

RESEARCH PAPER

Ethio-Eritrea Rapprochement: A Critical Appraisal of Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

The Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement has been a long-awaited event that has been met with both excitement and apprehension. As a result, employing a qualitative research approach, this paper provides a critical assessment of the challenges and prospects of the current Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement, as well as its implications for the Horn of Africa region's peace and stability. Despite the optimisms, the rapprochement faced enormous hurdles. The challenges of restoring trust between the two countries after decades of enmity and animosity, the persistence of major political issues such as the disputed border, the issue of monetary policy and economic imbalance, war displaced people, and the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa can all be mentioned. Moreover, un-demarcated boundary, the excluded voices of stakeholders during the Pretoria agreement, enmity between the TPLF and the PFDJ, and the divided Red Sea Alliance are among the overwhelming challenges. In terms of prospects, the rapprochement has transformed the horn of Africa's peace and security from reciprocal destabilization and subversion to mutual stability and cooperation. In addition, the rapprochement enhanced regional cooperation and integration in the horn of Africa, it decreased the threat of GERD, and enhanced the IGAD's credibility as a regional organization.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rapprochement, peace, security, stability, Horn of Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Rapprochement can be described as the restoration of the relationships between two sides after a disagreement on an economic, political, and cultural level (Kalwongel, 2008:7). When rapprochement occurs, the states involved have decided that armed violence is no longer a suitable method of competition or dispute resolution (Stephen, 1989: 5). "The term rapprochement refers to a relationship characterized by shared expectations of peaceful coexistence in which direct security competition has been suspended" (Van, 2016). It can be viewed as both a condition of affairs and a process aimed at transitioning from a state of conflict to one of peace and reconciliation. In the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea, they have chosen to end their state of war and re-establish political and economic connections.

According to studies, improved relations between adversaries are the product of leaders' abilities to make peace. The process of reconciling with enemies is founded on two interaction factors: international threat alignment and mutual economic advantage. Both of these characteristics must be present for successful reconciliation between opponents. However, in this article, the concept of rapprochement has been used to examine the current re-established interstate relationship between the FDR of Ethiopia and the states of Eritrea after two decades of mutual destruction and subversion.

Ethiopia and Eritrea are the countries of the Horn of Africa in the eastern part of the African region. Eritrea was an integral part of the Ethiopian empire before the 1880s. However, in 1885, Italy controlled Massawa with the support of the British, and Eritrea became the province of Italy in East Africa for about fifty years (1885-1941). Consequently, after the defeat of Italy in WWII, Eritrea was ruled under the mandate of British colonial power from 1941 to 1952. Nevertheless, after the investigation of the interests of the Eritrean peoples by the UN committee, it was decided to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952 (Tekeste et.al, 2000). The Ethio-Eritrea federation did not live long as Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, the then leader of the country, nullified the federation and made the boundary between Ethiopia and Eritrea a character of administrative division rather than an internationally recognized boundary.

After Eritrea became independent and the TPLF assumed power in Ethiopia in 1991, the two countries established a close relationship in the economic, security, political and social areas. They formally began a state-to-state interaction after the 1993 referendum by signing a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on 13 July 1993. "Consequently, a number of agreements and protocols were signed between the two governments to harmonize their economies and seemingly maintain peace and stability in the Horn of Africa" (Kidist, 2011:32).

Since 1991, Ethiopian and Eritrean governments have had sever disagreements on a variety of issues. However, the major source of disagreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea in the years between 1993 and 1997 was boundary issue, trade and investment. After the introduction of a new Eritrean currency, the 'Nakfa', and a new trade strategy by Ethiopia in 1997, the hostility between the two states grew worse. Therefore, the economic disagreement over trade and investment, partly provoked by Ethiopia's new trade policy, had an adverse effect on the two countries' relations and contributed significantly to the outbreak of the Ethiopian-Eritrean War (Lyons, 2006: 5; Kidist, 2011:39). Furthermore driven by the above economic disagreements, political misunderstandings arose as a result of the disputed border. This skirmish quickly escalated into a full-fledged war and the two parties then entered into a bloody battle from 1998 to 2000 (Dima, 2013; Kalewongel, 2008).

The political impasse between Ethiopia and Eritrea continued until the change of leadership in Ethiopia in 2018. The internal and external political situation forced the ruling coalition to change leadership which impacted both internal and external policies of the country. Internally, to widen political space in the country and promote political liberalization at large, the new leadership took several political and economic reforms (Michael, 2018). Externally, the resolution of the two-decade-long standoff between Ethiopia and Eritrea might be considered the new leadership's main success in terms of foreign policy. Therefore, this article provides an insightful appraisal on

challenges and prospects of the current Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement and its implication to the peace and security of Horn of Africa region.

Three major reasons motivated me to write this paper on this topic: First, existing literature on Ethiopian and Eritrean relation does not explain the significance of rapprochement for the two countries; rather, it emphasizes the value of the two countries to regional peace and stability. Existing literature focuses primarily on the issue of ending the “*no peace, no war*” situation and the implications of the rapprochement rather than searching for the challenges that the sub-region faced and the prospects that the rapprochement could obtain. “*The region became destabilized as a result of the two countries' protracted battle. Furthermore, he stated that peace and stability in the Horn depended on the resolution of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war and the triumph of long-term peace*” (Kalewongel, 2008).

Second, the positive events that have emerged from the recent rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea have captured my attention. The regional ramifications of the Ethiopia-Eritrea reunion highlight the power of rapprochement and togetherness. The rapprochement of the two countries demonstrates that even seemingly intractable issues may be overcome through effort and perseverance. As a result of the current warming of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, a new form of exhilaration has emerged in the region, as if all problems have been addressed and none remain. Third, as a political science student and an Ethiopian citizen, there is no more prominent and hot issue on my mind than the rapprochement that was carried out following the two decades of stalemate that destabilized the entire region and normalized inter-state relations in the volatile Horn of Africa sub-region.

Concerning the study area description, the Horn of Africa is a sub-region of the African continent. Geographically, the Horn of Africa is that horn-shaped section of Africa that protrudes into the Indian Ocean from the continent's mainland in northeastern Africa. The countries of the Horn of Africa are located in a dangerous area where it is hard to get away from the unrest and instability of the surrounding countries. This region is depicted as the most volatile, militarized, and conflict-ridden region on the African continent, is really one of the most vulnerable crisis zones in the world (Medhane, 2004).

The countries that compose the Horn of Africa have been arbitrarily defined. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia are commonly regarded as the “principal” countries of the Horn of Africa region. However, the region's geographical scope is expanded to encompass Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda, and it is sometimes referred to as the “Greater Horn of Africa” by including Tanzania on the list of constituent nations (Kasahun, 2013). Except for Uganda and Tanzania, this study focuses on all of the sub-region’s member countries.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this article, the author used a qualitative research method because it allows researchers to investigate the viewpoints of both homogenous and heterogeneous groups of people and to describe and narrate the existing phenomenon. This method also assists researchers in gaining new insights. It may be critical in presenting questions regarding probable links, causes, repercussions,

and dynamic processes. It also promotes open communication and allows for previously unconsidered new facts (Mohajan, 2018:19).

The study has employed purposive sampling techniques. Respondents were selected for interview questions based on their general knowledge and proximity to the issue under study. Thus, respondents have been chosen purposefully from the total population of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), and the Institute of Peace and Security. Therefore, in-depth key informant interviews were conducted to collect primary data. Secondary data was gathered from prior studies, including published and unpublished academic literature, as well as trustworthy media outlets. Finally, the collected data was analyzed using thematic data analysis methods.

As an ethical consideration, the researcher relied on the principles and regulations of ethical research during interview, transcription and reviewing literature- namely, avoiding plagiarism, data falsification, exaggeration, understatement, and overlooking, keeping anonymity of informants, bias, and prejudice. Furthermore, the ideas, quotes, and concepts from secondary sources were cited and acknowledged exhaustively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Challenge of Ethio-Eritrea Rapprochement

Unresolved Border Issue

Badme, a small town in Ethiopia, played an important role in both the two-year Ethio-Eritrean war and the post-war standoff. The village of Badme was at the heart of the entire war, as well as later negotiations between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the consequent peace treaties. The border between the two countries was not clearly defined at the time of Eritrea's independence. There were a series of border clashes between the TPLF and EPLF in the late 1970s and early 1980s, particularly in Badme, where the 1998-2000 war began. However, the two liberation fronts decided to settle their boundary dispute after the end of the military battle with Ethiopia's then-leadership, known as the Derg dictatorship (Kalewongel, 2008; Kidist, 2011).

Despite their commitment to handle the issue with the demise of the Derg regime, they saw the border as less important, despite their mutual hostility toward the matter. Instead, like the current Prime Minister Abiy and President Isaias Afwerki, they have signed many agreements to strengthen their economic, political, and security ties. However, border tensions on the Eritrean side flared up. Eritrea's leadership alleged in 1997 that Ethiopian armed forces had invaded its territory (Kalewongel, 2008:41). In November 1997, both countries decided to settle the dispute peacefully and formed a joint border commission. Nonetheless, during the 1998 Ethio-Eritrean war, the Eritrean forces conquered Badme and other surrounding territory administered by Ethiopia (Kidist, 2011: 47).

As a result of their failure to demarcate the boundary, which was the case of their disagreement during their guerilla war against the Derg regime, both the TPLF and EPLF purported to have the border case for their multifarious disagreements. Similarly, following the recent rapprochement, the two leaders have yet to demarcate a boundary, which was one of the

immediate causes of the 1998 conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea following the rapprochement (The Reporter, 2022). Furthermore, as Vilmer pointed out, when Prime Minister Abiy met with the head of the UN Somalia-Eritrea Sanctions Committee on May 9, 2018, he indicated that the conversation needs to move considerably beyond this "minor territorial dispute." Isaias has never given it any weight (Vilmer, 2021).

The so-called hug diplomacy- "*if we are in love, then the other things are minor, we might not need a border,*" said Prime Minister Abiy. The "*We are one people*" narratives are used to conceal the fact that a strict enforcement of the Algiers Agreement's boundary delineation provisions would be problematic. "Demarcating the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea appears difficult as Ethiopia's internal stability faces ups and downs" (Vilmer, 2021). Although the leaders were busy with the internal reform agenda (from the Ethiopian side), there was a time to demarcate the border soon after the rapprochement. It is important to solve the enmity between the TPLF and Eritrean leaders for the success of the peace deal particularly, the border demarcation (interview, 2023).

As a result, this declaration explains that there was a period to discuss border demarcation in order to fully implement the Algiers accord. Nonetheless, Eritrean authorities were hesitant to open their eyes to fully implement both the Algiers and Jiddah agreements, while Ethiopian officials were preoccupied with internal difficulties and the reform agenda. Even if the formal and official grounds for the war are known, no physical border lines have been defined. The village of Badme, or the declared cause of the two-year conflict and two-decade stalemate, has been forgotten as unimportant by both sides.

According to Eri-Platform (2018), unsolved border issues and the position of the borderland population are among the most significant hurdles for real, pervasive and viable peace. Both the delineation of the interstate border and the evacuation of Ethiopian forces from legal Eritrean territory are currently ongoing. A viable and lasting peace would be impossible without the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from sovereign Eritrean territory and the demarcation of the international boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia, given that territory was used as the *casus belli* and catalyst for the border war between 1998 and 2000 (Ibid).

According to key informants "neither of the leaders has made any progress on the border demarcation." There is a possibility of conflict between the two countries. The current leaders will once again pretend that the border issue is unresolved or unclear if their relations experience a destabilizing event. It is clear that the border problem may pose a hurdle to the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement, since both leaders regard it as a delicate area in which to implement it, and others argue about the loss of readiness to implement the border demarcation from both parties as the failure of the prospects of peace between the two countries (interview, 2023)

Therefore, the official causes of the last conflict, including the Badme issue, remain unsolved, despite the fact that they were responsible for the deaths of 80,000 to 100,000 people. It is difficult to expect a different outcome by repeating the same steps. As a result, the border should be delineated in any way possible. It is evident that problems exist, but methods and agreement

amongst stakeholders can change everything, as the "no war, no peace scenarios" of the previous couple of decades have changed with the two leaders' agreements to "no war, yes peace."

The Pretoria Agreement and the Failure of Expectations

On September 2, 2022, in Pretoria, Republic of South Africa, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia signed the Pretoria agreement- cessation of hostilities pact. According to this agreement, the TPLF would reclaim its power and legal person in the Tigray area and in Ethiopian politics in general (AU, 2022). Nonetheless, while the deal was a step toward removing Ethiopia from the two-year-long civil conflict, but the data shows that it will make the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement more difficult to accomplish. Eritrean leaders expected the TPLF leaders to lose their positions of leadership as a result of the violent battle between the federal government and the TPLF leaders, but the reality on the ground was different.

According to the agreement, article 7(2 a & c) of the agreement, the federal government must suspend military actions targeting TPLF combatants and facilitate the House of People's Representatives in abolishing the TPLF's terrorist classification. According to Article 10(2), the parties must initiate a political discussion in order to find long-term solutions to their fundamental political differences (AU, 2022). Accordingly, the two sides have agreed to halt any acts that could jeopardize the existence of the other, and they should do so in the proper manner, implying that the TPLF has extended its hand through this agreement to remain in power. Moreover, the parties will begin a political conversation to resolve the grievances that pushed them to conflict. As a result, given what Eritrean authorities and pro-PFDJ party members hoped for from the northern war that seemed implausible.

Furthermore, during his interview with Eri TV, Isaias Afwerki stated that "our perspective and the long-running game came to an end with the demise of TPLF. The phrase "game over" was not used carelessly. We can't speak for them, so we can't guarantee that future attempts won't be the same. Above all, we have gained valuable experience through collaborating with the Federal Forces as one team, which will be beneficial in establishing regional peace. This is a major dilemma for the TPLF (Ministry of Information Eritrean, 2021).

He also indicated that they TPLF leaders do not desire peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia. They will not be idle. They could try to start a war between Eritrea and Ethiopia and then use the resulting chaos to feed other concerns in the region. They have used various ruses and arrangements to exploit the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia for the past eighty years. They have benefited enormously from the strife between Eritrea and Ethiopia; consequently, the habit that they have nurtured for eighty years cannot be expected to shift overnight (Ibid).

Furthermore, according to key informants, Isaias Afwerki's government's ultimate goal is not to have a good relationship with the TPLF leaders, but to eliminate them from Ethiopian politics. However, the Pretoria agreement has allowed the TPLF leaders to continue their leadership responsibilities in both the Tigray area and at the federal level by providing them with a dialogue chance to resolve their disputes with the federal government (interview, 2023).

Even though Eritrea may see the TPLF's disarmament as a positive development, "it has yet to complete its mission of eliminating the TPLF once and for all by capturing or killing its leaders, causing massive displacement, and weakening its infrastructure and military capabilities in order to create a situation in which Tigray cannot pose a threat to Eritrea for at least the next 50 years" (Mohamed, 2022).

The preceding explanation shows that, despite the fact that many Ethiopians accept and regard the peace pact between the Federal government and the TPLF leaders as a way to peace, it would damage relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Because, the Eritrean government became enraged at the TPLF's continued rule in Tigray and their relationship with the federal government.

The agreement pledged to end the country's political deadlock and bring the TPLF into a unified administration. However, the agreement may have unforeseen effects for the Ethio-Eritrean rapprochement (Ibid). As a result, while the PFDJ leaders hoped that the TPLF leaders and the party itself would be demolished, the Pretoria agreement has rendered it a pipe dream. If not resolved on time, Eritrean authorities' failed ultimate purpose towards the TPLF will return them to previous problems.

Eritrea may become the main spoiler simply because they did not commit to anything specified in the agreement." According to the Nairobi agreement document, Tigray soldiers will be disarmed concurrently with the withdrawal of "foreign forces." However, none of those at the negotiating table have control over Eritrean troops. As a result, any unexpected move by Eritrean forces could jeopardize the peace deal (Felix, 2022).

As previously said, the TPLF and Eritrea remain archenemies, and reconciliation between them is required to save the country from the imminent destructive action of their animosity. The two-year catastrophic war of 1998-2000 was caused by both countries' then-leaders (TPLF and PFDJ), despite their claims to have addressed the border issue. As is generally known, the suspension of hostilities signed by the Ethiopian federal government and TPLF officials was a critical step toward peace in Ethiopia.

However, the antagonism between the Eritrean leadership and the TPLF will be the immediate problem for Ethiopia-Eritrea ties, as both organizations want the destabilization of the other. Mutual distrust and enmity between the two foes should be resolved through discussion and negotiation; otherwise, the consequences of their enmity could jeopardize normalized relations between Addis Abeba and Asmara, and its spillover effects could destabilize the prospects for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa.

Exclusion of the Voices of Stakeholders

The excluded voices of concerned stakeholders from regional and local populations, particularly in contested areas, posed a challenge to the execution of the Ethio-Eritrean rapprochement. According to Kalewongel (2008), the absence of those who reside near the disputed territories from the peace accord is the reason why the entire peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea was unable to end the conflict in general and the boundary issue in particular.

The idea here is that including the public in general and local people living in the disputed territory in particular, makes it easier to implement peace treaties.

People are more likely to support the implementation of peace treaties if they believe they played a role in their creation. People tend to reject implementation if they feel alienated by the peace process and see the agreements as imposed (Kalewongel, 2008:23). Aside from the general public, the individuals who live near the border should be consulted in the resolution of the border problem. Those who live in these locations were directly affected by the turmoil and ensuing war. Hence, incorporating their concerns into the resolution of the border disagreement is crucial.

Most importantly, prospects for long-term peaceful coexistence between the two countries must be investigated in a comprehensive manner that includes grassroots and civil society actors from both sides (Daniel & Paulos, 2011). Furthermore, Medhane (2004) believes that face-to-face meetings between middle officials from both countries are necessary to resolve the Ethio-Eritrea border conflict and ensure long-term peace between the two countries; however, the immediate priority should be to accelerate the engagement of stakeholders and members of civil society. Prioritize people-to-people relationships, to which religious organizations, mass organizations, the media, and others can make significant contributions.

The very limitation of Ethio-Eritrea reconciliation was the exclusion of those living along the border from the peace process. According to him, both Ethiopians and Eritreans were victims of the sad two-year conflict; however, the bordering villages were directly damaged by both the war and the standoff between Asmara and Addis Ababa until Ethiopia's government changed in 2018 (interview, 2023). Dialogue offers the best chance for peace to succeed. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to analyze the assertion that, while individuals were not a part of the problem, they were also not a part of the solution. When dealing with circumstances such as the Ethio-Eritrea border instance, the writers proved the need of paying attention to local narratives about the past, present, and future links and interdependence of the peoples who are most impacted.

Therefore, even if the issue of boundary demarcation and external relations falls under the purview of the federal government, regional leaders and local communities must be included in the peace process, not to contest the agreement, but to be a part of it due to their significant role in its execution. To enhance the peace pact, it is critical to organize at least one discussion session with the aforementioned stakeholders in order to clarify the parameters of the agreement reached by the top leaders. Furthermore, the outcome of an inclusive peace process would be beneficial to both countries in particular, as well as the stability of the Horn of Africa in general. The exclusion of the aforementioned groups from the peace process, however, has made them an obstacle to the current rapprochement between the two countries, particularly on the Ethiopian side, which has sought people-to-people engagement first.

The Red Sea Dividing Alliance

The Red Sea partnership is a strategic partnership announced in late 2020 by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, and Bahrain. The Red Sea Alliance might potentially be viewed as a threat to peace and security in the Horn of Africa. It could lead to increasing militarization of the region, as well as an atmosphere of distrust and fear. Gulf nations have been

paying increasing attention to the Red Sea in recent years. The area has historically been an important maritime route. In addition to functioning as a trade route from Asia to Europe and the Americas in the past, the Red Sea now connects the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. However, as regional and international countries compete for dominance in two critical straits, Bab El Mandab, located between Yemen, Djibouti, and Eritrea, as well as the Suez Canal in Egypt, has grown in importance (John, 2020).

Egypt and Saudi Arabia both played key roles in the development of the Red Sea alliance. For them, the Red Sea must be protected from outside intervention, notably from Saudi Arabia's political opponents (Turkey, Qatar, and Iran). Creating a platform that focuses on littoral countries is an easy method of stating that Turkey, Qatar, and Iran have little to do with Red Sea issues (Angela, 2020). Whereas Egyptian policies have been based around its goal to dominate the Nile's headwaters, it has worked to isolate Ethiopia and prevent an alliance of Horn states from developing to challenge its sub-regional hegemony (Medhane, 2004:127).

As key informants confirmed, the Red Sea Alliance has concentrated on Ethiopia since its inception, particularly in light of the membership terms chosen by Egyptian politicians and diplomats. Egypt had a crucial role in the formation of the Red Sea Alliance, which excluded Ethiopia. As a result, the Alliance will divide the newly cooperating leaders of the Horn of Africa, posing a challenge to regional collaboration (interview, 2023). It entails us that if not handled properly, the Red Sea Alliance would endanger regional integration as well as ties between Ethiopia and Eritrea, because it gives the mother Horn nations, with the exception of Ethiopia, a way to avoid IGAD and the AU, destabilizing the atmosphere of mutual cooperation between the states (Medhane, 2004:127).

Zach (2019) asserted that Egyptian diplomats were the most strident in their opposition to the idea that the Red Sea coastline should be the only requirement for admittance. Ethiopia and other participants who could decrease Cairo's influence are to be eliminated. He also pointed out that it is not a compelling rationale to exclude one of the region's most prominent heavyweights simply because Ethiopia does not officially have any Red Sea coastline (it is only 30 miles from the nearest beach). Egypt expressed its preference for red sea issues to be handled only by red sea states. Asmara has so far rejected AU and IGAD overtures on Red Sea issues. Egypt has always considered IGAD as a vehicle for Ethiopian interests, as one Egyptian ambassador stated, *"Any attempt to put Ethiopia at the center of the red sea conversation and any involvement of IGAD in the red sea is totally unacceptable"* (Medhane, 2004:127).

Ethiopia's exclusion from the Red Sea Alliance may hamper expanding relations in the Gulf, as well as the development of ports, infrastructure, and oil resources throughout the HOA. According to one of my key informants, a Middle East researcher, "Eritrea's rapprochement with Ethiopia in 2018 was terrible news for Egyptian officials because they lost their ability to project power in the Horn of Africa because Eritrea was a state that openly supported Egypt's demands for the GERD conflict." They were disappointed and designed a new alliance formation, the AU, aimed at the states of the Horn of Africa in general, and Ethiopia and Eritrea in particular (interview, 2023).

Isaias Afwerki would join any group that would allow him to work to the best of his ability since he is keen to take on a regional leadership position in the Horn of Africa. Therefore, Egypt would take advantage of President Isaias' frail side to undermine the existing rapprochement between Asmara and Addis Ababa in an effort to restore the "no peace, no war status quo that existed during Cairo's golden age. For this reason, I think that Isaias will utilize the Red Sea Alliance to balance out IGAD and Ethiopia (interview, 2023).

Regarding this, The Special Report (2020) indicated that Asmara is concerned that regional strategy as a whole will give Ethiopia a strong position in the Red Sea. Thus, when Riyadh hosted a conference in April 2019 to promote talks between Eritrea and Ethiopia over the Red Sea Alliance, the Eritrean president did not attend, citing differences with Addis Abeba and insisting on an alliance between Eritrea and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the Red Sea (Ibid. 20). According to the above assertions, Eritrea needs to be a regional leader, and Egypt's main goal is to isolate and weaken Ethiopia's role and leadership in the region.

Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia raised the question of alliance, which might exacerbate the rekindled interstate relations and cooperation in the Horn of Africa. Though revitalized interstate relations can enable them to support and stabilize each other, ushering them into strong cooperation, the deliberately chosen membership requirements established by Egyptian diplomats and officials to isolate Ethiopia have divided the major Horn of Africa states. As a result, the development of the Red Sea Alliance will be one of the major impediments to regional cooperation and integration in the Horn of Africa, particularly to connections between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as it will militarize the region and separate the governments. This could exacerbate the current condition of interstate relations if leaders fail to exercise caution when it comes to external meddling in their domestic affairs.

A new 'no peace, no war' Situations

Despite significant progress in the rapprochement process, there are still many bleak expectations for the future of this rapprochement. The first issue is that Ethiopia and Eritrea have a long history of enmity and distrust between them, which will not be easily addressed. The two countries have a lengthy history of violent strife and have never been on amicable terms. This will make it harder for them to trust each other in their new relationship. There are fears that the current enthusiasm and goodwill will not be enough to sustain the relationship in the long run, and that the two countries may revert to their old state of antagonism. Overall, this viewpoint holds that the two countries will revert to their previous status quo of "no peace, no war" situations, and that the development of peace and stability between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as in the entire Horn of Africa, will be hampered by the reasons mentioned and discussed below.

Antagonism between the TPLF and the PFDJ

The ambivalence of Eritrean leaders toward the implementation of peace promises, including motivating factors from the Ethiopian side such as port usage and border trade, has yet to materialize; similarly, the continued enmity between Eritrean leaders and the TPLF leaders, or the former vanguard party of the EPRDF, has led scholars and analysts to be pessimistic about recent relations between the two countries. According to Vilmer (2021), one of the problems of

the rapprochement is Eritrea leadership's ambivalence. He stated that it is still uncertain whether Ethiopia will have access to Eritrean ports, which was one of their main objectives. He also stated that Isaias is dissatisfied with the rapprochement initiatives, which would entail opening up Eritrea to trade, goods, and people, which would undoubtedly harm his totalitarian government.

This depicted that the unchanged stance of Eritrean and TPLF leaders, could jeopardize the recently normalized Ethiopian-Eritrean relations. Thus, the historical animosity between the TPLF and the PFDJ could be one of the factors that made Isaias Afwerki reluctant about implementing the peace process.

Due to domestic insecurity, Ethiopia and Eritrea's rapprochement would be less effective than regional and international communities anticipated. On the Ethiopian side, the TPLF leaders and the FDRE administration disagree on accepting the EEBC judgment. Also, if the border is opened, it will allow Eritreans to flee the nation; even during the border opening ceremony following the rapprochement, many Eritreans crossed the border to leave the country (interview, 2023).

Therefore, Eritrea is uncertainty about implementing the rapprochement, as well as the existing antagonism between Tigrayan regional leaders and Eritrean officials could weaken the possibilities for peace between the two countries, destabilizing the entire region. Furthermore, both countries should recognize the cost of the previous conflict as well as the two decades of “no war and no peace” between them. And it is preferable to resolve their political and economic disagreements rather than remain ambivalent. Their dispute, including the antagonism between the TPLF and PFDJ leaders, should be brought to the table; otherwise, the spillover effects will damage the present peace process, possibly leading to a return to the 'no peace, no war' situation.

The Limitations of the Peace Process itself

Because of the rapprochement's restricted character and unimplemented pledges, most of the key informants and previous studies are pessimistic about the peace process. Defending the primacy of state-to-state ties over a personal accord between the two presidents, Eri-Platform reiterated its long-held worry that the reliance of the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia in general, and the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia in particular, purely on Isaias' interests and personal agenda is extremely dangerous (Eri-Platform, 2018).

They began trading and other economic activity soon after the rapprochement without any institution or binding agreement to which they will adhere. Normalized ties between Ethiopia and Eritrea have transformed the two decades of mutual devastation and animosity between the two countries and the entire region. However, the un-demarcated border, their engagement in economic activity without official monetary policy, and the lack of binding agreement on the economic connection in general border trade vis-à-vis Ethiopia's use of Eritrean ports would be future battlegrounds for their tensions “by forgetting the past history, they will make the same mistake” (interview, 2023). In support of the foregoing remarks, Abdu (2021) stated that the Ethio-Eritrea Agreement lacked clear methods for modifying the terms of the settlement, voicing objections,

and generally adapting commitments and obligations to changing socioeconomic and diplomatic realities. The pact also lacks implementation methods and a timetable, despite its ambitious scope.

Despite the good outcomes of the rapprochement, the majority of the promises are not being fulfilled because their dimension has shifted from regional synergy to internal limitations. He added that, every principle of the Algiers agreement was documented and publicized in a way that allowed anyone to read, understand, and critique the concept of the deal, whereas the details of the Asmara and Jeddah accords are unknown." The Jeddah agreement has seven paragraphs that tell us about the declaration of some major issues without a timetable for implementation, responsible institutions, and prioritized areas of action plan (interview, 2023).

Thus, of the constraints of the Ethio-Eritrea peace process, many researchers are gloomy about the possibilities. The peace pact did not invite key players, such as regional leaders and local populations, whose absence could jeopardize the agreement's implementation. Furthermore, as previously said, the agreement between the two countries lacks the support of both institutional and significant stakeholders such as parliament, lawmakers, IGOs such as IGAD and AU, and NGOs due to its clandestine character.

External pressures and lack of Commitment

Though the impulse for the rapprochement was pushed by a change of leadership in Ethiopia, the involvement of other powers is obvious. Regardless of the significance of the rapprochement for regional peace and stability, the interests of regional and global powers are present to use the peace pact for the sake of their political gains in the region. Furthermore, according to Nikola (2018), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the United States (US) as well as other nations that were participating in the peace discussions in his paper titled "The Geopolitics behind the Peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea." Thus, knowing the goals and potential benefits for regional and international participants is critical.

According to Tesfa News (2018), the present developments between Ethiopia and Eritrea are tied to Eritrea's broader Red Sea relations. However, these initiators are not particularly interested in Eritrea adopting improvements that would increase the country's internal stability. After all, the Gulf's commitment is motivated by self-interest rather than values. A rapprochement between Addis Abeba and Asmara was perceived as benefitting their interests for a variety of reasons; in particular, Emirati leaders met with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and President Afwerki many times in the year leading up to the declaration of peace. In addition, the US sent its Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Tibor Nagy, to Eritrea, demonstrating its determination to changing its long-held anti-Eritrea policy. This makes the peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia part of larger Red Sea dynamics, rivalries, and interests that are projected onto the Horn and are more likely to feed instability in an already unstable area than to advance democracy (Ibid).

Given the current condition of events, Afwerki feels that a peace settlement mediated by the UAE would be advantageous. The president's domestic position has been bolstered by Eritrea's economic links with countries across the Red Sea, which may have caused some substantial alterations in the country's foreign policy. In reality, they have given him a fresh lease on life rather

than compelling him to rehabilitate. As a result, Afwerki's new allies have fortified his security and military foundation against direct threats or internal pressure for change, allowing him to escape the economic and political reform that Western financiers may have demanded (Ibid).

The external influences and support of the rapprochement were there during the initiation of the peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, currently the hands of the international community and the facilitators of the rapprochement to support its implementation are invisible, and it could convince us to believe that their support for the rapprochement was driven by their hidden agendas rather than stabilizing the region (interview, 2023).

The presence of regional and global forces in the Horn of Africa has both benefits and drawbacks. While they engage in regional peace and security to address regional concerns, they also cultivate seeds of insecurity and mistrust among the region's states. However, it is dependent on the ability of the individual state to shape its connections with other powers, which necessitates the expertise of practitioners (interview, 2023). Due to their concealed national interests behind the peace pact, regional and global powers have been active in the process of Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement.

Vilmer (2021) noted that, knowing that the first loser of the peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea would be Djibouti because the peace agreement will provide Ethiopia with another port service option, the Emiratis played a critical role in the process to demonstrate their power projection on Djibouti. As a result, Riyadh's participation in the reconciliation process was facilitated by the Saudi/UAE vs. Qatari-Iran axis competition in the Horn of Africa.

During the stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the dominant international actor, the United States, has been distracted with its "war on terror" and has ignored the implications of the two decades of mutual instability between the countries. However, while it was unclear how much it contributed to the peace process, the United States attempted to play a part in the Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement. Furthermore, the US's participation is prompted by two factors. The UAE- Saudi axis in the Horn of Africa is being strengthened, while China's developed economic engagement in Djibouti and the Horn in general is being questioned (Ibid).

To check and regulate china's actions in the Horn of Africa region, particularly in Djibouti, America requires an alternative ally from the region, which Eritrea provides (Nikola, 2018). Similarly, EU countries have praised the peace process since they are concerned about the refugee influx from Eritrea; consequently, soon after the reconciliation, they began to consider ways to return Eritrean refugees.

In sum, based on the preceding debate, it is evident that executing the Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement will be difficult, if not impossible, if financial and infrastructure supports are not provided. Furthermore, the agreements in Jeddah and Asmara speak of the establishment of a common economic zone, which requires external financial support to implement; additionally, the agreement speaks of the region's peace and stability, which would not be true without the constructive role of the already involved super and regional powers in the sub-region's peace and security issues. Thus, not helping but only appreciating could not bear the intended result of the development of peace and stability between the two countries and the entire sub-region.

PROSPECTS OF ETHIO-ERITREA RAPPROCHEMENT

Sustainable Peace and Stability

Apart from the aforementioned problems, the Ethio-Eritrean rapprochement has produced optimism and hope for the future. It has inaugurated a new age of peace and stability in the region. This has had a wide range of positive outcomes for the two countries and the region as a whole. The rapprochement has also provided an opportunity for the two countries to collaborate on regional issues. Ethiopia and Eritrea can become a regional hegemon for peace and stability if they work together. It might also lead to stronger regional integration, which would serve to enhance the economy of neighboring countries. As a result, this optimistic vision is founded on the principles presented and outlined below, according to which the two countries will achieve greater peace and development through mutual trust and cooperation.

The Disarmament of the TPLF Combatants and the Restoration of the Federal Government Institutions in the Tigray Region

The Pretoria agreement promised to restore federal government institutions and disarm combatant groups involved in the Tigray region's war that occurred from November 3, 2020, to November 2, 2022. As a result, Article 3(5) of the Pretoria agreement stated that the parties had agreed to reinstall federal institutions in Mekelle in order to foster a condition that would allow for the resuming supply of public services in the area and to ensure the protection of the city's population. To that end, the parties agree that the entry of the Ethiopia national defense and other relevant federal institutions into Mekelle must be quick, easy, peaceful, and coordinated. Moreover, the process should be aided by "open communication channel that will be established between the parties' senior commanders as per Article 6(c) of this Agreement" (AU, 2022).

Thus, disarmament of TPLF combatants and restoration of federal institutions in the region are critical steps toward ending the war, which is a threat to internal peace and prosperity. It is also critical to end the hostility between the TPLF leaders and the PFDJ in order to carry out the rapprochement's pledges. In keeping with the preceding comment, Abdu (2012) stated that if the Ethiopian prime minister is honest about the peace process, involvement with the TPLF, which controls Tigray, as one of the primary parties in the peace process is essential. Their exclusion may strengthen their resolve to oppose the agreement's implementation on the ground. Similarly, if the agreement is actually intended to bring about peace between the two countries, establishing connections between the PFDJ and the TPLF is a crucial component of that process (p. 40-41).

Furthermore, despite their two-year brutal battle, TPLF commanders have begun to implement the Pretoria deal by disarming and giving over their weapons to the federal government. As a result, the current relationships between Tigrayan leaders and the federal government will lead them to implement the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement, which can strengthen regional peace and stability; as a result, a constructive role is required to effectuate the prospects of both internal and regional peace and development.

Eritrea's Reactivation of IGAD Membership and Horn of Africa Cooperation

IGAD has mainly failed to carry out its grandiose mandate or goals, and it has only just begun to tap into its immense potential. Instead of serving as a model for a true regional bloc supported by the collaboration and confidence of its member nations, it became a venue for poisonous competition and mistrust. It was regularly used to criticize and punish individual member nations, as well as to achieve political agendas. Eritrea will remain a member of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in view of convincing evidence that long-standing efforts to isolate Eritrea, spearheaded primarily by the Western countries and their regional proxy, the TPLF, are failing. Thus, Eritrea continues to create relationships and cooperate with the member states rather than being isolated (Africa Business, 2023).

This indicates that the change of leadership in Ethiopia and rapprochement with Eritrea changed the latter's stance from destabilizing to stabilizing, and thus it is clear that Eritrea suspended its membership in IGAD due to its impasse with the former Ethiopian leaders, particularly the TPLF, and the decision of the IGAD member states that support Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia. Furthermore, one of my responders stated that now that its previous mistrust of neighboring nations, particularly Ethiopia, has been alleviated by the rapprochement, Eritrea may rejoin IGAD and play its role in the area. Eritrea's readmission to multilateral organization may enable IGAD, as a sub-regional body, to design inclusive and comprehensive regional policies to address the region's common regional concerns (interview, 2023).

IGAD is recovering the trust of its member states, including Eritrea. The restoration of the state of Eritrea will improve the organization's regional comprehensive role, which was weakened following the Ethiopia-Eritrea war. Eritrea's re-admission to IGAD represents a promising opportunity for regional integration, and it is incumbent on all parties to seize this opportunity to work toward a peaceful and honorable living for the people of the region. They will be able to correct past wrongs inflicted by colonialism, which tore communities apart and pitted them against one another (Delhi News, 2023). As a result, the goal of the agreement is that positive cooperation among state leaders will motivate them to improve the deteriorated regional peace and stability, which will motivate them to form effective and comprehensive regional economic cooperation rather than shallow cooperation based on mutual distrust.

Although some have expressed concern about the decline in port earnings, the Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement has benefited Djibouti. In the case of Mohamed and Miressa, restored relations could help Djibouti, which also has an unresolved boundary conflict with Eritrea. Because both countries now have great connections with Ethiopia, there may be an opportunity to settle this quietly. As a result, while the restoration of friendly relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea benefits both countries, the impacts will be felt throughout the region. The cycle of direct and proxy violence that has plagued the Horn of Africa for far too long may be broken by improved relations (Omar & Miressa, 2018).

To sum up, the good results of the rapprochement are felt in interstate relations because it has ceased the proxy war and conflict among the states, albeit there remain internal problems within the states. As a result of Ethio-Eritrea's rapprochement, there is an advantageous atmosphere for Horn states to collaborate on regional matters and resolve their differences without any destabilizing action.

Economic Interests: Port Services and GERD Development

The economic prospects of an Ethiopian-Eritrean rapprochement are quite favorable. With improved transit ties, more investment, and expanded trade, both countries stand to benefit considerably from closer collaboration. Economic integration and cooperation are crucial in maintaining peace and security because the opportunity cost of dependency lessens the possibility of war. Economic integration is vital for enhancing peace and security between governments because of the opportunity cost of dependency, which reduces the probability of conflict. According to several studies, stronger bilateral trade connections help to build peace. Key factors in fostering peace include growing bilateral interdependence and trade liberalization (Chatib, 2023).

Nikola (2018) in his article *“the Geopolitics behind the Peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea,”* suggested that the current peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea may boost the latter's economy and attract global investment, particularly given Eritrea's strategic location. Furthermore, the Ethiopian prime minister and Eritrea agreed in July to reopen the routes to Assab and Massawa, supporting in the growth of both ports. Thus, one of the primary benefits of the recent reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea is access to new ports for Ethiopia and an economic boost for Eritrea.

The ability to access Eritrea's seaports is a vital component in Ethiopia's economic development strategy. The easing of UN sanctions may enable Eritrea to attract investment and engage in international interactions (interview, 2023). Both of these factors have the potential to contribute to a change toward more positive growth and development. If used correctly, the rapprochement allows both countries to emphasize economic development over security.

In the same vein, despite his prior unfavorable position and rejection of the dam, Isaias Afwerki is seeking to have Eritrea benefit from the GERD development (Al-Monitor, 2020). Thus, beyond the two countries, the prospects of their economic cooperation would be peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. The new rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea would focus attention on regional economic integration throughout the region. Access to the Red Sea and use of Eritrean ports for Ethiopia is critical issues, without which Ethiopia's import-export commerce suffers greatly.

Therefore, the expansion of the GERD and the existence of Eritrean ports that Ethiopia can use to diversify its port services would lead to close cooperation. Eritrea requires electric power, which Ethiopia might give, and Ethiopia requires faster and less expensive port services; hence, the interests of both countries can effectuate the chances of peace and stability in the region. As described in the theoretical section, governments feel more comfortable when they cooperate than when they disaffiliate, and Ethiopia and Eritrea are not exceptions. The strength of economic cooperation and integration is irrefutable in transforming a destabilizing and discriminatory mentality into one of peace and harmony, whereas conflict and hatred can undermine a country's economic power. Thus, economic contacts and collaboration can foster mutual confidence and drive the two countries to focus on the development agenda that can be realized through the implementation of the peace process.

CONCLUSION

In this article, an attempt has been made to shed light on the challenges and prospects of Etio-Eritrea rapprochement and its implications for the peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. Eritrea became a de facto state in 1991 and a de jure state in 1993. After the independence of Eritrea, the Ethiopian and Eritrean leaders established interstate relations by accepting Eritrea's independence positively, and that was the first time that Eritrea was seen as a foreign state and signed different agreements with the then Ethiopian leaders to cooperate on economic, social, security, military, and other important walks of life with each other. However, the Ethio-Eritrea honeymoon period did not last long, and the two countries were soon embroiled in a devastating war from 1998 to 2000. Despite the fact that the Algiers agreement ended the two-year brutal war, the two countries continued to treat each other with contempt and obscurity until recently. Following the change of government in Ethiopia in 2018, both leaders initiated the rapprochement initiative. However, the rapprochement has mixed results in terms of prospects and challenges.

To begin with the prospects, the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea has significantly changed the natures of peace and stability situation in the Horn of Africa region. The features of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa have been known by mutual destabilization, subversion, and proxy war even before the disintegration of Eritrea from Ethiopia, and these peace and security features have made the entire region of the Horn a conflict-ridden environment. However, it dramatically changed after the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The rapprochement was followed by Eritrea-Djibouti discussion after a decade of enmity since the 2008 border war on the Dumeira Mountain and Somalia-Eritrea relations, which were deteriorated by Eritrea's support of the UIC to pressurize Ethiopia, and Somalia accused the former of destabilizing the country. Furthermore, the rapprochement has been followed by Kenya and Somalia's diplomatic discussion to solve their disagreement and the Sudan and South Sudan discussion. Thus, the rapprochement has transformed the Horn of Africa's well-known trait of mutual destabilization, subversion, and proxy to cooperation, mutual stabilization, and diplomatic negotiation.

Second, the rapprochement has improved regional economic cooperation and integration in the Horn of Africa. As the main impediment to regional integration, mutual destabilization and mistrust embedded in the region's interstate relations, has changed into discussion and negotiation on whatever differences exist, and states have begun to revive their bilateral and multilateral cooperation, which was impossible prior to the rapprochement. Furthermore, various infrastructure and energy-led regional cooperation initiatives have been implemented following the rapprochement of the two foes; thus, there is a suitable environment for regional cooperation and integration as opposition parties have returned to their homes, the proxy war has ceased, and the border dispute between the countries is on the verge of being resolved through negotiation.

Third, the rapprochement has reduced the threat of GERD and transformed the status quo from rejecting to supporting - in the case of Eritrea- and from military intervention to dialogue and debate - in the case of Egypt. And this can help to stabilize the Horn of Africa region. Although the influence of a third party and the economic interests of their people compel them to seek diplomatic solutions to their differences, it is undeniable that the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement has

changed the stance of Egypt, a country that used Eritrea as a threat to the dam, as well as their regional and global allies.

As a result, the changed status quo from Egypt and Eritrea toward the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam can stabilize the Horn of Africa sub-region and impact the growth of peace and stability in the region. Fourth, the rapprochement increased IGAD's credibility as a regional organization among its member states. The stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea was the main cause of the organization's weakness, especially after the 2006 decision by IGAD members to support Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia, which prompted Eritrea to suspend its membership in 2007 and support UIC in the country. Furthermore, the rapprochement resulted in the encirclement of Eritrea's internationally imposed sanctions, which transformed have changed the negative attitudes within the regional organizations. Therefore, it's evident that the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the revitalized interstate relations that following the rapprochement have make reduced the existing mutual destabilization and subversion policy and motivated them to cooperate on regional issues, which in turn enhanced the importance of IGAD, a sub-regional organization that was impotent due to the disagreement among its member states.

Regarding the challenges, the rapprochement does not address the reasons for the previous war, such as monetary policy, unequal economic relation, and the issue of border trade. As a result, the main message of the preceding arguments is that they will result in another case of “no peace, no war,” putting the two states at risk and destabilizing the entire region. This places the rapprochement under the spotlight of challenges. One of the most staggering challenges is reestablishing trust between the two countries after decades of hostility and resentment.

Secondly, the continuance of important political issues such as the disputed border, the question of monetary policy and economic imbalance, the necessity to assist individuals displaced by the conflict, and the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa sub-region. Thirdly, the un-demarcated border, the exclusion of stakeholder voices during the Pretoria agreement, hatred between the TPLF and the PFDJ, and the fractured Red Sea Alliance are among the greatest hurdles. Therefore, the author asserts that the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement poses both challenges and prospects for peace and stability of the two states in particular and the Horn of Africa region in general. To make the rapprochement worthwhile and the prospects to prevail, the challenges must be skillfully managed early.

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Economic Recession Hit-Back Leading to Unemployment Despite Being in Digital and Information Ages

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RESEARCH PAPER

Economic Recession Hit-Back Leading to Unemployment Despite Being in Digital and Information Ages

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ABSTRACT

Despite living in an era characterized by technological advancements and unprecedented access to information, economic recessions continue to exert a profound impact on employment rates. This study aims to analyze the underlying factors contributing to this enigma, exploring the interaction between economic recessions, technological progress, and the labor market. By examining the effects of the recession on various sectors, such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs, we uncover the intricate relationship between technological innovation, employment, and economic stability. The information and digital eras have produced huge technological advancements that have fundamentally changed how we live and work. Nonetheless, despite this advancement, economic downturns continue to occur, having a significant influence on individuals, companies, and entire civilizations. This study looks at 20 countries' GDPs, minimum wages, and unemployment rates to see how the global economic slump has impacted them despite their investments in new technologies and inventions. The countries studied include two from Africa and five from Asia. Additionally, this study discusses the how the persistent decline in economic activities disrupted the GDPs of various countries, rate of unemployment spread of misinformation and algorithmic decision-making and their potential implications for job security. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of targeted support for SMEs, investment in regulation of digital platforms, promotion of digital literacy, and international collaboration to foster economic resilience and ensure a more equitable distribution of opportunities in the face of economic uncertainties. The report also looks at the effects of economic downturns in the digital era and the reasons why they continue despite technological advancements. In its final section, it offers suggestions for potential courses of action to mitigate the consequences of economic downturns while emphasising some of the historically successful strategies. To successfully go through the uncertainties of the twenty-first century, business executives, governments, and society at large may need to have a thorough understanding of the causes of economic recessions and how to deal with them.

Keywords: Economic Recession, GDP, Minimum Wages, Unemployment Rate, Information and Digital Age.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology has advanced dramatically since the beginning of the digital era, changing how people live and work. Due to the increasing usage of technology that has improved manufacturing and efficiency, businesses can now reach more consumers and compete globally. However, the global economy is still prone to repeated recessions despite these developments. Economic recessions are characterised by a decline in the gross domestic product and employment, two measures of economic activity. Every aspect of the economy is impacted by recessions, including consumers, businesses, and governments (Yunanto et al., 2023). Market meltdowns, financial crises, and international crises are just a few examples of the many various shapes and sizes that recessions can take. In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, we find ourselves in the midst of the digital and information ages. With technological advancements and the proliferation of digital platforms, one would expect that unemployment rates would decrease as new opportunities emerge. However, a closer look reveals a paradoxical situation. Despite living in an era of innovation and endless possibilities, economic recessions continue to pose significant challenges, leading to high unemployment rates. The global financial crisis of 2008, which triggered a severe economic downturn, highlighted the vulnerability of economies worldwide (Yunanto et al., 2023).. Many countries struggled to recover, and the repercussions of the crisis are still felt in various sectors. While the digital and information ages have undoubtedly brought about numerous advancements, they have not shielded societies from the adverse effects of economic recessions.

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This study aims to delve into the intricate relationship between economic recessions, unemployment, and the digital and information ages. It seeks to understand why, despite living in a time of unprecedented connectivity and access to information, unemployment rates persist or even rise during economic recessions (Ahuru, 2022). One possible explanation is the disruption caused by economic recessions. When businesses face financial constraints, they often resort to cost-cutting measures, including layoffs and hiring freezes. This leads to a surge in unemployment, as individuals lose their jobs, and new employment opportunities become scarce. The digital and information ages, while offering new avenues for work, cannot fully compensate for the job losses resulting from economic recessions (Gwyn & Gerry, 2023). Moreover, the digital and information ages have brought about their own unique challenges. Technological advancements have automated many routine tasks, leading to a shift in the job market's demand for skills. Workers who lack the necessary digital literacy and skills find themselves at a disadvantage, struggling to secure employment in an increasingly competitive landscape. Thus, the digital divide exacerbates the impact of economic recessions and contributes to higher unemployment rates.

Furthermore, the study will explore how economic policies, both at the national and international levels, impact unemployment rates during economic downturns. Governments often implement fiscal and monetary measures to stimulate economic growth and mitigate the effects of recessions (Ahuru, 2022). Understanding the effectiveness of these policies in reducing unemployment in the digital and information ages is crucial for policymakers and economists alike (Molina-betancur et al., 2023). In a nut shell, despite living in the digital and information ages, economic recessions continue to inflict severe blows to employment rates. This study aims to shed light on the underlying causes of this phenomenon, examining the role of technological advancements, digital literacy, and economic policies (Burtnett, 2023). By deepening our

understanding of these dynamics, we can develop strategies and interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of economic downturns and create a more resilient and inclusive economy for all.

The failure to address the basic economic problems that lead to instability has been demonstrated by repeated recessions despite the developments in the information and digital era (Gwyn & Gerry, 2023). Because concerns regarding the role of technology in providing solutions for economic issues have been raised, it is now vital to examine the fundamental causes of economic downturns and how they can be remedied through the use of technology. Given the impact of economic recessions on various economic sectors and the rising use of technology, it is imperative to comprehend why economic downturns continue to occur in the digital age and how technology might be used to mitigate their effects (Carreri & Teso, 2006; Gwyn & Gerry, 2023; Molina-betancur et al., 2023). In order to understand the connection between economic recessions and unemployment, this study investigates why economic recessions persist despite technological advancements and suggests remedies for handling them in the information and digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When the economy is having trouble unemployment frequently increases. This is because there will be less economic activity during a recession, and businesses may reduce their workforce or fire workers as a result. People may also reduce their spending during a recession, which could lead to additional job losses, lower output levels, and higher unemployment rates. Research by Casal, Rivera, and Costa-Storti, for instance, in 2023, will examine how the economic crisis affects unemployment despite the fact that little research has been done in this area. This study aims to determine whether the recession has an impact on young people's drug use. "Is there an economic recession during COVID-19 in the United States from the perspective of the employment factor?" The COVID-19 pandemic in the US, which had a considerable impact on numerous organisations and enterprises, was validated by this study. The effect of monetary policy shocks on racial unemployment rates in the US was also studied by Bennani (2023). Ahn (2023) studied the Trend Unemployment Rate as well as the Duration Structure of Unemployment Hazards.

How much unemployment changes can depend on a variety of factors, including the length and severity of the recession, the size of the workforce, and the industries that are most affected. Some sources claim that the US unemployment rate reached its highest point during the Great Recession of 2007–2009, and that various industries were affected in different ways (Tobing 2023). It is important to keep in mind that there might be a complex relationship between economic crises and unemployment that differs depending on a range of economic, technological, and social factors. Some people commit suicide as a result of hardships caused by a variety of economic, environmental, and genetic factors (Duleba, Gonda, Rihmer, & Dome, 2012; Mathieu, Treloar, Hawgood, Ross, & Kolves, 2022).

Once more, job losses during a recession can affect both skilled and unskilled workers and can occur in a range of industries (Burtnett, 2023). A recession's effects on job loss can be particularly severe for persons who work in less stable or cyclical industries, such as manufacturing, construction, and retail. The degree of the job loss might vary greatly depending on the duration and extent of the recession, the velocity of recovery, and the steps taken by the

government and businesses to reduce the impact (Gwyn & Gerry, 2023). According to studies (Byaro et al., 2023; Casal et al., 2023), prolonged job loss can have a negative impact on people's mental and physical health. Additionally, there may be a link between the economic crisis and unemployment rates (Khan, A., & Ximei, W. 2022).

According to Gwyn & Gerry (2023) and Yunanto et al. (2023), the effects of economic recession on unemployment can differ by age group, industry, and location. Despite advancements in digital and information technologies, some industries that rely heavily on physical labour or face-to-face interactions may still suffer from recessions (Ahuru, 2022). For instance, a decline in demand may have an impact on the hotel and retail industries, leading to job losses and an increase in the unemployment rate. At the same time, automation and digitalization may negatively affect specific sectors of the economy and professions, which may lead to job losses and other economic problems. Since the labour market is constantly evolving, it's imperative to consider alternative solutions for facilitating the shift to a digital economy, promoting education and skill development, and encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship (Ogbonna et al., 2022). Additionally, effective job creation and economic growth support must be prioritised by decision-makers, as well as measures to assist individuals who may be more vulnerable to the effects of the economic downturn on employment, such as low-income workers, women, and minorities (Gwyn & Gerry, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Based on World of Statistics Reports (July 2023), this study seeks to show the effects of the worldwide recession on unemployment. These studies concentrate on the nominal GDP in trillions of US dollars of 20 chosen nations, the nominal minimum wages in US dollars, and the related percentage rates of unemployment. This study initially explores a number of studies on the effects of economic recessions on job losses before moving on to examine the influence of ICT on unemployment as a result of economic recessions. The World of Statistics page on Twitter provided a report on the GDPs per capita of the 20 countries that were chosen in 2023 at 4:56 p.m. on July 16, 2023. This study gathered pertinent literature to support the various secondary data that was taken from that report. Second, on July 9, 2023, at 2:26 PM, the World of Statistics produced a report on the rate of global minimum wages of 20 chosen countries. On July 9, 2023, 2:26 PM, the World of Statistics also produced a report on the rate of global youth unemployment in addition to one on the unemployment rates of 20 chosen countries. Finally, the data was evaluated in light of the findings and previous research.

SN	Country	GDP (\$) in Trillion	Minimum Wages (\$)	Rate of Unemployment (%)
1	Canada	2.08	1545	11.5
2	USA	26.85	1550	7.5
3	Germany	4.3	1594	6.1
4	Australia	1.7	2022	7.6

5	France	2.92	1380	16.9
6	Turkey	1.02	457	19.1
7	Nigeria	0.506	65	53.4
8	South Korea	1.72	1333	5.9
9	Netherlands	1.08	1895	8.2
10	Spain	1.49	925	28.4
11	Taiwan	0.79	800	11.5
12	Poland	0.748	584	10.3
13	Belgium	0.624	1509	14.6
14	Ireland	0.594	1753	7.4
15	Hong Kong	0.382	959	5.0
16	South Africa	0.399	226	62.1
17	Vietnam	0.449	162	7.41
18	Thailand	0.574	195	6.5
19	Portugal	0.267	690	18.3
20	Romania	0.348	393	21.7

Table 1. The GDP, Minimum wages, and the rate of unemployment of 20 countries per capita in 2023. Source: World of Statistic (July 2020)

FINDINGS

The global economy was predicted to undergo a transformation with the arrival of the digital and information ages, resulting in higher productivity, the creation of jobs, and overall growth. The difficulties brought about by the economic recession, which has led to chronically high unemployment rates, low minimum wage levels, and sluggish GDP development, have been examined in a number of linked works, nevertheless. This succinct discussion seeks to summarise some of the important works that illuminate these challenges, while also examining the underlying reasons and weighing the effects.

On the other hand, some studies have explored how the digital and information ages have also created new job opportunities. The growth of industries such as e-commerce, software development, data analysis, and digital marketing has resulted in the creation of new employment avenues (Waugh et al., 2020). However, it is important to note that the overall impact of these job creations may vary across different regions and industries. Scholars have also examined the role of government policies and interventions in mitigating the impact of economic recessions on unemployment (Antes, 2023). These studies highlight the importance of targeted initiatives such as skills development programs, retraining schemes, and entrepreneurship support to address unemployment challenges in the digital and information ages.

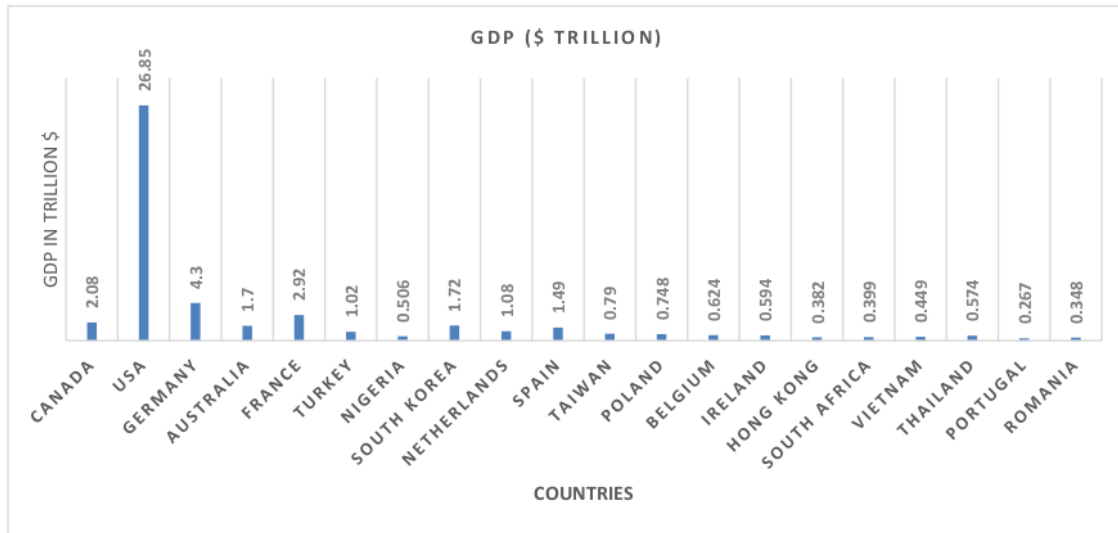


Figure 1. The GDP of the 20 countries in \$ in Trillion, Source: World of Statistics (July 2023)

According to Table 1 and its associated Figure 1, the USA has the greatest GDP among the 20 countries that were chosen, with a value of 26.85, which is incomparable to those with the lowest GDPs, like Portugal and Romania. Additionally, the \$1500 average pay is equivalent to \$1550 and 7.5%. This demonstrates that greater wages are not a given in nations with the largest GDPs. The USA has the largest GDP, as indicated in Table 1 and Figure 2, but it is unable to compete with Australia in terms of salaries due to Australia's higher minimum salary of \$2022 and lower unemployment rate of 7.6% of the total population. In a similar vein, a nation's ability to effectively manage its GDP and minimum wages will determine how high its unemployment rate is. Considering that low minimum salaries are always a sign of a lack of competitiveness in the technology and other resources.



Figure 2. The minimum wages in 20 selected countries, Source: World of Statistics (July 2023)

The development of information and digital technology has had a significant impact on both the job market and the world economy. In particular, technology has prompted disruptions and transformations in numerous established industries while also opening up new prospects for innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation (Postua et al., 2021). Several studies have examined the relationship between economic recessions and unemployment rates such as the studies by (Byaro et al., 2023 & Casal et al., 2023). These studies highlight how recessions can lead to job losses across various sectors, including those within the digital and information industries. The decline in economic activity often results in reduced demand for goods and services, leading to layoffs and higher unemployment rates (Byaro et al., 2023). While the digital and information ages have brought about significant technological advancements, they have also caused shifts in the labor market. Automation and digitization have led to the displacement of certain job roles, creating a mismatch between the skills available in the workforce and the demands of the evolving job market (Ogbonna et al., 2022). This mismatch can contribute to unemployment, particularly during economic downturns.

Economic recessions can disproportionately affect certain regions, exacerbating regional disparities in employment. The digital and information ages have seen the concentration of economic opportunities in certain urban areas, leading to uneven distribution of jobs (Gwyn & Gerry, 2023). Regions heavily dependent on industries vulnerable to recessions, such as manufacturing or traditional retail, may experience higher unemployment rates despite the presence of digital and information sectors (Papapetrou & Tsalaporta, 2021). The digital age has also facilitated the rise of entrepreneurship and startups. During economic recessions, individuals may turn to entrepreneurship as a response to limited job opportunities. While startups can contribute to job creation, they also face higher risks during economic downturns, as funding and consumer demand may decrease. Understanding the dynamics of startup ecosystems and their resilience in the face of recession can provide insights into employment trends in the digital and information ages (Ahuru, 2022). The digital and information ages have brought about significant advancements, but not all individuals have equal access to digital technologies and opportunities. The digital divide, characterized by disparities in internet access, digital skills, and technology adoption, can exacerbate inequalities in employment. Those who lack digital literacy or access to online job platforms may face greater challenges in finding employment during economic recessions.

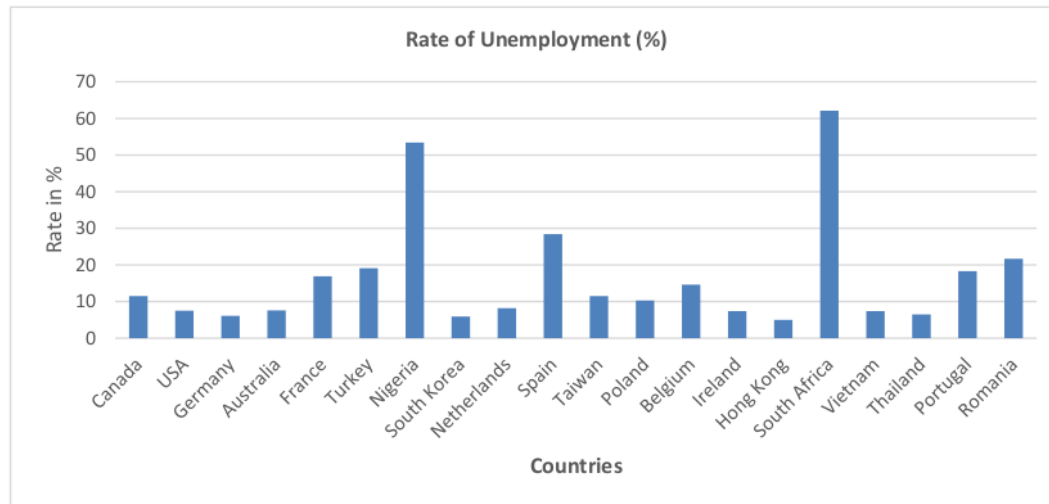


Figure 3. The rate of unemployment in 20 selected countries, Source: World of Statistics (July 2023)

The two African nations of Nigeria and South Africa, with respective unemployed rates of 53.4% and 62.1% of their entire populations, have the greatest rates of unemployment, according to data in Table 1 and Figure 3. And the low GDP and low minimum wage amounts—\$506 billion and \$65; \$399 billion and \$226 as seen above have something to do with this. Digitalization's effects on the labour market can be intricate and multidimensional. On the one hand, digitalization has the potential to generate new jobs in industries like internet marketing, data analytics, and software development (Ahuru, 2022). During periods of digital disruption, there may be a greater need for specific education and training because these industries require new skills and knowledge. The lowest unemployment rates are found in South Korea and Hong Kong, which highlights the two countries' strong economic importance. This shows that these two countries properly manage the economic and technological growth in their respective areas, which results in low unemployed rates.

The digital and information ages have brought about rapid technological advancements, leading to a growing demand for workers with specialized skills. However, there is often a mismatch between the skills possessed by job seekers and the skills required by employers in the digital economy (Gwyn & Gerry, 2023). This skills gap can contribute to higher unemployment rates, especially during economic recessions when employers may be more selective in their hiring. The digital age has also given rise to the gig economy, characterized by short-term contracts and freelance work facilitated by digital platforms (Topal, 2018). While this flexible work arrangement has provided opportunities for income generation, it can also lead to increased job insecurity and lower job stability during economic downturns. Workers in the gig economy may be more vulnerable to unemployment as they often lack the same protections and benefits as traditional employees.

Discussion of Findings

Despite the fact that it is quite rare to hear that digitalization leads to job displacement and unemployment, particularly in businesses that are substantially automated (Antes, 2023; Gwyn & Gerry, 2023), For instance, automation and robotics have significantly reduced the number of jobs in the industrial sector. The growth of e-commerce and online purchasing has also harmed traditional retail businesses, resulting in the closure of numerous brick-and-mortar stores and the elimination of retail jobs (Ahuru, 2022; Oye & Sciences, 2011). The growth of the gig economy, which has given independent contractors and freelancers new chances to find work through online marketplaces like Uber, Fiverr, and Upwork, is another component of the digitization of the economy (Waugh et al., 2020). However, the world of gig economy has also come under fire for lacking job security, benefits, and labour protections, raising questions about the standard of employment and long-term financial security for those employed in this field.

The winner-take-all dynamics that have emerged in the digital economy, where a small percentage of people and businesses amass enormous riches while the majority struggles with low-paying jobs and limited economic options, are examined by Gwyn and Gerry (2023). Similar to this, the Ahuru (2022) work explores the wider effects of technology development and automation on employment. Although technology has advanced quickly and there is more connectedness than ever before, the author contends that these innovations have also led to a reduction in the need for human employment. According to Papapetrou and Tsalaporta (2021), the low national GDP was caused by a decline in average earnings across industries. If a pay decline happens at the mean, this indicates that wage evolution in different economic sectors during the crisis differed. According to earlier research, workers at the top of the conditional wage distribution do not capture a disproportionate share of the salaries that have remained in the Greek economy throughout the same time period. According to Hean and Deng (2023), minimum wages had a serious detrimental effect on employment prior to the recession. The effects of minimum wages on unemployment during the recession were minimal.

This study also demonstrates that there are some promising and workable solutions to the problem of unemployment in a downturn in the economy: Policymakers can invest in education and training programmes to assist people develop the skills required for jobs of the future, particularly those that are in high demand in the digital economy, by investing in innovation and training (Mungodla et al. 2019). Long-term, this can lower unemployment and boost economic growth. Plans for employment retention: During economic downturns, governments might put in place plans for job retention that give firms subsidies to keep employees employed rather than fire them. In the medium term, up until the economy recovers, this can aid in maintaining employment levels (Gwyn & Gerry, 2023). Extension of emergency unemployment benefits: To assist unemployed people during periods of economic recession, governments may want to explore extending and expanding emergency unemployment benefits. In a nutshell, there is not an instant solution for the sophisticated and varied issue of unemployment during a downturn in the economy (Topal, 2018). In order to mitigate the effects of the recession on employment and encourage long-term economic growth, these and other viable methods might be combined.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how different countries' GDP growth is impacted by economic recessions. The authors emphasise the connections among the 20 countries' GDP, minimum wages, and unemployment rates. The study also sheds light on how economic recession, slow GDP growth, and fast GDP growth in various nations relate to one another. The global economic recession had a huge influence and resulted in a rise in unemployment because there were less work prospects. The labour market had a difficult time adjusting to remote working and the technical improvements of this era even though we were living in the digital information age. To lower unemployment rates, a mentality change and rapid acceptance of technology are now required. This study demonstrates that, despite the fact that economic digitalization has unquestionably increased opportunities for employment, it has also resulted in major displacements of employment and disruptions in a number of conventional industries. This emphasises the necessity of effective policies to promote employment, education, and training in the digital era and to make sure that the advantages of digitization are distributed more widely across various industries and individuals with all levels of competence.

The global economic recession had a huge influence and resulted in a rise in unemployment because there were less work prospects. The labour market had a difficult time adjusting to remote working and the technical improvements of this era even though we were living in the digital information age. In order to decrease unemployment rates, a mentality change and rapid acceptance of technology are now required. The study also looks at how the economic downturn has affected unemployment in various nations and areas. The authors examine variables such governmental policies, labour market dynamics, and social welfare systems as they compare unemployment rates during recessions across various economies. The goal of the research is to find trends and elements that can aid in reducing the detrimental effects of economic recessions on unemployment. Despite living in the digital and information age, economic recessions can still lead to high unemployment rates. The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in various sectors, particularly SMEs and entrepreneurs. Moreover, the spread of misinformation and the challenges posed by algorithms in terms of transparency and oversight are ongoing issues that need to be addressed. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic recession have had a significant impact on various aspects of society, including unemployment rates. Measures taken to contain the virus, such as lockdowns and restrictions, have particularly affected small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs, leading to higher unemployment levels and an increase in the number of people seeking financial aid. Additionally, the pandemic has also had negative effects on mental health, especially among children and adolescents. The impact of digital platforms on choice and quality for news consumers has been a subject of analysis and discussion. Governments have taken steps to combat fake news and disinformation, including the establishment of agencies to monitor online news and the introduction of legislation to penalize the dissemination of fake news. The manipulation of information can have significant consequences, influencing public perceptions and affecting election campaigns.

Recommendations

According to this report, the government ought to invest funds on technology and train unemployed people in new skills to increase their chances of securing distant employment. Companies should use remote work rules to lower operating costs and boost productivity. For businesses that embrace a remote working model, the government should offer tax benefits in order to foster an atmosphere that supports entrepreneurship and self-employment. People should be creative and look for opportunities for self-employment that fit with the contemporary digital era. This study makes the case for more research that other nations, particularly those in Africa, should be included in order to compare their levels of technological penetration in various economic sectors.

- Governments and policymakers should provide targeted support and financial assistance to SMEs and entrepreneurs to help them recover from the economic impact of the recession. This could include measures such as grants, tax incentives, and access to affordable loans.
- Given the negative impact of the pandemic on mental health, it is crucial to prioritize and invest in mental health services, especially for children and adolescents. This can include increasing access to mental health professionals, promoting mental health awareness, and implementing innovative policies and programs.
- Governments should continue to evaluate and regulate digital platforms to ensure transparency, choice, and quality of information for news consumers. Efforts to combat fake news and disinformation should be strengthened, and agencies responsible for monitoring online news should have the necessary resources and authority.
- Educating the public, especially young people, about critical thinking skills and digital literacy is essential in navigating the digital age. This can help individuals better discern and evaluate the information they encounter online, reducing the impact of misinformation.
- Policymakers should coordinate efforts and share best practices across countries to mitigate the impact of economic recessions. This can include sharing information on successful strategies for job creation, economic recovery, and support for affected industries.

Overall, addressing the impact of economic recessions on unemployment in the digital and information age requires a multi-faceted approach that combines financial support, mental health services, regulation of digital platforms, promotion of critical thinking, and international collaboration.

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