopia, acquiring sea access may not yield immediate economic benefits. Establishing a naval base, building a port, and paying various charges including lease fees, would be as costly as the current port service fees, especially given Ethiopia's growing debt burden. A naval base, particularly, is a non-revenue-generating asset. In the long run, a sea access could become strategically valuable, but the current ambiguous approach jeopardizes peaceful negotiations.

Ethiopia's pursuit of sea access, while strategically important, is fraught with economic, political, and security risks for both Ethiopia and the littoral countries in the region. Achieving this objective peacefully and sustainably will require transparency, collaboration, and careful negotiation. Prioritizing regional cooperation over unilateral action offers a far better path toward fostering sustainable peace and economic integration, ultimately ensuring mutual benefits for all parties involved.

5.0. Accommodating the Interests of All Parties

As intimated already, Ethiopia's demand for access to a coastline has predominantly met resistance from its neighboring coastal countries, except for Somaliland—a non-sovereign territory, which is unable to fulfil this demand legally.[42] Initial reaction from the coastal countries of Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti were negative due to security concerns and economic implications. Given their longstanding conflicts with Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia are particularly concerned about the potential threat posed by an Ethiopian naval base on their territories. Djibouti, by contrast is more concerned about the implications to its economy.

[42] With Turkish mediation Somalia's friction with Ethiopia over Somaliland's Memorandum of Understanding with Ethiopia seems to have eased, although the agreement has engendered popular protests in Somalia. It is not yet clear what the details of the agreement between Ethiopia and Somalia entails and if Somalia is willing to grant Ethiopia a coastline for a naval base.

Given these challenges, the countries of the region would need to explore alternative approaches that satisfy the economic wellbeing and other interests of all parties while building trust and regional peace. Longer-term approaches should be explored including bilateral, regional or combined strategies.

5.1.Bilateral Approaches

The bilateral relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, for example, will first require a formal agreement on how to meet Ethiopia's right of access to the Red Sea without geopardizing Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The bilateral relations may also include, restoring aspects of the pre-border war economic cooperation and integration between the two countries. That short-lived cooperation agreement enabled Ethiopia to access the ports of Assab and Massawa under mutually beneficial terms, diversifying its port options and securing competitive port service fees. Doing so will also enable the two countries to conduct their trade, including Ethiopia's port-related services, with payments in local currencies reducing the need for hard currency. Eritrea can also pay for its imports from Ethiopia, including possibly electricity, in *Birr* or *Nakfa,* again reducing the need for scarce hard currency. Finally, it will provide Ethiopia the opportunity to invest in the development of ports, such as Assab and Massawa to lower operational costs.

Developing such bilateral economic ties among the region's countries is likely to create conditions for developing close political and security relations. Such initiatives, along with avoiding unilateral declarations on matters that affect their neighbors, would also help the countries of the region to build trust, strengthen political and economic ties, and facilitate effective regional integration.

5.2.Regional Integration Approaches (Institutional approach)

Rebuilding a functional and inclusive regional integration framework is equally critical. The Intergovernmental Authority for Development's (IGAD) current ineffectiveness, driven by frequent disputes among member states, has stalled progress. A reformed IGAD that relies on institutions and includes civil society stakeholders could:

(1) *Enhance Economic Development:* Effective integration fosters economic growth by enhancing collaboration in several areas, including sharing of resources throughout the region through free trade and free flow of investments. Given the small size of most of the countries of the region, effective integration would enable them to benefit from economies of scale and specialization. Regional integration can also help member countries to develop complementarity among their economies. Further, effective integration is likely to enhance the region's bargaining power against non-regional trading partners. Table 3 ranks the countries of the Greater Horn based on integration level of their trade, infrastructure and macroeconomics. It shows that Uganda, Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia are the more integrated economies of the region. The same four countries are also the ones that have registered relatively better performance on their GDP per capita, depicted earlier in Table 1.

(2) *Establish Collective Security*: A stable, integration would also restrain member states from taking unilateral measures that threaten broad collective interests and security of member countries, and instead, encourage them to engage in advancing collective security and shared interests.

Ethiopia stands to benefit more from bilateral and integrated regional approaches than from a unilateral strategy focused solely on its own interests, which may harm some of its neighbors. A strengthened IGAD that promotes regional integration is, thus, essential for promoting sustainable economic development and long-term peace in the region.

Table 3: IGAD- Regional Integration - Five Dimensions of Regional Integration & Performance of Its Members.
Scores are calculated on a scale of 0 (not at all integrated) to 1 (entirely integrated).

S/N	countries	Trade Integration	Infrastructural Integration	Productive Integration	Free Movement	Macro-economic Integration
1	Uganda	0.74	0.61	0.92	0.77	0.39
2	Kenya	0.57	1.00	0.81	0.65	0.38
3	Djibouti	0.55	0.72	0.21	1.00	0.31
4	Ethiopia	0.48	0.54	0.04	0.06	0.85
5	Somalia	0.30	0.28	0.18	1.00	0.35
6	Sudan	0.20	0.58	0.11	0.30	0.55
7	S. Sudan	0.35	0.04	0.15	0.42	0.31
8	Eritrea	0.32	0.16	0.17	0.12	0.25
	Average	**0.44**	**0.48**	**0.32**	**0.54**	**0.42**

Source: IGAD. https://www.integrate-Africa.org/rankings/regional-economic-communities/igad/

6.0. Conclusion

Our analysis does not show that Ethiopia faces existential threat from being landlocked. While it may benefit from having its own seaport, its absence does not pose an existential threat, as contended by its prime minister. Unlike many landlocked countries, Ethiopia enjoys relatively short distances to its coastal neighbors' ports, which helps to keep transit costs relatively low. Its littoral neighbors have also never denied it access to their ports, as they recognize its right of access to the sea, and since doing so would be against their own interests.

Not having a naval base has also not caused any known security threat to its maritime trade. Presently, Ethiopia faces a greater security threat from internal

forces than external forces. It is also likely that one of its neighbors would lease it a coastal strip for a naval base provided that an Ethiopian navy in its territory does threaten its security and the lease fees are attractive.

Given its internal challenges, Ethiopia's aspirations to become a significant power may be a long-term project. In the short-term, it faces more significant hurdles than lack of control of a seacoast. Its ongoing nation-building crisis chief among the obstacles perpetuating chronic internal conflicts that threaten the country's unity and integrity. Addressing such foundational problems is crucial for Ethiopia to realize its big-power ambitions. Good regional relations can help Ethiopia with its nation-building crisis while poor regional relations can complicate its nation-building efforts.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Gebre Hiwet Tesfagiorgis

Our review of the ancient history, including the Aksumite Kingdom era, of Eritrea and the surrounding areas revealed that the diverse communities inhabiting the area share a proud common heritage. Such a common heritage needs to be channelled towards economic cooperation and peaceful coexistence rather than being used to claim territories of neighboring states.

Continuing to the modern history, we described how colonial Italy established Eritrea as its colony in 1890, following a series of treaties with local Afar sultanates. The Italian colonial rule, lasting over sixty years, unified the diverse ethnic groups (recognized as nine nationalities) in a common struggle against the colonial rule leading to the emergence of Eritrean nationalism. The latter was reinvigorated during the British Military Administration (BMA) following Italy's defeat in 1941 and became full-blown during the federation with and eventual annexation by Ethiopia. An arduous armed struggle led to the

independence of Eritrea, *de facto* in 1991 and *de jure* in 1993, following a referendum. Thus, Eritrea joined the world community as an independent sovereign state on May 28, 1993.

The current internationally defined and recognized boundaries between Eritrea and Ethiopia are colonially established, as is true of most modern African countries. In this case, an outcome of a series of treaties concluded between Italy, the colonizer of Eritrea, and Ethiopia's Emperor Menelik in the early 1990s. The Algiers Agreement in 2000, following a border conflict between the two countries, confirmed the colonially established borders between the two countries, only to be threatened with the resurfacing of Prime Minister Abiy's belligerent quest for owning a Red Sea coastal property.

In addressing the two interlinked issues of geography and demography, that are part of the main arguments Ethiopia uses to support its demand for ownership of and access to the Red Sea, we explored the role of physical geography and key periods in history defining the evolution of socio-economic isolation between and within countries in the Horn of Africa. Countries in the Horn of Africa, especially Ethiopia, are not only socio-politically isolated from each other, but also have marked isolation within.

Ethiopian elites' geographic and demographic arguments oversimplify the social and economic problems at hand. Overcoming the significant spatial difference lies more in institutional restructuring than in acquiring access to the sea. The current Ethiopian expansionist rhetoric, sometimes advocating forceful ownership of a sea outlet, only compounds mistrust among states and reinforces the existing isolation.

Regarding the ethnic argument, centered on the ethnic Afar, we have shown that the Afar are an integral part of the Eritrean state who played a critical role in the anti-colonial as well as the struggle for Eritrea's self-determination and independence, commencing in the 1940s, and throughout the armed struggle phase. The argument by Ethiopians that the majority of ethnic Afar reside in Ethiopia, and therefore, the Afar lands straddling Eritrea and Djibouti should belong to Ethiopia, violates the territorial integrity of the independent states

of Eritrea and Djibouti and goes contrary to the AU policy of inviolability of colonially established boundaries and international norms.

Posing the question, does international law provide Ethiopia the right of access to the sea? We answered in the affirmative. Article 125 (1) of the UN Law of the Sea provides landlocked states like Ethiopia "the right of access to and from the sea …" However, this right is not absolute. Sections (2) and (3) of the same article make it clear that the landlocked state's right is contingent on an agreement with the transit state and requires respecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Eritrea, and the other littoral states in the Horn region of Africa, recognize Ethiopia's right of access to the sea. The problem arises when Ethiopia demands *ownership* of a coastal territory, like the port of Assab. Unfortunately, Ethiopian leaders are obsessed with ownership in their quest for sea access. Asgede Hagos, in a recent essay, aptly titled, "The Ghosts of the Ethiopian Empire Continue to Haunt the Horn," describes Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy's "aggressive impulse against its neighbors," as a continuation of an imperial legacy that "still lingers in the collective consciousness of the Ethiopian state and the elites that sustain it."[43]

It needs to be emphasized that any claim of ownership of the Red Sea coast portion of Eritrea, be it the Port of Assab or otherwise, in the manner articulated by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, or in any other threatening way, is a direct affront to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea. It is a violation of two important and very relevant international laws: the 1964 African *uti possidetis*, that declared "sovereignty and inviolability of colonially inherited boundaries …," and Article 4 of the UN Charter that prohibits "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

[43] Hagos, Asgede, "The Ghosts of the Ethiopian Empire Continue to Haunt the Horn,"2024, accessed on Feb. 10, 2025 from: https://www.academia.edu/127568547/.

The contention that being landlocked is an existential threat to Ethiopia, as claimed by its Prime Minister, is an exaggeration. The respectably high economic growth experienced by the country, under EPRDF in the late 1990s and early 2000s, is a standing testimony to the possibility of economic success while being landlocked. The major problems lie elsewhere. Ethiopia faces more significant hurdles than lack of sea access. Chief among them is its ongoing nation-building crisis, perpetuating chronic internal conflicts threatening the country's unity and integrity. Addressing such foundational problems is a crucial requisite for Ethiopia to realize its developmental goals. Healthy regional relations can be helpful in her nation-building effort while poor regional relations, such as pushing to own a coastal territory, can complicate its nation-building effort.

Ethiopia's coastal neighbors have never denied it access to their ports, as they recognize its right of access to the sea, and since doing so would be against their own interests. Unlike many landlocked countries in Africa, Ethiopia enjoys relatively short distances to its coastal neighbors' ports, which helps keep transit costs relatively low.

Given these challenges, Ethiopia and the other countries in the region need to explore peaceful bilateral and/or multilateral negotiations provide Ethiopia access to the sea, satisfy the interests of all parties, and build trust among them.

For example, a peacefully negotiated bilateral agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, in accordance with the provisions of the Law of the Sea, that grants landlocked Ethiopia access to the sea without geopardizing transit Eritrea's sovereignty, would enable: (1) Ethiopia to have access to the Eritrean ports of Assab and Massawa under mutually benefitting terms, (2) both countries to rebuild economic cooperation, trade in local currencies to minimize the need for hard currency, and even to eventual integration of their economies, (3) Ethiopia to invest in the development of the ports of access and related infrastructural requirements, and (4) Eritrea to reactivate and enhance the

economic activities of its ports and gain economic benefits, while avoiding the constant sea-access related threats from Ethiopia.

Exploring a functional and inclusive regional integration is also important. Despite its current ineffectiveness, due to frequent disputes among its member states, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional organization, can provide the framework for such a regional integration. A functional regional integration would: (1) enhance interstate collaboration and foster economic growth, and (2) prevent unilateral adverse measures of member states. Ethiopia benefits from such a regional integration, as that can provide her with a framework for gaining access to the sea in the most economical and effective way.[44]

Several recommendations are implied in the foregoing discussion with which we would like to conclude this project. Following are the significant ones:

1. *Ethiopians need to reconcile with Eritrea's independence and sovereignty*. Ethiopians should accept and respect Eritrea's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. For the last thirty-some years, Eritrea has been an internationally recognized sovereign state (including by Ethiopia itself), covering its colonially defined territory, which includes the coastal areas of the Red Sea, including the ports of Assab and Massawa.
2. *Coastal States should accept Ethiopia's legal right of access to the sea*. Eritrea and the other coastal states of the Horn of Africa should recognize and accept Ethiopia's legitimate legal right of access to the sea and transit. Ethiopia, on its part, should focus on this right and cease its quest for ownership of any piece of Eritrea's territory, be it Assab or otherwise.
3. *Eritrea and Ethiopia should negotiate for a bilateral agreement*. The two states should formally negotiate in good faith for a bilateral agreement that provides Ethiopia free access to the Red Sea and freedom of transit of its goods in a way that does not infringe on Eritrea's sovereignty and

[44] Like the role the East African Community (EAC) plays in facilitating sea access to the landlocked states of Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda.

territorial integrity, as provided for in Article 125 of the United Nations Law of the Sea. It is hard to speculate the specifics of such an agreement. It depends on the negotiating position and strength of the parties. However, it should be noted that Eritrea should be mindful of the fact that Ethiopia has alternative sea outlets in the other transit states of the area. On the other hand, Ethiopia should be mindful of Eritrea's legitimate sovereignty and security rights and concerns.

4. *Area states should explore possibilities for negotiating multilateral agreements.* Doing so will lead to the establishment of a regional integration which can provide the framework for not only granting landlocked Ethiopia access to the sea, but also for economic cooperation, development, and peace and security of the region. Reforming the currently weakened Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) will be a good place to start.
5. *Ethiopia should cease playing the ethnic Afar card.* Ethiopia should cease insisting that the Eritrean ethnic Afar and their territory should belong to Ethiopia, where she claims the majority Afar reside. Any attempt at dislodging a community or territory from a neighboring coastal state in the name of ethnic unity goes contrary to the AU policy of *uti possidetis* and is thus, a breach of international law.
6. *Ethiopia should also cease any military or belligerent posture.* Ethiopia should cease its military, or other belligerent postures and threats in her quest for gaining access to the sea. Such approaches create a hostile atmosphere that hinders the pursuit of peaceful bilateral and/or multilateral negotiation.

These recommendations call for the abandonment of hostile approaches to settling differences. Instead, they emphasize peaceful negotiations and cooperation among states, bilaterally and/or multilaterally. If implemented, they can promote peace, stability and development not only between Eritrea and Ethiopia, but in the whole Horn of Africa region.

Short Bios of Members of the Task Force

(Listed in the order of their appearance in the report)

Yohannes Haile (Ph.D.) (✉) is a Regulatory Scientist in Health Canada, and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Neuroscience, Carleton University. He assesses biologics-derived therapies including cell and gene therapies. He leads Science and Regulatory Preparedness working group; represents Health Canada in the Canadian Standards Association in a capacity of member of subcommittee on Lymphohematopoietic Cells Standards. Yohannes received several prestigious awards including the *2021 Health Canada Awards of Excellence*. He previously served as Research Scientist at the University of Alberta; sessional lecturer at the King's University in Canada; and Biologist in CDC, Ministry of Health-Eritrea. Yohannes earned his PhD in Neuroscience and his M.Sc. in Molecular Microbiology and Aquatic Ecology.

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Gebre Hiwet Tesfagiorgis earned his **Ph.D.** and **J.D.** degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He held senior administrative positions at the University of Wisconsin and University of Nebraska. He was Director of Institutional Research when he retired from Iowa State University in 2016. He now resides in Madison, Wisconsin, USA. He was a member of the Constitutional Commission of Eritrea. His scholarship interest is in Eritrea and the Horn region of Africa. He has written, and edited, several publications on Eritrea. He was Executive Editor of the Eritrean Studies Review, journal of the Eritrean Studies Association.

Mohamed Kheir Omer (Ph.D.) (@mkheirom), a writer and researcher based in Norway, specializes in African political issues, focusing on the Horn of Africa. He previously served as the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Aquatic Sciences at the University of Asmara, Eritrea. He has authored two notable books,

The Dynamics of An Unfinished African Dream: Eritrea Ancient Times To 1968 and Asmara 1890-1941 Compared to Modern Times: A Virtual Exploration. His analytical writings on the Horn and the Sahel regions have appeared in magazines such as, *Foreign Policy, African Arguments, Democracy in Africa, Pan African Review, and Geeska*. He curates a digital archive dedicated to Eritrea and the Horn region at https://hedgait.blogspot.com/.

Mebrahtu Ateweberhan (Ph.D.) is a marine scientist with expertise in marine ecology, climate change impacts, and coastal ecosystem resilience, particularly in the Western Indian Ocean region. His research focuses on climate change-induced coral bleaching, biodiversity conservation, and the integration of community livelihoods with sustainable resource management. He served as a lecturer at the University of Asmara and held research fellowships at the University of Warwick, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and Blue Ventures Conservation. His early work focused on the seasonal dynamics of marine ecosystems in the Southern Red Sea (Eritrea). Currently, he is an independent environmental researcher. He has contributed to global initiatives like the United Nations Environment Programme.

Paulos T. Baatai (LL.M.) is a lawyer by training with extensive professional experience spanning humanitarian relief work, university lecturing, constitution-building, conflict resolution, and advocacy for peace, democracy and human rights. He led the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) that mobilized international support for drought- and war-victim Eritreans during the independence struggle (1976-1990). In post-independence Eritrea, he played a leading role in the making of the 1997 Eritrean constitution. Paulos served as: Senior Legal Officer of the United Nations Mission for Iraq (UNAMI); an advisor in the South Sudanese Constitution Review process; Senior Advisor to IGAD's Special Envoy for Peace in South Sudan. He quietly contributed for peace initiatives following 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrea war.

Teame Tewolde-Berhan holds two MSc degrees from the London School of Economics (LSE): one in Information Systems Analysis (1983) and another in International Law of the Sea and Marine Policy (1990). Anticipating Eritrea's imminent independence and the challenges of a landlocked Ethiopia, he wrote a

paper, 'Access to and from the Sea and Transit Rights for Landlocked States: The Case of Ethiopia,' for the EPLF in December 1990. Following independence in 1991, Teame served the Government of the State of Eritrea in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as Director of European Affairs until December 1994; and was also a member of the Eritrea-Yemen maritime dispute commission (1995-1996), coordinated development programs and co-founded Eritrean Strategic Research Institute, until he resigned in late 1997.

Kidane Mengisteab (Ph.D.) is Professor of African Studies and Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University. The focus of his research includes security in the Greater Horn of Africa, relevance of 'traditional' institutions to Africa's governance; socioeconomic implications of extractive industries in Africa; and new approaches to democratization in Africa. Among his books are *The Horn of Africa: Hot Spots in Global Politics, Polity Press, 2015 and an edited volume titled The Crisis of Democratization in the Greater Horn of Africa, James Currey, 2020.* He is currently finishing up a book *titled Africa's traditional Institutions of Governance: Promise and Problems.*

Sengal Woldetensae is a scholar and practitioner in economic development with specialization in public policy development and implementation. In post-independence Eritrea, he served as: Director of Industrial Development and Promotion in the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Industry (1991-2003); and Director of Water Resources Management and Use in the Ministry of Land Water and Environment (2004-2012). He contributed to the drafting the first Eritrean macro policy in 1994; and was a member of the delegation that negotiated the economic and trade agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia (1993 and 1995). Sengal has represented the Eritrean government at COMMESA, Alliances for Africa's Industrialization, and the Third UN Conference on Least Developed Countries.

Mengsteab Tesfayohannes, B., (Ph.D.) is an accomplished professor, researcher, and consultant with 30 years of expertise in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Economic Development Strategies, and Operations and Technology Management. He has taught at reputable academic institutions across Europe,

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