



INSIGHTS

S SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

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PORT CITY COLOMBO

CHINESE CHECKERS ON A LANKAN PORT

EXPERT INSIGHTS



KP Fabian,
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SINIFICATION OF THE EMERALD ISLAND

The passing of the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill (CPCEC) has generated concern, both domestically and internationally



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While many Sri Lankans may have celebrated the passing of a controversial legislation on May 20th, virtually granting China suzerainty over the Hambantota Port and the new concept Colombo port city, critics warn of a creeping 'colonisation'.

In 2018, when the \$1.5 billion deal was signed, the then Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had famously said, "There is no question of security problem. The Indian security issues have been addressed by us. There will be further discussions with India."

So far, there has been a studied silence from its neighbour across the Palk Straits.

A GRANDIOSE PLAN

The Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill (CPCEC) sanctions 296 hectares of land reclaimed from the Indian Ocean as Sri Lanka's first special economic zone (SEZ) for service-oriented industries to Chinese companies. There were widespread protests, with 19 petitions filed on the ground of being 'unconstitutional'. The Supreme court observed that certain sections were indeed so and passed it only once the government had incorporated its recommended amendments.

The opposition claims that the construction of this futuristic city,

primarily funded by China, would threaten the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the governing body selected for the Colombo Port City will be directly under the jurisdiction of the President, who could put Chinese nationals or companies on the board. This gives China a direct say in the governing and functioning of the SEZ. The argument is that there is an imminent risk of the creation of a 'Chinese colony' on Sri Lankan shores.

The ruling Rajapaksa-led government, however, has tried to dispel these notions by harping upon the economic benefits it would accrue. Sri Lanka will be the next financial hub, rivalling Dubai and Hong Kong, as most local laws related to registration grants, licenses, authorisations, and other approvals

Expert Q&A



KP Fabian, a former Indian Ambassador, has served in the Indian Foreign Service between 1964 and 2000, during which time he was posted to Sri Lanka, amongst many other countries.

Q Now that the Colombo Port City is more or less a reality, what should be India's strategy to safeguard its national interests?

A **KP Fabian:** There is nothing India can do to undo the project. India should not take any retaliatory action right now. When I was DHC in Colombo-1979-82, Sri Lanka had a vigorous press unafraid to criticize the government. The High Court should get hold of eminent columnists to write. It can also encourage scholarly study on the perils of over dependence on China. It can also encourage online discussions on the foreign policy options of Sri Lanka. Over time, Sri Lanka might realize the folly. Any expression of displeasure by India will not have the intended impact. Neither our External Affairs Ministry or Prime Minister has cultivated their counterpart to take it up discreetly.

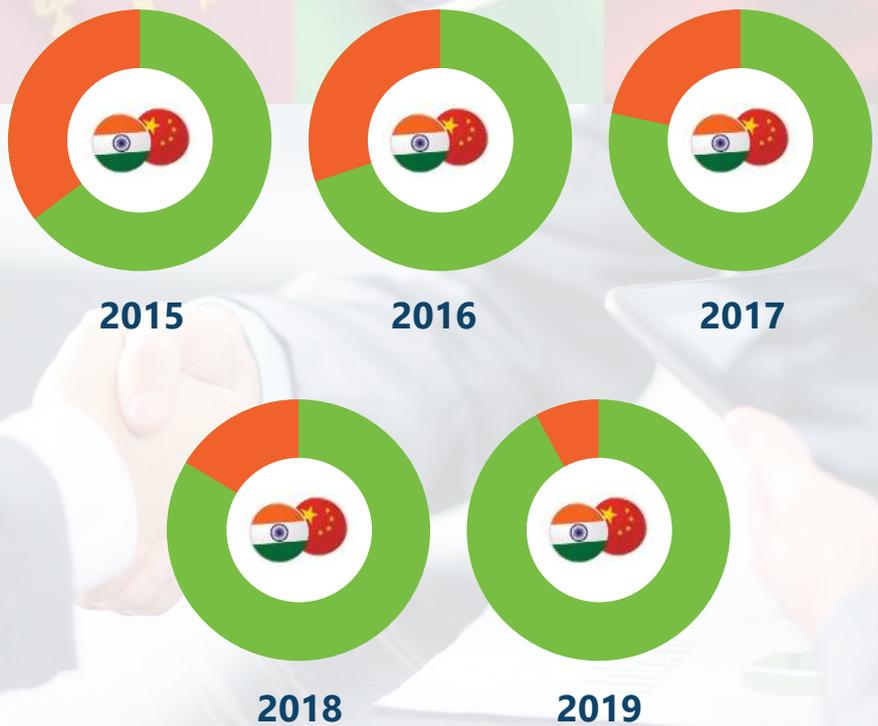
needed for businesses will either be relaxed or exempt in the SEZ. It will also be a haven for foreign direct investments (FDI) with sweeping tax breaks and tax-free salaries. The public has been promised 200,000 jobs in the first five years with salaries in foreign currency, akin to working overseas.

A CHARM OFFENSIVE

For the last few years, the historical linkages based on Buddhism

SRI LANKA'S OUTSTANDING DEBT TO CHINA AND INDIA

■ Chinese Debt Stock as a % of Total Foreign Debt ■ India's Debt Stock as a % of Total Foreign Debt



Source: The Diplomat

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have been called upon to emphasise closer Sino-Sri Lankan ties. This was underlined by the construction of the iconic Lotus Tower, the tallest structure in South Asia, funded by Beijing.

China-Sri Lanka relations have always been more about trade, commerce, and economy than military cooperation. The Hambantota Port is a testimony to that relationship. The port was built with loans taken from Chinese banks, which the Sri Lankan government is still paying off. In 2017, the port was given on a 99-year-long lease to China for \$1.12 billion dollars. Theoretically, even though China has a 70 per cent stake, the port remains under the Sri Lankan government with respect to its security and military potential.

Sri Lanka's strategic location at the junction of vital sea lanes of communications in the Indian Ocean needs no emphasis. To make the ambitious BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) a success, the trade belt through the Indian Ocean and Central Asia is critical. The choke point of the Malacca Straits, under the naval scrutiny of India (and by extension the Quad), is a vulnerability that Beijing is extremely nervous about. 80 per cent of China's energy supply pass through these narrow straits. The Colombo Port City Project and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) aim to find alternatives to the Malacca route.

Another gain is that over the years, China has developed a massive capacity in its construction industry.

CLEARING THE AIR

“ The Sri Lankan-Chinese relationship is economical and not military “



Dr Rohan Gunaratna, is a political analyst from Sri Lanka specializing in international terrorism. He shared his views with Synergia Foundation.

Due to 30 years of civil war within Sri Lanka, the economy of the country did not have much chance to grow. When the war ended in May 2009, the economy grew and did exceptionally well until the Easter Sunday attack in 2019 and the COVID pandemic in 2020.

The Colombo Port City project, therefore, will be a milestone in the economic development of Sri Lanka. Its geopolitical placement is well-suited to build a Port City which has the potential to turn Colombo into the next Dubai, Hong Kong, or Singapore. While Dubai brought great benefits to the Gulf countries, Hong Kong is an asset to China and Singapore improved the economic makeup of the Southeast Asian region. Similarly, Colombo Port city is expected to bring great economic benefits to the subcontinent, one of the poorest regions of the world.

Sri Lanka, at the same time, should be cautious of foreign interference, whether it be China, India, UK, EU or the U.S. and maintain President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's policy of neutrality. It encourages multilateral relations with all powers and takes care not to align itself to one block.

Towards the end of the Cold War, Sri Lanka had aligned itself with the U.S. and became the first country in South Asia to develop an open economy. However, due to India's proximity, this move angered India. During the Cold War, India advocated a command economy under Soviet influence. In retaliation, India armed, trained, financed and directed six terrorist groups in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka should be sensitive to the geopolitical realities and not repeat the same mistake. Sri Lanka should build the country by engaging with all major powers globally.

India should not misunderstand Sri Lanka's relations with China. The base of Sri Lankan culture is Buddhism, and that has been India's greatest gift to the country. Therefore, India should continue to improve relations with Sri Lanka. India should not expect its neighbours to fight China because of its own sour relations. The Sri Lankan-Chinese relationship is economical and not military.

India should try to improve economic relations with all its regional neighbours rather than criticise their bilateral relationships with China. India should demonstrate maturity in its foreign policy.

Sri Lanka, in turn, would like India to improve its relations with China. China's rise is inevitable as it is already an economic superpower. Both countries have had a history of friendship of 2500 years which broke apart after the 1962 Indo-China war. It would be highly beneficial to the South Asian subcontinent if both countries were to revive that friendship.

With projects now on the wane within mainland China, this surplus capacity must find a profitable outlet elsewhere. All civil engineering works in the Port City project have been handled by Chinese companies.

Similarly, the loans taken by the Sri Lankan government are from Chinese owned banks like Exim, while the Hambantota lease is managed by the China Merchants Port Holdings company. In short, all

material, equipment, and technology are bought from China itself, thus channelising profits into its domestic economy.

AN ECONOMIC COMPULSION

Sri Lanka's external sector has been facing a fiscal consolidation crisis for the longest time. The trade deficit, as well as the budget deficit, has made Sri Lanka dependant on long term/short term loans to keep reviving its foreign revenue reserves. The country is trapped in a vicious debt cycle wherein a low level of FDIs, and low revenue from exports and remittances, lead to difficulty in paying back loans, leading to more loans at even higher interest rates. The government is in a bind now to find a way out of the cycle, and the Chinese investments appear timely and most welcome.

Last year in March, China provided a concessionary loan of \$500 million for COVID-19 relief. Shortly thereafter, in May, Sri Lankan officials approved a loan of \$80 million from China to improve road infrastructure. China then pledged another \$90 million grant for medical care, education, and water supplies, soon after Yang Jiechi's (high ranking Chinese diplomat) visit in October 2020. Chinese loans come with a no-strings-attached approach, making them that much more attractive. The loans can be paid in long term instalments, and the only additional requirement China posits is to procure raw material and technology from their state-owned enterprises.

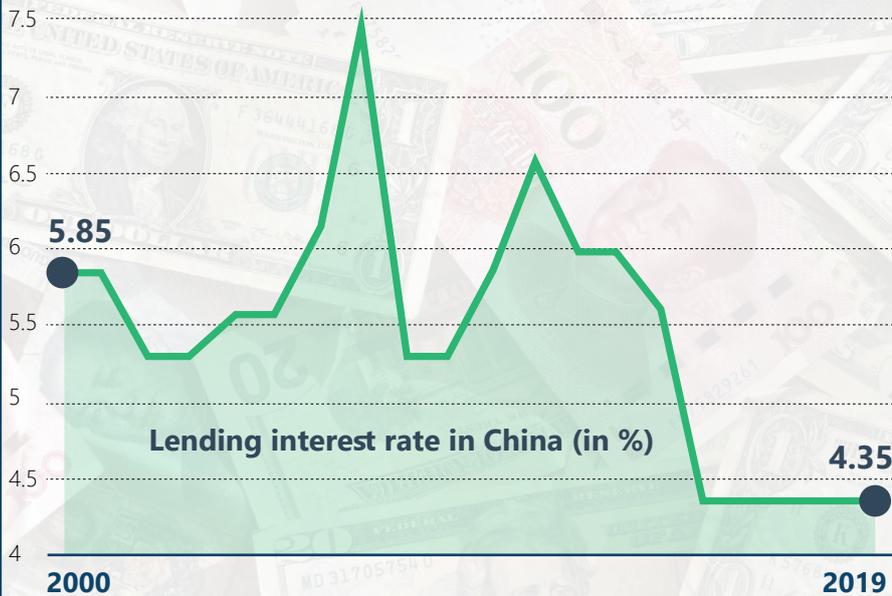
INTERNATIONAL PUSHBACK

The U.S. ambassador to Sri Lanka and Maldives, Alaina B Teplitz, has cautioned the Sri Lankan government that the tax breaks offered for the Port City could be used for nefarious purposes such as money laundering. Earlier, the then U.S Secretary of State Michael Pompeo had also warned Colombo that "the Chinese Communist Party is a predator", while "the United States comes in a different way — we come as a friend and a partner".

The U.S. has always been a

GENEROUS LOANS

To lure low- and middle-income countries into its debt trap, China offers loans at interest rates that are usually below market rates and have long grace periods. The lending interest rate has dropped from 5.85% in 2000 to 4.35% in 2019.



Source: World Bank

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sustainable market for Sri Lanka. Many Sri Lankan youth migrate or study in the U.S. ensuring that there is a steady flow of funds, knowledge, and technology vis-à-vis Sri Lankan expatriates. The U.S. has also been interested in promoting military cooperation with the country. In recent developments, the U.S. failed to renew the SOFA (Status of Armed Forces Agreement) as Sri Lanka sees it as a thinly veiled attempt to infringe upon its sovereignty. It has also fallen short of finalising the \$480 million Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC) accord, which is an independent U.S. foreign aid.

New Delhi has also in the past voiced its concern regarding Port City, considering it is just 3kms away from the ECT development Project at Colombo Port. The East Container Terminal Project, a 500-million-dollar project headed by India, Japan and Sri Lanka, was stalled due to growing labour union protests of foreign intervention in 'national assets' and was recently decided to be developed by Sri Lanka on its own with no Indian involvement.

George I. H. Cooke

a former Sri Lankan diplomat, is currently the Deputy Director of the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies.



“ The Colombo Port City has the potential of evolving into a hugely beneficial and prosperous venture. However Sri Lankan Policy makers have to dream the dream and make it a reality with effective strategizing.

There are three key tools required and these are – consultation, coordination and communication. Consultation with all stakeholders irrespective of their status to ensure that no area is left unexplored in realizing the potential. Coordination throughout the Sri Lankan state and private sectors, and the international community to ensure that concise understanding is reached on the outcome. Communication with the aforementioned sectors and very importantly, the public, to promote ownership and clarity.

The Colombo Port City is going to play a critical role in taking Sri Lanka higher up the power ladder, become a crucial player in South Asia and become a re-enforced node on the international stage. For this to happen, consultation, coordination and communication are paramount, so that priorities are realized and the potential achieved.

Assessment

Sri Lanka is at a crossroad with U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy and China's BRI project. While it may have repeatedly stressed its neutrality, its actions clearly show its leanings towards China which will come at a price in geostrategic terms.

While the dire economic compulsions of this small island nation are understandable, its strategic location in the Indian Ocean make it an arena of big power play. Thus, when it takes measures with long term strategic implications, it is bound to generate strong reactions from its friends and neighbours.

With a 'little Chinese territory' perched strategically on its southern extremities, India will have to relook at its strategic relationship with its neighbour.

BUDGETING FOR PEACE

Through its European Peace Facility, the EU has sidestepped legal and budgetary constraints on foreign armed interventions and overseas military funding




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Less than six months after approving an €8 billion fund to develop and acquire new weapons for militaries within the European Union (EU), the bloc has launched a new mechanism to finance training and equipment of non-European military forces around the world. Officially known as the European Peace Facility (EPF), this off-budget financial instrument aims to prevent conflict by supporting peace-keeping operations of international actors and increasing the operational capabilities of armed forces in partner countries. It also seeks to expand the EU's foreign policy toolkit by supplementing all external actions that have military

or defence implications under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Intended to disburse around €5 billion over a period of seven years (2021-2027), the EPF will be predicated on contributions from EU member states. Any assistance measures under this scheme, at the request of third countries or international organisations, will purportedly be accompanied by risk assessments and adequate safeguards. This is particularly crucial, given that the delivery of lethal weapons has been authorised for the first time under EPF-funded missions.

POLICY DELIBERATIONS

For many years, Brussels has grappled with the question of framing its military engagements in conflict-affected countries. Although

it is one of the largest providers of humanitarian and development aid abroad, it has refrained from supplying defence-related equipment to local partners for bolstering security in their territories.

The principal reason has been a legal restriction in Article 41(2) of the EU Treaty, which prohibits the bloc's budget from funding expenditure that arises out of operations having military or defence implications. Reflecting a political reticence in Europe to get involved in foreign military matters, this treaty provision has institutionalised a calibrated approach to the development-security paradigm. Identifying itself as primarily a 'civilian power', the bloc has pushed back against proposals to equip and train foreign armed forces.

Over the years, however, there was a growing perception that this strategy had created a security vacuum, often filled in by 'less



benevolent’ actors like Russia or China. For example, in 2018, Russia had garnered substantial influence in the Central African Republic by delivering light weapons to its government, even while European efforts to support the country’s reconstruction project yielded limited gains. Citing such instances, there were increasing calls in Europe to project hard power and put real funding behind their ambitions to stabilise conflict zones.

Given the legal restraints in the financing rules, however, this could only be implemented through an off-budget instrument. This is precisely what the EPF has sought to do while adhering to core European principles.

TARGETED THEATRES

Presently the African Peace Facility (APF) is the principal financial instrument that supports cooperation

with Africa and underpins the military operations of the African Union (AU). The EPF will now supersede the APF and give the EU some flexibility to finance peace operations anywhere in the world.

As evident from research papers and statements issued by European governments, the peace facility is most likely to be deployed in the Sahel region, which includes Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger (G5 Sahel). This is of important strategic interest, as the French military has been conducting a prolonged anti-insurgent operation against armed groups and Islamist radicals in the area. Soldiers from Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Czech Republic, and Estonia have also been involved in counter-terrorism training/ operations across these territories. By financing and training local forces, including the G5 Joint Force, the EU hopes to augment

ongoing peace-keeping efforts and restore security in this region.

Other theatres of conflict that are being considered for capacity-building include Mozambique, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as the Horn of Africa. There are even speculations that the EPF will support the training of the Libyan Coast Guard to tackle shared threats like piracy and terrorism.

POTENTIAL RISKS

Although the EPF has been touted as an initiative that affords more flexibility and autonomy to the EU’s security and foreign policy, it is replete with risks. Several human rights organisations have pointed out that the training and equipping of foreign security forces may escalate the conflict, as opposed to stabilising it. For example, in Libya,



EUROPEAN PEACE FACILITY

A new financial instrument to boost the EU's security and defence capabilities, and help preserve peace around the world

€5 billion for the **period 2021-2027** financed by the EU member states



What?

The EPF will finance external actions having **military** or **defence** implications and allow the EU to assist partner countries in military **peace** support operations.



Why?

The EPF will **prevent conflict, preserve peace** and **strengthen** international **security** and stability.

Empower partner countries and regional and international organisations to do the same.



How?

The EPF will operate **through missions and operations** in host countries and assistance, which may include the supply of:

- military and defence related equipment
- infrastructure
- technical support.

Source: Council of the European Union

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suspended or terminated in adverse circumstances. More worryingly, there is no oversight by the European Parliament, obscuring opportunities to subject the funding proposal to democratic scrutiny.

Therefore, the EPF leaves much to be desired in terms of its rationale, design, and governance, effectively impeding its utility as a sustainable peacebuilding instrument.

Assessment

While conflict resolution/ stability operations may have been the ostensible justification for training and arming of foreign forces, there is an important commercial angle that cannot be ignored. The EPF, if implemented successfully, will immensely benefit the European arms industry by providing new opportunities for overseas sales. In fact, several peace activists have accused the EU member-states of succumbing to weapons lobbies in return for more public funding.

To truly achieve its peacebuilding ambitions, the EPF will have to be accompanied by a clearly articulated political strategy that fosters public trust, reduces social exclusion, addresses resource competition, and facilitates the provision of basic services in targeted societies. Unlike other trust funds which have been used to deal with imagined threats like migration, the training and equipping of security forces under the peace facility should not be exploited as a cover to enhance 'border control'.

While financing military missions on the African continent, the EPF should not undermine the AU's role in conflict resolution. Headquartered in Addis Ababa, the regional expertise of this organisation will be key in tackling shared threats to peace and stability. In fact, the EPF would do well to coordinate its efforts with those of the AU and the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations.

military forces trained by the EU were accused of engaging in trafficking, kidnapping and torture of migrants. Similarly, in Mali, officers who had been educated in programmes led by EU-member states were believed to have been involved in the August 2020 military coup.

In countries with high levels of corruption and institutional fragility, where civilian oversight or accountability mechanisms are lacking, armed interventions may not always be the right solution. There is much to be learnt from the West's disastrous military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. The possibility

of weapons, including lethal equipment, being resold in the black market or illegally exported to armed militias in other countries cannot be ruled out, thereby aggravating the conflict dynamics in a region.

Acknowledging many of these legitimate concerns, the EU has introduced mechanisms like risk assessment procedures, traceability measures and post-shipment controls in order to ensure compliance with international standards. However, this methodological framework is riddled with 'soft' provisions. There is no binding obligation for military cooperation to be

OPENING UP THE MAPPING MARKET

The synergising of public and private segments in the mapping industry is bound to accelerate growth in India's geospatial market



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In a significant departure from its colonial-era regulation regime, the Central government has partially liberalised its mapping regulations through the 2021 'Geospatial Data Guidelines'. This has been followed up with a draft 'National Geospatial Policy' issued by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) that seeks to strengthen geospatial infrastructure, promote the use of geospatial data, and boost geospatial entrepreneurship for the socio-economic development of this country.

It remains to be seen whether a combination of these policies can further India's vision of achieving a five trillion-dollar economy, predicated on self-reliance or 'Aatmanirbharta'.

POTENTIAL USE-CASES

Geospatial data essentially connotes location-based information. As enumerated under the 2021 Guidelines, it includes "natural or man-made, physical, or imaginary features whether above the ground or below, boundaries, points of interest, natural phenomena, mobility data, weather patterns, statistical information, etc." Such data has tremendous utility in several applications, ranging from national infrastructure projects and disaster management to transport, logistics and finance. As individuals and enterprises become aware of the economic value inherent in geospatial information, they have deployed several emerging technologies to exploit this data. A



few examples include satellite-based remote sensing methods, ground-based surveys, terrestrial vehicle-mounted mobile mapping systems, mobile phone sensors as well as manned/unmanned aerial vehicles using photogrammetry techniques.

Once collected, this information can be extremely critical for governments, tech start-ups and other companies to offer location-based goods and services. In fact, India has recently witnessed a spurt in sectors like e-commerce, health technologies, transport, as well as navigation and food-delivery apps, all of which make use of geospatial data. With an ever-expanding market for this information, policymakers have realised that the government cannot be the sole player in mapping

the country. There is a pressing need for the private sector to be involved so that geospatial data can be accumulated in a more comprehensive, accurate, and granular fashion, with constant updates.

DEMOCRATISATION OF DATA

Since the British raj, cartography has always been a state monopoly in this country. By virtue of a fractured regulatory system, riddled with archaic acts, rules, policies and guidelines, the mapping industry was subject to several restrictions, right from the creation of maps to the production and dissemination of geospatial data. Private companies were required to seek licences and

follow a cumbersome system of pre-approvals, with long waiting periods and bureaucratic red tape. For instance, access to the 'Open Series Maps' produced by the Survey of India (SoI) was subject to a one-time clearance from the Ministry of Defence. Similarly, companies that undertook aerial photography or geophysical surveys were mandated to seek prior approval from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. These stipulations had put domestic enterprises at a considerable disadvantage, as foreign tech giants were able to rely on services like Google Maps and Google Earth, to make up for the absence of indigenously procured data.

In a bid to remedy this antiquated system, the Central Government has now brought out the 'Geospatial Data Guidelines', which allows information produced using public funds to be accessed by Indian entities without prior approvals, licenses or security clearances. As stated in the text, "Individuals, companies, organisations, and government agencies shall be free to process the acquired geospatial data, build applications, and develop solutions in relation to such data and use such data products, applications, solutions, etc. by way of selling, distributing, sharing, swapping, disseminating, publishing, deprecating and destructing." Map companies have also been trusted with the authority to self-certify their compliance with Indian guidelines.

The DST, however, has proposed to publish a negative list of attributes that subjects certain sensitive information to government control after stakeholder consultations. In other words, a distinction is sought to be drawn between the 'normal class' of data which can be collected by everyone and the 'controlled class' of data, which is dependent on government regulation. While the former can be exported to overseas jurisdictions, subject to threshold values of horizontal and vertical resolution, the latter will have to be stored and processed in India. This will address the concerns of the Defence department.

In the stipulated guidelines,

there is also a hint of protectionism, whereby Indian companies have been granted preferential access to systems useful for mapping data. This includes drones, terrestrial mobile mapping as well as light detection and ranging (LiDAR) technology. Under the provisions of the liberalisation rules, the data generated thereof will have to be stored in Indian servers or domestic cloud systems. Ultimately, therefore, the 2021 Guidelines have sought to give an edge to Indian companies in order to foster innovation. They have also placed private mapping companies on an equal footing with their public sector counterparts, taking special care to include carve-outs for national security and law enforcement purposes.

NURTURING THE ECOSYSTEM

Having deregulated the geospatial sector, the next logical step has been to develop an ecosystem that encourages spatial thinking, strengthens infrastructure and promotes the use of location-based data, products, solutions and services. In this regard, a draft National Geospatial Policy has been circulated, which seeks to unleash the potential of the geospatial sector and facilitates wealth creation in an enabling environment.

Accordingly, emphasis has been placed on stimulating innovation, incubating ideas, and promoting ease of business. Any topographic data collected by the SoI is to be treated as a common good, thereby levelling the playing field between government, non-government, academic, research and private actors.

To tackle the dearth of professionals in mining geospatial data, the draft policy has sought to establish a skill development initiative, which is subject to professional accreditation, similar to the medical and legal professionals. The formulation of internationally standardised curriculum and other educational programs have also been encouraged from the school to university level. Finally, the policy envisages the enhancement of placements among trained and

qualified youth by establishing robust linkages with allied industries.

Together with the 2021 Guidelines, therefore, the draft policy has paved the way for India to emerge as a credible mapping power, armed with next-generation technologies. In the words of Union Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, the reforms will unlock a value of Rs. 1,000 billion by 2030, as they create new opportunities for start-ups, private sector companies, public sector enterprises as well as research institutions in the geospatial sector.

Assessment

In India, there are unique navigational challenges that can only be resolved through localised research and standardisation. By addressing the non-availability of such high-quality indigenous maps, the new reforms can provide fresh impetus to the creation of highways, modernisation of railways and inter-linking of waterways.

Geospatial mapping, being essentially a data-gathering exercise, may give rise to privacy issues. If any of the location-based information serves to identify individuals, it could qualify as personal data, thereby attracting legal obligations for governments and private companies. In this regard, the government will have to reconcile the proposed reforms with the pending Data Protection Bill in India.

Up until now, mapping was the sole turf of the Survey of India, which worked in close coordination with the Army by having deputed officers within its ranks. Given genuine military concerns arising from a liberalisation of this sector, the new guidelines have incorporated provisions that restrict the mapping of vulnerable areas, vulnerable points, and border territories of India. They have also stipulated the accurate depiction of the country's political borders.

DOES AN APOLOGY MATTER?

The long-standing demand for compensating past wrongs of former colonial powers has been thrown into the limelight, once again



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French President Macron, in an address at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, apologised for 'France's overwhelming responsibility' in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. In a similar move, Germany has also officially regretted the genocide of the Herero and Nama people in Namibia, a former German colony (South West Africa-1884 to 1915).

While the expression of regret by public figures for crimes against humanity of their predecessors may be in real earnest, the descendants of the victims and their supporters cannot be blamed if they remain sceptical of the intent. Apologies sans compensation are empty gestures, and since the trust level of politicians is so low, there may be an inclination to regard all this as a gimmick to cloud the real issue.

Still, they come with a fervent hope that they may be a starting point for more substantial action, including perhaps some material redress at a later date.

TEARS OF THE PAST

While France has a long list of atrocities to its dubious credit for its brutal colonial past, the current apology is for an omission of more recent origin. The 1994, 'machete days' of Rwanda saw the murder of over 500,000 Tutsi minority by the majority Hutus. Over 2 million were internally and externally displaced. Clear evidence soon came to the fore, confirming the deep French connections to the Hutu leadership and its murderous military. The Tutsi came back to power through their military organ, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, led by the dynamic



Paul Kagame, who continues to rule Rwanda, turning it into one of the most progressive and well-run nations in Africa. To his credit, President Kagame graciously accepted the apology on behalf of his people, calling it 'an act of tremendous courage' and as 'more valuable than an apology: it is the truth'.

The move is seen as one in a series of gestures and actions where France is trying to engage with former colonies who refuse to forget or forgive the brutality of the French colonial era. President Macron deserves commendation for publicly acknowledging human rights violations. During his electoral campaign, he referred to the French colonisation of Algeria as 'a crime against humanity'. This, however, provoked the ire of the far-right in France and therefore, after assuming office, he has stated that there will be no apologies or regrets about the French occupation of Algeria and the bloody 8-year war which led to Algerian independence. He said instead that they would partake in 'symbolic acts' aimed at promoting reconciliation. The Rwandan apology has also invoked much backlash from the opposition and the far-

right forces who look upon French presence in Africa as a benign influence – the "white man's burden."

Germany, too was a brutal colonial power confining the indigenous people in concentration camps where most of them were worked to death, sexually mutilated, and even used for medical experimentation. It was a dry run for the deathly Nazi concentration camps of World War II. Germany has gone the extra length and announced financial aid for education, healthcare, and other critical infrastructure worth 1.3 billion dollars.

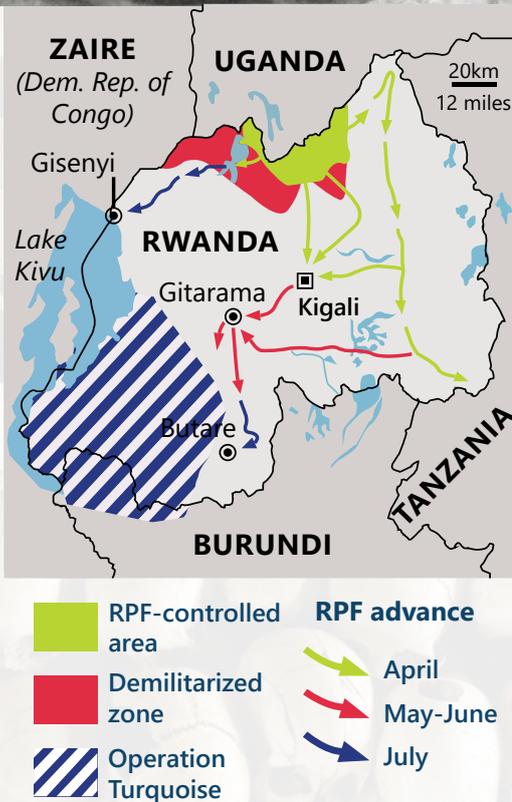
POLITICS OF REGRET

The legal and political skirmishes between erstwhile colonial masters and the oppressed have been going on since the 1960s, when most colonies were finally able to win their freedom. Due to the heavy immigration of citizens from developing to developed nations as well as the rise of developing countries that were once former colonies, the developed Western Nations are often confronted with their past crimes and colonial plundering. While some ex-colonial nations have taken the initiative to

RWANDA GENOCIDE: 100 DAYS OF SLAUGHTER

Over just 100 days in 1994, ethnic Hutu extremists killed around 800,000 people in an attempt to exterminate Rwanda's minority Tutsi community, which had long dominated the country

- **1990:** Rebels of Tutsi-dominated **Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF)** invade Rwanda from Uganda
- **Apr 6, 1994:** President **Habyarimana** - ethnic Hutu negotiating peace with RPF - killed along with Burundian president when their plane is shot down over Kigali
- **Apr 7:** Hutu extremists seize control of army and government, and begin massacre of Tutsis
- **Jun 23:** France launches UN-sanctioned **Operation Turquoise** to set up safe zones
- **Jul 4:** Backed by Uganda's army, RPF - led by **Paul Kagame** - captures Kigali
- Two million Hutus flee to Zaire, sparking nine-year conflict that draws in six countries and claims 5m lives



Source: Stratfor, BBC, AFP

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the official historical narrative of the state.

The whole process of arriving at a political consensus for a public apology by a former colonial power comes with a churning within its domestic political space. Most citizens need to be convinced of the logic in paying back for actions that happened in the past. The fear that expression of regret makes you look weak in the international arena must be assuaged. This may explain why Japan has not acknowledged its brutal colonisation in China, Korea, and other parts of South-East Asia. There is no domestic pressure, and most often, there is subtle compliance with the actions of the past.

The most quoted logic for refusing an apology was made famous by the former Australian prime minister, John Howard, who, when asked to compensate the Aboriginal people, refused to hold accountable the present generation for the crimes of their ancestors. A counter to this argument is that even if the current generation did not directly commit the crimes, they still reap the benefits, material and otherwise, as also their domineering position in the comity of nations, which has its roots in their past colonial empire.

FORGIVE & FORGET?

An apology contributes to a culture of accountability that reasserts the norms and principles of democratic nations. It addresses the victims, humanises them and gives them the dignity and respect that once was denied to them.

To bring about a final closure to the national trauma of the past, it is imperative that financial redressals come with genuine regret and acknowledgement of the offender, for otherwise, the aid would look like handouts insulting the victims. This is what happened in Canada when financial support was given to the native First Nations people without acknowledging or apologising for the mass plunder and theft of their lands by settler immigrants. It was met with much backlash and uproar by the native population and critics worldwide.

at least recognise the harm done, most countries have maintained a 'let bygones be bygones' attitude.

In most case, reparations are the focal point for rectifying past injustices and have become a common legal means of redressal against an individual, group or an entire country. Post World War II, Germany compensated the individual survivors of the Holocaust, and the U.S. also compensated its citizens of Japanese origin who were interned in concentration camps during the duration of the war. The British compensated the Kenyans for the atrocities of the Mau Mau insurgency but have fallen short of even apologising for all their excesses

in India during their rapacious rule, as demanded by Mr Shashi Tharoor in his famous address to the Oxford Union in 2015.

Politically, apologies issued by states are not empty gestures, as they come at a political and material price. They must be done with majority support of the respective legislative bodies, compensation and commemoration policies, educational policies on how to impart this to the next generation so that they can learn from the past, deep research on how the past should be remembered (museums, cultural sites, giving holidays for remembrance) etc.

An apology invokes a change in

CHANGE AT THE TOP

June may see a change of guard in the highest echelons of the Iranian government, but whether it will usher in a fresh breath into governance is doubtful



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On May 11th, Iran's Guardian Council, a 12-member clerical body holding much influence and power, released the names of seven approved candidates (out of hundreds who had applied). With this, the suspense building up for the Iranian Presidential elections scheduled for June finally ended. The elected candidate will replace President Hassan Rouhani, who is not eligible for re-election due to term limits.

The chosen seven are all middle-aged and carefully selected by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The candidates showcase very little ideological diversity, to ensure no radical change in the current thought process of the Iranian state. There is no woman candidate, although officially, women are not barred.

THE CANDIDATES

Ebrahim Raisi, a cleric and the Judiciary Chief, is set to lead the polls this time around after having lost the race to Hassan Rouhani in the last elections. A favourite with the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Raisi is considered as an unapologetic conservative with strong anti-Western views and motives. As the judiciary chief, he has ordered the arrest and execution of numerous political prisoners. He was also a fierce critic of Rouhani's foreign policy, accusing him of showing weakness in front of world powers.

Abdolnasser Hemmati, who has been asked to quit his position as the Central Bank head, is close to the reformist-centrist political front that was propped up by former President Hashemi Rafsanjani. He may be the



only one to give some contest to the front runner Ebrahim Raisi.

Mohsen Rezai commanded the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in 1981 and led the IRGC forces during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, where he was accused of making many faulty decisions. Nicknamed as the 'perennial candidate', this is his fourth attempt at the presidency.

Saeed Jalili has been in the limelight as the country's chief nuclear negotiator (2007-13) and is considered an 'old guard'. He is a member of the influential Expediency Council. He, too, had tried his hand earlier, coming third in the 2013 presidential elections.

Mohsen Mehralizadeh, the sole reformist, was rejected by the Reforms Front Party as their candidate but has been approved as an Independent. His application was rejected in the 2016 parliamentary elections.

Amirhossein Qazizadeh Hashemi is a surgeon and a hard-line MP. At 50, he is the youngest candidate.

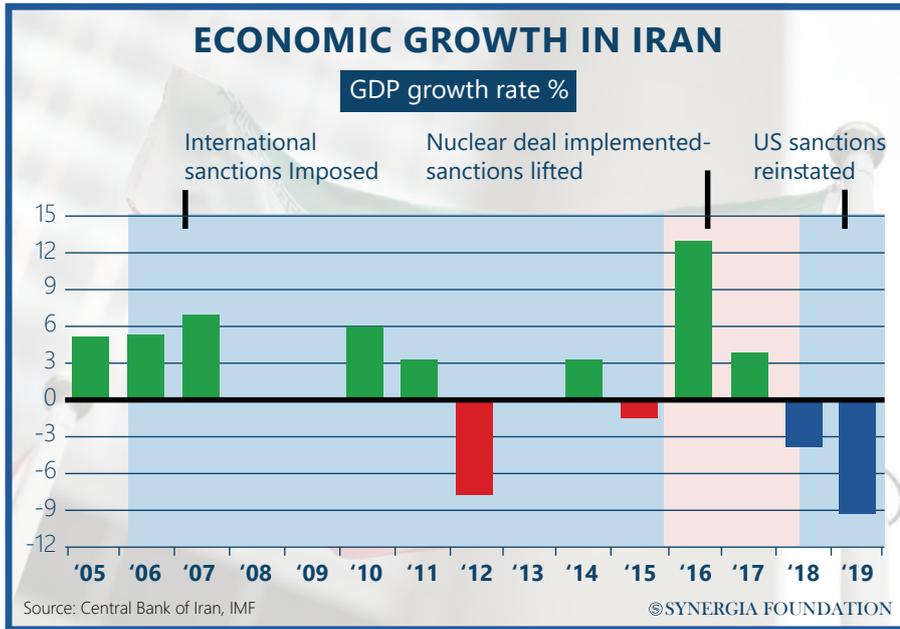
The seventh candidate, Alireza Zakani, is also a conservative MP

who has vocally opposed the 2015 nuclear deal. He has been the commander of the militia force Basij Resistance Force, often used to crush the opposition.

THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS

In the past, the Guardian Council has been widely criticized for being biased, declining nominations with vested interests and obstructing the political process of free and fair elections. This seems to be the case this year as well as the approved candidates are from conservative parties or are known for holding hard-line stances as opposed to reformists/ moderates.

The absence from the list of two prominent personalities – Ali Larijani (former parliamentary speaker from the centre-right and a nuclear negotiator) and Eshaq Jehangiri (a reformist and incumbent Vice President) – has been controversial. These were the only two considered fit to pose a real challenge to Raisi. It is now being alleged that the whole election is merely a formality to



blocked the IMF from giving a loan to Iran as part of COVID relief during the pandemic.

The Biden administration, however, has shown willingness to revisit the deal with newer objectives and goals. The talks are currently underway, yet an election won by a hard-liner may throw a spanner into the works.

A hard-liner win is, however, favourable to another world power – China. Both countries echo similar anti-West rhetoric, which helps in forging a bond on common grounds. The conservatives, therefore, look upon China as an opportunity for investment in infrastructure, oil fields and natural energy resources. The BRI project, extending the China-Pakistan economic corridor to Chabahar, thus creating the China-Central Asia-West Asia economic corridor as well the proposed 25-year co-operation plan, make for a comprehensive strategic partnership between the two.

Regionally the Iranian elections come at a time when, for the first time, talks are being held between Iran and its arch-rival Saudi Arabia. The attitude of the new President will be critical for the continuation and success of these talks, which will benefit the trouble-torn region immensely.

For India, a good relationship with Iran is strategically important. India is not only its third-largest oil and natural gas consumer but also a potential strategic partner once the U.S. and its allies depart Afghanistan, leaving it at the mercy of the Taliban and its Pakistani mentor, the Pakistani Army.

In 2016, great investment and infrastructure were envisioned between the two countries, especially with respect to the Chabahar Railway project connecting Central Asia with West Asia and the Farzad Oil fields prospected by India. The reverting of strict U.S. sanctions, however, put a stop to these plans as India was reluctant to go forward due to fear of American sanctions. India would be keenly awaiting the installation of the new dispensation in Tehran so that it can forge its relations with renewed vigour.

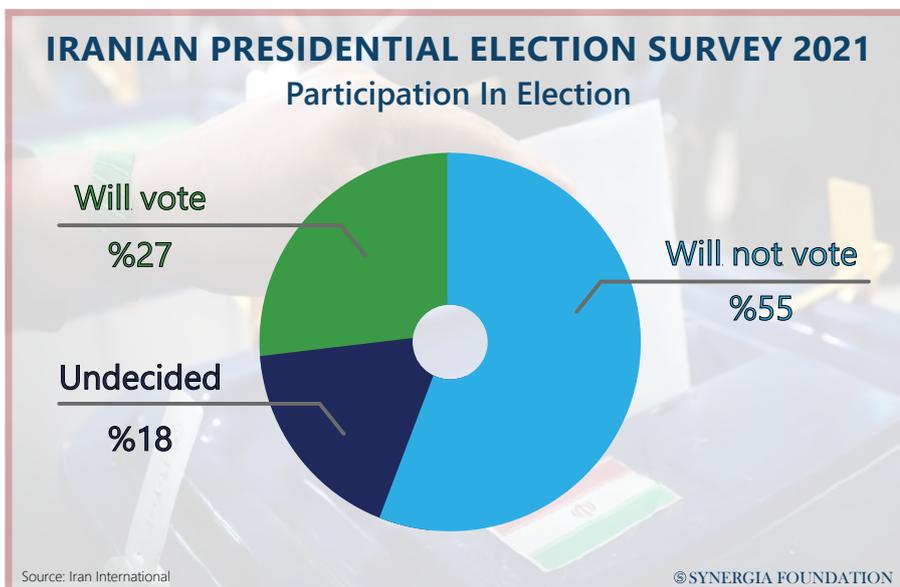
anoint Raisi.

Being held in the backdrop of massive and prolonged anti-government protests and the subsequent violent state backlash, these elections were eagerly awaited both domestically and internationally. The tensions have been exacerbated by a collapsing economy ravaged by sanctions, falling oil prices, the pandemic, leaving the public largely dispirited.

The common man is exasperated, and the Majlis election held in February saw a depressingly low voter turnout (approximately 42%). The same is predicted to be repeated for the Presidential elections especially considering the chosen candidates. It is being said that a low turnout will favour Ebrahim Raisi.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

The JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) agreement is also a critical issue that will determine the future of the nation. The deal was considered a feather in the cap of the reformist camp. They claimed it would enable Iran to rise to its potential as an energy-rich nation with 7% of the world's natural resources and 11% of global oil reserves. Yet this victory was short-lived as the Trump administration opted out of the agreement in 2018. The subsequent U.S. containment policy seemed almost cruel wherein U.S. imposed sanctions on medicines, relief packages, and even



ETHIOPIA- SOURING RELATIONS

Ethiopia, the lynchpin in the Horn of Africa, is being pushed into the arms of Russia and China by growing western punitive actions for excesses in Tigray



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The imposition of the U.S. sanctions would come as a big blow to Abiy Ahmed, the charismatic Prime Minister of Ethiopia and winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace prize. Before Ethiopia let loose its sizable military in a bloody punitive campaign on its recalcitrant province of Tigray, in cohorts with its erstwhile enemy Eritrea, the country was a poster boy for democracy in Africa. It received the largest U.S. aid in Sub Sahara Africa and was regarded as a frontline state against Islamic radicalism.

The U.S. has sanctioned both Ethiopian and Eritrean officials to

include travel restrictions on senior Ethiopian government functionaries and cut in security assistance. A wave of public protests broke out in Ethiopia against Washington's 'meddling in its internal affairs.' Ethiopian Foreign minister Dina Mufti has called the US to reconsider its decision.

The EU, too, has declined to send any observers for the elections scheduled in June and is considering additional punitive actions. It has already cancelled €100 million aid to Eritrea.

It appears the wheel of time has turned a full circle for Ethiopia, and it is back to its international isolation.

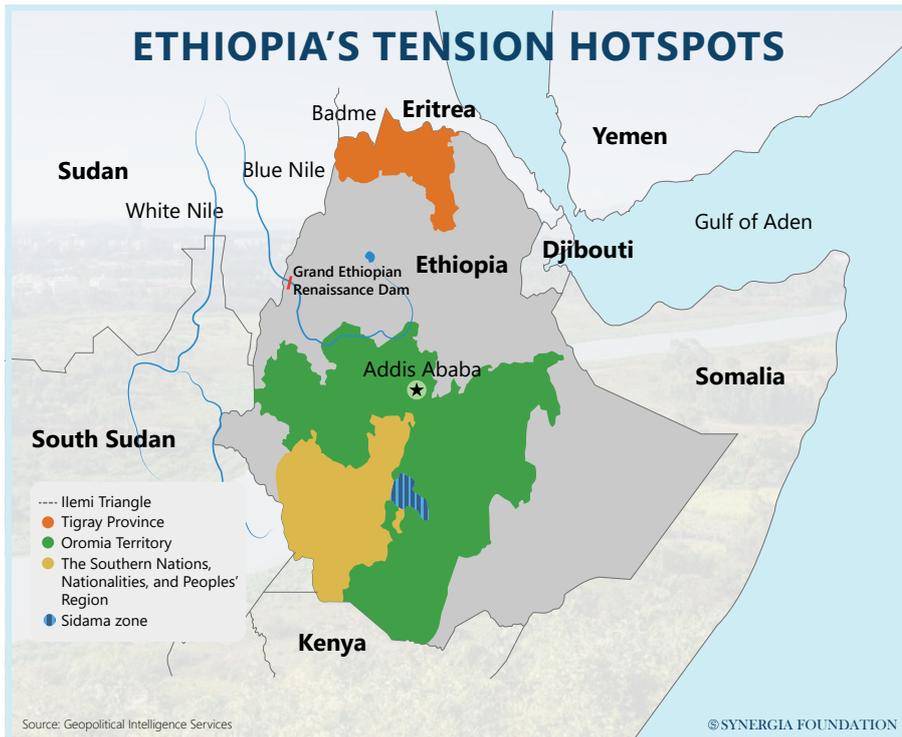
THE TIGRAY BLOODBATH

The Ethiopian military offensive to teach the small yet influential

Tigray province defies logic. While it may have suppressed the rising aspirations of its delinquent province, the extreme levels of atrocities verified by the UN and other independent agencies have attracted global concern and condemnation. Equally responsible for this human tragedy is Isaias Afwerki, the dictator of Eritrea, and the former arch-enemy of Ethiopia, who conspired with (some reports say goaded) Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed into launching this needless campaign.

The pandemic has worsened the plight of the displaced within Tigray. The UN is warning of a potential famine after crops were ruined and livestock slaughtered.

Refugees and the displaced demographic say that the Eritrean troops continue to be present



holding elections in September 2020 against the orders of the government, thus triggering the conflict yet again.

WILL SANCTIONS WORK?

The implications of the sanctions imposed seem vague. The U.S. Secretary of State, Mr Blinken, announced blanket sanctions on political figures and their families without naming any, and economic sanctions with a bunch of exemptions without naming what they were.

Without targeting the sanctions on key leaders responsible for the conflict, it engenders a nationalistic response amidst Ethiopian elections and a civil war.

Moreover, the sanctions came after seven months of massive human rights violations and open criticism of the U.S. as being extremely soft on Ethiopia.

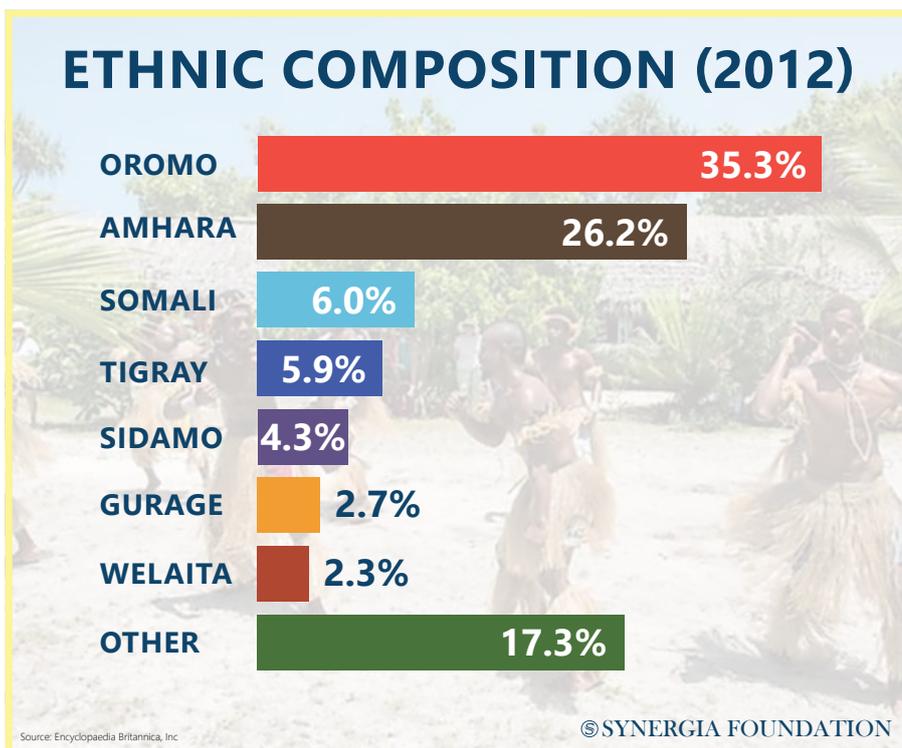
A TICKING TIME BOMB

Ethiopia is the second-most populous country in Africa, with a remarkable history and a multi-religious culture. Known as Abyssinia during World War II, its struggle against Mussolini's invasion to turn it into a colony assumed epic proportions. Since the ouster of a pro-Soviet regime in the late 1990s, the West has courted it, trying to build it as an engine of stability in the strategic horn of Africa.

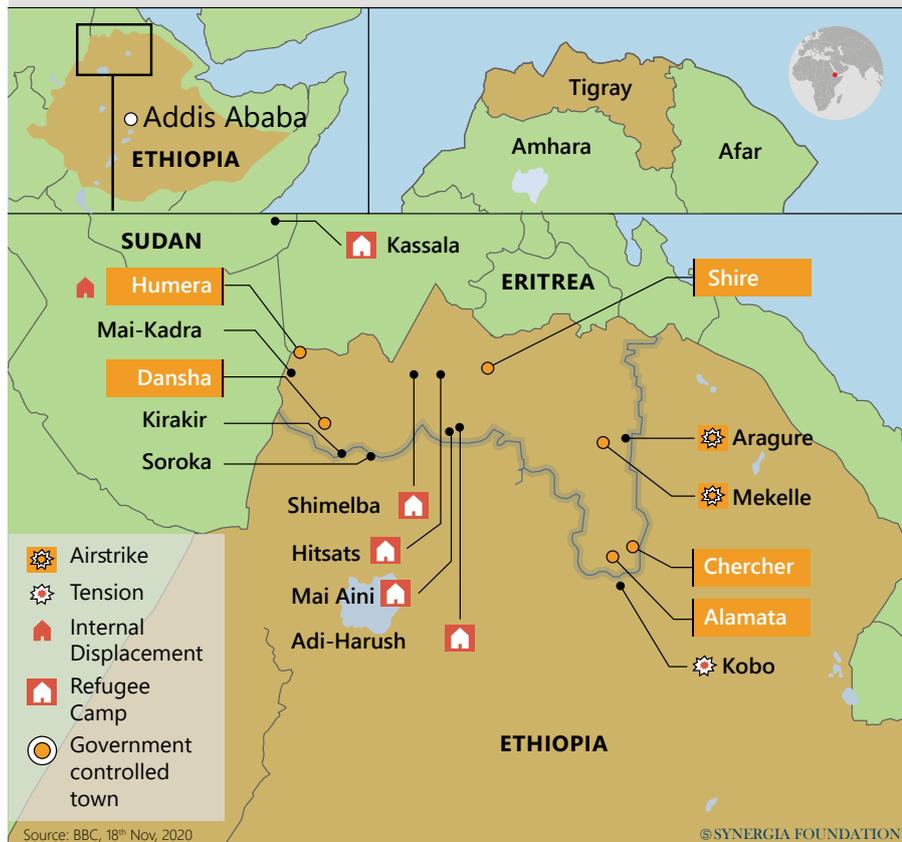
Ethiopia risks losing this stature and being relegated to geopolitical backwaters along with its newfound ally Eritrea. In a wider perspective, the role of Ethiopia as a stabilising force in the region which was based on the circumstance of the past – of stable domestic conditions, fair relations with neighbours, and the strength of its foreign policy that primarily focused on diplomacy – is being contested within the regional and international community. The impact is already visible with mobile giant Vodacom's pledge of USD 850 million investment already in jeopardy from the sanctions. Ethiopia's image as a 'country on the move' amidst foreign investors is

at Tigray inciting extreme sexual violence. The rationale behind the desolation of cultural heritage and famine is being challenged by some experts as 'ethnic cleansing' and 'a systemic attempt to exterminate a community'. The extensive levels of sexual violence incited upon the Tigrayan women are observed as an 'attempt to destroy the reproductive capacity' as there are reports of 'rapes in groups as large as 20 to 30'. Tigray is one of the major ethnic

groups in Ethiopia, accounting for six per cent of the population. It was dominant in the nation's politics as part of the ruling coalition (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) for three decades before falling out with Addis Ababa last year. Tigray's leaders controlled the politics in their region till 2018 before Abiy came into power. They challenged the Abiy government twice – first by rejecting an offer to join his coalition and second by



ETHIOPIA'S TIGRAY CRISIS



the Tigray conflict at a larger glance. Armed conflict subsists at the Sudanese border with spill over effects in Somalia. Threats of Egypt – Ethiopia conflict over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is also getting increasingly intermingled within this context.

There is a growing inclination within Ethiopia to relook at its relations with its erstwhile mentor, Russia, and rising China. Russia, which had a limited role in Africa till 2017, has been supporting the negotiations over the operation of GERD along with China.

China already leads the foreign investment in Ethiopia, especially in major infrastructure projects. Sharing the principle of 'non-interference in internal matters', their strategic cooperation partnership continues to invigorate. It will be interesting to observe these regional power dynamic shifts evolving in the future.

also fast losing its sheen.

Furthermore, Tigray is not the only conflict afflicting the Horn of

Africa. Four distinct armed groups are fighting in the region that is increasingly intermingled within

IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE HORN

Claiming historical antecedents that reach back to Queen Sheba mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, today, this beautiful country is in a state of perpetual turmoil. The underlying cause of the conflict has been over the nature of the Ethiopian state. With different ethnolinguistic identity groups in the nation, the balance of power is hard to maintain.

There are as many as 80 such recorded groups in Ethiopia – Amhara, Oromo, and Tigray being the most influential. Organisations and media in Ethiopia are largely ethnic-based and propagate widely contrasting ideologies. Elites from Amhara and Oromo ethnicities have even sought the media to spread hatred. After receiving the Nobel prize in 2019, Ethiopian President Abiy Ahmed has since lost his credibility over his frequent discriminatory remarks within and outside of his Oromo community. The Oromos are sceptical of his loyalty to the 'Oromo cause', whereas

Amharas criticise his commitment to 'Ethiopiawinet' or 'pan-Ethiopian nationalism'. The consolidation of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism in 1995 to just nine regions was a key factor that engendered resentment by the ethnic and linguistic minorities. Intense political and economic marginalisation mobilised their demand for regional status, which is, in fact, acknowledged in Ethiopia's constitution but was rejected by Abiy Ahmed. The absence of shared meanings of nationalism facilitates the nature of war and conflict between different ethnic identities. As the concept of majoritarian democracy is clearly not working for Ethiopia, experts recommend Arend Lijphart's 'consociationalism' approach, which accommodates minorities by granting them collective rights to establish a stable democratic system. Ethiopia presents many important lessons to other countries struggling with similar ethnic and religious factionalism within their boundaries.

S Assessment

There needs to be a step-by-step approach to the conflict rather than blanket sanctions. Larger dialogue at the national level is critical to reimagining Ethiopian federalism rather than focusing directly on Tigray.

Whether the sanctions are effective or not in ending the conflict remains to be seen, but it will most immediately affect the kind of investment the country needs for development, particularly foreign investment. The U.S. could also block funding from the World Bank and the IMF, derailing long term economic plans.

The sanctions are also negatively shaping the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Ethiopia, which could potentially harm Ethiopia's function as an intelligence partner overseeing armed groups in the African continent, especially in Somalia, Djibouti, and Sudan.



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