

## Ethiopia-U.S. Diplomatic Ties in Post-2018: Diplomatic Rift and Efforts of Reengagement and Normalization

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### Abstract

*In more than a century old diplomatic relations, Ethiopia and U.S have been through a number of historical trajectories whereby their bilateral diplomatic relations were burgeoning at times and dwindling at other times. This article aimed to examine the longstanding Ethio-U.S diplomatic ties vis-à-vis the post-2018 diplomatic rifts and the subsequent reengagement and normalization efforts. To address the main objective, the study employed both primary and secondary data obtained through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Desk Review. The results of the study showed that the core causes reside in the geopolitical interests of the U.S in the Horn of Africa region (HoA), and the emerging changes thereof that may do harm than good to the strategic interests of the U.S and its allies. The non-core causes, whereas, are related to the two years' war (2020-2022) blasted between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, in the country's north and the subsequent humanitarian atrocities. Even though Ethiopia was able to reengage with the U.S following the Pretoria Peace deal, the U.S has outlined two additional preconditions if the reengagement and normalization efforts have to be realized successfully. First, Ethiopia should allow the UN investigation team to access the humanitarian atrocities committed by the warring parties, even beyond Tigray; second, it has to arrange for a mechanism of transitional justice for the war victims, and thereby to bring about accountability on those who are found to be guilty of committing war crimes. Whatever setbacks appear to challenge the reengagement and normalization efforts, the two nations need to resume their strategic partnership based on mutual interest, for the common good of both countries and the HoA region at large.*

### Article History

Received 01 Jan 2025

Accepted 02 April 2025

Published 30 June 2025

### Keywords

Diplomatic ties,  
Ethiopia, diplomatic  
rift, normalization,  
reengagement, U.S.

In more than a century old diplomatic relation, Ethiopia and U.S have been through a number of historical trajectories when their relation was burgeoning at times and dwindling at other times. Ethiopia's history of independence that was consolidated by the victory Adwa (1996) over colonial powers transcend the image of the country to a worldwide recognition. According to Getachew (2009), that circumstance reckoned many European nations to engage with Ethiopia and equally necessitated the U.S to establish a relation with Ethiopia in 1903 that at first was limited to trade relation. Understanding that the U.S has no colonial ambition, emperor Menelik was also interested to establish diplomatic relations with the U.S<sup>1</sup>. The coming of Haile Selassie to the imperial throne in 1930 brought the relation between the two nations into a new chapter, where Ethiopia and the U.S establish strategic alliances. Ethiopia's geostrategic location in the Red Sea, its military capability and history of independence as well as the Emperor's pro-West policy were served to be Ethiopia's strategic leverages to augment the alliance. Ethiopia was able to export peace to the world by sending its peace keeping battalion, which successful accomplish

<sup>1</sup> "The fact that the U.S. was not a colonial power and had no history of antagonism toward Ethiopia, unlike a number of European countries, encouraged Ethiopia's Emperors to establish ties with the United States" (Getachew 2009, P.3).

its mission in the Korean War, siding with the US bloc; Ethiopia was the first country of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to send its military troops. It also leased the Kagnew communication base to the U.S for 25 years signed in 1953, and the center served as intelligence pivot that the U.S used to protect its interest in the Middle East (Henze, 1990; Getachew, 2009). In reciprocity, Haile Sellassie used the relationship to win military and economic aid, secure access to Eritrea, and gain legitimacy for his role in diplomatic affairs (Lyons, 1986). The U.S's role in modernizing Ethiopia's military power and launching its pioneer institutions, such as Ethiopian Airlines and Telecommunication, is renowned among Ethiopians to date. During the 44 years-long reign of Haile Sellassie, on the other hand, the diplomatic relation of the two nations was stalled at times when the U.S refrained to oppose Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and failed to support Ethiopia, when the U.S declared to fund the Aswan Dam in 1957 without the prior knowledge of Haile Sellassie, and when the U.S retreated to provide advanced weapons for Ethiopia, which was threatened by Somalia, in the final years of the emperor's reign<sup>2</sup>. In much of Ethiopia's diplomatic history, however, Haile Sellassie's rule was celebrated to be the finest time in Ethio-US relations.

After the coming of the military regime to the Ethiopia state power in 1974, a different kind of history was recorded with regard to Ethio-US relation. In the then bipolar system of the world, the Derg inclined to the socialist camp and anti-America sentiments were propagated among the Ethiopian populace (Getachew, 2009). In the first three years of Mengistu's reign, the U.S attempted much to maintain the relation it had with Haile Sellassie's Ethiopia, though it finally ended unsuccessful. The relationship was eventually stopped in 1977 when the Derg expelled the Americans from the Kagnew station, despite that US's interest in the Kagnew base was declining during the final years of Emperor Haile Sellassie's reign<sup>3</sup>. The US's resentment was, therefore caused mainly by Derg's foreign policy shift, aligning with the East bloc-led by the USSR and rooting the Socialism state philosophy in the HoA region. Henze (1990) reaffirmed that Mengistu continued his efforts throughout the 1980s to steer the nation towards a path reminiscent of Albanian-Stalinism while maintaining a fundamentally anti-American stance in both his actions and beliefs. As a result, Ethiopia's interests were harmed and the country was forced to receive the hardest hit from proxy wars opened unto it by domestic rebel groups and the irredentist regime of neighboring Somalia, during the Cold War period. Equally, the then bipolar world order actually gave the Derg a breathing space for alternative diplomacy that helped the country to gain a military support from the socialist camp in the fight against Somalia's aggression<sup>4</sup>. The situation eventually ended with the removal the Derg from the state power and the secession of Eritrea, in the immediate aftermath, created landlocked Ethiopia and continued being an outlier

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<sup>2</sup> "The aging emperor Haile Selassie made his last visit to the US in 1973 and explained to the Nixon Administration, mired in the Watergate scandal, that Somalia, armed by the USSR, was planning to attack Ethiopia. He requested improved US weapons but received none" (Getachew 2009, p.61).

<sup>3</sup> The US resorted to the Diego Garcia intelligence center, which was located on the shore of the Indian Ocean (Interview conducted with a scholar at the department of PSIR, Bahir dar University, December 13, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> "The reign of the military regime (1974-1991) was in the era of cold war and bipolar system which determined the foreign policy of nation states across the world. Therefore, the same logic applies on the foreign policy of Ethiopia under the military regime because the milestone of Ethiopian foreign policy during the then time was making Soviet Union and another socialist states the natural ally of the country" (Negera 2018, P.195)

state of the Red Sea region. This implies that shifting one's alliance to U.S's ideological and power adversaries to be a flashpoint in the U.S's foreign policy tradition.

The end of the Cold War coincided with the coming of TPLF/EPRDF to the Ethiopian state power in 1991; as a result, Ethiopia and the U.S were able to mend their long-standing relations (Getachew, 2009). Given the Unipolar world order-led by the U.S, the TPLF regime was successful to exploit Ethiopia's relation with the U.S despite its communism-leaning ideology from genesis. The regime was repressive internally while being a trusted and strong ally of the US in the HoA region. According to Getachew (2009), the U.S was obliged to align with the TPLF/EPRDF since the transitional period for being the only organization that promised to advance and protect the U.S interest in the HoA region. Meanwhile Ethiopia's long-term strategic interest remained secondary as evidenced from the separation of Eritrea with no trouble, and Ethiopia's lack of sea access. The declaration of the "War on Terror" in 2001, the new defining feature of the U.S foreign policy, again helped the TPLF/EPRDF regime attest its being a reliable partner to protect the strategic interests of the U.S in the volatile HoA region. Though Ethiopia's growing cooperation with China and the sense of geopolitical shift toward Beijing were increasingly prominent concerns, this was embedded in broader divergences between United States and Ethiopian decision makers (Verhoeven & Woldemariam, 2022). TPLF's strong state apparatus, its strategy of balancing the West and East and the considerable support of the U.S enabled the regime to control every structural power of the country, and thereby to portray Ethiopia and itself as the region's hegemon. Accordingly, the TPLF regime was able to play a leading role in the fight against terrorism and sending peace keeping troops to different countries that were fragile. In return, the US provided a considerable amount of humanitarian aids, finance and other forms of support to the EPRDF/TPLF regime. Needless to mention, the outbreak of war with Eritrea in 1998 and the human rights situation in Ethiopia following Ethiopia's 2005 national election impede Ethiopia-U.S relations for years (Shinn, 2018). After the demise of PM Meles Zenawi in 2012, the EPRDF/TPLF regime was losing its political stamina to sustain the strength once it had in the national state and the HoA region. In the US's foreign policy tradition, when a regime is declining and failing to ensure the basic rights and security of its citizens, it begins to seek to ally with the potentially incoming power circle. The U.S did this to Haile Sellasie when the revolutionary movement was getting at its peak, and this proactive policy of the US is meant to abort an anti-American sentiment before setting roots among the country's populace and the incoming power circle. Once again the U.S applied the same policy when popular uprisings, against EPRDF/TPLF's tyranny rule, were getting stronger. That circumstance finally ended up with the coming of Abiy Ahmed to the Ethiopian state power in 2018. All in all, TPLF's rein was depicted to be the other fine time with regard to the Ethiopia's diplomatic relations with the U.S, next to Emperor Haile Sellasie's reign.

In 2018, Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed came to power with a promising reformist agenda, which earned him an explicit support from the U.S. In an attempt to quell the popular unrest that has been holding the country at grip, he promised to implement dramatic political and economic reforms, in addition to spearheading a historic peace deal with the longtime foe-neighboring Eritrea. This is an achievement that even got him a global acclaim and recognition through an award of the Nobel Peace Prize for peace. He was celebrated by different actors in and out for

releasing thousands of political prisoners, allowing exiled political dissidents to return home as well as unblocking hundreds of media outlets. In December 2019, the Prime Minister dissolved the EPRDF and created the Prosperity Party to promote inclusion, economic growth, and development. The TPLF was not happy with what was going on and objected the reform heralded by the new PM, so that it retreated to Mekele- its last stronghold, where TPLF began to recalibrating its capacity against the federal government.

Before Abiy Ahmed's reforms took roots, however, two significant developments began to rebuild and/or emerge. First, Egypt's diplomatic pressure began to re-erect against Abiy's administration for it subdue for the GERD negotiation, leveraging Trump administration's pro-Egypt stand. The second is the outbreak of the war with TPLF, in the country's north. Besides, the growing instability in most parts of the country and the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the protracted war have gravely concerned the U.S. Consequently, Ethiopia's regional supremacy is seemingly contested; against all odds, Ethiopia has long been seen as guardian of peace and security in the fragile horn of Africa. Most importantly, in an era of heightened superpower rivalry, when the West's hegemony has been challenged by China and Russia more than ever, the geopolitically significant HoA region and the countries therein may be at a crossroad. Especially, the status of Ethiopia-U.S relation as a long-standing strategic partners and the former's being the anchor state of the HoA region may do harm or otherwise to the national interests of both nations as well as the region. Thus, examining the causes of the diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S is important to harness the reengagement and normalization efforts.

Ethiopia, with a population of more than 120 million people, is among Africa's geopolitically significant and most populous countries. Since 2018, (Verhoeven & Woldemariam, 2022), the changes at the top echelons of the political leadership heralded widely anticipated political and economic reforms, at home and abroad<sup>5</sup>. Yet, amidst the positivity, Ethiopia has faced notable challenges whose consequences impact the reform efforts to stagger, and, to say the least, the stability of the country is being tested, and internal politics has become dubious. Equally, the diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S is affecting both nations, and to the worst, it will impact and exacerbate the volatile situation in the horn of Africa.

Two years after the outbreak of the war in Ethiopia's north, the Pretoria peace deal is signed that helped to better the situation in Ethiopia and bridge the diplomatic rift existed between Ethiopia and the U.S. In view of this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Ethiopia has prepared a reengagement plan with the West/US in January, 2022. In its one year course, however, the present researcher has found no study that is meant to assess the status of the peace deal, the challenges thereof, and the success of Ethiopia's reengagement strategy and its course of action. Besides, no study is found to assess the new developments after the Pretoria agreement as well as the obstacles in Ethio-U.S diplomatic reengagement and normalization efforts. The articles and opinion papers in various blogs are mostly mere opinions that are used to antagonize either party

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<sup>5</sup> "The United States spearheaded the embrace of the new leader. His message of reform impressed many in Washington; like the Ethiopian public, U.S. officials were charmed by Abiy's youth, rhetoric and popular touch." Harry Verhoeven & Michael Woldemariam (2022, P.12)

so that they may not serve to ensure a detente. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the causes of the post-2018 diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S, the developments after the Pretoria peace deal, and Ethiopia's reengagement plan and normalization efforts with the U.S. If one is genuine enough to address the diplomatic rift and restore the century old diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and the U.S, such studies are believed to contribute to the success of Ethiopia's diplomatic reengagement and normalization efforts with the U.S. With this rationale, this study aims to answer the following questions:

What caused the current diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S. despite the latter's support for PM Abiy's reformist agenda during the earlier days of his tenure? What are the new developments in Ethio-U.S detente, following the post-Pretoria Peace deal? What has Ethiopia's reengagement plan brought so far?

To answer these questions, the study claims to take an 'Inside-Out' and a balanced perspective in its analysis. Instead of externalizing all the problems that currently failed Ethiopia to external actors in the international diplomatic arena, particularly in the U.S, it preferred to depart from the internal dynamics of the country at individual, institutional and state levels. The study applied an exploratory design, as its main purpose is to assess new issues related to causes of the diplomatic rift, the developments in Ethio-U.S rapprochement following the Pretoria peace deal as well as the so far course of Ethiopia's reengagement and normalization efforts that were not properly addressed by previous studies. Besides, the study followed a qualitative approach.

The primary data was collected using KIIs and FDGs, as both tools allow to obtain richer qualitative data, from University scholars, senior diplomats and Ambassadors in two months' time (from December 11, 2022-February 20, 2023). Thus, the study is not intended to capture new developments after the specified period. Informants were selected using purposive and snow-ball sampling techniques as the issue under investigation requires practical and theoretical expertise in international relation and diplomacy. KIIs were conducted with a total of 10 people (6 diplomats and 4 University scholars), and three focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with University scholars to further build on some of the contested issues and contradictory perspectives. The interview scheme contained a total of 30 questions that were categorized under six main themes in view of the research questions. Most of the questions were presented to all consultants, and the rest were presented only to the diplomats and Ambassadors as they require practical expertise related to Ethiopia's reengagement plan and its implementation. All interviews were conducted in Amharic to allow for an in-depth elaborations meanwhile the oral data was translated into the target language (English) on the spot. Field notebook was used to keep the recorded data under the name of each consultant, interview time duration and other necessary details for easier and later use, during the analysis phase. The obtained data were organized under each thematic category and consultant's name, and were analyzed accordingly.

The secondary data was obtained from scholarly articles and books while official statements of both governments and media outlets were consulted as primary data sources. The latter two sources were those particularly released after the outbreak of the war in Ethiopia's north. The secondary data was also interpreted along with the primary data using meta-analysis techniques. Lastly, in the body of this paper, data consultants were referred either by generic references or

institutional affiliations to ensure source anonymity. The theoretical framework of this study looks into diplomatic history and bilateral diplomacy, which allowed to analyze issues both at State-level and individual-level.

## Causes of the Diplomatic Rift between Ethiopia and U.S

For the purpose of the present analysis, the causes of the current diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S are identified as core and non-core. The core causes are designated to be strategic by their character and reside in the U.S's geopolitical interest in the HoA region, and the new developments therein that may do harm than good to the strategic interests of the U.S and its allies. The non-core causes, rather are related to the two years' war (2020-2022) blasted between the federal government of Ethiopia and the TPLF, in the country's north and the subsequent humanitarian atrocities. The fiasco in properly using the diplomatic tools that the incumbent government could have utilized better than it did during the crisis time added to the non-core causes. At some point, however, the causes in both categories may come at an interface.

### *Core Causes of the Diplomatic Rift*

One of the core cause of the current diplomatic rift is the unpredictability of the settlement between Abiy and Isaias despite US's initial support for the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement. The coming of the Eritrean statesman to the geopolitical chessboard of the HoA eventually frustrated the U.S for it would hurt its strategic interest in the region as Eritrea is supposed not to concede to the interests of the U.S. For instance, the US was not happy with Abiy's handling of Eritrea/Isaias and the tripartite regional axis created by Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia as was signed on September 5, 2018. The tripartite axis of power concerned the U.S as it would bring about new geopolitical dynamics and additional security challenge to the already fragile HoA. Cognizant to the fact that Herman Cohen and the late Meles Zenawi speeded up the independence of Eritrea in 1991, such an attempt of reunification between Ethiopia and Eritrea might not please the West in general and the U.S in particular. Even though Prime Minister's regional peace diplomacy vis-à-vis the rapprochement with Eritrea earned him a recognition, the US expectation of Abiy as pacifier between Isaias and the west have fallen short of their expectations. This implies that Abiy has nullified US's leverage on Eritrea by dissolving its 20 years-long isolationist policy on Eritrea, and the U.S is not happy with that<sup>6</sup>. With regard to Ethiopia's rapprochement with Eritrea, there might be differences in the views of the Ethiopian government and the US, but this is an African issue that should not be dictated by others<sup>7</sup>. Ethiopia recognizes US's strategic concern in the Horn of Africa region and the Red Sea as a whole, as an important geopolitical fulcrum, but that should not go to the extent of compromising Ethiopia's policy independence. Ethiopia advocates for working together based on mutual interest and benefit that would make ensure the sustainability of its diplomatic relations with the U.S, to say the least.

The other core cause for the diplomatic rift goes along with Ethiopia's rejection of the U.S claim for a mediation role in the GERD negotiation with Egypt. After the coming of Abiy, the GERD

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<sup>6</sup> Interview conducted with a senior diplomat at the MoFA, on February 13, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

construction effort takes a different story that has gone to take a recalibrated investment to its completion. Ethiopia's recalibrated effort concerned Egypt and necessitated it to exploit Ethiopia's domestic instability and pledging the U.S to coerce Ethiopia. US's request to play a mediating role on the GERD and Ethiopia's refusal only allowed the U.S to act as an observer. Consequently, amidst the deteriorating domestic situation in Ethiopia, the U.S retracted the Declaration of Principles (DOP) of the GERD signed in 2015 and began to diplomatically suffocate the incumbent government. Obviously, the U.S believes that supporting Egypt is supporting Israel as the Arabs recognition to Israel is fundamentally catalyzed by Egypt through the Abraham Accord. In return, Egypt leverages its role in pacifying Arab-Israel relation and request the U.S to put much pressure on Ethiopia in relation to the GERD and the Nile waters, at large, despite that Ethiopia's internal fragility further aggravated US's/West diplomatic pressure on Ethiopia. The difference between Ethiopia and the U.S in resolving the GERD dispute is mainly due to the U.S's unbalanced approach, which was not accepted by Ethiopia. Consequently, the U.S backed Egypt to bring the issue to the Security Council (UNSC) time and again as if the GERD is a security issue than to be a legitimate quest for reasonable and equitable use of the Nile waters for development, as propagated by Ethiopia and the other countries in the upper riparian. This happened mostly due to serious misinformation campaigns made against the GERD by Egypt and various international actors backing Egypt.

The U.S was happy with PM Abiy's reformist agenda and his initiatives taken to stabilize the domestic politics of the country. For instance, Mike Pence, vice President of the U.S during Trump 1.0 told to the then Ethiopian Ambassador to the U.S, his hope on the initiatives taken by Abiy at first, but later things were going off track and came to create a diplomatic rift between the two nations.<sup>8</sup> For that to happen, Trump's handling of the Abraham Accord was the turning point. Obama was keen to solve Israel-Palestine disagreement fairly; whereas, Trump did the reverse favoring Israel via the Abraham Accord. Trump aspired to solve five international conflicts, and thereby to win the Noble Peace prize, which PM Abiy has won it for peacefully settling the Ethio-Eritrean case. Meanwhile, Egypt presented the GERD case to Trump, who had no prior and clear knowledge of it. Egypt framed the GERD narration as if the dam posed a security threat to the downstream countries, including Israel, and presented it to be an agenda of the Arab world. Egypt did this via lobbyist firms and any means possible. Besides, Egypt and some American firms want to transcend the Nile waters for the development of the Arab world, so Egypt depicted to Trump that the GERD posed danger to the success of the Abraham Accord, and this deliberately designed narrative triggered Trump to speak emotionally about the GERD. Trump then spoke "bomb the dam", which is an irresponsible act uttered by the President of a big and powerful country.

Following Trump's statement, the then Ambassador of Ethiopia to the U.S was invited to the State department and clarified that Trump's statement is that of his own and does not reflect the official position of the American government<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, the case of the GERD was given to the Treasury department to show that the State department was not happy with the inflammatory statement of the President. Of course, the U.S needs to play a mediating role in the GERD and the

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<sup>8</sup> Interview conducted with former Ambassador of Ethiopia to the U.S, on December 3, 2022 at Addis Ababa.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Nile waters issue, but the Ethiopian delegation did not accept that; instead, it worked steadfastly to make the issue an African agenda and to be solved under the auspice of the AU. Ethiopia's refusal to accept U.S.'s claim for mediation finally left the U.S. to play an observer's role only. This did not please the Trump administration so much so that the situation can be considered as the first disagreement marking the diplomatic rift between U.S. and Ethiopia before the outbreak of the Tigray war in November 2020. Trump uttered, "Since Ethiopia didn't accept our offer to mediating the GERD, U.S. suspends the \$220 million defense aid"<sup>10</sup>. Following the coming of Joe Biden to the American Presidency, Ethiopia began to present the GERD issue to the new administration afresh.

Most importantly, in an era of heightened Superpower rivalry, US's hegemony has been challenged by China and Russia more than ever, so the U.S. needs strong and stable Ethiopia as its long-standing strategic ally in HoA region. Besides, the U.S. wants Ethiopia to detach itself from China as it is supposed to be the gateway to Africa's market and economy. Thus, it needs to ensure the incoming government of Abiy as a strong and trusted ally of the U.S. that serves the strategic interests of America and its allies. The U.S. does not like Ethiopia's ever increasing alliance with China.<sup>11</sup> Given the Superpower rivalry in shaping the new global order, US wanted to surpass China in the geopolitical entanglements of the HoA region, where China is using Ethiopia as a gateway to African economy and market. Since China is viewed as having an upper hand in the geopolitical and geo-economic engagements with Africa, the U.S. wanted to deter China through a tight grip in the overall issues of the region, particularly Ethiopia. This speaks that U.S. was expecting PM Abiy to divert Ethiopia's alliance to Washington. Verhoeven & Woldemariam (2022) expressed a similar view that the political transition in 2018 in Addis Ababa was significant for the US-Ethiopia relationship, especially viewed through the lens of the Cold War, and Abiy Ahmed's rise to power came with a commitment to reform Ethiopia's ideology in order to bolster its partnership with the United States. Despite the many clues of Abiy Ahmed for pro-West ideology at the beginning of his tenure, the practice eventually does not seem meeting U.S.'s expectations. This might be due to U.S.'s diplomatic pressure and sanctions imposed onto the incumbent government, following the war in Ethiopia's north.

Besides, some scholars claim that Ethiopia's non-alignment foreign policy has affected its relation with the US/West, but for some others, this claim does not hold water.<sup>12</sup> For the latter, the incumbent government's weak diplomatic effort, rather, has affected Ethiopia's relation with the US/West. Of course, Abiy's stand eventually depicted his <sup>13</sup> pro-U.S. stand, but that too is not a better resolve to serve the national interests of Ethiopia, especially in an era of heightened Superpower rivalry. Such inclination to one power camp is deadly, hence Ethiopia's non-alignment Foreign Policy still sounds best to better serve the national interests of the country. In a similar note, some experts contended that Ethiopia's new FP that prioritizes regional integration agenda seemingly affects the country's diplomatic posture in the international diplomacy<sup>14</sup>. If the U.S. needs stable of HoA so much so to serve its interest, Ethiopia's regional integration effort

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Interview conducted with an Ethiopian scholar at Bahir Dar University, on December 15, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

undeniable plays a significant role to stabilize the region. Thus, this argument does not seem to be valid.

While the 2018 political reform was undertaking in Ethiopia, the coming of Trump to the American presidency was served as an important coincidence for Abiy's administration. Trump's U.S pushed TPLF to accept the reform, and up until he leaves office, the US was providing much support for Abiy's leadership; except that Trump made a strong statement on the GERD out of naivety and due to the aggressive diplomacy played by Egypt.<sup>15</sup>

After the Democrats assumed the U.S presidency, two things seemingly emerge to worsen the diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S. First, the Biden administration's mounting concern on the recurring violence and war in the country and its suspicion of the incumbent government's state capacity and failure to contain the precarious situation served as a pretext to impose diplomatic pressures. Against what was known during the reign of EPRDF/TPLF, Abiy's time becomes full of chaos, allowing the U.S to doubt the incumbent government's state capacity. Second, the Ethiopian incumbent's wrong assumption that Trump administration's support would continue the same after the coming of the Democratic Party to the U.S administration. Consequently, Abiy administration's failed to design a proactive strategy that is well-informed to capture the likely changes to come immediately after the Biden administration took office. Unlike the policy of Trump's administration, the HoA region gained much attention from Biden's U.S.<sup>16</sup>. Conversely, for a number of in and out challenges, the Ethiopian incumbent rather embarked more on safeguarding the state from disintegration so that the reform agenda was not able to take roots as it was promised during the very beginning of Abiy's term<sup>17</sup>.

Meanwhile, some of the core-causes of the diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S can be viewed at individual level, rather than at the State level. Even though, PM Abiy has made tremendous economic reforms as he promised, the retreat if not the delay to fully commit some of those promises, like liberalizing the economy might have sent a different signal to the U.S policy makers. For instance, PM Abiy is believed to privatize and open up public enterprises, like the Ethiopian Airlines, EthioTelecom and the banking sector, but his administration so far has liberalized only the Telecom sector. Given economic liberalization being one of the reasons for the US's/West support for PM Abiy at the beginning of his tenure, the selective liberalization act of the incumbent government is believed to enlarge the diplomatic rift between the two nations<sup>18</sup>.

In a nutshell, the core-causes of the post-2018 diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S are related to the unpredictability of the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement and the anticipated consequences of that to the instability of the HoA region, Ethiopia's lack of proactive strategy that can address the changes made by the Biden administration, U.S's interest to detach Ethiopia from China and the differing approach of the two countries in resolving the GERD dispute.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview conducted former Ambassador of Ethiopia to the US on December 3, 2022 at Addis Ababa.

<sup>16</sup> Interview conducted with a scholar at the department of PSIR, Bahir dar University on December 12, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Interview conducted with a scholar at the department of PSIR, Bahir dar University on December 12, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Interview conducted with a senior Ambassador at MoFA, on January 15, 2023.

*Non-core Causes of the Diplomatic Rift*

The non-core causes for the current diplomatic rift between the U.S and Ethiopia are related with the two years' war and its consequences. The U.S views Ethiopia as its strategic ally in the HoA region, and undeniably stable Ethiopia would better serve U.S's geopolitical interest. The U.S grave concern about the chaotic situation of Ethiopia since the outbreak of the war in the country's north is, therefore, a matter of safeguarding the former's strategic interest in the volatile HoA region. At the beginning of the war, the Trump administration clearly expressed its support for the federal government's mandate to defend the country from collapse, assuming that the armed conflict would be brief. Unfortunately, the war has gone protracted and resulted in disquieting the humanitarian predicaments. Coupled with TPLF's diplomatic maneuvers that outsmarted the diplomatic and international public relation efforts of the federal government, U.S's diplomatic pressure on the latter begin to building momentum. This is mainly not because of U.S's interest to support the TPLF; rather, the weak capacity of the Ethiopian incumbent to enforce law and order and to effectively manage the swift political dynamics heralding in the country. Other geopolitical changes, for instance, the tripartite regional bloc formed by Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia rather helped Ethiopia at least to minimize enemies during the war, despite that the U.S was suspicious of the tripartite axis. In actual terms, in such chaotic periods, the US has a tradition of supporting vulnerable groups/factions, and thereby putting pressures on incumbent governments to submit to its interests.

The humanitarian crisis caused by the war in the country's north, thus, triggered the U.S to voice a to-do-list of sanctions to be imposed on the federal government. The continued internal displacement, migration, shortage of food and other humanitarian crises served to change the mind of the international community, and triggered the U.S to coerce the federal government. Major western media outlets and disinformation campaigns went against the narratives of the federal government and laid the entire blame on Ethiopia. The U.S government began issuing statements condemning what transpires following the conflict, but the statements turned a blind eye to the heinous crimes and the atrocities committed by the TPLF forces, especially in neighboring Amhara and Afar regions<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, US's support to TPLF served to protracting the war; the rebel group was not pressured by the U.S and the international community for different reasons<sup>20</sup>. The double standard that was evident in almost every statements of the U.S government and its diplomats offended the Ethiopian government and government-affiliated diaspora, and obliged them to doubt U.S's genuine intent and the fairness of its rhetoric.

Even though the US government showed its full support for the 2018 political transition, the coming of the Democratic Party to the U.S administration allowed TPLF's favorite elements to manipulate the situation in favor of the TPLF because of their long-standing patron-client relationship. In the Democratic Party, TPLF has had influential allies, think-tanks and lobbyist groups that worked to its interest. The same goes to what was going on deep in the State

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<sup>19</sup> "The Ethiopia conflict has evoked a specific response pattern by the 'international community', primarily the United States of America (USA), the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN): they address, or rather 'target', the Ethiopian government and not the insurgent TPLF which has caused most of the killing and destruction" (Abbink 2021, P. 1).

<sup>20</sup> Interview conducted with the Ambassador of Ethiopia to the U.S, on December 3, 2022.

department and the prominent western media too. These all influenced the view of U.S policy makers to stand against the incumbent government of Ethiopia.

On the other hand, Ethiopia's diplomatic mission in the U.S did not handle the issue as per the magnitude of the problem to curtail TPLF's aggressive diplomatic effort. Largely, the incumbent government's international PR strategy was not effective to inform and convince the international community about the true nature and structural causes of the war. Its failure in public diplomacy, lack of a robust strategy to maneuver its international public relation, weakness to counter the misinformation and disinformation as well as media campaigns, uninformed resistance to employ high-grade lobbyist firms, and the setback to manage the communication behavior of high government officials who failed to comment on the U.S government's sanctions in diplomatic terms are found to worsen the longstanding relations between Ethiopia and the U.S. Though the public rallies of the Ethiopian diaspora were used to condemn U.S's unfair stand, and was able to put some degree of influence on the U.S government, such rallies were not tantamount and strategic enough to influence the U.S's policy makers.

Following that myopic and misguided act of the TPLF, the resultant violent conflict resulted in wide ranging humanitarian crisis and collateral damages on both sides of the warring parties. This protracted situation, ostensibly served as a pretext for the U.S government to impose diplomatic pressures, as was evident from its numerous and continuous statements that went as far as trying to subdue the Ethiopian incumbent through diplomatic sanctions. Coupled with its shrewd nature, TPLF rather aggressively worked to exploit the situation and shifting it to its deceitful strategy of propagating and leveraging humanitarian crisis to win political concessions through crisis-induced international pressure on the government of Ethiopia. Consequently, the U.S government began pressurizing and sanctioning the Ethiopian government and its high officials. The expulsion of Ethiopia from the AGOA, suspension of non-concessional loan and the introduction of the so called HR 6600 bill are some of the showcases for the worsening diplomatic rift between Ethiopia and the U.S.

On the Ethiopian side, public rallies, media rhetoric, 'intellectual' discourse and official statements were continued condemning and antagonizing the U.S for its uninformed policies and actions directed at the federal government. Though the U.S government continued defending the resentments and allegations of Ethiopians both inside the country and abroad, the views are not normalizing to date. As a result, the diplomatic rift between the two nations continued to widen as the war is getting prolonged and intensified, and thereby to scaling up the humanitarian crisis and atrocities therein. The U.S official's lack of interest to discuss about who first blow the war in Ethiopia's North may imply that the war and the subsequent humanitarian atrocities cannot be the core-causes for the diplomatic rift between U.S and Ethiopia<sup>21</sup>.

When the Biden administration assumed the State's power, many of the top personalities during the Obama time retook office. These guys were good sympathizers of TPLF so that Abiy's regime has faced challenges all through the two year's war in the country's North. The Biden administration that became in bad terms with the Ethiopian incumbent accompanied the TPLF up until Debre Berhan in an attempt to bring it back to the Ethiopian state power. The U.S

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<sup>21</sup> Interview conducted with former Ambassador of Ethiopia to the U.S, on December 3, 2022.

expected that the old and the new leadership would harmonize and consolidate the political reform taking place in the country since 2018, but the TPLF and the new administration-led by PM Abiy went antagonistically to destabilize the country. However, what was wrong with Abiy?

Firstly, the U.S learned that Abiy has come up with a good vision and palpable reformist agenda, but his administration suffered from poor management of the change and lack of state control. Hence, the U.S becomes uncertain about the incumbent government's capacity to curtail the violence and war heralding in the most populace country of the HoA region. The spillover effect of the conflict will put the volatile region into total jeopardy, which in turn will hurt the strategic interests of the U.S. Similarly, Verhoeven and Michael (2022, P.3) stipulated that "Ethiopia's growing inability to be a regional anchor and to guarantee the basic rights and security of its citizens damaged the long-standing U.S.-Ethiopia partnership." Secondly, the U.S loses its trust on PM Abiy who denied the presence of the Eritrean army in the Ethiopian territory as attested by the U.S's envoy meeting him. If diplomacy has to be effective, building trust matters most in the first place. The U.S needs leaders to be trustworthy whatsoever their domestic state philosophy might be dictatorial or democratic. As to some scholars<sup>22</sup>, Abiy has lost his trustworthiness to the U.S, and both leaderships seemingly went differently after that. Despite Abiy's liberal ideological leaning that served to catch U.S's interest at the beginning of his tenure, the U.S's diplomacy that practically rely on realism and pragmatism demands objective returns from its partners. Hence, any relation with the U.S is measured by what you contribute to serve its best interests. According to these scholars, Abiy went short of exploiting Ethiopia's geostrategic leverage in the HoA region, in favor of his power consolidation efforts.

By and large, Ethiopia's domestic problems are believed to make the country vulnerable to external power's interference and diplomatic pressure, in general, and the U.S, in particular. Our internal solidarity is very vital to our international diplomacy and overall effectiveness of our foreign policy. The main challenges of Ethiopia's internal solidarity are embedded with the narratives of TPLF and its allies that have been built during the last 40 years. These includes, politicizing history, polarized ethnic politics, the contested Constitution and the Federal structure that rests on ethno-linguistic divisions. Even though the multi-lingual and multi-cultural realities of the country have to be properly treated within the jurisdiction of the state, polarized views have to be studied and entertained through national dialogues<sup>23</sup>, and critical revisions have to be made on the fundamental issues aforementioned.

### **Ethio-U.S Reengagement in Post-Pretoria and the Way Forward**

The U.S played a key role for the success of the Pretoria peace deal. Some scholars even contend that it can be claimed to be a US-led peace deal than to be an AU-led peace deal<sup>24</sup>. This might be due to the agreements short of AU's established norm.<sup>25</sup> The success of the peace deal also served

<sup>22</sup> Interview conducted with a scholar at the department of PSIR, Dire Dawa University, on December 18, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> An Interview conducted with an Ethiopian scholar at Bahir dar University, on December 12, 2022.

<sup>24</sup> An Interview conducted with an Ethiopian scholars at the department of PSIR, Bahir dar, on December 15, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Despite the role of the African Union in convening the negotiations, it is evident that the process and the text represent a regression from the norms, principles and institutions of the African Union's peace and security architecture, from the Constitutive Act of 2000 to the 'silencing the guns' initiative. It turns the clock back to the barebones model of peace accords characteristic of the era of the Organisation of African Unity (Mulugeta 2024, P.2).

as a linchpin for Ethio-U.S reengagement. Conversely, there are still challenges to fully implement the peace deal. First, the main actors of the war (Eritrea and Amhara forces), other than the ones involved in the signing of the peace deal, objected the modality of the peace deal, so they are acting as spoilers. Second, differences, among the actors, in the resolve of the contested areas of Wolkait and Raya may eventually affect the full-scale implementation of the peace deal, and thereby to impact the Ethio-U.S reengagement. Especially, the revival of TPLF as a political entity concerned Eritrea. The Eritrean government is suspicious of revenge if TPLF once again regain its political power both in the Tigray regional state and in the federal government. For some scholars, the implementation of the Alger's agreement will also make another point of disagreement after the Pretoria peace deal<sup>26</sup>. However, an Ethiopian senior diplomat does not agree with the claim that the Alger's agreement will rebound to affect the peace deal, given the federal government's endorsement of the implementation in 2018.<sup>27</sup>

After the Pretoria peace deal, the other issue raised to impact the Ethio-U.S reengagement is the preconditions set forth by the U.S and EU. The preconditions force the Ethiopian government to allow the UN investigation team to conduct a unilateral investigation on human rights violations and atrocities, and war crimes committed by the warring parties during the two years' war in the country's north. Besides, they demand the Ethiopian government to implement a prescribed mechanism of transitional justice. Despite the fact that the Pretoria peace agreement has improved the bilateral diplomatic relation between the U.S and Ethiopia, diplomatic normalization and total lifting of all the sanctions imposed on Ethiopia entail the fulfilment of the aforementioned conditions. Some scholars argue that the Ethiopian government should not allow these to happen as allowing such investigations is self-suicidal<sup>28</sup>. Rather, Ethiopia needs to work on alternative diplomacy and earn additional resources for the post-war reconstruction efforts from other countries, mainly from China and other emerging powers through multilateral diplomacy. Two months after the data collection is completed, the researcher learned that agreement is not reached on furthering the investigation of humanitarian atrocities and war crimes, and ultimately the precondition is retracted. Whereas, the Ethiopian government accepted to implement the other precondition and started working to serve transitional justice.

With regard to Ethio-U.S reengagement, an Ethiopian diplomat stipulated that the diplomatic relations of the two nations is more important than the AGOA sanction and the resolutions tabled against Ethiopia. Thus, Ethiopia has expressed its keen interest not only to re-engage with the U.S but also to work beyond re-engagement. In the so far course, Ethiopia's mission in Washington is mobilizing Ethiopian experts in the diaspora to approach U.S top officials and policy makers, and they are discussing about the matter closely. Besides, the Ethiopian mission in Washington came to terms with regard to the importance of employing high-grade lobbyist firm that could facilitate things in favor of Ethiopia. The post-Pretoria reengagement and normalization efforts are going well so much so that both the US and the EU promised to support Ethiopia's post-war reconstruction efforts. During the data collection period, the EU promised to provide one billion

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> "The Badme case cannot affect the reengagement effort of Ethiopia and the US. I think it is a closed agenda, which the TPLF cannot reclaim."-An Interview conducted with an Ethiopian diplomat at Addis Ababa, on February 13, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Interview conducted at the department of PSIR, Bahir dar University, on December 12, 2022.

USD, and the U.S is doing the same except that both of them are expecting the Ethiopian government to meet the preconditions aforementioned so that it can ensure diplomatic normalization with the U.S, despite all odds.<sup>29</sup>

### **Ethiopia's Re-engagement and Normalization Plans and Efforts with the U.S**

Ethiopia's reengagement plan was first developed in January 2022, almost two months after the Pretoria peace deal was signed. In effect, Ethiopia and the U.S were able to reengage in the immediate aftermath of the peace deal signed in November, 2022. The re-engagement plan developed by the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) highlighted the government's resentment on U.S's diplomatic pressure and sanctions, and the document underscored that U.S's diplomatic pressure and sanctions were based on insufficient data and inadequate scrutiny of the reality on the ground. A higher Ethiopian diplomat firmly stipulated that Ethiopia needs to go beyond reengagement with the U.S, thus the reengagement plan should be revised to that end<sup>30</sup>.

According to an Ethiopian senior diplomat, even though Ethiopia and the U.S has already reengaged following the Pretoria peace deal, the two preconditions set forth by the U.S and EU may affect the sustainability of the reengagement and the road to normalization<sup>31</sup>. Since these preconditions are dangerous signals for the Ethiopian government, it should seek for diplomatic ways to deal with the U.S. Interestingly, Americans are open for dialogue and discussions, so Ethiopian diplomats can exploit this tradition to deter any harm to come by due to the preconditions<sup>32</sup>.

Notwithstanding that the Ethiopian government is keen on normalizing with the U.S, some political personalities in top echelon lack the courage to face the reality in the country. This stubbornness can hinder Ethiopia to achieve the aspired goal of the reengagement plan. A senior diplomat, for instance, argued that there is no peace agreement between the federal government and the TPLF; rather, what was signed is an agreement for permanent cessation of hostilities<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, Mulugeta (2024) argued that the title of the agreement text by itself entails a problem.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the Pretoria deal cannot be a guarantee for the success of the aspired re-engagement and normalization efforts. If the reengagement plan has to be effective, it needs to have an action plan, and the tasks have to be cascaded to different stakeholders other than the MoFA. Nonetheless, all details in the modalities of implementation need not be publicized. A senior

<sup>29</sup> "We openly talked to them and expressed our keen interest to re-engage with the US and to work beyond re-engagement. In the so far course, I as an Ambassador to the US am working with Ethiopian experts in the diaspora to approach U.S officials and policy makers and discuss the matter closely. However, I feel that employing lobbyists matters most to facilitate things in favor of Ethiopia in the diplomatic market of the US." Ethiopia's Ambassador to the U.S in interview conducted in Addis Ababa, on December 3, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Interview conducted with Ethiopia's Ambassador to the U.S, on December 3, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Interview conducted with Ethiopia's former Ambassador to the U.S, on December 3, 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Interview conducted with a senior diplomat at MoFA, on February 13, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> The document signed by the FGE and TPLF in Pretoria is entitled: 'Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities.' The title itself indicates a major problem. Normally a cessation of hostilities is a temporary, interim measure that paves the way for negotiation towards a political settlement that would resolve the main disputes that generated hostilities. A 'permanent cessation of hostilities' is a newly-introduced and undefined concept. The implication, deliberate or inadvertent, is that the agreement is a truce, promising that the two parties will not fight one another, leaving everything else open (Mulugeta 2024, P.2).

diplomat who involved in the drafting process of the reengagement plan stipulated that, “I am suspicious of our strict adherence to the plan as there is no action plan as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Though the first reengagement plan prepared in January 2022 has got things implemented by both Ethiopia and the U.S, the MoFA has developed two other plans of reintegration and normalization that are meant to capture the new developments after the peace deal.”<sup>35</sup>

There were four preconditions declared by the U.S and the EU to reengage with Ethiopia. These include: ceasefire, unfettered humanitarian access to the affected areas in Tigray, finalizing the investigation by the UN team on the humanitarian atrocities committed and transitional justice. Since the government has met the first two conditions, Ethiopia has already reengaged with the US. To go for reintegration and normalization, however, both the U.S and EU demand the Ethiopian government to fulfill the rest two conditions. With regard to the rest two preconditions, the Ethiopian government has raised due concerns and questions. For instance, it questioned the impartiality of the UN investigation team and wanted to have a different team to be organized by the AU and that complies with the motto “African solution to African problems”. Consequently, the U.S has showed tactical retreat on the modality of executing the investigation of humanitarian atrocities; whereas, the EU insists on pressurizing the Ethiopian government to accept the preconditions, may be for a reason deep-rooted in their colonial mindset. The U.S rather appeal for a different approach to achieve their interest; for example, it requested to send U.S’s experts to help the Ethiopian government in investigating the humanitarian atrocities.<sup>36</sup>

During the discussion with the U.S and EU envoys on the modality of ensuring accountability, the Ethiopian team was not defending the accountability issue in principle; rather, it interrogated who is going to investigate the atrocities and how they are going to be investigated. Some members of the Ethiopian team were even in a position to collaborate with the UN to continue the investigation of humanitarian atrocities that are supposed to be committed in the war-torn areas of Tigray, Afar and Amhara regions. However, the UN shifted its position claiming for conducting the same investigation beyond the three regions aforementioned. Since UN’s position is beyond what was intended initially, the Ethiopian government did not accept that.<sup>37</sup>

According to the senior diplomat, mainly it is the EU not the U.S that was orchestrating a collaborated heavy hand on the Ethiopian government<sup>38</sup>. The U.S rather advised both parties (Ethiopia and EU) to seek for other alternative ways to deal with the matter. By implication, the U.S seemingly understood the shifting power dynamics of the war and wanted to ally with the incumbent government of Ethiopia, despite its earlier attempt to immune the TPLF until the latter’s devastated retreat from Debre Berhan. This shows that after the Pretoria peace deal, the U.S’s position on the federal government becomes modest relative to the EU’s stubborn claim for an all-out investigation of humanitarian atrocities by the UN’s team. The US’s tactical retreat and expression of interest to provide experts to facilitate the investigation can be considered as U.S’s diplomatic maneuvering skill to achieve its goal in another way without harming its diplomatic

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<sup>35</sup> Interview conducted with a senior diplomat at MoFA, on February 13, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Interview conducted with a senior diplomat at MoFA, on February 13, 2023.

reengagement with Ethiopia. Ostensibly, Ethiopia's rejection of the EU from being a part of the Pretoria peace deal might have contributed for EU's stubborn stand on Ethiopia after the Pretoria peace deal.

On a different note, a senior diplomat in MoFA suggested a different scenario than what is observed on the ground, regarding the challenges of normalizing with the U.S. He contended that, "the other challenge to the success of the envisioned reengagement and normalization of Ethiopia's diplomatic relations with the U.S is that Ethiopia's foreign policy has been personalized. As the PM Abiy is seizing the executive role of MoFA, the role of the Ministry in executing Ethiopia's foreign policy goals is highly constrained." He added that "having such conflicting roles, how can our diplomatic missions implement the reengagement plans?"<sup>39</sup> But, isn't it obvious that the personal engagement of the PM is necessitated because of lack of capable institutions, Ministers and diplomats? The challenges of conflicting roles and uncoordinated diplomatic efforts of institutions and individuals to Ethiopia's diplomacy are left for future studies.

## Conclusion

Ethiopia and the United States of America have maintained over a century-old diplomatic relations whereby their bilateral diplomatic relation has been through a number of historical trajectories. The U.S. under the Trump 1.0 administration endorsed the political reforms initiated by Prime Minister Abiy in 2018. PM Abiy's initiatives to liberalize Ethiopia's economy, including privatizing public enterprises, have gained U.S's support, reflecting the continuity of the strategic partnership between the two nations. Later, Abiy Ahmed's rejection of the U.S.'s claim for mediation of the GERD dispute with Egypt, coupled with the U.S.'s pro-Egypt position during the Trump 1.0 administration, led to a diplomatic rift in Ethio-U.S relations. Ethiopia's strategic partnership with China, whose growing influence in Africa is alarming to the U.S., went against U.S's expectation of Abiy Ahmed's pro-U.S ideology. Besides, the Ethiopian incumbent's fiasco to effectively navigate the region's geopolitical dynamics and pacify Isaias with the U.S further added to the core-causes of Ethio-U.S diplomatic rift. The outbreak of war with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) exacerbated the situation, raising concerns in the U.S. about Ethiopia's internal stability and its impact on regional security. The Tigray war, exacerbated by the TPLF's actions, has triggered a significant humanitarian crisis impacting both fighting parties, contributing to deepening civilian suffering. The sanctions imposed by the U.S., like the expulsion of Ethiopia from AGOA, have strained U.S's relations with Ethiopia, igniting public backlash against U.S. policies. As the conflict prolongs, the humanitarian situation worsens, leading to increased atrocities and deeper diplomatic divides between Ethiopia and the U.S. The U.S. played a significant role in the success of the Pretoria peace agreement, which not only facilitated the cessation of hostilities among the warring factions but also reestablished diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and the U.S. However, challenges remain to fully implement the peace deal, as some main actors, Eritrea and Amhara forces have expressed concerns that may hinder the post-Pretoria progress. Disputes regarding the contested regions of Wolkait and Raya could ultimately

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<sup>39</sup> "For instance, during the PM's recent official visits to Italy, Malta and France, no expert advisors from MoFA was included" -A senior diplomat interviewed at MoFA, on February 13, 2023.

impact the agreement's execution and the normalization of Ethio-U.S relations. While the Pretoria agreement has served for Ethio-U.S reengagement, achieving complete normalization and the lifting of sanctions imposed on Ethiopia depends on the Ethiopian government's commitment to resolving ongoing conflicts, fostering a balanced relationship with both the U.S. and China, and playing an active role in the Horn of Africa's diplomacy. Ethiopia's reengagement and normalization plans outlines the government's intention to restore diplomatic normalization, but they lack concrete action plan, coordinated efforts among stakeholders as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Despite all the challenges, it is crucial for both Ethiopia and the U.S to normalize their age-old diplomatic relations, restore their strategic partnership for the benefit of both nations and the Horn of Africa region. The gaps in the existing reintegration and normalization plans and efforts can be addressed by applying implementation strategies and oversight mechanisms. These efforts need to capture the new developments in global and regional geopolitics and geo-economics and be pursued in a coordinated effort to prevent further setbacks and ensure diplomatic normalization between U.S and Ethiopia.

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