LUISS ⛫

Master's Degree in International Relations
Major: Diplomacy

Chair of
Diplomacy and Negotiation

The Role of the African Union in Mediating the Tigray Conflict: Balancing Internal Challenges and External Expectations

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Academic Year 2023/2024

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Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Ferrara for the invaluable guidance, support and patience he has shown me over the last few months, and for the insightful suggestions and constant encouragement he has always so promptly offered.

I am also grateful to my family, as I could not have embarked on this journey without their unconditional support. In particular, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents, Fabio and Roberta, and my brother, Nicolò, for their unwavering support, encouragement and understanding.

I also wish to mention some of the friends who have been by my side throughout these wonderful years, whose support has been a constant source of strength: Alberto, Alessandro, Andrea, Benedetta, Dario, Flaminia, Francesca, and Luca.

Lastly, I wish to extend my gratitude to all those I have encountered along this journey. Each of you has contributed in your unique way to shape my experience and foster my growth. Your support, even in the smallest of gestures, has truly meant a lot to me.

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Abstract

On 2 November 2022, the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front issued a joint statement, announcing that they had successfully attained a consensus for the cessation of hostilities. The signature of the Agreement, facilitated by the African Union, silenced the guns and concluded a devastating two-year conflict that resulted in hundreds of thousands of fatalities and forced millions to flee their homes, reinstating constitutional order, and paving the way for the gradual normalization of life in Ethiopia.

Two years of conflict ensued following Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's decision, in November 2020, for the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) to launch a military operation on the northern Tigray region, with the objective of displacing the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). This occurred in retaliation to armed assaults carried out by the Tigray People's Forces (TPF) against federal military installations in Mekelle, the Tigray regional capital. Despite narratives around the conflict remain highly debated, the root causes of the conflict stem from disagreements over the distribution of power between federal authorities and Ethiopia's regional governments, reflecting a clash between "unitarianist forces" advocating for centralized governance and groups demanding a federalist system of self-government in Ethiopia.

The crisis posed major challenges for both regional and international peace efforts, leading a variety of actors to advocate for the AU involvement. A group of three former African Leaders, led by the AU's High Representative for the Horn of Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo, convened federal and TPLF officials together for talks in South Africa in late 2022, culminating in the peace dela signed on November 2 in Pretoria.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the role of the African Union (AU) in mediating the Tigray conflict, with a particular emphasis on the organization's ability to reconcile local political dynamics and expectations from regional and global actors. This study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the African Union's peace mediation efforts by addressing the following research questions: (1) "How did the African Union navigate the pressures of local political dynamics and international expectations in the mediation of the Tigray conflict?" And (2) "what does this reveal about its role in preserving and promoting regional stability?".

After exploring the main characteristics of international mediation theory and providing an overview of the Putnam's "Two-Level Game Theory", the first and more theoretical chapter will be dedicated to applying the theory to the context of the Tigray conflict, highlighting how entangled domestic and international factors influenced and determined the African Union's mediation process. This chapter also examines the AU's structural evolution and its current role in conflict resolution, with particular attention to the African Peace and Security Architecture.

The second chapter delves into the origins and intensification of the Tigray conflict, outlining the crisis's political, historical, and economic causes. It subsequently examines the principal factions engaged, the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, with a particular attention on the interplay between internal dynamics and external variables. Attention will also be devoted towards international dynamics that influenced the AU's mediation efforts, illustrating the positions and interests of global actors and the principal diplomatic initiatives undertaken in order to settle the crisis.

Finally, through the analysis of the Pretoria Agreement, the study will seek to evaluate the role played by the African Union in mediating the Tigray conflict, focusing on the mediation process, key provisions, and the potential of the agreement to establish a lasting peace. Additionally, the final section and the conclusion aim to evaluate the innovativeness of AU's mediation strategy regarding conflict prevention and resolution, while also reflecting on the broader implications for the African Union's future role in regional conflict resolution.

Introduction

On Wednesday, November 2, 2022, representatives of the Ethiopian government and of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) unexpectedly issued a joint statement during African Union-mediated discussions in Pretoria, declaring the signing of an "Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities", aimed at "permanently silence the guns and end the two years of conflict in Northern Ethiopia" [Joint Statement between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), 2022: art. 1/2]. A week later, the senior military commanders from both sides convened in Nairobi, Kenya, to negotiate the specific implementation of the peace agreement's main clauses.

The conflict's negotiated resolution was facilitated by a specific mediation intervention from the African Union, which, with significant backing from key international actors, especially the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations, successfully enabled dialogue between the parties and promoted the adoption of a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA), thereby concluding one of this century's most brutal conflicts. Notwithstanding certain challenges to AU's mediation efforts, particularly the TPLF's perceived bias against the African Union Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa and former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, the African Union ultimately succeeded in convening the two parties for negotiations and facilitating the signing of the Agreement in Pretoria in November 2022.

This achievement was facilitated by the interplay of two key elements that induced "ripeness" in the conflict, allowing the negotiated resolution of the dispute to be the best alternative for the contending sides. Firstly, the escalation of the intensity of the conflict, prompted by a new offensive from governmental forces, beginning in late August 2022, coupled with the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the Ethiopian region of Tigray, has compelled the TPLF to reassess the costs associated with prolonging the conflict, while simultaneously urging the international community to strongly advocate for an end to hostilities to allow immediate humanitarian assistance to the civilian population. Secondly, the increasing economic pressure from the United States and the European Union has driven the Abiy Ahmed's government to confront a severe economic crisis, marked by high inflation, diminished productivity, and increased foreign debt, bringing the necessity for a reassessment of its political objectives and on the best way to achieve them.

With that being said, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of the African Union in mediating the Tigray conflict, with a particular emphasis on the organization's ability to harmonize local political dynamics with international pressures. This study seeks to elucidate the relevance of the African Union's peace mediation efforts by addressing the following research questions: (1) "How did the African Union navigate the pressures of local political dynamics and international expectations in the mediation of the Tigray conflict?" And (2) "what does this reveal about its role in preserving and promoting regional stability?".

This research is structured into three chapters designed to increase the accessibility of this intricate process. The first chapter, "International Mediation: a Theoretical Framework", will be dedicated to exploring the main characteristics of international mediation theory and providing an overview of the Putnam's "Two-Level Game Theory", with particular emphasis on its application to international mediation contexts, highlighting how entangled domestic and international factors influenced and determined the African Union's mediation efforts.

In order to comprehend the application and significance of international mediation in peace-making efforts, it is indeed imperative to firstly deliver an overview of the concept from a theoretical standpoint, examine the principal debates in literature, and subsequently delve into a more specific analysis of the specifics of the African Union's mediation initiatives. Consequently, the primary objective of this first chapter will be to analyze the characteristics of international mediation, outlining its potential definitions, its main actors, and possible determinants of its success or failure, with the aim to enhance comprehension of effective mediation strategies in modern conflicts.

Furthermore, the second section of the first chapter will provide a comprehensive analysis of the "Two Level Game Theory" devised by Robert Putnam. After recognizing the relevance of the dual relationship between domestic politics and international relations, it is essential to understand how the interplay between the two levels influence decision-making. Robert Putnam, in his article "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games" presents a theoretical framework for comprehending the intertwined relation between foreign and domestic politics. Thus, the main objective will be to clarify how the interplay and potential interactions between these two levels of accountability influence negotiator's decisions within the realm of policymaking, and how the acknowledgment of these dual pressure influenced AU's mediation strategies in its peace efforts in the Tigray conflict.

The Second Chapter, "the Tigray Conflict: Origins, Escalation, and International Initiatives", will delve into the origins and intensification of the Tigray conflict, outlining the crisis's political, historical, and economic causes. It will do so by examining the most recent cycle of Ethiopian political history, during which the principal protagonists emerged. It will subsequently examine the principal factions engaged in the conflict, the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), with a particular attention on the interplay between internal dynamics and external variables. In the second section, particular attention will be devoted toward international initiatives undertaken by a plethora of international actors in order to influence the conduct of the hostilities and the consequent development of the mediation initiative. A deep understanding of both the root causes of the conflict and the international environment that influenced the course of the war is crucial to deeply understand the main characteristics of the two levels of the game, domestic and international, whose interplay importantly influenced the AU's mediation strategies.

Therefore, to shed light on the unfolding of these developments, the first chapter will draw a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of the war by providing an accurate description of the recent political history of Ethiopia, with particular emphasis on the evolution in the application of the concept of ethnic federalism within the Ethiopian state structure. Indeed, following the removal of the Derg regime in 1991, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), under the leadership of Tigrayan Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, initiated a process to construct a federal government that created predominantly ethnic-based territorial entities. This development aligned with the TPLF's historic agenda, which advocated for the self-determination of ethnic groups during its struggle with the Derg [Ishiyama, 2023]. The federalization process spanned four years and culminated in the ratification of a new constitution in 1995 [Mengie, 2015]. As of today, despite narratives around the conflict remain highly debated, it can be asserted that the root causes of the conflict stem from disagreements over the distribution of power between federal authorities and Ethiopia's regional governments, reflecting a clash between "unitarianist forces" advocating for centralized governance and groups demanding a federalist system of self-government in Ethiopia.

Furthermore, the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa has resulted in the conflict between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray's People Liberation Front to have repercussions extending beyond Ethiopia's borders, affecting the entire area and engaging

regional and global powers invested in this strategically vital area. Several foreign actors provided diplomatic support to the Federal government in the fight, granting legitimacy to the military action and the West, while refraining from directly endorsing Abiy's initiative, adopted a conservative approach, allowing time for the military action to success without imposing significant diplomatic pressure despite the atrocities committed on the battlefield.

Finally, Chapter 3, "the Pretoria Agreement: a Deal to End the War?", will look at the mediation process carried out by the African Union that culminated in the signature of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on November 2, 2022. At this point, to comprehensively grasp the implications of the mediation of the African Union in the conflict, will be in fact essential to complement the historical and theoretical analysis with a thorough examination of the process that led to the end of hostilities. Thereafter, a detailed analysis will be conducted on the principal terms of the agreement, alongside an examination of its legal and political implications, to enhance understanding of its wider impact and significance for both Ethiopia and the region.

Thus, the objective of this concluding chapter will be to assess the effectiveness of the African Union's mediation initiatives in fostering peace and stability across the African continent, using the resolution of the two-year violent conflict in Northern Ethiopia as a case study. Its assessment will provide valuable insights not only on the efficacy of African Union's mediation capacities, but also on the role of regional organizations in effectively promoting peace and stability, and how such efforts may be leveraged to mediate future conflicts.

Chapter One

INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In a contemporary international environment characterized by persistent instability and increasingly intricate and interconnected global disputes, the importance of international mediation has become more vital and demanding than ever before. Consequently, the primary objective of this first chapter is to analyze the characteristics of international mediation, outlining its potential definitions, its main actors, and possible determinants of its success or failure, with the aim to enhance comprehension of effective mediation strategies in modern conflicts. By doing so, this chapter aims is to elucidate and evaluate the role of organizations such as the African Union in mediating international conflict and fostering global stability.

1. A Theory of International Mediation

The mediation initiative of a third party unrelated to the conflict can be an effective method for conflict resolution when direct negotiations between the parties fail or are not feasible due to profound mistrust between the parties. [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 32]. In the context of today's international affairs, characterized by persistent challenges such as increasing tensions and a concerning rise in internal and ethnic conflicts, third-party international mediation has become an essential instrument to promote and maintain global peace and stability [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 32]. The following section seeks to explore the various definitions of international mediation and to identify the key attributes that characterize it.

1.1 The Nature of Mediation: Definition and Key Principles

International mediation is a conflict management mechanism defined by the involvement of a third party into the negotiating process between conflicting parties, aimed at facilitating a resolution of the dispute through a mutually acceptable agreement [Greig & Diehl, 2012]. Mediation as a conflict management technique has a substantial historical background and is rapidly emerging as a crucial strategy for settling international disputes [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 32]. Throughout the past century, international mediation has been extensively employed by individuals, states, and international organizations to tackle intractable disputes and settle protracted international hostilities. Comprehensive research indicates that mediation is employed in around 70 percent of all conflicts and attains success in 34 percent of instances [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 32].

Mediation, as a form of conflict management, appears particularly appropriate for the dynamics of international relations. In the contemporary interdependent, multi-state system, plagued with heightened instability and an increasing incidence of major ethnic and other identity-based conflicts, and where states, driven by their own self-interests, may not always recognize negotiations with an opponent as a viable option, international mediation may seem intuitively inherently appealing and rational [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 32]. Arguably, mediation is the most effective method we have for addressing with complex, challenging, and asymmetric conflicts in the modern world [*ibid*.].

The term mediation etymologically originates from the Latin *mediare*, signifying "to halve" or "to be in the middle". At its core, mediation is fundamentally a procedure in which a third party facilitates the resolution of disputes between opposing parties by assisting them identify common ground [Greig & Diehl, 2012]. The process of mediation, on the other hand, assumes a more intricate and nuanced role as an instrument for the preservation of international stability and conflict resolution, frequently involving several parties, delicate power dynamics, and high-stakes results. In a classic definition, Bercovitch describes mediation as "a process of conflict management where disputants seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an individual, group, state, or organization to settle their conflict or resolving their differences without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law" [Bercovitch et al., 1991: 8].

In a different variant, Wall and Standifer [Wall et al., 2001: 370] describe mediation as "assistance to two or more interacting parties by third parties who (usually) have no authority to impose an outcome" [in Greig & Diehl, 2012]. This perspective emphasizes that mediation is voluntary for both the disputants and the mediator. However, precisely because of the voluntary nature of mediation, it cannot be guaranteed that all parties to a conflict will be eager to allow for a mediation initiative in the resolution of the dispute [Greig & Diehl, 2012]. For instance, governments facing a rebel uprising frequently ignore international calls for mediation [*ibid.*]. According to Bercovitch and Jackson [2009], third-party mediation is particularly likely to take place under the following conditions: (1) conflicts are prolonged and intricate; (2) the parties' attempts at conflict resolution have reached a deadlock; (3) neither side is willing to incur additional costs or escalate the situation; and (4) the parties are amenable to collaborating to resolve their impasse. [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 32].

Neutrality and impartiality is often pointed out as one of the defining characteristics of mediation [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009]. Kochan and Jick [2011: 211] define mediation as a "process in which a neutral party attempts to get the direct participants to reach a voluntary agreement" [in Greig & Diehl, 2012]. Gail Bingham [1985] characterizes mediation as "the assistance of a neutral third party to a negotiation" [in Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009]. This definition goes further, adding to the requirement of not being involved in the dispute the necessity for the mediator to have no significant interests in the dispute and in its potential settlement [Greig & Diehl, 2012]. As suggested by Greig and Diehl [2012], despite the relevance of the neutral factor in mediation, it would be better to not include it in its fundamental definition, but rather consider it as a variable in the assessment of the mediation process [Greig & Diehl, 2012]. Indeed, while all mediation are conducted by third parties not involved in the conflict, it cannot be said that they are always neutral in character (e.g. the US mediation between Israel and Egypt, 1979) [*ibid.*].

Alternative definitions of mediation place less emphasis on the mediator's characteristics, while focusing more on the specifics of the process by which the mediator influences the attempted resolution of a dispute [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. According to Zartman [2008: 155], mediation can be defined as "a mode of negotiation in which a third party helps the parties find a solution which they cannot find themselves". Christopher Moore [1986: 6] describe it as "an extension and elaboration of the negotiation process. Mediation involves the intervention of an acceptable, impartial, and neutral third party who has no authoritative

decision-making power to assist contending parties in voluntarily reaching their own mutually acceptable settlement" [in Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009].

Bercovitch and Jackson (2009: 34-35) consolidate these features, together with additional factors, to delineate the fundamental attributes of mediation as follows:

First, "*mediation is an extension and continuation of peaceful conflict resolution*" [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 34]. According to this first assertion, mediation is positioned as an essential component within the comprehensive framework of peaceful conflict resolution techniques, not occurring in isolation, but founded on prior attempts to resolve conflicts amicably. When alternative methods fail or encounter obstacles in reaching a resolution, mediation offers a systematic option by introducing a third-party into the negotiating process. This addition is particularly significant because it respects the fundamental principles of peaceful resolution of controversies, while offering an impartial approach to the search of the terms of a settlement.

Second, "*mediation involves the intervention of an outsider – an individual, a group, or an organization – into a conflict between two or more states or other actors*" [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 34]. Here, the emphasis is on the essential function of the mediator as an external, unbiased third party. The mediator's position, as not-directly-involved in the conflict, enables its role of guide and facilitator, supporting their intervention to help the parties comprehending each other's positions, find common ground, and pursuing a mutually acceptable solution [Greig & Diehl, 2012]. This intervention is crucial as, in several conflicts, the disputing parties may be excessively entrenched in their positions to engage in productive talks, while a third-party can provide new options and offer potential settlements.

Third, "*mediation is noncoercive, nonviolent, and, ultimately, nonbinding from of intervention*" [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 34]. Mediation, as contrast to other tools of peaceful resolution, does not enforce a decision on the parties concerned as it is inherently voluntary and non-coercive. The mediator cannot impose a certain decision and should retain from employing coercion or intimidation to facilitate a resolution. Instead, the mediator's main function is to foster dialogue and propose potential solutions to end the dispute. The non-binding nature of mediation causes it to be particularly appealing to conflicting parties, as it enables them to retain autonomy and influence over the process and, above all, the final

decision. However, the other side of the coin, it implies that solutions attained through a mediated diplomatic process have higher potential for failure, since the contenders may be reluctant to implement the suggested recommendations.

To this regard, it may be useful to highlight the main features of a binding procedure for dispute resolution. Arbitration, like mediation, possesses a triadic structure (distinct from the dyadic format characteristic of a traditional negotiating process) where the third party remains independent and impartial, granting them the exclusive control over the entire process. A second key distinction between mediation and arbitration lies in the former being a non-institutionalized process lacking no general procedures or formal norms, while the latter usually adheres to a structured framework with specific regulations and standardized protocols. This significant difference provides the mediator with far greater flexibility compared to the arbitrator.

Fourth, "*mediators enter a conflict, whether internal or international, in order to affect, change, resolve, modify, or influence it in some way. Mediators use personal or structural resources to achieve these objectives*" [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 34]. This statement stresses the fact that mediation is not a passive or neutral behavior, but an active intervention designed to alter the dynamics of a conflict. The mediator aims to positively impact the conflict whether by promoting a resolution, facilitating communication between the parties, or addressing the fundamental causes of the dispute. To this end, third parties who act as mediators employ their own resources in the process, including personnel, expertise and structural resources and must be prepared to invest time and energy in the management of the conflict. Their motives might be altruistic, or mediators may have vested interests in a dispute or in a possible solution. The next section (*1.2 The Actors of Mediation*) identifies the actors most likely to assume the role of mediators and addresses the incentives of mediation. This proactive role, while can give mediators considerable influence in shaping the course of the conflict, it requires a careful balancing to prevent them from overreach or the imposition of their own agenda.

Fifth, "*mediators bring with them, consciously or otherwise, ideas, knowledge, resources, and interests of their own or of the group of organization they represent. Mediators often have their own assumptions and agendas about the conflict in question*" [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 34]. Although some definitions emphasize neutrality as the distinctive feature

of mediation, it is hard to believe that the performance of their role is conducted completely free of personal biases, assumptions or objectives based on the pursue of national interests. A mediator's history, experiences, and affiliation, whether consciously or unconsciously, can influence their approach to the conflict. A mediator from a specific country or organization may indeed possess predetermined beliefs regarding the underlying reasons of the conflict, and its possible resolution. Identifying and acknowledging these biases is essential for maintaining the parties' trust on the mediation process.

Sixth, "*mediation is a voluntary form of conflict management. The actors involved retain control over the outcome (if not always over the process) of their conflict, as well as the freedom to accept or reject mediation or mediator's proposals*" [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 34-35]. One of the most significant features of international mediation is that the parties involved must accept the presence of a specific mediator. It is thus important for the mediator to establish common rules and develop a common and comprehensive understanding of the mediating process. The consent of the parties relies on several factors, making crucial for the mediator to implement confidence-building techniques, as the commitment and dedication of the parties towards a mediated negotiation process is a crucial factor for the successful and peaceful resolution of an international dispute. A further demonstration that mediation is inherently predicated on consent is that, although the parties may not possess full control over the process, they ultimately retain the authority to accept or reject any suggestions that may emerge from the negotiating table. This key feature of mediation represents a crucial enhancement of its appeal to conflicting parties.

Lastly, "*mediation usually operates on an ad hoc basis only*" [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 35]. This aspect illustrates the flexible and contextual character of mediation. Mediation is employed as a temporary, singular intervention to resolve particular issues, enabling it to be adapted to the specific circumstances of each conflict. Nonetheless, this also implies that mediation cannot be a comprehensive remedy for systemic problems. While mediation can be successful in settling particular disputes, it is not intended to tackle structural or recurring issues that may require more institutionalized efforts.

1.2 The Actors of Mediation

Conflict is an inevitable element of all human interactions. Given the complex nature intrinsic in contemporary intrastate and interstate conflicts, it is not surprising that the entities that make the international community, states, organizations and individuals, may be eager to act to promote the peaceful resolution of disputes [Bercovitch, 1992: 99]. In an international environment lacking a centralized authority, the potential mediators are numerous, then, to clarify the myriads of possible mediators, it may be useful to classify them into official and unofficial categories: "Track One" and "Track Two" diplomacy. "Track One" diplomacy denotes formal and official governmental diplomacy carried out by official representatives of a state or state-like entity, involving engagement with other official authorities. Official diplomatic efforts can be differentiated from unofficial interactions, usually conducted by private citizens or non-governmental organizations, commonly referred to as "Track Two" Diplomacy [Berridge, 2015: 254-259].

Despite the proliferation and growth in significance of numerous non-state actors after the end of the Second World War, States continue to be perceived as the most relevant actors in the international community [Bercovitch, 1992: 99]. As suggested by Bercovitch [1992], this is mainly because the contemporary diplomatic system developed with a focus on the state, and several of the norms and customs that are current in international relations apply to nations only [*ibid*.]. For this reason, States have been the most frequent providers of conflict mediation [Grieg & Diehl, 2012: 62]. Typically, a state will appoint one of its most senior decision-makers to serve as a representative of its government when it is requested to mediate a dispute, and their actions will be influenced by their national positions, the autonomy afforded to them in formulating proposals, and the different resources, capacities, and political ideologies of their respective countries [Bercovitch, 1992: 101].

Among states, the major powers constitute the majority of all state-led mediation initiatives [Grieg & Diehl, 2012: 64]. Thus, it is not a surprise to see how each major power allocated a significant percentage of its mediation efforts to conflicts in which it had particular interests, be they related to national security or economic factors [Berridge, 2015]. Consequently, while United States administrations have concentrated significant mediation efforts on disputes in the Middle East, the Russian/Soviet mediation activity peaked in the 1950s amid global superpower rivalry, declined significantly in the 1980s, and surged again in the 1990s,

indicative of the emergence of new destabilizing threats to its security in both the former Yugoslavia and certain former Soviet Republics [Greig and Diehl, 2012: 65]

As for the motivations, according to Berridge [2015] the major powers typically engage in mediation efforts for one or more of the following reasons: to mitigate crises that put at risk the global stability, including economic stability (e.g. Western intervention in the oil-rich Middle East), to sustain and increase their international status, to maintain the internal stability of alliances where they play a prominent role, thus prevent offers of external assistance [Berridge, 2015: 255] The United States and the United Kingdom have been significantly influenced by these forces when engaging themselves in the Cyprus dispute, which involves two crucial members of NATO's southern flank: Turkey and Greece [*ibid.*]

The number of international, regional and other non-state entities has experienced a phenomenal increase in the past few decades as a result of the increasing complexity of the global system. In certain instances, these organizations have emerged as more significant service providers than traditional governments, also engaging actively in the pursuit of policies that foster a peaceful environment [Bercovitch, 1992: 102]. Despite being "governmental" in nature, regional and international organizations incorporate numerous aspects typically linked to impartiality and are usually entrusted with the responsibility of mediating conflicts among members [Bercovitch, 1992]. As a consequence, organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, the Organization of American States, and Arab League have accounted for many mediation efforts carried out since the end of the Second World War [Grieg & Diehl, 2012: 67].

Despite having actively mediated some of the world's most perilous conflict zones, including disputes between Israel and Lebanon, as well as India and Pakistan, the UN has mostly focused its attention on civil wars, including the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, Cyprus, and Western Sahara [Berridge, 2015]. While UN mediation constitutes 64% of all mediation efforts by international organizations [Grieg & Diehl, 2012: 68], various other IOs have emerged as significant providers of conflict mediation within the international framework. The Organization for African Unity, the predecessor of the current African Union, was one of the most proactive international organizations in facilitating mediations and intervening in some of the region's most lethal conflicts, including the civil wars in Burundi, Rwanda, and Liberia. [Berridge, 2015]. Large regional organizations, in fact, benefit from

their extensive membership, which enhances their leverage during mediation when a consensus for diplomatic intervention is present among members, and they possess direct familiarity with the regions in which they operate [Grieg & Diehl, 2012: 69]

After discussing official "Track One" government-to-government diplomacy, it is essential to explore the concept of informal "Track Two" diplomacy. The notion of "Track Two" diplomacy began to surface by the 1970s, referred to in the United States as "citizen diplomacy" [Berridge, 2015: 257]. However, the term was first introduced in the 1981 article, "Foreign Policy According to Freud", published in Foreign Policy [Davidson & Montville, 1981: 145-157]. This appellation is typically attributed to Joseph V. Montville, a US Foreign Service officer, who characterized Track Two diplomacy, in contrast to traditional "Track One" diplomacy, specifically as: "unofficial, non-structured interaction […] always open-minded, often altruistic […]. Its underlying assumption is that actual or potential conflicts can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness" [Davidson & Montville, 1981: 155]. This type of mediation is an informal and unofficial engagement commonly conducted by individuals, NGOs and religious organizations [Berridge, 2015: 257].

As anticipated, individuals play a crucial role in the realm of "Track Two" diplomacy. By individual mediation, we refer to an activity that is conducted by individuals who do not hold an official, representative role [Bercovitch, 1992]. Individual mediators may vary in their nature, resources, and expertise, with these attributes influencing both the objectives they pursue, and the tactics employed in mediation [*ibid*.]. The strategies and mediation of individuals are more closely linked to their abilities and personal experiences than to external and contextual factors [Bercovitch, 1992: 100]. Consequently, according to Bercovitch, individual mediation can demonstrate superior flexibility and innovation compared to mediation conducted by states. [*ibid*.].

The pool of private mediators often include individuals with substantial experience in government, leadership roles in religious organization, or prominent positions within prominent international organizations [Bercovitch 1992; Grieg & Diehl, 2012; Berridge, 2015] Former US President Jimmy Carter, former South African President Nelson Mandela, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan have all acted as mediators in global conflict [Grieg & Diehl, 2012: 70]. Private individuals heavily depend on their personal status and

diplomatic acumen, as they lack the material resources and power necessary to incentivize or coerce disputants, or to assure any parties of a final settlement that may be achieved [Grieg & Diehl, 2012: 70]. Alongside former political leaders, private individuals involved in these activities have been important scholars whose expertise may result effective in conflict management, and influential businessman (e.g. Armand Hammer, the American tycoon who undertook diplomatic efforts to foster East-West *détente* during the Cold War) [Berridge, 2015]. Such individuals are motivated by a combination of corporate interests, political aspiration, and philanthropic inclinations. [Bercovitch, 1992; Berridge, 2015: 257]

Other actors, including non-governmental organizations, serve as mediators of international conflicts in Track Two diplomacy. Religious organizations have often played a significant role among NGO, with the Order of Sant'Egidio that gained fame for its involvement in concluding the civil war in Mozambique in the early 1990s [Berridge, 2015: 257]. Minor religious groups, such as the Quakers, have similarly to calming civil wars [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. The Quakers' mediation efforts, for instance, are motivated by their ideology, which regards conflict as fundamentally immoral and promotes tangible actions for achieving peace [*ibid*.]. The said religious beliefs frequently foster trust in Quaker mediators among conflicting parties who perceive the Quakers' purpose for mediating as grounded in their pacifist and spiritual convictions [Bercovitch and Kadayifici-Orellana, 2009; Grieg & Diehl, 2012].

To conclude, the efficacy of Track Two mediation is often evident during the pre-negotiation phase, as they are free from political authority and may articulate their positions without restrictions, bringing onto the negotiating table new potential solutions for a settlement [Berridge, 2015]. The limitations of Track Two diplomacy, however, pertain to the restricted ability of the participants to affect the political framework, and the absence of the necessary resources to exert leverage during negotiations and subsequent agreement implementation [*ibid*.]. It is no hidden that entities who perform their function in the framework of Track Two diplomacy often acknowledge that their initiatives are most effective when conducted alongside official efforts, despite the challenges in coordinating such collaboration.

Multiparty Mediation. It has thus far been presumed that mediation is always conducted by a singular actor that focuses its energies on resolving the conflict. This can be

advantageous as increased rapport and confidence between the belligerents and a third party enhances the effectiveness of conflict mediation. Grieg and Diehl [2012: 71], however, emphasize that solo mediation is not without its drawbacks. For instance, a weak third party's unilateral mediation is constrained by the minimal resources available to influence the negotiations and induce concessions from both parties to reach an agreement [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. Today, the participation of multiple mediators has become standard practice. [Berridge, 2015: 258]. Multiparty mediation may occur simultaneously or sequentially and can either coordinated or uncoordinated. As a consequence, third parties' endeavor to facilitate an agreement in the conflict through various uncoordinated efforts by distinct third parties, a coalition of third parties collaborating in a unified initiative, or through sequential mediation efforts over time [Bohmelt, 2011].

Although multiparty mediation present significant drawbacks, as it involves numerous participants in the diplomatic process that may jeopardize the joint effort by promoting conflict messages and exacerbating confusion [Grieg and Diehl, 2012: 72], mediators often recognize various benefits in synchronizing their efforts and, for this reason, engage in multiparty mediation [Berridge, 2015]. Collaborating with other third parties can indeed facilitate resource pooling, enhancing the leverage of the mediators and enabling a more effective efforts [Crocker er al., 2001]. Multiparty mediation can also serve as a mechanism to equilibrate the biases of the solo mediator and offers to the parties a mechanism for both sides to engage an additional actor whom they sees as sympathetic to their interest [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. Following from that, a clear difference exists between states and international organizations on the composition of their mediation team [Grieg and Diehl, 2015: 74]. While multiparty state mediation endeavors concentrate on equilibrating the stances of third parties by incorporating new actors into the process to counteract the biases of existing mediator, international organizations usually tend to involve into the mediation initiative other parties that they see having analogous interests [*ibid*.].

At times, multiparty mediation efforts may occur sequentially in a conflict, with various third parties attempting to resolve the dispute at distinct intervals [Grieg & Diehl, 2012: 76]. This is based on the premise that disputes and conflicts have life cycles, and that specific types of mediators are more suitable for particular stages than others [Berridge, 2015]. This type of mediation was observed in Haiti, where responsibility initially resided with the OAS, subsequently passed to the UN and ultimately to the US [Berridge, 2015: 259]. Usually,

highly mediated conflict is either a protracted dispute posing a substantial threat to regional security or a conflict in which major powers have clear interests involved. For instance, Balkans War and the conflict in Karabakh prompted numerous mediations attempts by various third parties [Greig and Diehl, 2012: 77].

1.2.1 The African Union as a Mediator?

The establishment of the African Union ushered in a new era in conflict resolution and peacebuilding across Africa. The transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the AU marked a pivotal change from the previous focus on sovereignty and non-intervention in internal matters, empowering the Organizations to take actions in member states under extreme circumstances. Consequently, the AU established more organized institutions designed to fulfill a range of various economic, social, and political objectives [Apuuli, 2017]

Until the late 1980s, mediation within the OAU was primarily marked by ad hoc processes and the organization's constrained institutional capabilities. Established in 1963 in Addis Ababa[1], the OAU mediation initiatives were governed by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, as stated in Article III (2) of its Charter[2]. This position significantly limited its capacity to engage in internal conflicts, hindering the OAU's ability to utilize mediation in addressing intra-state conflicts. The OAU's mediation strategy primarily depended on the initiatives of the Commission on Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration [Article XIX, Charter of the OAU; 1963] as well as ad hoc committees formed by African leaders, which were convened to resolve conflicts, especially those concerning the delimitation of borders [Touval, 1967] Notwithstanding these constraints, a notable accomplishment was the administration of territorial conflicts arising from colonial boundaries[3]. The OAU adopted the principle of maintaining colonial borders, affectively managing various border disputes through diplomatic means and subtle intervention [Touval,

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[1] Organization of African Unity (OAU), Charter of the Organization of African Unity, *25 May 1963 – Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

[2] Article III (2) of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (Addis Ababa, 25 May 1963), limits the organization's ability to mediate intra-state conflicts by requiring the adherence of the parties to the principle of "non-interference in the internal affairs of States".

[3] For instance, in 1964, following the Moroccan incursion into Algerian territory, both nations pursued distinct mediators. Algeria urged the OAU Council of Ministers to regard the situation as an emergency, but Morocco sought resolution through the UN. Nevertheless, Morocco was urged by several non-African nations to acquiesce to the OAU mediation. The OAU's Council of Ministers established an ad hoc commission, consisting of Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Tanzania mediate the conflict.

1967]. The foundation of the African Union in the early 2000s[4] marked a transformative shift in mediation, leading to a more strong, systematic, and integrated approach to dispute resolution in the African continent.

In 2009, the African Union adopted the Action Plan to Strengthen the AU's Mediation Capacity, acknowledging the necessity to shift from an ad hoc strategy to a more structured and systematic conflict management framework [Nathan, 2009]. The plan defines mediation as 'a process of dialogue and negotiation in which a third party assists two or more disputant parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve conflict without resorting to force' [*ibid.*]. To implement this action plan and strengthen the AU's mediation capacity, several capacity building initiatives have been undertaken. [Nathan, 2009]. In response to this necessity, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC Protocol) has been adopted[5]. As of today, the African Union is officially committed to fostering peace, security and stability across the continent through its established institutions, including the African Union Panel of the Wise (AU PW), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Africa Peace Fund (APF).

The African Union's ability to serve as an effective mediator emerged from a long process of institutional development. The AU has evolved from a limited strategy during the OAU era to a more comprehensive framework for conflict resolution. Despite substantial remaining challenges, including political discord among members, a limited budget, and difficulties in the implementation of conflict management initiatives, the AU has established itself as a crucial actor in African-based conflict resolution, employing a comprehensive approach that includes early-warning mechanisms, mediation initiatives, peacekeeping interventions, and post-conflict reconstruction.

1.3 Forms of Mediation

The term "mediation" broadly refers to various third-party actions aimed at conflict-management. The strategy employed by third parties in mediation is usually contingent upon the circumstances encountered by the conflicting parties [Berridge, 2015]. For this reason, in

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[4] Constitutive Act of the African Union Adopted by the Thirty-Sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, *11 July 2000 - Lome, Togo.*
[5] Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union; *Durban, South Africa - 9 July 2002.*

certain conflicts where the principal barrier to achieving a settlement is the transmission of information, the mediator can effectively assist by just facilitating communications; for other conflicts, instead, it may be necessary for a third-party to assume a more active role [Berridge, 2015].

One approach for a better understanding of the variety of mediation forms is to consider the degree of dedication exhibited by the third party in facilitating the attainment of a final settlement. To this regard, Fisher [2007] distinguishes between four levels of mediation: "light mediation", "consultation", "pure mediation", and "power mediation".

In mediating a dispute, a third-party main interest may be that of fostering informal connections between the parties in order to diminishing antagonism and build trust. In this first form of mediation, usually defined as conciliation or "light mediation" [Pruitt, 2000; Greig & Diehl, 2012], the third-party is usually inclined to offer "good offices" by coordinating the meetings' location and time. among the disputants rather than engaging directly in the negotiation process [Berridge, 2015]. To this regard, it may be useful to recall when the Community of Sant'Egidio facilitated negotiations between the central government and insurgents during Mozambique's civil war facilitating the resolution of the conflict and the adoption of a Peace Agreement in Rome in 1992[Grieg & Diehl, 2012].

A further form of mediation is "consultation". The mediator's role in the bargaining process is more substantial here. The third-party actively participates in the discussions, fulfilling a consultative role to assist the disputants in resolving the issues at hand [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. In this form of mediation, the third party needs to intervene and assist the conflicting in recognizing the disputed issue as a mutual interest to settle [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. This involvement, however, remains constrained, as the mediator is generally resistant to "hard bargaining" and primarily emphasizes encouraging both parties to consider their mutual interests in resolving the dispute [Berridge, 2015].

Additionally, "pure mediation" delineates the mediator's responsibility as managing the information exchange between the two parties and proposing viable settlement agreements for the dispute [Berridge, 2015]. In this capacity, the mediator becomes a solution innovator to the conflict [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. The mediator in this case exercises a greater degree of

control over the discussions than in consultation, such as establishing the agenda and identifying potential settlements [Berridge, 2015].

In the last form, the mediator actively employs its resources to facilitate an agreement between the parties. "Heavy mediation" [Pruitt, 2000], "Manipulation" [Zartman, 2007], "Power Mediation" [Grieg and Diehl, 2012] represents the most coercive form of third-party diplomatic involvement [Grieg and Diehl, 2012]. Here, the mediator presents incentives and penalties to enhance the conditions of a potential settlement [Berridge, 2015]. The American mediation of the Camp David Accord, where the US offered significant amount of foreign aid to both Israel and Egypt exemplifies effective power mediation [Grieg & Diehl, 2012].

Touval and Zartman [1985] proposed a different classification with three categories: communication-facilitation, formulation and manipulation.

In the first category, the mediator, functioning as a communicator or a facilitator, acts as a conduit for communication between conflicting parties, emphasizing the importance of ensuring continued discussion and dialogue. This is because a conflict also signifies a breakdown in communication, with the parties involved refusing direct dialogue. Here, the role of the mediator is characterized as passive in human affairs, as it is confined to establishing contact with the parties, earning their trust and confidence, facilitating interactions, identifying issues and interests, providing missing information, conveying proposal and promoting communication [Touval & Zartman, 1985]

In a mediation as a formulation, the mediator assumes a more proactive role. In contrast to facilitation, formulation entails a significant contribution to negotiations by the mediator. In such situations, the failure of communication is not the sole reason a mediator is required; at times, the parties are unwilling to contemplate a resolution. Indeed, when a mediator functions as a formulator, they devise and present new solutions to the disputants, facilitating their selection of a mutually acceptable alternative [Touval & Zartman, 1985]. In this situation, the mediator must cultivate additional abilities and possess attributes of both creativity and innovation, actively seeking a mutually acceptable solution and proposing new processes.

When communication and innovation become insufficient, mediation may devolve into manipulation. Consequently, when the mediator acts as a manipulator, they exploit their position and leverage to influence the crisis negotiation process. The mediator seeks to alter

the reservation points of each party, modifying the disputants' expectation and expanding or introducing alternatives within the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA). The mediator's role entails power, transforming the dyadic negotiating structure into a triadic framework, where the mediator becomes a full participant, initiating substantial suggestions and propositions. The objective is to sustain the triangle dynamic, preserving the mutual impasse, ensuring that no party can dominate, thereby leading both to view the mediator as the sole solution to their deadlock. The mediator's role is to inform the parties of the costs associated with non-agreement, so facilitating the development of a framework for an acceptable outcome. A unilateral win is unacceptable due to its inherent instability, as the aggrieved person may be dissatisfied and attempt to reverse the decisions made.

1.4 The Success and Failure of Mediation

A significant issue in both the practice and study of mediation is distinguishing between its success and failure. In certain instances, such as the promotion of a lasting peace, recognizing a success is easy. Differentiating success from failure is particularly challenging when a mediation initiative results in a cease-fire without securing a final resolution of the conflict [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. However, a mediation effort that promotes a ceasefire between the two parties undoubtedly contributes to peace, at least for some time. Since a mediated ceasefire reduces the intensity of conflict between opposing factions, it may be reasonable to characterize this outcome as successful [*ibid*.]. Yet some confrontations undergo a cyclical pattern of mediated cease-fires, each of which subsequently violated[6]. A mediation effort that results in neither a cease-fire nor an agreement, with both parties persisting in hostilities may be deemed as a failure [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. Other failed mediations, however, may nevertheless facilitate peace in the long run. Facilitating direct discussions between the parties can foster confidence and rapport, hence increasing the likelihood of future negotiations and the attainment of a conclusive settlement [Rubin 1992; Bercovitch & Gartner 2006; Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. Should that be seen a success or a failure? It is thus clear, for some cases of mediation, the distinction between "success" and "failure" is not clearly defined.

Here, the emphasis will primarily be on success defined in two distinct manners. The initial accomplishment in persuading the conflicting parties to agree to mediation, or "getting to the

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[6] We can observe it in several conflicts that are still ongoing at present, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian civil war, and the Libyan internal conflict.

table". The second is the achievement of an agreement between the parties as a result of the mediation effort. The two stages are interconnected, as certain characteristics that motivate players to pursue mediation also affect their willingness to reach a final agreement [Grieg and Diehl, 2012].

The initial stage that we need to analyze in conflict management, though it may not be a definitive assurance of success, is to convene together the involved parties for negotiation. This allows them to reassess their views about the opposing party and convey details regarding their own negotiation stances. Yet, this is not as straightforward as it appears for two primary reasons: parties in the conflict (1) fear the possibility that peace overtures may be perceived as a sign of weakness that can be exploited [Grieg and Diehl, 2012]; (2) dread the potential domestic political costs of sitting down with the enemy [Spector, 1998]. To address deeply entrenched disputes, it is essential to alter the disputants' assumptions regarding the optimal approach to conflict resolution [Stein, 1989].

The willingness of parties to engage in negotiations and embrace mediation might arise as the expenses of conflict escalate ("pain") and diplomatic solutions become more attractive than ongoing violence ("promise") [Grieg & Diehl, 2012].

Actors are more inclined to seek mediation when their conflict is really distressing. Continual militaristic confrontations impose direct expenses on the adversaries. Under these circumstances, they may pursue alternatives to mitigate expenses [Berridge, 2015]. The concept of "mutually hurting stalemate" elucidates the perceptual circumstances that may compel adversaries to negotiate. MHS is a condition "in which neither side can win, yet continuing the conflict will be very harmful to each" [Zartman, 2003]. MHS comprises three fundamental components. The term "stalemate" denotes a deadlock in the war, wherein neither party perceives the possibility of attaining its objectives through ongoing fighting [Berridge, 2015]. The second aspect, "hurting," indicates that the parties are incurring specific costs, presuming they are substantial enough to require a change in conduct [*ibid*.]. The last phrase, "mutually," signifies that both parties incur substantial expenses and have limited prospects of achieving success by ongoing confrontation [*ibid*.]. While the pain must be reciprocal, it does not need have to be equivalent or originate from the same source [Zartman, 2001; Grieg and Diehl, 2012]. The results of a mutually hurting stalemate are that the parties will attempt to alter their policies based on a cost-benefit analysis [Greig & Diehl, 2012]. Consequently,

disputants pursue mediation when they anticipate a more favorable end with it than without it, coupled with a concern over the repercussions of ongoing conflict [Greig & Diehl, 2012].

The presence of significant costs alone may not suffice for enemies to pursue diplomatic alternatives. They must also recognize that a "way out" of the rivalry is available [Zartman, 2000]. There are several sources for this perceptual change. One way to become more acceptance of diplomacy is from past experience [Grieg & Diehl, 2012]. In this way, diplomatic failure paradoxically may lay the groundwork for future diplomatic efforts and soften rivals to future negotiations [Berridge, 2015]. Another approach to attain this may involve enhanced collaboration among competitors on matters unrelated to the points of dispute [Grieg and Diehl, 2012]. This functionalist perspective posits that collaboration in areas outside of competition may enhance relationships and potentially facilitate conflict resolution.

While the involvement of a willing mediator and the agreement of the disputing parties to engage in dialogue is a crucial first step towards peace, it does not ensure that a resolution can be achieved. Indeed, most mediation efforts are unsuccessful [Grieg and Diehl, 2012]. Sometimes disputants may engage in mediation to appease a dominant third party or a conflicting party may agree to mediation to enhance their public image while strategically preparing for future confrontations [Richmond, 1998].

Bercovitch and Jackson [2009] identify various elements and conditions that either hinder or facilitate mediation efforts, hence influencing the success or failure of these initiatives. Due to the variety of disputes, contexts, and participants, there is no singular correct method for mediating a conflict. Nonetheless, certain factors may be significant. For instance, a powerful mediator, capable of leveraging resources in a mediation process, can achieve success where a less influential mediator may falter [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 39-40]. By doing so, influential mediators can utilize their resources to increase the costs for disputants who refuse a settlement, so expanding their win-sets [*ibid*.]. The identification of the actor pursuing a certain mediation affects the outcome, as does the status of the individual conducting the diplomatic initiatives, which also impacts the likelihood of success. Senior mediators can enhance the likelihood of successful mediation due to their significant influence and status [Grieg and Diehl, 2012; Zartman and Touval, 1985].

Moreover, other structural factors influence the mediation, encompassing physical, social, and interpersonal elements. The two most significant structural factors influencing the efficacy of mediation are the time of the mediation and the intensity of the conflict [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 42]. Conflicts, like all other social processes, have their own life cycles. There are times when a conflict is "ripe" for mediation [Zartman, 1985] and times when mediation can only intensify a conflict. Consensus on the definition of a favorable moment is scarce; yet, the presence of a "mutually hurting stalemate" serves as the most effective criterion for determining the appropriate time to start a mediation [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2019: 42].

The concept of intensity is closely associated with this component. The literature on mediation presents two opposing concepts [Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 42]. As reported by Bercovitch and Jackson [2009], Jackson [1952] and Young [1967] propose that an increase in dispute intensity correlates with a greater probability of mediation acceptance and success. An opposing perspective argues that more intensity and bigger losses will lead to more polarized positions among the parties, resulting in a heightened determination to reject any mediation efforts [Modelski, 1964; Brockner, 1982; in Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009].

The characteristics of a conflict, the problems involved, the level of severity, the scheduling of mediation, and the mediation context all significantly influence the mediation process. To enhance the likelihood of success, aspiring mediators must comprehend all structural elements and address all potential impediments to mediation.

2. Putnam's Two-Level Game Theory

Domestic politics and international relations are frequently, if not always, interconnected, and numerous theories have attempted to elucidate this seemingly complex entanglement. In recent years, Richard Haass [2013] has contended, particularly concerning the United States, that numerous States have assured nearly exaggerated performance internationally, while concurrently neglecting several domestic domains, including economics, budgetary management and education. The failure to establish a connection between domestic and foreign matters is defined by Hass with the term "underreach" [Haas, 2013: 78].

Nonetheless, to argue over whether or not domestic politics actually dictates international relations, or vice versa, may result tautological. The answer to this question is clearly both. The most crucial questions to pose are: when does this occur and how? [Putnam, 1988: 427] Robert Putnam, in his article "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games" presents a theoretical framework for comprehending the intertwined relation between diplomacy and domestic politics.

2.1 Understanding Domestic-International Interactions

Robert Putnam illustrates a fundamental instance of the intertwining of diplomacy and domestic politics by providing us with an analysis of the diplomatic process that culminated in the 1978 Bonn G7 conference. In the mid-1970s, a concerted global reflation initiative, driven by "locomotive" economies of the United States, Germany and Japan, was suggested to facilitate Western recovery from the first oil shock [Putnam, 1988]. This proposal significant momentum with the advent of the Carter administration in the US and received enthusiastic support by other countries and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) [Putnam, 1988: 427-428]. At the same time, the US administration encountered domestic obstacles in the promotion of an extensive energy program, while Germany voiced a series of complaints regarding US unlimited demand for imported oil [Putnam, 1988]. All parties, however, acknowledged that the global economy was in a precarious situation [Putnam, 1988: 427].

At the Bonn summit, un unforeseen comprehensive package of measures was adopted, representing a rare instance where all participants left happier than when they arrived [Putnam, 1988: 428]. In fact, Germany accepted an additional fiscal stimulus, the US President pledged

to reducing regulation of domestic oil prices, and Japan committed to intensify effort towards economic growth and, overall, the Bonn Summit resulted in a comprehensive agreement [Putnam, 1988: 428].

The question to be posed here, however, is how the agreement was made possible. To this regard, Putnam's research indicates that that key Bonn governments adopted different policies compared to those they would have pursued without international negotiation, and that consensus was achievable solely because a significant minority within each the government internally supported the policy needed at the international level [Putnam, 1988: 428].

In each of the "Bonn countries", there was a faction advocating for the necessary policy change at the international level; nevertheless, this movement was initially in the minority. Consequently, international pressure was an essential prerequisite for realizing these political transformations [Putnam, 1988: 430]. Conversely, without internal support, international forces alone would have been not sufficient to achieve the final accord.

The Bonn Agreement can be seen as an outstanding example of the combination of domestic constraints and international pressure. Thus, purely "internal" or "international" analysis would provide only a partial explanation, while omitting the crucial aspect of the interplay between the two levels of the game. [Putnam, 1988: 430]. The episode illustrated by Robert Putnam demonstrate that such can only be explained by a comprehensive theory that account for both internal and international factors, and their interactions [*ibid*].

The Bonn Agreement negotiation process exemplified how governments often participate in that Putnam referred to as "Two-Level Games", occurring concurrently at both the local and international levels, whether in multilateral or bilateral talks.

In his two-levels game theory, Putnam suggests that domestic leaders play as "chief negotiators" on the international stage, while always requiring "ratification" from his internal constituencies [Putnam, 1988]. The potential results of international negotiations, along with the various types of agreements that may receive domestic approval, delineate a leader's "win-set" [de Conceicao-Heldt, 2017], with its size facilitating the assessment of any potential settlement [Putnam, 1988].

The likelihood of success relies on the actions of multiple actors:

Internationally, delegates from various national governments negotiate to address issues of collective action, improve the lives of their constituents, establish international institutions that foster cooperation, and find ways to end wars in societies that have been devastated. Thus, collaboration can occur in a wide range of domains, such as commerce, money, safety, progress, ecology, or medical treatment [de Conceicao-Heldt, 2017]. Global actors may engage in bargaining processes within formal frameworks, including the United Nations and its affiliates, and in informal intergovernmental contexts such the G-7 or the G-20 [de Conceicao-Heldt, 2017]. Both national governments and international bureaucracy have emerged as key players in global governance due to the proliferation of international organizations and, as IOs' structures have become more politicized, non-governmental organizations have emerged as important players, and International Organizations have begun to consult and rely on NGOs' expertise [Tallberg et al., 2013].

At the *national level*, various stakeholders with divergent interests, such as politicians, bureaucrats, group of interests, NGOs, and voters, engage within domestic political institutions (e.i. Parliaments and Ministries) to discuss and monitor a country's foreign policy decisions [de Conceicao-Heldt, 2017]. At the *transnational level*, actors that operated regardless of borders (e.i. multinational corporations, transnational advocacy organizations and terrorist groups) act with the aim of affecting the domestic and international policies of nations [Frieden, 1999].

2.2 The Importance of Win-Sets

Putnam's theory encompasses two levels of interaction among participants in negotiations. The two-level game is quite intricate, decisions that are sensible for a player at one stage may be imprudent for that same player while negotiating at the other level [Putnam, 1988: 434]. For a better understanding, Putnam simplifies the game into two levels [Putnam, 1988: 436]:

1. "bargaining between the negotiators, leading to a tentative agreement; call that Level I".

2. "separate discussions within each group of constituents about whether to ratify the agreement; call that Level II".

At the first level of negotiations, the 'chief negotiator' serves as the primary negotiating authority. The term 'chief negotiator' may refer to an individual, a group of individuals, one or more organizations, contingent on the circumstances [Putnam, 198+8.

This sequential division into a negotiation phases (Level I) and a ratification phase (Level II), is advantageous for the purpose of exposure. Yet, it is crucial to consider that the impact on expectations will be significant, as preliminary discussions and negotiations at Level II are expected to establish an initial stance for the Level I negotiations [Putnam, 1988]. Also, the necessity for Level II ratification will undoubtedly influence Level I negotiations. In fact, anticipations of refusal at Level II can disrupt talks at Level I without even starting talks at the international level [Putnam, 1988: 436-438]. Frequently, the two-level approach may be "iterative", as negotiators explore potential accords and assess the perspectives of the internal stakeholders [Putnam, 1988: 436].

The significance of win-sets derives from the fact that they are determinants of relative negotiating power of the parties. In fact, assuming all factors are constant, larger win-sets increase the probability of Level I agreements, since constituents are more amenable to a wide variety of alternatives [Putnam, 1988: 437]. Level I negotiators lack distinct win-sets of their own and exclusively negotiate for solutions they are certain will be acceptable to internal actors at Level II, as they know that a positive outcome is contingent upon the overlap of the Level II and Level win-sets [Putnam, 1988]. As win-sets represent the spectrum of acceptable outcomes for individuals or groups on a specific topic, a larger win-set at the Level II increases the likelihood of overlap [Putnam, 1988: 437]. Consequently, it is evident that talks at Level I are more likely to succeed when larger win-sets exist at Level II, since this allows for a greater number of acceptable solutions, thereby enhancing the probability of identifying a mutually agreeable resolution for all the parties involved [Putnam, 1988: 438].

Nonetheless, extensive win-sets may come with certain drawbacks. A negotiator with a wider projected win-set is more susceptible to being influenced by other Level I negotiators [Putnam, 1988]. If the counterparts are aware that the leader possesses a wide win-set, they recognize that almost any policies may be implemented within its country, revealing a potential weakness during the bargaining process [Putnam, 1988]. On the contrary, when a leader possesses a limited domestic win-set, they can leverage this to negotiate more effectively on the international stage [*ibid*.]. As noted by Putnam, lamenting the domestic

constraints under which one must operate is the first thing to say at the beginning of any negotiation [Harrison & Campbell, 1976; in Putnam, 1988]. This general principle was first noted by Thomas Schelling: "The power of a negotiator often rests on a manifest inability to make concessions and meet demands …" [Schelling, 1980: 19; in Putnam, 1988]. However, a limited win-set for a country constitutes a negotiation advantage only if the other side recognizes the presence of internal limits [Putnam, 1988]. Consequently, a negotiator with fewer constraints will offer more concessions than they typically would, in the circumstance where reaching an agreement is preferable to having none [Iida, 1993: 410]. Understanding the domestic acceptance range of a leader's proposals enables that negotiator to bargain more effectively on the international stage, securing concessions and policies that should align with the preferences of domestic coalitions [Putnam, 1988].

However, negotiators may possess asymmetric information regarding the win-set of their counterparts' domestic constituencies. Inadequate knowledge will not produce quicker or more amicable outcomes, as negotiators lack awareness of the degree to which domestic restrictions limit the opposition's bargaining power [Iida, 1993: 412]. Politicizing an issue may be a way to make the other side aware of their own internal constraints, as it frequently mobilizes factions that are not concerned about the repercussion of a lack of internal consensus, hence shrinking the effective win-set [Putnam, 1988: 445].

2.3 The Determinants of a Win-Set

Understanding the conditions that influence the size of the win-set is crucial in analyzing a negotiation through a two-level approach. Putnam [1988: 442] identifies three critical groups of factors:

- The preferences and coalitions in level II

- Level II institutions

- The strategies of the negotiators in level I.

Let us examine them individually:

1) **"The size of the win-set depends on preferences and possible coalitions among Level II constituents" [Putnam, 1988].**

By abstracting from the specifics of Level II politics, one can delineate some principles that regulate the size of win-sets [Putnam, 1988: 442]. For instance, a reduced cost of the "no deal" for constituents corresponds to a diminished win-set [*ibid.*]. The option to ratify a proposed agreement does not preclude a range of potentially appealing alternatives; rather, the only alternative to this is the lack of an agreement [Putnam, 1988]. This typically signifies a maintenance of a certain status-quo; yet, in certain instances, this lack of agreement may exacerbate the issue [*ibid.*]. While some negotiating parties may endure minimal costs for a no-deal scenario, other actors will incur substantial costs; hence, the former group will exhibit greater skepticism towards Level I agreements than the latter [Putnam, 1988: 443].

Putnam suggests that the size of the win-set, and hence the negotiating capacity of the Level I negotiator, is contingent upon the relative strength of the "isolationist" forces, which resists international cooperation, and the "internationalists", who advocate for universal support [Putnam, 1988: 443]. Smaller or more dependent countries with open economies are likely to show stronger support for international cooperation compared to more self-sufficient nations, such as the United States, where the repercussions of a no-deal scenario are typically less significant for the majority of the constituents [Putnam, 1988: 443]. As a consequence, more self-reliant governments are likely to engage in fewer international accords and face greater challenges in their internal negotiation, *ceteris paribus* [*ibid.*].

However, Level I constituencies sometimes are not particularly "homogeneous" [Putnam, 1988]. In heterogeneous political societies, internationally coordinated efforts may encounter internal resistance both from those who believe international integration is already excessive, as well as from other who contend it is not yet sufficient. Such models are prevalent in negotiations involving many items [Putnam, 1988: 444]. These conflicts may be designed as "factional" [Walton & McKersie, 1991] due to the negotiator's entrapment between rival groups inside the same organization.

The chief negotiator encounter distinct challenges at Level I when addressing a homogenous conflict compared to those confronting a heterogeneous issue [Putnam, 1988:

444]. The negotiator's likelihood of securing ratification increases with greater "success" at Level I. In such instances, the negotiator may leverage the implied threat of his hawks to optimize his benefits or mitigate his losses at Level I. In anticipating Level II, the negotiator's primary challenge in a homogenous conflict is reconciling the discrepancy between the constituent expectation and the negotiated outcome [Putnam, 1988: 445].

In the context of a negotiator engaged in a heterogeneous conflict, the task is more challenging. In attempting to enhance the probability of ratification, he cannot merely adhere to the "the more the better" principle [Putnam, 1988: 445-446]. In certain instances, the demarcations inside Level II could overlap, allowing the chief negotiator to potentially identify covert allies at the opponent's negotiating table [Putnam. 1998: 446]. Thus, in such circumstances, internal divisions are advantageous as they can significantly enhance the potential for international cooperation [*ibid*.]. Thus, Putnam suggests that an internally divided government is more likely to reach an international agreement that one that is resolutely committed [Putnam, 1988].

By trying to make the chances of ratification more and more likely, he can't just follow the "more, better" rule. In certain situations, the internal divisions within Level II negotiations can spill over into the Level I framework, enabling negotiators at the Level I stage to secure silent allies even from their opponent's side [Putnam, 1988]. This dynamic creates opportunities for transnational alignments, whether implicit or explicit, where domestic interests compel governments to adopt policies that benefit both parties [*ibid.*]. In such scenarios, internal disagreements can actually facilitate international cooperation by creating space for compromise. A government with internal divisions may be more adaptable and inclined to reach international agreements than one that is rigidly committed to a single, unified policy stance. [Putnam, 1998: 447]. Note that this technique operates not by altering the preferences of domestic constituents, but rather by creating a policy option that was previously outside domestic control.

2) **"The size of the win-set depends on the Level II political institutions" [Putnam, 1988].**

As suggested by Putnam, the "ratification procedures clearly influence the size of the win set" [Putnam, 1988: 448]. For instance, if a two-thirds vote is necessary for ratification, the

win set will likely be lower shorter compared to the case in which only a simple majority is required [Putnam, 1988: 448].

Nonetheless, not all ratification process are comprehensive and formalized. For instance, the Japanese inclination to pursue extensive internal consensus prior to action constraints the Japanese win-set [Putnam, 1988: 449]. Internal political processes can significantly impact the size of a government's win-set in negotiations. [Putnam, 1988: 449]. This idea connects with the ongoing debate around "state strength" and "state autonomy." Specifically, the greater the autonomy of central decision-makers from domestic factions, the larger the potential win-set they can operate within. However, the two-level framework suggests a trade-off: as a state's autonomy from domestic actors increases, its international bargaining position may weaken, making it more challenging to secure favorable outcomes on the global stage [Putnam, 1988: 449].

3) "The size of the win-set depends on the strategies of the negotiator in Level I" [Putnam, 1988]

Level I negotiators possess a mixed motivation regarding their win-set, as expansive win-sets facilitate agreement attainment but diminish their bargaining leverage [Putnam, 1988]. This presents a tactical challenge, since gaining support from constituents may illustrate dedication to a specific stance but could also have irrevocable consequences on their attitudes, hindering future ratification of a compromise agreement [Putnam, 1988: 450].

To broaden their win-set and facilitate ratification, negotiators may utilize both traditional side-payments and general "goodwill" [Putnam, 1988: 450]. Side-payments may originate from unrelated domestic sources or be obtained through international negotiations [Putnam, 1988: 450].

To this regard, an experienced negotiator should optimize the cost-effectiveness of concessions and demands by focusing on initiatives, both domestically and internationally, with consideration of their Level II incidence [Putnam, 1988: 451]. In this undertaking, Level I negotiators frequently collaborate [*ibid*.]. Consequently, negotiators of elevated rank are preferred by foreign parties to engage with. Diplomats then behave logically by declining to deal with a counterpart of lesser status, and, for instance, America's negotiation partners have

valid apprehensions whenever the American president is weakened domestically [Putnam, 1988: 452].

2.4 The Two-Level Game Theory in Mediation Contexts

As emphasized in the previous sections, Robert Putnam's Two-Level Game Theory provides a solid framework for understanding international negotiations. Originally meant to be applied to negotiations between two or more parties, the theory posits that negotiators face two distinct, yet interconnected, levels of decision-making: the international level and the domestic level. The fundamental idea is that "chief negotiators" must simultaneously negotiate at both levels, balancing the pressures of international negotiations with the constraints of domestic politics.

This theoretical approach can be highly valuable also in international mediation contexts, where a third party is introduced in the negotiation with the aim of facilitating an amicable resolution of a dispute between the conflicting sides. To this end, Putnam's Two-Level Game Theory provides a framework for mediators to fully understand political dynamics and formulate strategies that accommodate domestic constraints and international demands. In international mediation, the mediator's role is complicated by the fact that they must not only help facilitate communication and understanding between the parties, but also account for internal political contexts that may affect the acceptance of proposed solutions. Therefore, the mediator is tasked with understanding the broader context, including the interests of the international community and the domestic constraints that may affect the negotiators' capacity to negotiate and to accept a final settlement.

One of the key contributions of Putnam's theory in international mediation contexts, it is its recognition of the "linkage" between the two levels of negotiation, namely the process by which negotiators attempt to balance the demands of the international community with those of domestic constituencies. Under these circumstances, an international agreement may be presented as a package deal whereby concessions at one level are balanced by gains at another. In mediation, a qualified third-party mediator may assist to such linkages by framing the negotiation in terms that appeal to both the international and domestic priorities of the contending parties.

In addition to linkage, Putnam's approach emphasizes the concept of the "win-set," which refers to the set of possible agreements that might satisfy the international community and meet the domestic political restrictions of each party. Political demands and domestic preferences within a country help to define the win-set and, as already observed, the larger the win-set the greater the possibility to reach an agreement. Therefore, regardless of the international context, the mediator will face significant challenges in achieving a compromise if there is strong domestic opposition, then shrinking the win-set. Thus, mediators must understand the win-set size of each side and base their assessment of the probability of success on this notion. In some cases, they may need expand the win-set by proposing compromises and exerting diplomatic and economic pressure.

With that being said, we can conclude that Robert Putnam's Two-Level Game Theory offers valuable insights of the complexities of international mediation. Indeed, the theory provides a framework for comprehending how negotiators balance international demands with domestic constraints and how linkage and win-sets impact the result of negotiations. Understanding the dual level of the process may prove valuable in assisting international mediators to overcome difficulties and reach durable agreements.

2.5 Application to the Case of the Tigray's Conflict

An application of the Putnam's "Two-Level Game" theory should highlight the role that a delicate balancing act of the demands at both Level I and Level II may have in determining the success of a mediation initiative. Should the "chief negotiators" fail to reconcile the demands and expectations of domestic actors with the objectives of international negotiations, they risk facing internal dissent and the collapse of the agreement. This dual-level dynamic was essential in influencing the settlement process of the Tigray conflict, involving not only the two conflicting sides, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, but also a variety of external actors, including the African Union.

At the international level, the Tigray conflict attracted considerable attention from international powers, regional actors and public opinion. Following the outbreak of hostilities in November 2020, Ethiopia faced escalating diplomatic pressure from various countries and organizations, particularly the United States and the European Union, who denounced human rights violations and atrocities perpetrated by both factions in the conflict. International actors exerted economic and diplomatic pressure on Ethiopia's government and advocated for a

ceasefire and a restoration of peace. In this occasion, the African Union served as a crucial mediator, advocating for a more inclusive and locally driven peace process.

Internally, the Ethiopian political landscape is highly complex. The Tigray conflict itself has profound origins in Ethiopia's political history, notably the ethnic federalism system established in the early 1990s. The TPLF was a dominant force within Ethiopia's ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), that, through a policy of ethnic federalism, aimed to transform Ethiopia into a post-imperial "nation of nations". The party was dismantled by Abiy Ahmed in 2018. The conflict was thus not solely a national security issue but also a reflection of a profound political dispute between various ethnic groups and political elites.

Furthermore, the Ethiopian government had the challenge of negotiating a peace accord while struggling with domestic political pressures, particularly from regional leaders, ethnic groups, and military factions. Abiy Ahmed needed to reconcile the demands of the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups, who were concerned that a political agreement with the TPLF would jeopardize their own standing and the overall stability of Ethiopia. The TPLF, for its part, needed as well to consider its internal political dynamics. Although it lost its previous supremacy, the TPLF remained a crucial organization in the political landscape of northern Ethiopia, supported by substantial support from the Tigrayan population and many armed groups.

To conclude, the application of Putnam's Two-Level Game in the Tigray conflict can help us highlight the complex interplay of domestic and international forces that ultimately influenced the final settlement in Pretoria. Indeed, during negotiations, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF were simultaneously addressing the conflicting demands of international actors, in particular western countries, and internal political constituents. It is finally crucial to underline how the international community recognized that achieving peace in Tigray necessitated two main elements: a proactive diplomatic engagement and a comprehensive understanding of Ethiopia's internal political dynamics, making the African Union the most suited actor for the role.

Chapter Two
THE TIGRAY CONFLICT: ORIGINS, ESCALATION AND INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

SUMMARY: 1. An Overview of the Tigray Conflict. – 1.1 Origins and Root Causes: Two Visions of Ethiopia. – 1.1.1 The Derg Regime and the Emergence of the TPLF. – 1.1.2 The EPRDF Government. – 1.1.2.1 Ethnic Federalism and Conflict. – 1.1.3 Abiy Ahmed and the Marginalization of the TPLF. – 1.2 The Resort to Violence and the Humanitarian Tragedy. – 2. Pressure of the International Community. – 2.1 Initiatives of Regional and Global Actors. – 2.1.1 Eritrea. – 2.1.2 The African Union. – 2.1.3 Kenya. – 2.1.4 The United States. – 2.1.5 The European Union. – 2.1.6 The UAE, Turkey, China, and Russia

Having conducted an in-depth analysis of the notion of international mediation and an extensive description of the Putnam's Two-Level Game Theory, it is now essential to delve deeper into the practical subject matter of this dissertation: the Ethiopian Tigray conflict, its deep origins, the way to conflict, and the international efforts that eventually culminated in the signing of the Agreement for the cessation of Hostilities in November 2022 in South Africa.

Therefore, to shed light on the unfolding of these developments, the present chapter will, first of all, draw a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of the war by providing an accurate description of the recent political history of Ethiopia, with particular emphasis on the evolution in the application of the concept of ethnic federalism within the Ethiopian state structure. Thereafter, the plethora of international initiatives undertaken to influence the course of conflict will be addressed, focusing on the interests and diplomatic initiatives of the main external actors involved, with the ultimate objective of depicting a comprehensive scenario that would allow a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the African Union's mediation efforts of the conflict.

1. An Overview of the Tigray Conflict

The Ethiopian civil war erupted on November 3, 2020, and persisted for two years, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands and the displacement of millions, until it came to a conclusion as a result of a negotiated settlement reached in November 2022 in South Africa. The violence and brutality of the conflict has severely undermined Ethiopia's social fabric, soon extending beyond the Tigray region to the neighboring Amhara and Afara regional states and, as reported by many international bodies, witnessing throughout the conflict the

perpetration of severe human rights violations by both contending parties, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Since the military offensive initiated by the Ethiopian central government against the Tigray region in November 2020 can be seen as the culmination of the increasing intensification of two years of tensions between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Tigray People's Liberation Front's leadership, the first section of this Second Chapter will delve into the origins and the root causes of the Ethiopian Tigray war, with the aim of attaining a comprehensive understanding of the variables that exacerbated the political tensions in the country eventually leading to conflict. This will be achieved by focusing specifically on the political history, and historical significance, of the concept of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, illustrating how deeply entrenched divisions on how to govern the country resulted in a catalyst for violence.

1.1 Origins and Root Causes: Two Visions of Ethiopia

Federalism has emerged as a crucial mechanism to address diverse and common interests inside a state, establishing a union to fulfill shared responsibilities and regional administrations to meet the distinct needs of each autonomous area [Mengie, 2015]. While a universally accepted definition of federalism is lacking, a political system is usually classified as federal when it has two levels of government that operate independently within their constitutionally defined domains [Feeley & Rubin, 2008]. Watts [2008] contends that a federal form of government entails a distribution of power between a central authority and several federated entities, each operating directly through its own administrative agencies. In this case, it is important to underline that a major reason why federalism is favored over a centralized government is its capacity to accommodate divergent local interests [Selassie, 2003]. Federalism, regarded as a normative ideal, denotes in fact the distribution of power among independent entities and is considered to promote the values of "unity in diversity", and "shared rule and self-rule" [Watts, 2008].

Consequently, during the initial stages of post-colonial politics in the African continent, the introduction of a federal system in the state structures of newly established African countries was perceived as an effective way to reconcile unity and diversity. It is in fact crucial to recall that the most notable characteristic of African communities and identities

was their diversity and fluidity: a cultural setting in which individuals frequently interacted, mingled with other groups, assimilated different languages and cultures, and possessed multiple overlapping and alternative identities [Berman, 2010; Taye, 2017]. Such attempts, regrettably, turned out to be short-lived experiment[7] [Erk, 2014]. Notwithstanding, three African nations, namely Ethiopia, South Africa and Nigeria, adopted a federal system to address ethnic diversity. Of particular importance for the purposes of this study, Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism, which relies on ethnic groupings as the foundation of its state's structure [Selassie, 2003], This unique case of ethnic federal system, that structured regional states along ethnic lines, granted the ultimate sovereign power in the hands of ethnic groups and empowered them with the authority to leave the federation and form their own independent state[8].

The causes of the crisis subject of this research can be traced to Ethiopia's system of government, with its profound and interconnected roots rendering this a particularly intractable dispute. The core motive for the conflict in the Ethiopian region of Tigray revolves around a significant dispute over the structure of the Ethiopian State and the distribution of power across it. In particular, the issue at the core of the dispute is the following: should Ethiopia adopt a centralized or non-centralized system, and in which way? Where should the balance of power lie? This dispute itself has a lengthy history and, to better understand the root causes of the conflict, we shall delve into the main eras of modern Ethiopia's political history and analyze how the "federal issue" has developed in recent years.

1.1.1 The Derg Regime and the emergence of the TPLF

Ethiopia is among the world's oldest nations and one of the few African countries with a longstanding and solid legacy of a modern consolidated state, originating in the mid-nineteenth century [Dessie et al., 2024]. Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868) is acknowledged as the pioneer of Ethiopia's political modernization, striving to consolidate the many polities of Ethiopia under the principle of *ser'at* (ordered administration) [Taye, 2017]. During this first imperial era, the Tigray region and Tigrayans played a crucial role in the formation of the modern Ethiopian empire and the establishment of its present borders [Plaut & Vaughan,

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[7] Here some federal experiments carried out in Africa: Congo (1960-1065), Kenya (1963-65), Uganda (1962-1966), Mali (1959), and Cameroon (1961-1972). – See: Erk, J. (2014). Federalism and decentralization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Five patterns of evolution. *Journal of African Affairs*, 24 (5), pp. 535–552.
[8] See: *Articles 8 and 39 of the Ethiopian Federal Constitution* and *1.1.2.1 Ethnic Federalism and Conflict*

2023]. Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) thereafter strengthened imperial power, safeguarded Ethiopian independence, and initiated the development of modern Ethiopia [Taye, 2017]. During its rule, in March 1986, Ethiopian soldiers defeated Italy in the well-known battle of Adwa, one of the rare times an African nation defeated a European state [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023].

Several authors [Pankhurst, 1955; Zewde, 2002; Alemayehu, 2014; Taye, 2017] contended that Emperor Menelik II unified Ethiopia and established the current Ethiopia state by securing its independence and sovereignty. It is crucial to emphasize that Menelik, in the creation of modern Ethiopia, employed a conquering strategy that lasted until two years after the battle of Adwa, when the process of territorial expansion was concluded and the empire state established [Zewde, 2002]. The new state of Ethiopia that emerged thereafter was a mosaic of multi-ethnicity, which encompassed a variety of cultures, economies, languages, and religions, administered by regional lords who were permitted to control their territories in exchange for a certain tax payment to the central government [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Thus, Ethiopia functioned for most of its history as a *de facto* federal system, wherein the emperor managed national affairs, while regional leaderships retained their authority to impose taxes, ensure local security and oversee commerce [Taye, 2017]. Consequently, already in the imperial era, a fundamental issue at dispute in Ethiopian politics was the balance of power between regional and central authorities.

After the end of the II World War, when the reign of Selassie I (1930-1974) promoted a second wave of centralization and modernization, Ethiopia was still a monarchy with a feudal system, wherein the emperor held absolute power, and the country was divided into provinces governed by appointed officials [Dessie, 2024]. For the first time in Ethiopia's history, Selassie succeeded in curtailing the power of Ethiopia's regional élites and the autonomy of its regions, creating a professionalized national bureaucracy and army to carry out the tasks that until that moment were performed by regional authorities [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. However, by the end of the 1950s, millions of Ethiopians endured socio-economic issues such as severe poverty and persecution oppression. These economic challenges, paired with a revitalized sense of ethnic nationalism among the new class of educated students, ultimately precipitated a security and political crisis, resulting in the collapse of the imperial state [Dessie, 2024].

In this atmosphere of renewed political activism, it is important to emphasize the emergence of the "Ethiopian student movement"[9]. In the lack of political parties and strong associational life, students emerged at the end of the imperial period as "the most outspoken and visibly the only consolidated opposition group" [Balsvik, 1985]. It was the student movement that first elucidated the concept of the "self-determination of nationalities" within the Ethiopian empire state and, until recently, all the political organizations engaged in Ethiopia's politics derived their origins from the actions of the student movement [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Nevertheless, neither the students nor the various political organizations descended from them attained power. Instead, the military seized power and instituted the Derg regime in 1974.

The Provisional Military Administrative Committee (1974-1991), known as the Derg, that overthrew the monarchy and governed the country for 17 years, consisted of a group of 120 young soldiers who adopted a radical Marxist rhetoric and its revolutionary terminology [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. By the end of 1975, the leftist regime implemented major economic reforms with the objective of attaining the nationalization of the economy, including the property of urban and rural land, effectively diffusing popular dissent in rural areas, especially in the Oromo territories and in the south of the country [Rahmato, 1984; Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Meanwhile, a powerful commitment to national centralization, coupled with an intensification of the Derg's "Ethiopia first" rhetoric of pan-Ethiopian unitary nationalism[10], intensified a series of subnational conflicts. Nationalists and ethno-nationalist movements gained momentum in several parts of the empire, notably in Eritrea (annexed in 1962 following a decade of forced federation), in the Somali and Afar regions of the lowland east, in parts of Oromia, and in Tigray [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023].

In this political setting, the Tigray People's Liberation Front [TPLF] was officially established and emerged as a crucial actor [Taye, 2017]. The formation of the TPLF in February 1975 can be seen as a result of the convergence of the ambitions and experiences of educated Tigrayans with their recognition of the impoverished, underdeveloped and stagnant conditions of life in Tigray, which were perceived as the consequences of a systematic and ethnically motivated government policy of discrimination against the region [Plaut &

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[9] To better explore the Ethiopian Student Movement, see Zewde, B. (2014). The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement, c. 1960-1974. Boydell & Brewer.
[10] The commitment of the new regime to the "indivisibility of Ethiopian unity" was included in the "Ten-point Programme" issued by the Provisional Military Administrative Committee in 1974.

Vaughan, 2023]. As for their political objectives: the TPLF 1976 manifesto called for the establishment of an independent republic of Tigray, which was subsequently revised to demand cultural and political autonomy for the region within a unified Ethiopian State [Taye, 2017]. However, during the late 1970s and 1980s the remote mountainous areas of Tigray were home to several different kinds of movement fighting the Derg government, in particular the TPLF was in competition with three other organizations[11]: the EDU, the TLF, and the EPRP.

The brutal military and socio-economic strategies of the Derg significantly pushed the population in Tigray (and Eritrea) towards support for nationalist movements. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Tigray and other northern regions of Ethiopia suffered a catastrophic famine resulting in an estimated 400.000 fatalities [de Waal, 1991], substantially intensified by the Derg's counterinsurgency tactics used against the insurgents [*ibid.*][12]. By the end of the 1980s, the TPLF had established a coalition with other factions under the umbrella of the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) and, as support for the Derg from the Soviet bloc diminished, the EPRDF, in a strategic alliance with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) led by Isaias Afwerki, engaged in combat and ultimately dismantled the communist Derg regime [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Following Eritrea's *de facto* secession in 1991[13], the newly established EPRDF government in Addis Ababa adopted a federal system based on the "self-determination of nations, nationalities and peoples".

1.1.2   The EPDRF government

On the morning of 21 May 1991, Lt Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, the leader of the Derg, departed from Addis Ababa to pay a visit to a military camp. En route, the aircraft was diverted to Nairobi, from where he went into exile in Zimbabwe, bringing 17 years of military Marxist rule to a close. Shortly thereafter, Derg officials flew to London to engage in US-mediated discussions with the EPDRF, with the EPLF, and with the Oromo Liberation Front. The talks were arranged for 27 May, but, by that time, the Eritrean capital, Asmara, was

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[11] In the early period of TPLF history, it was in competition with the conservative Tigrayan nationalists EDU, the Tigray Liberation Front (TLF), a radical proponent of Tigrayan nationalism, and the EPRP, the Tigrayan-led pan-Ethiopianist movement.

[12] As reported in Plaut & Vaughan, 2023: 70 "*When US Chargé d'affaires, David Korn, called on the acting foreign minister in December 1984, he was told that ... food is a major element in our strategy against the secessionists*". [citing the account given by a US diplomat, D.Korn,Ethiopia, the US and the Soviet Union, Croom Helm, 1996]

[13] *De iure* after a referendum on Eritrean independence held in 1993 under the control of the United Nations.

captured by Eritrean forces while EPRDF forces occupied Addis Ababa, and no conference took place [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023].

After the collapse of the Derg regime, in July 1991, representatives from 27 Ethiopian political organizations and international observers from 15 nations gathered in the Africa Hall in Addis Ababa. In this context, the Conference acquiesced to the *de facto* separation of Eritrea and reached agreement upon a "Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia" which they anticipated would steer Ethiopia through three significant transformations: (1) democratization of politics, (2) economic liberalization, and (3) state decentralization with the implementation of an ethnic federalist system [Vaughan, 1994]. The 1991 Charter [Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia, no.1, 1991] granted extensive rights of "self-determination" to all the ethnic groups: to "preserve its identity and have it respected, promote its culture and history and use and develop its language" [Article 2(a)]; to "administer its own affairs within its own defined territory and effectively participate in the central government on the basis of freedom, and fair and proper representation" [Article 2(b)]; and to "exercise its right to self-determination of independence, when the concerned, nation/nationality and people is convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged or abrogated" [Article 2(c)]. These federal principles of self-determination would support the formation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia as established under the new constitution adopted by the EPRDF government in 1994.

Although the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) consisted of four main components: namely, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), and the South Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF) [Taye, 2017], the TPLF alone dominated the Ethiopian political landscape and was responsible for drafting and implementing the constitution in 1994 [Vestal, 1999]. With the adoption of the revised constitution of the country, the new administration instituted a federal system centered around the concept ethnic identity. The new Constitution categorizes the member states of the "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia" into nine federated National Regional States "delimited on the basis of settlement patterns, language, identity and the consent of the people concerned" [Article 46/47].

The EPRDF architects of Ethiopia's new constitution viewed federalism as a tool of conflict resolution, intended to end the country's impoverishment after decades of internal strife. However, some authors [Legesse, 2015; Taye, 2017] argue that the introduction of ethnic federalism into Ethiopia's state structure institutionalized ethnicity, causing the politicization of tribal identity, eventually leading to ethnic conflicts. In this perspective, ethnic conflicts are not seen as natural consequence of multiethnicity but rather as a result of the politicization of ethnicity driven by the ethno-federalist system. Critics of the new government asserted that the introduction of the new system, by allegedly "ethnicising" Ethiopian politics, was creating a problem where there had been none. Its most fervent enemies perceived the new federal structure as a minority Tigrayan conspiracy to *divide et impera* Ethiopia [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023].

Consequently, two factions of domestic opposition to the EPRDF and the ethnic-federalism system gradually emerged throughout the 1990s. Pan-Ethiopianist nationalists opposed the implementation of the federal structure, seeing it as inherently divisive and detrimental to Ethiopia's strength [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Meanwhile, several other ethno-nationalist organizations that had opposed the Derg were maneuvered out of power by the governing party in the 1990s. They asserted that federal practices within the EPRDF framework, now controlled by Tigrayans, served as a façade for ethnocentric central governance of the entire nation. Organizations representing the Oromo, Somali, and Sidama withdrew from the government and reverted to violent rebellion [*ibid.*].

1.1.2.1 Ethnic Federalism and Conflict

Following the removal of the Derg regime in 1991, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), under the leadership of Tigrayan Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, initiated a process to construct a federal government that created predominantly ethnic-based territorial entities. The new government not only reorganized the state into the present Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, but also systematically reinterpreted citizenship, politics, and identity based on ethnicity [ICG, 2009]. This development aligned with the TPLF's historic agenda, which advocated for the self-determination of ethnic groups during its struggle with the Derg [Ishiyama, 2023]. TPLF leaders asserted that the preservation of Ethiopia's unity could only be achieved by ethnic and regional autonomy [*ibid*.]. The federalization process, characterized by the institutionalization of self-determination and self-

rule, spanned four years and culminated in the ratification of a new constitution in 1995 [Mengie, 2015]. Article 47(1) of the Ethiopian constitution [1995] delineated the member states of the "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia" into nine ethnically based regional states[14]. Despite the constitution assigning all functions not directly attributed to the federal government to regional governments[15], the regional states remained subordinate to the central authority [Chanie, 2007]

While a federal structure is essential and not optional for countries such as Ethiopia, characterized by significant societal diversity and extensive territory, the selected form of the federal system has sparked controversy. Proponents of institutionalization of ethnicity assert that ethnic federalism promotes tolerance of diversity, self-rule, and reduces secessionist inclinations [Balcha, 2008]. Critics, on the other hand, argue that the ethnic federal structure institutionalizes tribal discrimination, impairs essential individual rights, foster centrifugal tendencies and generates unwelcome rivalry among ethnic groupings [Regassa, 2021].

In particular, numerous academics have posited that ethnic federalism is a critical aspect in explaining the present fracture of the Ethiopian nation [Alemante, 2003; Abbink, 2006; Keller, 2006; Mengie, 2015; Taye, 2017; Ishiyama, 2023]. Several have also indicated that prior experiences with ethnic federalism, such as in Yugoslav and Soviet Federations, have culminated in national dissolution, sometimes accompanied by violent repercussions [Roeder, 2009; Anderson, 2014]. They contend that ethno-federalism is flawed as it fosters the emergence of ethnic identities above national ones, hence heightening the probability of conflict escalation into severe crisis [*ibid.*]. According to Abbink [2006], and others [Mengie, 2015; Taye, 2017], the ethnification of politics and identity in Ethiopia is also accompanied by poor governance and increased authoritarianism, which contribute to exacerbate ethnic tensions.

Ethiopia's population is highly diversified, with over eighty ethnic groups within the country. Nevertheless, the two predominant groups, the Oromo and the Amhara make up over 60% of the total population [CIA, 2024], and the four largest groups comprise the majority of the population. Alongside the Oromo and the Amhara, the Somali constitutes around 7.2% of the population, while the Tigray accounts for about 5.7%. Aalen [2002] and others have

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[14] Tigray; Afar; Amhara; Oromia; Somalia; Benshangul/Gumuz; Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples; Gambela Peoples; Harari People [Art.47(1) – Constitution of the FDRE, 1995]
[15] The residual clause is contained in Article 52(1) of the FDRE Constitution [1995]

observed that the delineation of federal divisions in Ethiopia has resulted in significantly diverse constituent entities and an asymmetrical federal system, as well as several regional states characterized by ethnic heterogeneity inside their regional boundaries. Indeed. although five ethnic groups own their ethnic regional state within the Federation, cooperation among various groups is necessary in the other four regional states. The structure of Ethiopian federalism, particularly in ethnically diverse regions, has incited rivalry among ethnic groups for regional dominance, causing the destabilization and the weakening of local regional governments [Abbink, 2006].

A significant issue requiring considerable attention is the distribution of funds from the federal government to the different regional states. In a federation, as a general rule, central governments allocate funds to federated states, focusing on the necessity of an efficient revenue-sharing arrangement between central and regional authorities [Lancaster, 2012]. In Ethiopia, the constitutional powers of sub-national states are safeguarded, yet actual decentralization is significantly constrained by fiscal, political and administrative centralism [Dickovick, 2014; Taye, 2017]. In particular, regional governments in Ethiopia have previously claimed that the EPRDF administration primary prioritized on assistance to the Tigray region [Taye, 2017]. The TPLF's monopolization of important federal government positions has resulted in an absence of equitable financial allocation mechanism, fostering resentment among many ethnic groups. As Ambassador Herman Cohen[16] explained, "the hegemonic minority rule of the Tigray People's Liberation Front is difficult to sustain as Ethiopians are demanding freedom and democracy" [Gellaw, 2012]. For fiscal federalism to operate effectively, there must be a just and equal allocation of financial resources between the central government and the states. In the absence of this occurrence, a significant possibility for conflict will arise. In Ethiopia, regional states possess little budgetary autonomy and rely on the federal government's provision of cash [Lancaster, 2012].

A further discordant characteristics of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism is the constitutional provision for secession, a feature also present in previous experiences with a predominantly ethnic federal framework, such as the Soviet Union[17]. It should be noted that the Preamble of the Federal Constitution of Ethiopia delineated a fragmented society by asserting that the

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[16] Ambassador Herman Cohen is a retired career diplomat and specialist in African Affairs. Ambassador Cohen retired from the US Department of State in 1993. His last position was Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under President George H.W. Bush.
[17] Article 72 of the 1977 Constitution of the Soviet Union stated that "Each Union Republic shall retain the right freely to secede from the USSR".

constituent authority are resides with ethnic groups ("nations, nationalities and peoples") of Ethiopia rather than the people of Ethiopia. Article 39 of the Ethiopian Constitution further elucidate that ethnic groups possess the right to assert their sovereignty at any time and secede from the Federation, stipulating that "Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession". Aalen [2002] asserted that, in light of article 39, this is clearly a constitutional anomaly, without equivalents in contemporary federal systems. Article 39 has the potential to generate frustrations, distrust and enduring conflict among ethnic groups if some communities do not perceive to be sufficiently acknowledged by the federal government.

1.1.3   Abiy Ahmed and the Marginalization of the TPLF

Following the abrupt death of Tigrayan EPRDF leader and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2012, the unity of the central Ethiopian government began to deteriorate and differences among the four constituent factions started to surface. Especially, Amhara and Tigrayan politicians engaged in heated mutual recrimination, with disputes about land and boundary issue being revived [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. During that period, the most critical policy issue of federalism emerged: the fixed distribution of territory among ethnically defined entities. As Ethiopia's economy and population expanded, the need for arable land increased, particularly in the land-scarce and highly populated northern areas of the country [*ibid.*]. Political mobilization in several regions had an ethicized character, leading to escalating public protests against the government of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn faced growing mass protests, notably in the Oromo and Amhara regions [Uluer, 2023].

In 2018, following four years of violent anti-government protests met with state repression and the adoption of increasingly severe states of emergency, the reputation of the EPRDF deteriorated and its cohesion weakened, prompting Prime Minister Desalegn to resign [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Due to the prominent role played by the Oromo nationalists during the protests against the government, the new Ethiopian leader could only be of Oromo descent. Hence, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, a youthful member of the Oromo People's Democratic Party, son of an Amhara Christian mother and an Oromo Muslim father, was shortly after designated as the new Ethiopian head of government [Mokaddem, 2019].

Prime Minister Abiy embraced a novel unitary and nationalist discourse, articulating the concept of Ethiopia's return to its origins via the attractive notion of *medemer*, or "synergy". With the introduction of this new philosophy, the new Prime Minister proposed a depoliticized renewed fervor for collective Ethiopian values. According to its promoter, *medemer* is a concept of unity for diversity [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. To accompany it, Prime Minister Abiy announce a comprehensive amnesty, welcoming back all those formerly excluded from the domestic political arena[18].

Capitalizing on domestic and international enthusiasm, the new Prime Minister decreed a multitude of measures grounded on the novel approach. The "medemer reforms", as outlined at the World Economic Forum 2019 in Davos, were centered on three interrelated pillars: (1) fostering a dynamic democracy; (2) enhancing national economy; (3) promoting regional integration and global openness [Mokeddem, 2019]. In the initial months of his administration, Prime Minister Ahmed committed to implementing a set of changes that would signify a substantial progression toward democracy. He liberated thousands of political detainees, removed constraints on independent media, and welcomed back the previously exiled opposition factions, notably the Oromo Liberation Front and the Ginbot 7 [Pichon, 2022]. Regarding gender equality, he supported Sahle-Wok Zewde, a former diplomat, in her bid to become the first female president of the country and established gender balance within his cabinet [Mokeddem, 2019]. However, simultaneously, he marginalized the TPLF in the selection of new senior security officials. It is important to recall that, from 1991 to 2018, Ethiopia's national security and military institutions were each directed by just two people, all four of whom were former TPLF soldiers during the Derg era, who will be dismissed by the new Prime Minister at the very beginning of his administration [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]

Notwithstanding, the most significant achievement, which will secure him the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, was the peace agreement with Eritrea and the reopening of the shared border. In July 2018, Abiy Ahmed finalized a peace accord with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, therefore concluding the hostilities between the two countries that had persisted since the 1998-2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean war. In that occasion, the government of Addis Ababa unconditionally recognized the borders delineated in 2002 in accordance with the Algiers Agreements. [Pellet, 2021]. However, the recognition of the borders sealed by the peace

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[18] PM Abiy Ahmed claimed that he had released 60.000 political prisoners. See his interview with the Financial Times, February 21, 2019 - https://www.ft.com/content/abe678b6-346f-11e9-bb0c-42459962a812

agreement required the acknowledgment of Eritrean sovereignty over Badme and its adjacent region, which Tigrayan authorities still considered part of their territory [Pichon, 2022].

Concurrently with the implementation of these reforms, Abiy Ahmed sought to amend the TPLF-based EPRDF policies to adopt a more inclusive approach. Consequently, the Prime Minister initiated a reformation of the party by founding a new political body, the Prosperity Party (PP), in December 2019 [Uluer, 2023]. Three of the four EPRDF parties joined the newly established Prosperity Party, together with regional parties that had not participated in prior national administration. However, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) opted against merging with the Prosperity Party, viewing the establishment of the new unitary organization as a strategy by Abiy to deviate from Ethiopia's ethnic federalism and to diminish the influence of the Tigrayan leadership [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. The Prosperity Party centralized decision-making, redistributing authority between its executive bodies and regional branches, with central organs wielding more influence than under the EPRDF, where regional parties functioned as powerful autonomous organizations [ICG, 2019]. The merger undoubtedly signifies a departure from ethnic power sharing and the proposed reform permitted the new party's regional branches to include individuals from all ethnic backgrounds, and its central committee was not anymore officially constituted of ethno-regional factions [*ibid.*].

After the creation of the Prosperity Party in late 2019, tensions with the TPLF were escalating significantly. The situation deteriorated swiftly following the government's announcement to delay federal and regional elections originally planned for May and subsequently for August 2020, citing the Covid-19 outbreak as a justification for the inability to conduct them safely [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. The Tigray regional administration disregarded the federal authorities' resolution to postpone the regional election, as it deemed this move a violation of the constitutional restriction imposed on governing tenure and the Council of the Tigray regional state determined that the regional elections for Tigray would have taken place in September regardless [*ibid.*]. The Federal Government warned that the Tigrayan elections were unlawful, and, on September 9, 2020, the Ethiopian federal Parliament deemed them unconstitutional [Paravicini, 2020a].

The elections proceeded however, resulting in a decisive majority for the TPLF [Al Jazeera, 2020]. The Federal government not only denounced the elections as illegitimate, but also proceeded to treat the newly elected Tigrayan administration as unlawful. Consequently,

the Federal House of People's Representatives mandated the cessation of all federal budget transfers and inter-governmental relations with the Tigray region [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023].

1.2 The Resort to Violence and the Humanitarian Tragedy

In the aftermath of the contentious election in Tigray in September 2020, it became evident that Tigray was trapped in a spiral that would eventually lead to a violent confrontation with its neighbors. On October 29, 2020, the Tigrayan authorities declined to accept a new commander, General Jamal Muhammad, for the Ethiopian army's largest division, the Northern Command, and decided to detain him upon his arrival at the airport and subsequently deport him back to Addis Ababa [Plaut, 2020]. This was a threat to Abiy's authority that no Prime Minister could have tolerated. On 3 November 2020, the TPLF leader, Debretsion Gebremichael, stated that Tigrayans desired pace, yet, if war erupted, they were ready to fight and to prevail [BBC, 2020a]. In the early hours of November 4, Tigrayan forces allegedly initiated a brutal assault on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Force and violent confrontations between the two factions occurred near Mekelle airport as well, as reported by the UN [UN OCHA, 2020].

As a reaction to the attack, Prime Minister Ahmed proclaimed a six-month state of emergency in Tigray on November 4 [Embassy of Ethiopia to the US, 2020a] and announced the initiation of a military operation, known as the Mekelle Offensive, which rapidly intensified as the Ethiopian National Defense Forces advanced into Tigray and Tigray Defense Forces heightened their counteractions [BBC, 2020b]. Abiy initially framed the offensive as a targeted operation against the TPLF leadership. However, a telephone and internet communication blackout in Tigray was implemented at the start of the conflict halted coverage of ground condition, and media and UN officials began raising concerns over the mistreatment of civilians[19] [UN News, 2020]. Shortly thereafter, Ethiopia's neighbor, Eritrea, intervened militarily in the conflict on the side of the Ethiopian government [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. In March 2021, after months of denial, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed acknowledged the involvement of Eritrean forces in Tigray [BBC, 2021].

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[19] On November 24, 2020, Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, warned that "such rhetoric suggests possible breaches of the cardinal principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution in the conduct of hostilities that are designed to ensure the civilian population is protected".

The violence was mostly concentrated within the Tigray region until mid-2021, when a Tigrayan offensive recaptured the regional capital of Mekelle, prompting federal forces to retreat from a significant portion of the state and announce a temporary ceasefire [The Guardian, 2021]. At that time, USAID determined that, following months of reports regarding troops blocking aid and destroying crops, 5.2 million out of 6 million people in Tigray required assistance, with up to 900,000 people experiencing famine conditions [USAID, 2021], whereas Abiy claimed to the BBC that "there is no hunger in Tigray" [AP, 2021]. Humanitarian assistance to Tigray, already limited by the conflict, ceased in July 2021 and subsequently faced restrictions in what the United Nations described as a *de facto* humanitarian blockade [UN OCHA, 2021].

The Tigrayan forces subsequently initiated operation into Amhara and Afar regions, beginning a rapid advance that would concerns the Addis Ababa might be besieged in November 2021 [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. However, the federal military, bolstered by newly acquired drones allegedly received from Turkey and the UAE, compelled a withdrawal of the Tigrayan Defense Forces in December, resulting in a subsequent temporary cessation of hostilities [Walsh, 2021]. Unfortunately, the humanitarian truce announced by the Abiy's government in March 2022 would collapse in August and intense combat recommenced [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023].

Narratives around the conflict remain heavily contested, with disinformation remaining one of prevalent feature of the conflict. The telecommunications and internet shutdown impeded information flow while the government progressively curtailed reporting and impeded entry for journalists and human rights observes to Tigray [Zelalem, 2022; Mumo, 2022]. In addition, the Ethiopia government expelled seven U.N. officials in 2021, accusing them of "meddling" [UN, 2021a], and also four Irish diplomats due to Ireland's stance on the conflict, consequently threatening to cut diplomatic ties with the European country [AFP, 2022].

It is important to note that the violent war resulted in serious violations of international human rights law, humanitarian, and refugee law. As reported by several international bodies, significant violations and abuses occurred during the conflict, with both the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the Tigrayan Defense Forces implicated in mass atrocities, including

widespread and systematic "unlawful killings and extra-judicial executions", "torture and other forms of ill-treatment", "sexual violence", and "mass killings"[20] [UN OHCHR, 2021].

In particular, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), established by the UN Human Rights Council with a mandate to conduct impartial investigation into alleged violations and abuses, concluded in 2022 that all parties had perpetrated war crimes, while the federal government, and its allies, had committed crimes against humanity and employed starvation as a weapon of war [ICHREE, 2022]. The UN experts confirmed dozens of large-scale killings by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops, indicating a systematic targeting of young male civilians of Tigrayan ethnicity. They also identified serious violations committed by Tigray forces, including rape, killings, and torture in Amhara and Afar regions [CRS, 2024]. Furthermore, the US State Department released their assessment in March 2023, indicating that all factions involved in the fight had perpetrated war crimes, that Ethiopia's military and allied forces committed crimes against humanity, and that Amhara troops had engaged in ethnic cleansing in western Tigray [US Department of State, 2023].

Despite the aggressive rhetoric and the atrocities committed on the ground, after a series of failed efforts to negotiate a settlement, the TPLF and the Ethiopian Federal Government signed a cessation of hostilities agreement on November 2, 2022, in Pretoria, South Africa. Followed by negotiations in Nairobi, the agreement pledged to disarm Tigrayan forces, transfer authority over Tigray to the Ethiopian government, cease the Mekelle Offensive, and provide unrestricted humanitarian access to Tigray. Chapter 3 of this dissertation will provide a detailed analysis of the process leading to the agreement's signature, its key aspects, and its political implications.

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[20] See *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation*, November 3, 2021; and Human Right Watch,

1.2.1   A Political Qualification of the Tigray Conflict

The conflict in Tigray, which erupted in November 2020 in the northern region of Ethiopia, has attracted significant attention from both the international community and scholars of international relations. To fully comprehend the origins, the characteristics of the parties involved, and the wider implications for Ethiopia, it is crucial to analyze this conflict within the broader framework of political dynamics. From a political perspective, the Tigray conflict can be categorized as a form of non-international armed conflict (NIAC). However, determining whether violence within a state constitutes a NIAC or is just internal struggle or civil unrest can be challenging [Akande, 2020]. The existence of a non-international armed conflict (NIAC) is primarily determined by the intensity of the violence and the quality of the parties involved [Milanovic & Vidanovic, 2012]. In the landmark Tadic case, the ICTY characterized a NIAC as a scenario of "protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a State" [in Akande, 2020].

The first criterion for determining whether a NIAC exists is the involvement of an "organized armed group". Thus, NIACs are conflict in which at least one party is a non-state armed group [Milanovic & Vidanovic, 2012]. For a group to qualify as a party to a NIAC, it must exhibit a sufficient level of organization, including a responsible command structure, control of part of the state's territory, and the capacity to carry out sustained military operations [*ibid*.] While a requirement of organization is presumed with regard to governmental forces, non-state armed organizations, such as the Tigray People's Liberation Front, must fulfill these criteria owing to their informal character. In our case study, the TPLF, once a dominant political force in Ethiopia's EPRDF ruling coalition, represents the non-state actor, while the Ethiopian federal government, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, represents the state actor. Furthermore, from a different perspective, the conflict can be seen as a struggle over the very nature of the Ethiopian state. As we have extensively seen, Ethiopia has a federal system that grants significant autonomy to its ethnically defined regional states. However, the federal government under Abiy Ahmed has moved to centralize power, undermining the autonomy of the regional states. The TPLF opposed this centralization, viewing it as an existential threat to Tigray's political autonomy. In this context, the conflict represents a struggle for political representation and autonomy, driven by regional and ethnic identity. However, despite groups involved in NIACs usually have a political purpose, this is not a requirement in the definition

of a non-international armed conflict [Akande, 2020]. Finally, the second condition for a NIAC is that the violence must meet a certain intensity level, referred to as "protracted armed violence". While the term "protracted" implies a certain duration, the primary requirement is the intensity of the conflict rather than its length [Akande, 2020]. In the case of the Tigray conflict, factors such as the conflict's duration, the high number of casualties, and the involvement of various international actors all contribute to its classification as a NIAC.

Despite the distinction between international and non-international armed conflicts, drawing a clear line between them can be difficult, especially when foreign intervention occurs in a NIAC. In particular, the classification of foreign intervention as a factor that converts a non-international armed conflict (NIAC) into an international armed conflict (IAC) is contingent upon the characteristics of the intervention [Akande, 2020]. In the Tigray conflict, two types of cross-border factors have influenced the situation, but they did not transform the conflict into an IAC. The first type is the spillover scenario. An internal NIAC begins in State A, where the armed forces of State A engage with armed group X. However, the conflict spills over into State B's territory [Milanovic & Vidanovic, 2012]. This occurred in the Tigray conflict, where clashes between the Tigray Defense Forces and Ethiopian government forces spread across the border into Eritrea. Lacking the "protracted armed violence" threshold, these military operations will nevertheless be considered as part of the overall armed conflict [*ibid.*]. The second type of cross-border NIAC is foreign intervention. In this case, State A is involved in an internal conflict with armed group X and invites State B to intervene on its behalf [Milanovic & Vidanovic, 2012]. In the Tigray conflict, Eritrean forces joined Ethiopian government troops in fighting the TPLF. However, A foreign intervention on behalf of the country's government does not *ipso facto* internationalize the NIAC [*ibid.*].

With that being said, we can conclude that the Tigray conflict displays many characteristics of a NIAC, including organized armed groups and intense and protracted violence, distinguishing it from an international conflict. The political and ethnic aspects of the conflict highlight the complexities of the conflict, and the involvement of foreign actors further complicates the classification. However, the conflict's intrinsic characteristics have confined it to the category of a non-international armed conflict. Understanding the Tigray conflict within this framework is crucial for addressing its fundamental political issues and assessing its attempted resolution.

2. Pressure of the International Community

The strategic importance of the Horn of Africa has resulted in the conflict between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray's People Liberation Front to have repercussions extending beyond Ethiopia's borders, affecting the entire area and engaging regional and global powers invested in this strategically vital area. Several foreign actors provided diplomatic support to the Federal government in the fight, granting legitimacy to the military action and the West, while refraining from directly endorsing Abiy's initiative, adopted a conserved approach, allowing time for success without imposing significant diplomatic pressure despite the atrocities committed on the battlefield. This tendency resulted from several variables, specifically: (1) Ethiopia's relevant role in the area; (2) the TPLF's strategic error of militarizing a political dispute; and (3) the proactive nature of Abiy's foreign policy.

Even prior to the eruption of hostilities in Tigray, diplomatic initiatives were undertaken to prevent the violence and once started the conflict would soon engage multiple actors of the international community. The severity of the fighting, along with the worsening of the humanitarian situation, propelled these initiatives. Shortly after the hostilities began, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres offered his good offices to mediate between the parties [Paravicini, 2020b]. During the course of the conflict, the western world has provided humanitarian assistance, sent delegation and enforced sanctions. As a reaction to international pressure, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed pursued other partners, in particular the UAE. The Arab country has consistently supported the alliance formed by Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia with significant financial contributions and the supply of armaments and drones. The Ethiopian leader has also strengthened relations also with Turkey, China, and Russia, seeking allies willing to supply weaponry without inquiring into human rights issue [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Furthermore, China and Russia have utilized the threat of their veto in the UN Security Council to obstruct accountability for the parties involved in the war in Tigray.

This section will provide an outline of the involvement of regional and global actors in the Tigray conflict. It will do so by exploring how neighboring countries, international organizations, and global powers have influenced the dynamics of the conflict, offering insights into their political, economic, and humanitarian interventions in the region.

2.1 Initiatives of Regional and Global Actors

2.1.1 Eritrea

Shortly before the escalation of the conflict in Tigray, an unforeseen event occurred in the region, the 2018 accord between Eritrea and Ethiopia resolved the boundary dispute that had lasted for over thirty years. The agreement initiated a period of tight collaboration between the governments of Afwerki's Eritrea and Abiy's Ethiopia [Aweke & Seid, 2022]. Consequently, since the first days of the conflict in the Tigray region, Eritrean troops have participated in military actions in support to the Ethiopian National Defense Forces [Stewart, 2020]. However, despite mounting evidence, both Ethiopia and Eritrea persistently refuted the presence of Eritrean forces in the Tigray region until Abiy acknowledged it in April 2021 [BBC, 2021]. In February 2021, the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Andrew Lowcock, asserted that Eritrean forces controlled up to 40% of Tigray's territory [Anna, 2021].

Eritrea's first clear motivation for engaging in the Tigray conflict has been the eradication of the TPLF, regarded as a historical adversary and still perceived as a menace to the Eritrean government. According to Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, the growing Tigrayan nationalism posed an existential threat to Eritrea [Dessie, 2025], giving the fact that over 55% of the Eritrean population is comprised of ethnic Tigrinya, while an additional 30% identifies as ethnic Tigre, both of which are closely linked to the Tigrayans in the Ethiopian northern region. [CIA, 2024]. A second objective was the acquisition of territories it has historically asserted along its border with Tigray, primarily the "Badme Triangle", which were militarily captured during the 1998 conflict, and which Abiy Ahmed was unable to relinquish despite his accord with Afwerki in 2018 [Demissie, 2023]. The disputed region was recognized as belonging to Eritrea after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed consented to completely adhere to the terms of the Algiers Agreement and the outcomes of the 2002 UN backed Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission ruling that granted the disputed areas of Badme to Eritrea [Caslavova, 2022]. Notwithstanding the positive outcome resulting from the rapid advance of the Ethiopian Federal Army and the consequent weakening of the TPLF, as reported by many international bodies, the course of the Eritrean involvement in the conflict has been marked by the committal of atrocities against Tigrayan civilians, including the perpetration of war crimes [Human Rights Watch, 2021].

2.1.2 The African Union.

The African Union's involvement in the Tigray conflict revealed a complex and occasionally contradictory role in tackling one of the most devastating crises on the continent in recent years. Before the war, the AU demonstrated a growing dedication to humanitarian principles, particularly through the framework of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which underscores the obligation of member states and the organization itself to intervene in instances of mass atrocities, adopting this principle as a guide for realizing its landmark objectives of "African solutions to African problems" and "Silencing the Guns in Africa" [Negm, 2022]. However, the outbreak of the Tigray war revealed substantial challenges to the AU's ability to uphold its principles, highlighting the limitations of its early warning mechanism and Peace and Security Architecture system, intended to be a key mechanism to avoid the escalation of conflicts [Demissie, 2023].

One of the first significant setbacks for the AU's peace efforts occurred when Moussa Faki Mahamat, the African Union Commission Chairperson, initially described the Ethiopian government's military offensive in Tigray as a "legitimate law enforcement operation" in early November 2020 [APA News, 2020]. This characterization, issued amid ongoing fights, drew sharp condemnation from Tigrayans, who accused the AU of siding with the Ethiopian government, further eroding the possibility of an early mediation process that could have resolved the conflict before it escalated further [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. The AU's reluctance reflected a broader tension within the organization, frequently caught between its humanitarian commitments and the principles of non-interference that have historically shaped African policy [Demissie, 2023].

As the conflict escalated and reports of human rights violations multiplied, pressure mounted on the AU to intervene. In response, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, then serving as Chair of the AU, promptly assembled a mediation team to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. In November 2020, following a visit of Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde who was in South Africa in her capacity as Prime Minister's Special Envoy, Ramaphosa appointed three former African presidents - Joaquim Chissano, former President of the Republic of Mozambique; Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, former President of the Republic of Liberia, Kgalema Motlanthe, former President of the Republic of South Africa - as special envoys of the African Union to facilitate mediation between the conflicting parties

in Ethiopia [Addis Standard, 2020]. Alongside President Zewde's support, Teferi Melesse Desta, the Ethiopian Ambassador to Britain, confirmed on the BBC that his country had accepted the appointment of the envoys to mediate the crisis [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Unfortunately, this initiative faced significant challenges from the beginning, primarily due to the rejection of the peace initiative by Prime Minister Abiy [Bloomberg, 2020]. The Prime Minister, who viewed the conflict as an internal matter, insisted that it be resolved within the country, sidelining external actors and pushing back against the AU's involvement. His initial refusal of the mediation highlighted the political constraints that the African Union faced, especially in situation where member states were unwilling to accept external intervention in matters, they considered domestic affairs.

After the failure of the initial mediation attempt, the AU sought for alternative mediators who would be acceptable to all concerned, turning to former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo in August 2021 [AU, 2021]. The former Nigerian President was a figure with considerable diplomatic experience[21]. Nonetheless, his involvement was not without controversy. Obasanjo, serving as AU observer, had previously endorsed the disputed June 2021 Ethiopian election, which faced extensive criticism for its lack of fairness, notably from the European Union and other international observers. In that case, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, said that there were no fulfillment of minimum standard requirement for deploying any electoral observation mission and announced that it would not send EU monitors to the election [EU, 2021].

The AU's endorsement of the election, despite the ongoing war in Tigray, failed to garner credibility among the Tigrayans, who perceived the AU as biased in favor of the Ethiopian government. This perception of partiality impeded Obasanjo's efforts to gain the trust of all parties involved. Despite these obstacles, Obasanjo persevered, attempting to bring together various factions and push for a ceasefire. However, the diplomatic efforts faced repeated challenged, as both the Ethiopian government and the Tigray authorities remained deeply entrenched in their stances [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Alongside to Obasanjo, the AU's mediation efforts began to include other regional actors, such as Kenya, whose involvement was seen as a potential way to balance the mediation process and increase the legitimacy of the AU's efforts.

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[21] Obasanjo was appointed Special Envoy by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo. He held separate meetings with DRC President Joseph Kabila and rebel leader Laurent Nkunda.

2.1.3 Kenya

As a neighboring country to Ethiopia, Kenya's interests in the conflict was inevitable, given the potential spillover effects the war could have on regional security, humanitarian conditions and economic stability. One of Kenya's primary concerns was the potential disintegration of Ethiopia, which could destabilize the entire Horn of Africa. Kenyan officials repeatedly stated that the Kenyan government sought to avoid the disintegration of Ethiopia at any cost, and to shift the focus of the AU back to the protection of the unity and integrity of African States [Demissie, 2023]. Kenya's stance was grounded in the belief that a fractured Ethiopia could lead to a wave of instability that might affect neighboring countries, including Kenya itself, especially in terms of security and refugee flows. In addition to security concerns, Kenya had substantial economic interests in Ethiopia that made the conflict particularly concerning. In May 2021, Kenya's telecommunications giant Safaricom secured a license to operate in Ethiopia, a deal worth $850 million, making it the single largest foreign direct investment in Ethiopia at that time [Ngugi, 2021]. Kenya also hosts one of the largest Ethiopian refugee populations in Africa, further emphasizing its humanitarian stake in the conflict [Demissie, 2023].

From the outset of the conflict, Kenya played an active diplomatic role. Nairobi served as a hub for international meetings, providing a neutral ground for dialogue [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. The Kenyan government, led by President Uhuru Kenyatta, used its significant diplomatic leverage, and support from the United Stated, to engage both the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front in negotiations [*ibid.*]. In addition, Nairobi served as an important base for the international media when journalist were not allowed in Ethiopia. Kenya has also played an important role at the UN, where it became a non-permanent member of the Security Council in January 2021, representing the African bloc. In July 2021, Kenya's permanent representative to the UN urged all parties to the conflict to lay down their arms, emphasizing the importance of a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement [Nation, 2021]. President Joe Biden's meeting with President Kenyatta in October 2021 further highlighted Kenya's strategic position in the international efforts to resolve the conflict [Mdhani & Anna, 2021]. Subsequent contacts occurred with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who emphasized the urgent need for a ceasefire to allow negotiations to take place [US Department of State, 2021a].

The diplomatic efforts gained further momentum in mid-September 2022, when the newly elected Kenyan President William Ruto appointed his predecessor Kenyatta as a peace envoy to Ethiopia and the Great Lakes region [Maina, 2022]. Following pressure from the US and TPLF, Kenyatta was invited to join the AU-led mediation team on the Tigray conflict. His inclusion was intended to balance Obasanjo, who had been a difficult interlocutor for the West and who was viewed with suspicion by senior TPLF leaders [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Progress was achieved thanks to the Kenyans, the AU, Obasanjo and Kenyatta. In June 2022, Debretsion, the TPLF leader, addressed the Tigrayan public on television to explain the "talks about talks", and the Ethiopian government responded by establishing a committee to oversee the planned negotiations [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Kenyatta's involvement in the AU mediated negotiation played a pivotal role in advancing the peace process, eventually leading to the Pretoria Conference and the signature of an agreement of Cessation of Hostilities in November 2022. Following the Pretoria conference, Kenya also hosted two more sessions where members of the TPLF and the GFDRE deliberated on the majority of the ideas for executing the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities [Demissie, 2023].

2.1.4   The United States.

US friendship and engagement with Ethiopia have been longstanding and enduring, despite Ethiopia's alignment to the Soviet Union under the Derg regime. In the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is seen as an ally, and it has been a key partner in the fight against militant Islamists. Ethiopia is geographically close to significant US markets and security interests in the Middle East, as well as crucial maritime routes of the Red Sea and the Suez Canal [CRS, 2024]. However, in recent years Ethiopia has emerged as a focal point of Chinese economic and political competition. Furthermore, the United States supported Egypt in its dispute with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile [Mbaku, 2020]. In its response to the conflict in Tigray, the United States attempted to balance its own national needs with the pursuit of a safe and human resolution to the Tigray conflict. Thus, initially the US response has been defined by three different characteristics: (1) a supportive stance for the federal government in law enforcement, attributing responsibility for the conflict's outbreak to the TPLF; (2) a limited engagement with the crisis, primarily consisting of a few "tweets"" from former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [EPC, 2021]; and (3) a refusal to internationalize the crisis, risking it to spiraling from an internal security campaign into a regional conflict.

Within 24 hours of the eruption of hostilities, the United States Assistant Secretary for African Affairs engaged in dialogue with Demeke Mekonnen, Ethiopia's deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister [Embassy of Ethiopia to the US, 2020b], and sought to devise a strategy to cease the conflict, while emphasizing that it did not perceive an equivalence between two sides, as the government represented a sovereign nation while the Tigrayans constituted a rebellious region [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. It is important to note that the outbreak of the conflict coincided with the US Presidential election. Indeed, it was not until November 30 that the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, called Prime Minister Abiy to convey his concerns and call for the cessation of violence [Reuters, 2020].

After his inauguration, President Biden adopted a policy different from that of his predecessor, consistently calling for the cessation of the hostilities [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. On February 4, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Abiy to allow aid access into Tigray [US Department of State, 2021b] while the new US Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, advocated for an end to the atrocities at the UN Security Council [Al Jazeera, 2021a]. During the Biden Administration, US diplomatic efforts regarding the Tigray conflict emerged as the foremost American priority in Africa [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023], with the clear objectives: cessation of hostilities and human rights violations, withdrawal of Eritrean troops, and provision of humanitarian assistance to Tigray. Shortly thereafter, Abiy formally acknowledged the presence of Eritrean military in Tigray [BBC, 2021]. On April 22, China and Russia allowed a Security Council resolution, based on an Irish draft and endorsed by the United States, expressing "deep concern about allegations of human rights violations" and calling for "a scaled up humanitarian response" and the "restoration of normalcy" [UN, 2021b]. Furthermore, the United States suspended the majority of its non-humanitarian aid to Ethiopia, conditioning its resumption on advancements in humanitarian issues [Psaledakis, 2021].

In January 2022, President Biden announced that the US would remove Ethiopia from the free trade pact known as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) owing to accusation of human rights violations [US Trade Representative, 2022]. By mid-2022, economic pressure resulted in Ethiopia facing significant economic challenges, and with terms for negotiations being openly discussed by both parties [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Indeed, the Ethiopian response to international condemnation over the atrocities committed during the Tigray war was constrained by its economic reliance on Western economic assistance. The

escalating diplomatic isolation of Ethiopia during the war resulted in significant economic repercussions, notably a surge in inflation to its highest rate in over a decade, impacting a substantial portion of the population [AP, 2022].

2.1.5 The European Union.

The EU worked closely with the United States in an attempt to halt the war. The European Union is, of course, in a more difficult position than Washington, since it must reach agreement between al 27 member states to act effectively. The European Union reacted to the crisis with expression of concerns and calls for a ceasefire. On November 26, 2020, the European Parliament passed an urgent resolution calling for immediate cessation of hostilities and for support for mediation initiatives [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. The EU's primary concern during the early stages of the conflict was ensuring humanitarian access to the Tigray region [EU Parliament, 2021]. The blockade of aid to the area led to widespread famine and suffering, and the EU sought to pressure the Ethiopian government and other involved parties to allow international aid agencies into Tigray.

On January 15, 2021, Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, raised alarms about potential war crimes committed in the region [BBC, 2021b]. Also, he emphasized the importance of accountability and announced the suspension of budgetary aid to Ethiopia until humanitarian access to Tigray was restored [Clark, 2022]. In line with its diplomatic efforts, the EU appointed Pekka Haavisto, Finland's Foreign Minister, as the EU's Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa in early 2021. In February 2021, the Finnish Minister met with Ethiopian authorities, representatives from the African Union, and civil society organizations, striving to facilitate dialogue between the conflicting sides [EU Parliament, 2022]. Despite these efforts, the European Union was unable to send a formal observer mission to monitor the June 2021 Ethiopian parliamentary elections.

After the conflicting sides agreed to a humanitarian truce in March 2022, the EU reiterated its support for the African Union led peace initiative, by affirming ongoing support to "regional and African Union mediation efforts, led by Special Representative Obasanjo, trusting that these will deliver peace" [Council of the EU, 2021]. The EU's diplomatic engagement continued throughout 2022, with Anette Weber, the new EU special representative for the Horn of Africa, and Mike Hammer, the US Special Envoy, holding talks

with Ethiopian authorities in Addis Ababa and with Debretsion in Mekelle in July 2022. Their discussions centered on bolstering the AU's mediation efforts [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023].

2.1.6 The UAE, Turkey, China and Russia

Given the strong ties between the UAE and both Ethiopia and Eritrea since Abiy Ahmed assumed leadership, along with its facilitation of the 2018 peace accord between the two countries, the Ethiopian Ambassador in Abu Dhabi promptly convened with the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs on November 19, 2020, to convey the "irresponsible" conduct of the TPLF, emphasizing that the Ethiopian government aims to conclude the law enforcement operation expeditiously [EPC, 2021]. Furthermore, during the outbreak of the Tigray conflict in November 2020, the UAE faced allegations of providing drones that destroyed a significant portion of Tigrayan armor and military equipment [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Despite some denials, evidence was provided on EAU delivering drones in what was described as an "air bridge" to support Ethiopia's war effort in Tigray [Al Jazeera, 2021b]. The UAE had multiple motivations for safeguarding the stability of Ethiopia, including its initial involvement in fostering peace in the Horn of Africa by facilitating the reconciliation agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea [EPC, 2021], as well as its substantial investments across various sectors in Ethiopia and the broader Horn of Africa, which could be jeopardized by regional instability [Zoubir, 2024].

Nevertheless, the UAE was not the main supplier of armaments, Turkey was [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. The relationship between Addis Ababa and Ankara had been evolving for some time, within the initiative of Turkey's President to extend his country's influence in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa in what has been described as a "neo-Ottoman revival" [Vertin, 2019]. The Turkish stance is supported by certain economic factors, notably the desire to maintain the upward trajectory in economic relations with Ethiopia, as evidenced by the trade volume between the two nations, which approached 400 million US dollars in 2019, with Turkish exports to Ethiopia constituting 380 million dollars. Furthermore, the value of Turkish investments in Ethiopia has escalated to 2.5 million dollars, facilitated by the operations of over 200 Turkish enterprises within the country. [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. In August 2021, during the peak of the Tigrayan advance to Addis Ababa, Prime Minister Abiy formalized a military agreement with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, subsequently resulting in substantial Turkish defense and aviation exports to Ethiopia and the manufacture of Turkish

drones in Ethiopia since then [Spicer et al., 2021]. The drones played a significant, maybe pivotal part in Abiy's military campaign, dramatically altering the power balance in favor of the Federal Government [Gatepoulous, 2021].

China has long been involved in trade and investment across the Horn of Africa, with significant strategic interests in the area that correspond with its Belt and Road Initiative. The interests encompass substantial investments in infrastructure, significant loans, particularly from the Export–Import Bank of China, and regional security in the Red Sea trade corridor between China and Europe, supported by China's first overseas military base in Djibouti, established in 2017 [Demissie, 2023]. Ethiopia has notably benefited from Chinese investment, resulting in infrastructure such as a renovated railway from Djibouti to Addis Ababa, a public transport system in the capital, and industries manufacturing diverse products [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. From 2006 to 2018, Chinese investment reportedly totaled $14.8 billion, becoming China the largest foreign investor in the country, overtaking the United States [Ministry of Finance of Ethiopia, 2023]. China has played an important role in the conflict, along with Russia, repeatedly using its position on the UN Security Council to obstruct discussion regarding the situation in Tigray and to oppose efforts by Western powers to impose sanctions on combatants, citing national sovereignty as the rational for resisting further action at the UN [Demissie, 2023]. China's position has been clearly exposed by Chinese MFA Wang Yi, "China firmly supports Ethiopia's efforts to safeguard national sovereignty and independence, believes that the Ethiopian government has the capacity and wisdom to properly handle its affairs… China will adhere to its consistent position and oppose external forces interfering in Ethiopia's internal affairs under the pretext of human rights" [in Plaut & Vaughan, 2023: 334].

Russia has sought to enhance its relationships with African countries in response to widespread condemnation of its war in Ukraine. Several African states, Ethiopia included, have sought to preserve a non-aligned position toward the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as evidenced by their abstention from United Nations voting on resolutions condemning Russia's behavior. In March 2022, Ethiopia refrained from voting in the UN General Assembly on a resolution denouncing Russia's invasion, while Sudan abstained and Eritrea was one of only five nations that opposed it [EEAS, 2022]. Russia's key leverage in Africa lies in its capacity to serve as a diplomatic counterbalance to Western nations, particularly by exercising its UNSC veto power in favor of African countries that experience strained relations with the

West regarding human rights and democracy. However, economic and developmental collaboration between Russia and Africa remains minimal [Demissie, 2023]. Russian foreign minister Lavrov visited Ethiopia in July 2022 during his first trip of Africa since the invasion of Ukraine began, asserting Russia's 'firm support' to the Federal Government at a time of deteriorating ties between Ethiopia, the US and EU [Paravicini, 2022].

The conflict between the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, due to Ethiopia's strategic geographical position, had many implications that extend beyond Ethiopia's borders, affecting the Horn of Africa and regional and international powers. Since the onset of the escalation in the Tigray Region, numerous neighboring countries of Ethiopia have expressed significant apprehension regarding the potential transference of the conflict into their territories, particularly as these nations are concurrently experiencing the presence of groups advocating for separatist agendas. Those countries have provided substantial assistance to the federal government by endorsing the legality of the military operation initiated by the Ethiopian armed forces and allowing adequate time for its success without exerting diplomatic pressure. The major regional and international actors have embraced a conservative stance regarding the conflict in Ethiopia, as the diverse international interests in the country have favored a cautious approach, awaiting the results of the conflict in the Tigray Region and addressing the ensuing realities, thereby granting the Ethiopian armed forces enough time to advance their military campaign against Tigray.

Chapter Three

THE PRETORIA AGREEMENT: A DEAL TO END THE WAR?

SUMMARY: 1. The Negotiation Process of the Pretoria Agreement. – 1.1 Preliminary Initiatives. – 1.2 The Humanitarian Truce and Renewed Mediation Efforts. – 1.3 Towards the Cessation of Hostilities. – 1.4 An Assessment of the Role of the African Union. – 2. The Pretoria Agreement: Silencing the Guns. – 2.1 Key Points of the Agreement. – 2.1.1 Permanent Cessation of Hostilities and Security Measures. – 2.1.2 Humanitarian Access and Restoration of Essential Services. – 2.1.3 Restoration of Federal Authority in the Tigray Region. – 2.1.4 Monitoring, Verification and Compliance. – 2.2 A Deal to End the War: Local Political Implications. – 2.3 Regional and International Perspectives

The analysis conducted so far has had as its main objective to provide a comprehensive review, from both a historical and theoretical perspective, on the concept of international mediation. Furthermore, the study has been complemented by an examination of the Ethiopia's Tigray conflict. This analysis has illuminated the historical and structural roots of the conflict in Northern Ethiopia by examining the recent political history of Ethiopia, with particular emphasis on the notion of ethnic federalism. An analysis of international initiatives undertaken in order to influence the conflict has been conducted to illustrate the broader context in which the African Union carried out its mediation efforts.

At this point, to comprehensively grasp the implications of the mediation of the African Union in the conflict, it is essential to complement the historical and theoretical analysis with a thorough examination of the process culminating in the signing of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement by the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray's People Liberation Front, in Pretoria on November 2, 2022. Thereafter, a detailed analysis will be conducted on the principal terms of the agreement, alongside an examination of its legal and political implications, to enhance understanding of its wider impact and significance for both Ethiopia and the region.

Thus, the objective of this concluding chapter will be to assess the effectiveness of the African Union's mediation initiatives in fostering peace and stability across the African continent, using the resolution of the two-year violent conflict in Northern Ethiopia as a case study. Its assessment will provide valuable insights not only on the efficacy of African Union's mediation capacities, but also on the role of regional organizations in effectively promoting peace and stability, and how such efforts may be leveraged to mediate future conflicts.

1. The Negotiation Process of the Pretoria Agreement

On Wednesday, November 2, 2022, representatives of the Ethiopian government and of the Tigray People's Liberation Front unexpectedly issued a joint statement during African Union-mediated discussions in Pretoria, declaring the signing of an "Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities", aimed at "permanently silence the guns and end the two years of conflict in Northern Ethiopia" [Joint Statement between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), 2022: art. 1/2]. A week later, the highest-ranking military leaders from both sides convened in Nairobi, Kenya, to negotiate the specific implementation of the peace agreement's main clauses.

What factors made the situation "ripe" for mediation? What circumstances led both sides to view a negotiated agreement as the most viable solution? The mediation was made possible by new military dynamics and increased economic pressures that forced the two conflicting parties to reassess the costs of continuing to fight, ultimately making the negotiated solution the best possible alternative. A series of military defeats, particularly due to the use of Turkish-made drones by the Ethiopian federal government coupled with the profound devastation of ten weeks of unparalleled violence following the resurgence of intense conflict on 24 August 2022, forced the TPLF leadership to reassess their political and military objectives. Meanwhile, Abiy Ahmed's government found itself facing urgent economic pressures, particularly due to the withdrawal of financial aid by major international actors, such as the United States and the European Union [Mabera, 2023]. Reports indicated that the country was facing deteriorating economic conditions, marked by increasing external debt and rising inflation, and it possessed less than a month's worth of foreign exchange reserves, following significant investment losses and substantial military expenditures, while the IMF declined to consider new funding amidst the ongoing conflict [De Rosario & Savage, 2022; Mabera, 2023].

Having explored the key factors which, over the years, have contributed to the outbreak of violence in Ethiopia's Tigray region, as well as the key diplomatic initiatives undertaken by major international actors, this section will provide a comprehensive illustration of the process that led to the signature of the Pretoria Agreement. Specifically, through the examination of three different phases of the conflict, the objective is to elucidate how the African Union

managed the competing pressures of local political dynamics and international expectations in mediating the conflict.

Indeed, for the purposes of the dissertation, this analysis will examine the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia as evolving through three primary phases culminating in the signature of the "Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities" on November 2, 2022, between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). These phases illustrate the increasing complexity of the conflict and the evolving dynamics that enabled the mediation by the African Union, ultimately resulting in the agreement.

The conflict started in November 2020, and the first phase lasted until November 2, 2021. In this phase, the advances of the TPLF forces threatened the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, prompting the government to declare a state of emergency. The Ethiopian national army and the Tigrayan forces engaged in intense confrontations, especially in the north, while the international community observed with increasing concern as the situation deteriorated.

In the second phase, from November 2021 until the collapse of the humanitarian truce in August 2022, the nature of the conflict changed. Notwithstanding the agreement for a ceasefire and international diplomatic attempts at mediation, the conflict intensified. This period was characterized by harsh military confrontations, significant humanitarian suffering, and considerable challenges in delivering aid to impacted people. The ceasefire agreed eventually failed, resulting in a return to active fighting in August 2022.

The last phase started with the resumption of hostilities following the collapse of the humanitarian truce in August 2022 and persisted until the signing of the Pretoria Agreement in November 2022. It was marked by a heightened sense of urgency, due to the conflict's destructive nature, significant economic pressure, and considerable political instability. Both the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, confronted with the rising costs of ongoing fighting, were ultimately forced to reevaluate their positions, resulting in a mediated agreement brokered by the African Union. The Pretoria Agreement marked a major turning point, concluding the hostilities after nearly two years of devastating war.

1.1 Preliminary Initiatives

The first phase of the conflict in northern Ethiopia began in the Tigray region on November 3, 2020, when the Ethiopian federal government launched an offensive into the Tigray region following an attack allegedly carried out by the Tigray Defense Forces on the Ethiopian National Defense Forces' northern command base. Debretsion Gebremichael, the TPLF leader, later described the attack as a preemptive measure in response to the federal government's alleged troop mobilization along Tigray's southern border and its plans to launch a military operation to arrest Tigray's leaders [Pellet, 2021]. This initial attack resulted in four weeks of intense fighting, during which the federal forces succeeded in taking control of all major cities in Tigray, including the regional capital, Mekelle. Already in this period, the Eritrean Defense Forces engaged in the conflict, supporting the federal government and conducting attacks on Tigray civilians [ICHREE, 2022; EPO, 2024].

As reported by the Ethiopia Peace Observatory, the Tigray region was the main stage for violence during the first phase of the conflict, with some clashes also occurring in the Amhara region and along the shared border with Eritrea [EPO, 2024]. The military operation by Ahmed's government was successfully concluded by the end of November 2020, with the recapture of control over most of the Tigray region. At that stage, the Tigrayan forces transitioned from a conventional approach to insurgency, complicating repression by state forces, as TPLF troops were increasingly integrated with the civilian population. [*ibid.*]. During this period, the United Nations reported that Ethiopian government forces and their Eritrean allies perpetrated war crimes against the Tigrayan civilian population [ICHREE, 2022]. During this first stage, the Ethiopian National Army sustained significant losses despite the federal forces regaining control of sizable areas, and the Ethiopian government was under mounting international criticism, including the adoption of sanctions, as a result of the Eritrean troops' involvement and the targeting of civilians [EPO, 2024]. On June 28, 2021, the Ethiopian government made the decision to declare a unilateral ceasefire and remove its forces from the area due to a worsening humanitarian situation and military setbacks [ICG, 2021].

The withdrawal of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the government's announcement of the unilateral ceasefire marked an important turning point in the conflict [EPO, 2024]. At that time, following discussions with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed cautious optimism, stating that he hoped for an

effective cessation of hostilities in Tigray [Schipani, 2021]. However, the TPLF dismissed the ceasefire as a "joke," vowing to continue attacking Ethiopian federal forces unless its own conditions for a mutual ceasefire were met [Paravicini & Fick, 2021; EPO, 2024]. The Tigray People's Liberation Front released seven conditions for a ceasefire one week after the federal government announced the unilateral ceasefire [Reda, 2021]. The conditions set forth by the TPLF included [*ibid.*]:

1. "Invading forces from Amhara and Eritrea must withdraw from Tigray and return to their pre-war territories; […] the resolution of issues related to Tigray and Eritrea must be predicated on dialogue with the Government of Tigray alone".

2. "[…] Proceedings to hold Abiy Ahmed and Isaias Afwerki accountable in direct proportion to the severity and magnitude of the damage they have inflicted on Tigray and the despicable crimes committed against the people of Tigray must be put into motion; to that end, it is imperative that there be an agreement on the need for the United Nations to establish an independent investigative body to put in place proper mechanism for bringing criminals to the International Criminal Court".

3. "Allow the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to people of Tigray; […] facilitate the return of all Tigrayans, internally displaced and refugees, to their homes […]"

4. "The people of Tigray must have full access of all forms of services, such as electricity, telecommunications, banking, air travel, education, healthcare, transportation, commerce […]"

5. "Respect the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and accept the fact that the constitution is the sole basis for any negotiations going forward; enable the democratically elected Government of Tigray, with all its powers and constitutional responsibilities, to resume its regular work […]"

6. "Given the expiration of the legal mandate of the federal government, subsequent decisions […] issued at all levels of the executive branch […] should be considered null and void […]"

7. "The Government of Tigray considers the creation of an independent international entity entrusted with the task of the following-up on the implementation of these preconditions for a ceasefire to be a non-negotiable element of the ceasefire itself".

The federal government has not issued an official answer concerning the requirements for a ceasefire. However, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs described these

criteria as "impossible" to follow during a conversation with media on July 9, 2021 [EPO, 2024].

With the Ethiopian federal government's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire and the publication of the seven conditions by the TPLF, both conflicting sides acknowledged for the first time that the conflict required a political solution, indicating a recognition by both parties that the violence alone could not resolve the situation [Fick, 2021].

Nevertheless, the underlying issues that led to the conflict were deep rooted, and any potential political solution would be complex. One of the most difficult issues at the time was the status of Western Tigray zone, which had been under the control of Amhara regional forces since the onset of the conflict. This zone had been disputed for over 30 years, with disagreements over its administration playing a significant role in shaping Amhara nationalist identity politics [EPO, 2024]. At this stage, TPLF forces began military activity in the Afar and Amhara regions, putting pressure on the federal government to accept its conditions [*ibid*.]. The expansion of the conflict into these areas prompted regional governments to call for mobilization to counter TPLF forces, further escalating the violence and complicating efforts to reach a peaceful resolution [*ibid*.].

Still, there have been some positive developments over this period. The federal government pledged to expedite unrestricted humanitarian access to Tigray for humanitarian organizations, ensuring the prompt restoration of basic services, including power and communications [UNSG, 2021]. Moreover, the Government committed to use the truce to enable essential humanitarian aid, including regular United Nations humanitarian flights to Tigray, along with support for agricultural initiatives [ibid.]. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has also indicated that "humanitarian access within most of Tigray is significantly improving," suggesting that TPLF authorities were collaborating with foreign assistance agencies [OCHA, 2021].

However, by early November 2021, the situation had escalated significantly. The Tigrayan forces, joined by the Oromo Liberation Army, in alliance with the TPLF since August 2021, advanced within eighty-five miles of the capital and threatened Addis Ababa and the Ethiopian government [CFR, 2023]. As a response, the federal government decided to issue a state of emergency on 2 November 202 in an effort to mobilize forces and prevent the fall of Addis

Ababa [Houreld, 2021]. As the military pressure intensified again, the ceasefire that had been in place disintegrated and the conflict erupted once again in full force.

During this first phase of the conflict in Tigray, as already highlighted in the Second Chapter, the African Union primarily engaged in two main tracks for mediation efforts. The initial track involved South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his capacity as Chair of the African Union, appointing three former African Presidents as special envoys to mediate between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. This effort, however, faced significant obstacles from the beginning. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed rejected the initiative, claiming that the conflict was an internal matter requiring a domestic solution, thus sidelining any external mediation attempts. The second track involved former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo serving as AU Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa. His appointment, in August 2021, was controversial due to his past endorsement of the disputed June 2021 Ethiopian elections, which had been widely criticized for their lack of fairness. This endorsement, particularly in light of the ongoing conflict in Tigray, fostered a perception of partiality toward the Ethiopian government, then initially undermining Obasanjo's ability to gain the trust of all parties involved.

A notable early challenge to the African Union's peace initiatives arose when the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, characterized the Ethiopian government's military campaign in Tigray as a "legitimate law enforcement operation [AU, 2020]. He praised the Ethiopian government, asserting that "in Ethiopia, the federal government took bold steps to preserve the unity, stability and respect for the constitutional order of the country; which is legitimate for all states" [ibid.] This statement, issued during ongoing hostilities, faced sharp criticism from Tigrayans, who accused the AU of siding with the Ethiopian government, so further undermining the AU's credibility as an impartial mediator [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023].

In response to the imminent humanitarian crisis, the AU initiated mediation efforts between the opposing parties. In November 2021, after a visit of Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde, the African Union Chair, Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, designated former President of the Republic of Mozambique Joaquim Chissano, former President of the Republic of Liberia Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and former President of the Republic of South Africa Kgalema Motlanthe as special envoys of the African Union to mediate between the conflicting

factions in Ethiopia inspired by the spirit of African solutions for African problems [Back, 2024]. Unfortunately, this initiative faced significant challenges from the beginning, primarily due to the rejection of the peace initiative by Prime Minister Abiy [Bloomberg, 2020]. The Prime Minister, who viewed the conflict as an internal matter, insisted that it be resolved within the country, sidelining external actors and resisting the AU's involvement.

In August 2021, the African Union appointed the former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo as High Representative for the Horn of Africa to initiate and lead the mediation process [AU, 2021a]. The Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki, characterized this as part of its "drive to promote peace, security, stability and political dialogue all over the Horn of Africa region" [in Berhe, 2021]. Nonetheless, his involvement was not without controversy. In particular, the AU's impartiality has been scrutinized due to its role as one of the few non-Ethiopian institutions to observe the disputed general elections in June 2021. In that case, the African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM), led by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, concluded that "despite some operational, logistical, security, political and Covid-19 related challenges, overall, the pre-election and Election Day processes were conducted in an orderly, peaceful and credible manner. There was nothing, in the Mission's estimation, that distracted from the credible conduct of the elections. The Mission, therefore, commends all Ethiopians for the demonstrated commitment to the democratic development of the country" [AU, 2021b].

However, the elections occurred under inadequate circumstances. Several political opposition leaders were incarcerated, violence was proliferating in multiple regions of the country, with the majority of international actors declining to monitor the election [EPO, 2024]. In that case, the EU rejected to send observers, citing the lack of fulfillment of minimal standard requirements for sending any electoral observation mission [EU, 2021] and the United States government, via its special envoy to the Horn of Africa, recommended that the Ethiopian government defer the elections and focus on peace-making [Berhe, 2021]. Following the election, the electoral process was denounced by several political parties, including five seen aligned with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's ruling party [*ibid.*].

The AU's endorsement of the election, despite the ongoing conflict in Tigray, did not achieve confidence among the Tigrayans, who viewed the AU as partial to the Ethiopian government. The Government of Tigray, via its spokesman, expressed its reservations over

the AU effort and the selection of Obasanjo as its special envoy [Arab News, 2021]. In the first phase of the conflict, this perception of partiality impeded Obasanjo's efforts to gain the trust of all parties involved.

1.2 The Humanitarian Truce and Renewed Mediation Efforts

The second phase of the conflict began on 24 November 2021, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared his intention to lead the Ethiopian forces "from the front" and initiated a counteroffensive against the Tigrayan forces that were threatening Addis Ababa [Feleke, 2021]. In December, government forces rapidly began regaining control over the majority of territories particularly due to the use of Turkish-made drones. On 20 December 2021, following the government successful counteroffensive, the TPLF requested a ceasefire, and its military leaders announced the withdrawal of their forces to the borders of Tigray region [EPO, 2024]. Concurrently, the federal government proclaimed the conclusion of the initial phase of military operations against the TPLF and signaled that it would cease its advance towards Mekelle [Al Jazeera, 2021c].

On 10 March, the United States authorities reportedly facilitated a secret meeting in the Seychelles between military leaders, Tsadkan Gebretensae of the TPLF and Birhanu Jula of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, to negotiate a potential truce [Walsh, 2022]. Consequently, hostilities diminished, and two weeks later, on 24 March, the Ethiopian government officially announced an indefinite humanitarian truce to facilitate the delivery of aid to Tigray, where the population was in urgent need of food and medication [Al Jazeera, 2022a]. The Tigray regional government agreed to the humanitarian truce and expressed its "willingness and readiness to resolve the situation […] peacefully" on the condition of humanitarian assistance "commensurate with needs on the ground, and within a reasonable timeframe" [TEAO, 2022a].

The humanitarian truce, effective from March to August 2022, facilitated a limited and intermittent flow of aid into Tigray. Nonetheless, the quantity of supplies that ultimately arrived in the territory was significantly inadequate to satisfy the growing needs of the local population [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Nevertheless, aspirations that the humanitarian ceasefire may swiftly culminate in a peace accord rapidly diminished. Both the TPLF leadership and Abiy Ahmed's administration shown no effort in establishing a common ground for a mutual

agreement. [Mabera, 2023]. The central government consistently justified the necessity for military action by citing the preservation of state unity [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Conversely, the leadership of the TPLF persisted in pursuing its political objectives, such as the reclamation of territory in Western Tigray, the restoration of essential services and the provision of humanitarian aid, through military actions [Mabera, 2023]. Thus, despite the temporary cessation of hostilities, the persistent ambitions indicated that both parties remained far from achieving a lasting and negotiated solution.

During this stage, the United States, the European Union, and the African Union tried to take advantage of the pause in the fighting to facilitate negotiations between the two warrying sides [EPO, 2024]. On June 27, the Ethiopian federal government established a seven-members peace committee, led by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Demeke Mekonen, to seek a negotiated resolution to the conflict, insisting that the AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo, should lead the peace negotiations [Abebe, 2022; Addis Standard, 2022; EPO, 2024]. Attempts towards reconciliation were previously made by the Tigrayan leadership as well, which, some days before the establishment of the peace-committee by Abiy's government, released a statement indicating their readiness to engage in a "credible, impartial, and principled peace process", while expressing reservations in the AU led initiative [Abebe, 2022; TEAO, 2022c]. Indeed, in the letter that Debretsion Gebremichael, the TPLF leader, addressed to the Chairperson of the African Union, he stressed that "the silence of the African Union over the war and the atrocities perpetrated by the forces ranged against us was a betrayal of the Foundational Principles of the Union. [...] In the considered view of the People and Government of Tigray the leadership of the African Union Commission has yet to redeem its failures and restore our trust" [*ibid*.]. Debretsion also said Tigray's position "remains that the peace process requires the engagement of a range of international partners, under the leadership of the Government of Kenya. Among those partners are the United States, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates, the United Nations, and the African Union" [*ibid*.].

At the end of July, Redwan Hussien, PM Abiy Ahmed's national security advisor, expressed on a post on Twitter (now "X") that the Federal government was "ready to talks anytime anywhere" and that "talks should begin without preconditions". [Hussein, 2022 in Abebe, 2022] The declaration coincided with the day the Director-General of the World Health Organization characterized the situation in Tigray as the "most severe humanitarian crisis

globally" [Al Jazeera, 2022b]. Nonetheless, the TPLF persisted in demanding the satisfaction of its preconditions, particularly the restoration of essential services in Tigray and unrestricted access to humanitarian assistance. Debretsion, the leader of the TPLF, remarked that "if the federal government were genuinely prepared to pursue peace, it would have reinstated fundamental public services in the region" [AP, 2022b]. Moreover, a continual challenge during the truce was the contention about the mediator for the peace negotiations. The Ethiopian government supported the African Union's Horn of Africa Envoy, Olusegun Obasanjo, while the Tigrayan leadership preferred Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta to lead the mediation efforts. The Ethiopian government subsequently accused the TPLF of lacking interests in peace negotiations to conclude the conflict in the northern region, resulting in escalating hostility between the parties [AFP, 2022b]. By late August, negotiations for peace had entirely collapsed, and hostilities recommenced.

As noted by Abebe [2023], during the second phase of the conflict, there were at least three significant obstacles preventing progress in the peace process. The first issue was the disagreement over who should lead the peace negotiations. The government of Abiy Ahmed endorsed the mediation initiatives of the African Union, led by Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria and High Representative for the Horn of Africa of the African Union. Nonetheless, the TPLF leadership challenged Obasanjo's neutrality, alleging that he exhibited excessive bias towards the Ethiopian federal government. In light of this circumstance, the Tigray administration advocated for the assistance of Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, to assume a more equitable mediation role. The suggestion also encompassed the participation of important international actors, such as the US and the EU, to guarantee a more impartial and efficacious mediation. [Abebe, 2023].

The second impediment to mediation between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF pertained to a significant divergence about the prerequisites for entering dialogue. The TPLF asserted that the reinstatement of vital services was a requirement for any mediation, contending that the restoration of basic services, including telecommunications, water, and electricity, was crucial for fostering a trustworthy atmosphere. Conversely, the Abiy Ahmed administration contended that mediation must precede the reinstatement of services, asserting that discussion might serve as the initial step in addressing humanitarian concerns and reestablishing order [Abebe, 2023].

The third obstacle to the mediation process focused on the contested territories in Western Tigray, regions historically claimed by both Tigray and Amhara peoples. Before the conflict, these territories were governed by the regional administration of Tigray. However, Amhara forces took control of the area in November 2020. The Tigray People's Liberation Front sought a return to the prewar conditions, but their request for a withdrawal from the disputed areas was a significant impediment for the federal government, as conceding on such issue would jeopardize relations with the Amhara and Eritrean forces and potentially incite discord among allies [Abebe, 2023].

1.3 Towards the Cessation of Hostilities

The ceasefire brokered in March 2022 was fragile and intermittent and violence occurred on several fronts, especially along the border with the Afar region in the initial months of 2022 [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. Nevertheless, until August 2022, Tigrayan troops generally remained inside Tigray, while Ethiopian and Eritrean forces did not advance beyond the territories they had previously captured [ibid.]. Additionally, from April 2022, some assistance was provided to Tigray, however, as previously said, it was completely insufficient. In September 2022, a UN Human Rights Council-mandated International Commission of Human Rights Experts identified reasonable grounds to believe that all parties had perpetrated human rights violations, especially pointing out Ethiopian forces for "intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare" [ICHREE, 2022]. At the time, it became clear that the situation was untenable, and it was evident to all parties that only two options remained: successful negotiations or the renewal of hostilities.

Both factions exploited the pause in hostilities to retrain and reposition their forces, and on August 24, the conflict resumed [Brown & Zelalem, 2022]. The spokesperson for the Tigray People's Liberation Front posted on Twitter, reporting intense fighting at multiple locations along the border between Tigray and Eritrea. Meanwhile, and the US Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa stated that they had been closely monitoring the movement of Eritrean troops across the border [Plaut & Vaughan, 2023]. This marked the beginning of the third phase of the conflict, with both sides blaming each other for triggering the new wave of clashes.

Following the fall of the ceasefire, the conflict has resumed with full intensity. A UNICEF report from October 2022 [in Addis Standard, 2022] stated that approximately 600,000 individuals have been newly displaced from the resumption of hostilities in August until the end of conflict, pointing out that restrictions on humanitarian access to the region hindered an adequate humanitarian response. Furthermore, research by the Gand University indicated that by the end of October 2022, the conflict had resulted in around 300,000 to 600,000 casualties, predominantly among civilians [York, 2022]. The severity of the conflict and its appalling impact on civilians brought many international actors to call for the cessation of hostilities. Among them, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for the warring parties to resume peace talks, while warning that "the situation in Ethiopia is spiraling out of control", urging an immediate end to hostilities in the Tigray region [UNSG, 2022].

At that point, despite the mounting violences and a climate of growing distrust between the parties not allowing space for direct consultations, the new military and economic conditions induced the parties into a condition of mutually hurting stalemate (MHS), prompting both sides to a strategic reassessment of the costs associated with the continuation of the conflict and the potential for a negotiated resolution of the dispute. The federal administration faced deteriorating economic conditions, characterized by escalating inflation, increasing external debt, and the cessation of financial assistance from the United States and the European Union, which generated significant motivation to pursue peace [Mabera, 2023]. Similarly, a series of military defeats, particularly due to the use of Turkish-made drones by the Ethiopian federal government coupled with the profound devastation of ten weeks of unparalleled violence compelled the Tigrayan leadership to reassess its position [*ibid.*].

Adding to the growing pressure to end the conflict, external actors played a significant role in driving momentum toward peace talks. In particular, the diplomatic initiative of EU and US Special Envoys for the Horn of Africa Annette Webber and Mike Hammer encouraged the launch of talks between the FDRE and the TPLF, playing a crucial role in expressing their support for the AU's mediation efforts that ultimately culminated in the negotiations conducted in South Africa and led to the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement [EEAS, 2022b].

On early September, TPLF leader Debretsion Gebremichael showed an opening for mediation initiatives by sending a letter to the United Nations proposing an immediate cessation of hostilities [Abdi, 2022]. He stated that "as prelude to a sustainable and resolute peace, we propose a cessation of hostilities that includes the following four elements [*ibid.*]:

1. An immediate, unconditional and complete lifting of the blockade on essential services.

2. Unfettered humanitarian access, including clear and agreed protocols and arrangements to this effect.

3. The withdrawal of Eritrean forces from every part of Ethiopian and Tigrayan territory, under international monitoring, to positions in which they can no longer pose any threat to us.

4. Return to the constitutionally recognized borders of Tigray as they stood prior to the outbreak of hostilities in November 2020."

The United States subsequently organized a meeting in Djibouti, facilitated by the US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Mike Hammer, to negotiate peace on September 9 [Walsh, 2022]. This meeting was attended by Tigrayan officials and Abiy's National Security Advisor, Redwan Hussien, and the Ethiopian Justice Minister, Gedion Timothewos [*ibid.*]. The day after, the AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki extended Obasanjo's mandate as AU's special envoy [FANABC, 2022]. On September 11, 2022, the TPLF accepted negotiations with the federal government and, in a clear departure from its September 7 letter, the government of Tigray regional administration agreed to a "credible AU-led peace process … [that] will also include mutually acceptable mediators; international observers […] and international experts" [TEAO, 2022b]. On October 5, both the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan forces agreed to participate in negotiation in South Africa invited by the African Union [Paravicini, 2022b]. The talks began on October 25 in Pretoria at the South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs building [Miridzhanian & Acharya, 2022].

The negotiating parties were led by TPLF spokesperson Getachew Reda and Ethiopian national security advisor Redwan Hussien [Miridzhanian & Acharya, 2022]. Talks were mediated by the African Union Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa and former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, and former Deputy-President of South Africa Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. In addition, United Nations and United States representative participated as international observers [*ibid.*].

After ten days of formal negotiations, on Wednesday, November 2, 2022, representatives of the Ethiopian government and of the Tigray People's Liberation Front issued a joint statement, declaring the signing of an "Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities", aimed at "permanently silence the guns and end the two years of conflict in Northern Ethiopia"

1.4 An Assessment of the Role of the African Union

The African Union played a crucial role in the mediation process that ultimately led to the signing of the Pretoria Agreement between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front in November 2022. It is important to underline, that the African Union's mediation efforts, intended to promote a ceasefire, facilitate communication among the conflicting sides, and encourage the restoration of peace, stability and security in the Tigray region and across the whole country, were significantly challenged by the profound mistrust that prevailed between the contending parties. Two pivotal factors facilitated the overcoming of these challenges. Firstly, the external backing of the African Union's mediation initiatives by significant international actors, including the United States and the European Union, who, through their diplomatic initiatives, reinforced the legitimacy of the African Union-led process and imposed escalating costs on the factions for perpetuating the conflict. Secondly, the participation of former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in the mediation team that help mitigate the perceived partiality of Olusegun Obasanjo in favor of the Ethiopian federal government, facilitating the TPLF's acceptance of the mediation.

During the mediation initiative, the challenging task for the African Union's mediators was to maintain a delicate balance between internal and international pressures while striving for an agreement that would satisfy all parties concerned, all while preserving the integrity of the negotiating process.

At the internal level, the African Union, in its role as mediator, needed to deal with the local dynamics concerning both the federal government and the TPLF. On one hand, Abiy Ahmed's Ethiopian federal government encountered difficulties concerning its domestic legitimacy and alliances, especially with the Amhara forces and the Eritrean government led by Isaias Afwerki. Initially, the war in Tigray was framed as a law enforcement operation against the TPLF, but the increasing casualties and criticisms regarding the management of

the conflict created considerable political challenges. The African Union's intervention, while always advocated for, was finally formally accepted in light of escalating economic challenges and increasing criticism over human rights violations. Conversely, for the TPLF, the negotiation process represented a matter of political survival. As of September 2022, the group was in a position of military weakness while retaining considerable political support within the Tigrayan population. International efforts, notably by US envoy Mike Hammer and EU representative Annette Weber, alongside former Kenyan President Kenyatta's involvement in the mediation process, eventually influenced the TPLF's decision to accept the African Union's mediation.

Internationally, the African Union had to navigate pressures from both global and regional actors, while maintaining focus on the preservation of regional peace and stability. The United States and the European Union strongly endorsed the African Union's mediation initiative, while simultaneously exerting pressure on the Ethiopian government by condemning human rights violations and imposing economic sanctions. At the same time, the involvement of regional actors, such as Eritrea, which supported the Ethiopian government's offensive against the Tigrayan leadership, further complicated the mediation process and posed a risk of creating possible spoilers.

According to our application of Putnam's theory to international mediation contexts, the success of mediation depends on the mediator's ability to find a compromise that is acceptable at both the local and international levels. For the Ethiopian government, the willingness to negotiate may have been seen as an opportunity to reduce international pressure, halt sanctions, and maintain control over the country. For the TPLF, accepting the African Union-mediated initiative represented an opportunity to regain political legitimacy, end the conflict, and gain political concessions, such as the granting of more autonomy.

However, despite the African Union's efforts, Abiy Ahmed's internal political position was deeply rooted and international pressures failed to compel the Ethiopian government into making significant concessions. Given the military difficulties and the humanitarian crisis, the TPLF representatives made many concessions, accepting almost all of Abiy's conditions. As a consequence, the signing of the Pretoria agreement left many Tigrayans confused, eroding the traditional majority role of the organization and diminishing the domestic win-set of the TPLF.

2. The Pretoria Agreement: Silencing the Guns

On November 2, 2022, the Federal Government of Ethiopia led by Abiy Ahmed, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front leadership reached a deal to bring an end two years of conflict in Northern Ethiopia. The agreement, facilitated by the mediation of the African Union in Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa, was welcomed as a victory by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Ethiopian authorities. Leaders of the TPLF agreed to disarm their troops and reinstate federal authority in the territory. In return, the Ethiopian National Defense Force ceased its advance into Mekelle and pledged to restore essential services in the area and revoke the terrorist label imposed on the TPLF [Dessie et al., 2024].

The agreement was reinforced by an additional agreement on implementing modalities. On November 7, 2022, five days after the signature of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Pretoria, Ethiopian and Tigrayan military leaders, notably ENDF Chief of Staff Birhanu Jula and Tigray Defense Forces Commander-in-Chief Tadesse Werede, maintained crucial momentum and convened for further discussions in Nairobi, Kenya, to address the restoration of humanitarian access to the Tigray region and the Tigrayan disarmament process. On November 12, they issued a declaration reiterating their adherence to the original agreement and delineated the specifics of its implementation [Nairobi, 2022].

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed welcomed the agreement, describing it as "monumental in moving Ethiopia forward on the path of the reforms we embarked upon four and a half years ago", adding "our commitment to peace remains steadfast, and our commitment to collaborating for the implementation of the agreement is equally strong" [Reuters, 2022]. Likewise, the AU and IGAD commended it as a notable achievement demonstrating the effectiveness of African Solutions to African Problems [*ibid.*]. The signing of the Agreement received widespread praise from international actors as well. UN Secretary-General, through his spokesperson, welcomed the agreement marking it as a critical first step towards ending the brutal conflict [Al Jazeera, 2022c] and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken supported the agreement by saying on "X" that he "welcome the signing of a cessation of hostilities […] and commend the African Union for its extraordinary efforts to bring peace to northern Ethiopia" [Blinken, 2022].

2.1 Key Points of the Agreement

The "Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities" was designed to end the violent conflict that began in November 2020 in the northern Ethiopia's region of Tigray through a peaceful, negotiated solution. Both the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front acknowledged "the destructive consequence of the conflict on human lives and livelihoods" and committed to resolve political problems "through political means" [Pretoria Agreement, 2022: Preamble]. The Agreement sought to establish a comprehensive framework to settle disputes between the parties, in an effort to "seek a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis within the framework of the permanent cessation of hostilities where a monitoring and verification mechanism shall be put in place to monitor compliance" [*ibid*.].

The Agreement includes a preamble and fifteen articles, starting with the objectives of the Agreement, followed by principles; humanitarian access; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; confidence-building measures; restoration of Federal authority in the Tigray region; and procedures for monitoring, verification, and compliance. Article 12 emphasizes that both the Federal Government and the TPLF must "implement this Agreement in good faith and to refrain from any action that undermines and/or is inconsistent with the spirit and letter of this Cessation of Hostilities" [Pretoria Agreement, 2022: Article 12].

Having provided a comprehensive account of the events, initiatives and negotiations that eventually culminated in the signature of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities, the following section will seek to provide a critical review of the main provision of the Agreement. To ensure a thorough analysis, the discussion will be structured around 3 + 1 main baskets: (1) the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities and security measures; (2) Humanitarian access and restoration of basic services; (3) Restoration of federal authority in the Tigray region and political initiatives; and, lastly, (4) Procedures for monitoring, verification and compliance.

By exploring this core areas, this analysis will offer valuable insights into the fundamental components of the agreements, making it possible to assess the progress made in its implementation, and critically evaluate its overall success in fostering peace and stability in the region.

2.1.1   Permanent Cessation of Hostilities and Security Measures

Article 2 of the Pretoria Agreement outlines the essential principles that serve as the foundation for constructive dialogue and peace between the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. In particular, the agreement emphasized the commitment to core values that would guide the parties toward a peaceful resolution of the dispute, including "(a) respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; (b) legality and respect for constitutional norms […]; (c) respect for fundamental human rights […]; (d) protection of civilians; (e) respect for the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance; (f) accountability and justice […]; (g) unhindered humanitarian access to all in need of assistance; and (h) the use of humanitarian aid exclusively for humanitarian purposes" [Pretoria Agreement, 2022: Article 2].

One of the primary components of the Pretoria Agreement is the cessation of hostilities between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the Tigrayan Defense Forces. Article 3(1) lays the groundwork for an immediate ceasefire, stipulating that both parties must "immediately disengage forces […] under their control". This includes "the cessation of overt and covert acts of violence; laying of mines; sabotage; airstrikes; direct or indirect acts of violence; and subversion or use of proxies to destabilize the other party or collusion with any external force hostile to either party" [Pretoria Agreement, 2022: Article 3(2)]. By calling for an immediate ceasefire, the Agreement seeks to create a conducive environment for peace, reducing the level of violence and allowing room for humanitarian aid and political dialogue.

In addition to the cessation of hostilities, the Pretoria Agreement places significant emphasis on the process of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR). Specifically, article 6(f) mandates that "the overall disarmament of the TPLF combatants, including light weapons, [should be completed] within 30 days from the signing of the Agreement" [Article 6(f)]. This process is needed to facilitate the reintegration of combatants into civilian life and help prevent the re-escalation of violence. The Agreement also detailed the need "to organize a meeting of senior commanders within 5 days from the signing of this Agreement to discuss and work out detailed modalities for disarmament for the TPLF combatants" [Pretoria Agreement, 2022: Article 6(d)]. Thus, the initial meeting was followed by a follow-up meeting of senior military commanders in Nairobi, Kenya, on November 7. The Nairobi Declaration highlighted the phased nature of disarmament, dividing the process

into two phases and linking it to the withdrawal of non-ENDF forces from Tigray. Specifically, the first phase should focus on the surrender of light weapons and the second phase where "disarmament oh heavy weapons will be done concurrently with the withdrawal of foreign and non-ENDF forces from the region" [Nairobi Declaration, 2022: Article 2(d)].

Furthermore, the Nairobi Declaration called for the formation of "a joint committee […] to work out a detailed implementation plan for the disarmament of light weapons" [Article 2.1]. This step was seen as crucial for the effective execution of the DDR process, ensuring that all actions are coordinated and that the terms of the agreement are adhered to in practice. On December 1, 2022, the US State Department reported that there had been a promising start in implementation, and by December 4, Tadesse Werede, the Tigrayan military Commander-in-Chief, stated that around 65% of Tigrayan combatants were disengaged despite the ongoing presence of Eritrean forces [Addis Standard, 2022b]. A few days later, Ethiopia's military announced that Tigrayan forces began handing over their heavy weapons as a part of the implementation of the peace deal [Misikir, 2023].

2.1.2 Humanitarian Access and Restoration of Essential Services

Following the signing of the Pretoria Agreement on November 2, 2022, there was significant international hope that humanitarian aid would be swiftly made available to the Tigray region and surrounding war-torn areas[22]. The Agreement explicitly required the Ethiopian federal government to "expedite the provision of humanitarian aid in collaboration with humanitarian agencies taking into account the specifics needs of vulnerable groups […]" and "undertakes to facilitate the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons and refugees" [Pretoria Agreement, 2022: Article 5].

Almost immediately, United Nations officials began discussion with Ethiopian authorities about reopening the roads that had been closed during the conflict to expedite the provision of aid [Burke, 2022]. However, on November 10, the World Health Organizations raised concerns reporting that aid had not been allowed to reach the region despite the fact that humanitarian access was a key component of the peace deal [*ibid.*].

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[22] See: Reaction to Ethiopia Truce Deal. *Reuters*, (November 3, 2022).
https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/reaction-agreement-cessation-hostilities-tigray-2022-11-02/

On November 12, the Nairobi Declaration on the implementation of the agreement was signed, reinforcing the commitment of both parties to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid in accordance with article 5 of the Agreement. They agreed to "cooperate and facilitate the delivery of unhindered humanitarian access" to Tigray and the neighboring regions that had also been affected by the conflict [Article 4]. The African Union's mediator Olusegun Obasanjo emphasized that the deal would take "immediate effect" [Al Jazeera, 2022d].

By November 26, there were signs of improvement in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Catherine Sozi, the UN resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ethiopia, reported that 450 trucks, carrying almost 18,000 tons of food and medical supplies, had reached Tigray between 15-24 November 2022 [Addis Standard, 2022c]. Although this marked an important step, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, many areas of Tigray remained inaccessible and efforts were still inadequate to meet the vast needs of the population [Mwai, 2023].

In addition to the need of humanitarian assistance, large parts of the Tigray region had also been without basic services such as electricity, telecommunications, and banking services for almost two years. The Pretoria Agreement addressed this issue, with the Federal Government of Ethiopia pledging to "expedite and coordinate the restoration of essential services in the Tigray region" as a part of confidence-building measures [Pretoria Agreement, 2022: Article 7.2(b)].

In the days following the agreement, there were signs of progress in the restoration of essential services. On November 12, the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia announced that it had restored banking services in Western Tigray [Addis Standard, 2022d]. Ethiopian Airlines resumed regular commercial passenger flights to Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, on December 28, 2022, and later to Shire on January 2, 2023 [Mwai, 2023]. On December 6, 2022, the national electricity operator announced that Mekelle had been reconnected to the national power grid after more than a year of power outages caused by the conflict [AFP, 2022c]. By the end of December 2022, mobile telephone connectivity had also been restored in many areas, although some areas still remained without power and phone communications access [Mwai, 2023].

2.1.3 Restoration of Federal Authority in the Tigray Region

Concerning the restoration of Federal Authority in Tigray and the representation of Tigray in Federal institutions, the peace agreement outlines specific provisions aimed at ensuring the region's reintegration into Ethiopia's national governance structures. Initially, Article 3 states that: "(5) The Parties agree to restore the presence of federal authority in Mekelle in order to create a conducive environment for the resumption of public services in the region as well as the safety of the inhabitants of the city. To this effect, the Parties agree that the ENDF and other relevant Federal Institutions shall have an expeditious, smooth, peaceful, and coordinated entry into Mekelle, which shall be facilitated through the open communication channel to be established between the senior commanders of the Parties".

Article 9 of the Agreement further discusses the restoration of Federal Authority, stating that "(1) The Parties agree on the restoration of Federal Authority in the Tigray region, including control of federal institutions and agencies; ". On the other side, it highlights the importance of inclusive governance and representation by providing that: "(2) the Federal Government shall ensure and facilitate the representation of the Tigray region in the federal institutions, including the House of Federation, and House of Peoples' Representatives, in accordance with the FDRE Constitution and applicable laws". Furthermore, Article 10 introduces the issue of the beginning of political negotiations to achieve a political settlement. It specifies that "(1) within a week of the implementation of Article 7(2)(c) [lifting of the terrorist designation of the TPLF by the House of People's Representatives] and until elections for the Regional Council and the House of Peoples' Representatives are held […], the establishment of an inclusive Interim Regional Administration will be settled through political dialogues between the parties" and that "(2) […] the Parties shall start a political dialogue to find lasting solutions to the underlying political differences between them":

The removal of TPLF's terrorist designation by the Ethiopian Parliament on March 16, 2023, as outlined in the Agreement, marked a turning point in sustaining the momentum of the peace process [Misikir, 2023b]. This decision paved the way for choice of Getachew Reda, the TPLF spokesperson, to lead the incoming interim administration of the regional state [Addis Standard, 2023] and his consequent official appointment by Prime Abiy Ahmed on March 17, 2023, as the Head of the Interim Regional Administration [The Guardian, 2023]

2.1.4 Monitoring, Verification and Compliance

Lastly, the successful deployment of the African Union Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission in Ethiopia marked a significant step forward in the efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. According to Article 11 of the Agreement, "the Parties agreed to institute a monitoring, verification, and compliance mechanism for the effective implementation of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities. For this purpose, the Parties agree to establish a Joint Committee comprising a representative from each party, a representative from IGAD and chaired by the African Union through the High-Level Panel. The AU, through the High-Level Panel, shall appoint a team of African experts to monitor the implementation of the permanent cessation of hostilities" [Pretoria Agreement, 2022].

By January 2023, the African Union had successfully deployed a full team of military and civilian personnel as part of the AU Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission (AU-MVCM). This team, stationed in Mekelle, consisted of twenty-one African experts drawn from Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Their deployment was in line with Article 11 of the Agreement, ensuring that the process of monitoring, verification and compliance was undertaken by experts with a deep understanding of the regional context, inspired by the principle of regional commitment to peace and stability in Ethiopia. [AU, 2023] The AU-MVCM team's responsibilities were vast and crucial for the region's recovery. They were tasked with "monitoring the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, the resettlement of internally displaced persons, the resumption of economic and social services, the facilitation of humanitarian access and the protection of civilians in the Tigray region" [*ibid*].

Nonetheless, both the Joint Committee and the team of African experts, assigned to oversee the monitoring, verification, and compliance mechanism have mostly remained inactive. Indeed, as reported by the Addis Standard [2024], the first strategic review on the implementation of the CoHA intended to "undertake strategic reflection and support critical aspects of the Peace Process, such as humanitarian support, DDR, rehabilitation, and reconstruction," occurred only sixteen months after the signature of the agreement. And the statement released at the end of the meeting did not specify if any steps had been established to renew and accelerate the fulfillment of outstanding commitments. [Addis Standard, 2024]

2.2 A Deal to End the War: Local Political Implications

As it has been emphasized throughout the chapter, it was the military developments on the ground that made the situation "ripe" for mediation, compelling the parties to seek a negotiated settlement of the dispute. The Ethiopian National Defense Forces' two months of violent offensive, coupled with the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the region, made it necessary for the TPLF leadership to accept the African Union's mediation proposal. At the same time, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed endorsed the opening of a mediation channel, recognizing the untenable circumstances for Ethiopia, which was facing a severe economic crisis and increasing criticism from the West over alleged human rights violations.

In response to the military challenges and the humanitarian catastrophe, the Tigrayan officials made several compromises, accepting almost all the conditions set by Abiy Ahmed. The agreement was signed between the federal government and the TPLF and not, as initially requested by the Tigrayans, with the regional authorities of Tigray, whose election in 2020 was never recognized by Addis Ababa, reducing the war to being between the legitimate national government and a rebel group. The implementation of the agreement has paved the way for the complete restoration of federal authority throughout the region, allowing the return of federal authorities into the region and the disarmament of the Tigrayan Defense Forces. While the TPLF got the chance to survive as an organized political group, the signature of the Agreement marked the political defeat of the TPLF, which has failed to establish a *de facto* state in Tigray or promote a regime change in Addis Ababa [Donelli, 2023].

The agreement signed in Pretoria initially had several unresolved issues, which were subsequently largely addressed during implementation talks between military senior commanders in Nairobi and in following consultations between the parties. One of the most significant issues pertained to the presence of Eritrean and Amhara forces in large parts of Tigray's territories. At the signing of the Agreement on the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities, several observers indicated that important actors in the conflict, who were not involved in the peace process, could be acting as "spoilers" of the peace agreement [CRS, 2024]. The Pretoria declaration subsequently linked the disarmament of the Tigray Defense Forces with the departure of foreign and non-ENDF forces from Tigray[23]. Their presence has significantly hampered the disarmament of the TDF, as required in the agreements made in Pretoria and

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[23] See: *2.1.1 Permanent Cessation of Hostilities and Security Measures*

Nairobi. Notwithstanding this, starting in the latter days of December 2022, the majority of Eritrean forces departed from the region [Endeshaw, 2022].

Another unresolved issue in Pretoria concerned the procedures for monitoring and verifying the implementation of the agreement. However, in accordance with the Nairobi Declaration, the African Union has instituted the Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mechanism, responsible for "monitoring the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, the resettlement of internally displaced persons, the resumption of economic and social services, the facilitation of humanitarian access, and the protection of civilians in the Tigray region," whose work began at the end of December in Mekelle.

Notwithstanding the clear improvements and results achieved, particularly the achievement of the primary objective of the Agreement, namely to silence the guns that had been violently employed for over two years in Tigray, there are still unsolved matters that hinder the restoration of stability in Ethiopia. In particular, the peace deal has not adequately addressed the primary factors that triggered the conflict in Northern Ethiopia [Donelli, 2023]. As a consequence, the tensions among the several ethnic groups that populate the country, together with the hostility of the Oromo and Amhara factions against the TPLF, continue to be at the center of political disputes in the Ethiopian landscape.

As it has been extensively observed in the second chapter, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed founded his political initiative on the promotion of pan-Ethiopian nationalism and the dismantling of the Ethnic-federalist system that has existed in Ethiopia since the 1990s. The disagreement between the two different visions of Ethiopia ideas has renewed the importance of identity in Ethiopian politics, reviving tensions, rivalries, and ethnically motivated violence.

Nowadays, Ethiopia continues to struggle with insurgencies, local conflicts, and territorial disputes, especially involving the two largest ethnic groups, the Amhara and Oromo [CRS, 2024]. Since 2019, the government has been compelled to confront increased hostilities from the armed group of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). The OLA, having taking control of many districts in southern Ethiopia, has perpetrated violent acts against the Amhara communities in the region, resulting in thousands of fatalities and displacing tens of thousands. The OLA's actions have encouraged many Amhara Fano militias to advance into the southern Oromia areas, leading to a series of clashes against the OLA [Donelli, 2023]. The situation

further deteriorated in 2022 when the federal government carried out several airstrikes, significantly affecting civilian lives in the region [CRS, 2024]. Beginning in April 2023, negotiations for peace occurred in Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, between delegates of the OLA and the Ethiopian government. Following a series of failures in restoring stability, a peace deal, facilitated by the mediation of Kenya, Norway and the Unites States, was finally reached in Addis Ababa on December 1, 2024 [*ibid.*].

Furthermore, just after the signature of the Pretoria Agreement, the Ethiopian government was forced to confront itself with the emergence of a new crisis with the Amhara leadership. As already noted in this dissertation, the Amhara forces fought alongside the Ethiopian National Defense Forces in the Tigray war and, at the very onset of the conflict, militarily seized the Western Tigray districts, an area that had been a longstanding point of dispute between the Amhara and Tigray regions. Notably, the Fano Amhara armed group opposed and rejected the agreement between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF, claiming authority over the contested lands. As a consequence, military confrontations occurred between the Fano militias and federal troops, leading the national government of Abiy Ahmed to proclaim a state of emergency in August 2023, imposing a military rule and severing internet access in the region [CRS, 2024]. As of today, the Western Tigray territories remain occupied by Amhara forces, obstructing the return of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Tigrayans and preventing the attainment of a political settlement of the dispute.

2.3 Regional and International Perspectives

Significant shifts in regional alignments and the crystallization of specific global dynamics have been brought about by the major role played by regional and international players in the larger context established by the conflict between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF. Since the beginning of the conflict, the federal government led by Abiy Ahmed and the TPLF have engaged in confrontations not just militarily but also in diplomatic initiatives and media arenas [Carbone, 2023]. The Addis Ababa government has repeatedly emphasized the domestic nature of the war, characterizing it as a law enforcement operation and juxtaposing its state authority with the insurrectionist nature of the TPLF's initiative. Conversely, the Tigrayan leadership has insisted on reiterating its condemnation of the human rights violations committed by federal forces and Eritrean military, while stressing the

unconstitutional nature of the Abiy's government that remained in office despite the expiration of its mandate.

At the regional level, the conflict in Tigray initially established a solid axis of cooperation between the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea, rooted in their common opposition to the TPLF [Donelli, 2023]. The diplomatic rapprochement between the two countries, launched by the 2018 Peace Agreement, can indeed be seen as one of the main contingent factors contributing to the conflict's emergence in November 2020. Besides Eritrea, the countries most concerned with the development of the conflict were Sudan and Djibouti.

The former, which enjoyed good relations with the EPRDF Ethiopian administration, capitalized on the circumstances to annex the historically disputed lands in the al-Fashaqa region. These new tensions add to those arising from the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. To this regard, Sudan has adopted progressively less conciliatory rhetoric towards Ethiopia, aligning more closely with the position of the Egyptian government regarding the project [Gebresenbet & Tariku, 2023]. On the other hand, Djibouti has been significantly affected by the economic consequences of the conflict. Indeed, it is important to note again that Ethiopia is a landlocked nation whose international commerce predominantly passes through the corridor from Addis Ababa to Djibouti to get access to the sea [Donelli, 2023]. Finally, the conflict has created a conducive environment for Kenya's regional prestige, which has stepped in to fill the power vacuum left by Ethiopia in the region.

At the international level[24], the conflict in Tigray has highlighted the crystallization of certain global dynamics. Russia and China have, in fact, unconditionally supported the federal government of Abiy Ahmed, notably by exercising the threat of their veto power in the United Nations Security Council. The Russian government has indeed fully supported the Ethiopian government's thesis that characterized the conflict as a domestic issue exclusively within the competence of the federal government [Carbone, 2023]. Also for this reason, Russia secured Ethiopia's neutrality in the United Nations voting over the invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, China, motivated by substantial economic interests in the Horn of Africa, has persistently advocated for the principle of non-interference, firmly condemning the use of

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[24] For a comprehensive analysis of the international initiatives undertaken in order to influence the conflict see: *Chapter 2, 2. Pressure of the International Community*

sanctions. Conversely, the United States and the European Union have adopted a more neutral position primarily motivated by humanitarian concerns. Western powers have therefore concentrated their diplomatic efforts on facilitating access to humanitarian assistance and on supporting mediation initiatives led by the African Union.

Finally, it is crucial to highlight the essential role played by regional diplomacy in securing the signature of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The African Union's mediation, headed by prominent personalities such as former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, and former South African Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka, has resulted in a deal that came as a surprise for many observers. This regional mediation initiative is certainly the compelling element of the dispute, as it illustrates the evolution of hybrid mediation and regional crisis resolution mechanism. The African Union's mediation, openly supported by the United States and the European Union, can be deemed a major success for the African Union's "silencing the guns" agenda and reinforced the principle of "African solutions to African problems".

Conclusion – The African Union: a New Role in Regional Stability?

The successful outcome of the African Union's mediation efforts in the Tigray conflict, marked by the signing of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Pretoria on November 2, 2022, represented a significant achievement for the African Union in its pursuit of regional stability, marking a major success for its "Silencing the Guns in Africa" agenda and reinforcing the principle of "African Solutions to African Problems". The significant mediation efforts undertaken by the African Union, with the support of international actors such as the Unites States, the European Union, and the United Nations, finally resulted crucial in bringing to an end two years of brutal war between the Ethiopian Government of Abiy Ahmed and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, allowing humanitarian access into the region and paving the way for a potential process of national reconciliation in Ethiopia. However, the complexities of this conflict, in particular the difficult task of balancing of local political dynamics and international pressure, presented both challenges and opportunities for the African Union in its role as a mediator.

As highlighted in this research, the African Union's mediation efforts in the Tigray conflict revealed the significance of the crucial interplay between internal and external pressures, illustrating the challenges faced by regional organization in promoting peace in context characterized by internal division and external influence. Thus, the AU's role in mediating the Tigray conflict was marked by the acknowledgment of the competing domestic political interests of the Federal government and the TPLF, while also responding to urgent calls for intervention by the international community. As highlighted in Chapter 2, the African Union had to face the TPLF's initial skepticism regarding the impartiality of its Special Envoy, Olusegun Obasanjo, and also align its efforts with the diplomatic and economic pressures of the international community.

One of the main objectives of this study has been to explore the dynamics of international mediation theory particularly through the application of Putnam's "Two-Level Game Theory". Understanding foreign-domestic interactions has been essential in exploring how the African Union' mediation efforts were influenced by both domestic consideration in the Abiy's government and in the TPLF, as well as the international expectations for a swift end of the conflict. By engaging with both levels, the African Union managed to facilitated dialogue between the two conflicting parties and leading them to the signature of the Peace Agreement in Pretoria.

However, it is crucial to point out as well the limitations faced by the African Union. First, its ability to monitor and enforce agreements remains constrained by financial and political limitations and, more importantly, the signature of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities, though crucial, has not adequately addressed the primary political and ethnic factors that triggered the conflict in Northern Ethiopia.

The African Union's role in this mediation also highlighted its evolving nature in intervening in intra-state conflicts, marking a crucial shift from its traditional focus on international disputes and the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. In general, it can be asserted that the successful mediation of the Tigray conflict represents for the African Union a significant step forward in its development of peace-making capacities on the African continent, despite still relying much on the crucial support of international actors.

Furthermore, the AU's initiative in Tigray also provides valuable insights into the broader role of regional organizations in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It is indeed increasingly evident that regional organizations can act as important players capable of shaping the outcome of negotiations, due to their capacity to engage effectively with both local actors and the international community, essential characteristics for successfully promoting regional stability. However, to fully achieve this potential, regional organizations need to develop their mediation tools, while the international community should assist them in bolstering their legitimacy and improving their institutional framework.

With that being said, we can conclude that the African Union's mediation of the Tigray conflict represented a crucial achievement, demonstrating the AU's ability to promote stability by balancing the interests of domestic actors with international pressures. However, it is now important for the African Union to develop its ability to ensure that the agreements are implemented effectively. Finally, the mediation of the Tigray conflict should serve as a reminder of the ongoing challenges that Africa faces in the pursuit of peace, and the need for sustained efforts to address the root causes of conflicts and promote lasting regional stability.

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