

Taxed Foreign Policy of Ethiopia

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Abstract

Ethiopia's bid to pursue an 'independent' foreign policy that serves its national interest has faced contemporary challenges enmeshed in the regional geopolitical milieu and the changing global order. Alongside the actual challenges related to domestic politico-economic arrangements, the external conundrums continue to strain the state's capability. This study, therefore, attempts to analyze the external context hindering the state from realizing the lofty ideals the state seeks to preserve and the benefit generated from its interaction with the outside world. To this end, the study establishes facts, analyzes them and seeks to anticipate the possible outcomes if the possible conundrums continue to inflict damage on the modus operandi of the foreign policy of the Ethiopian state. Accordingly, the paper argues that the interplay of domestic, regional and global dynamics continue to tax Ethiopia's foreign policy and hindering it from accruing economic and security benefits from making interactions with the outside world over the past couple of years.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Foreign Policy, Geopolitical Milieu, Global Order

Introduction

Ethiopia's foreign policy course seeking to maintain political independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and assume rightful regional position has often faced with different challenges throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For the last sixty years, at least, the domestic security conundrums in tandem with the regional security dynamics characterized by internal conflicts, inter-state conflicts and external interventions have continued to cause stress to the country's foreign policy.² Furthermore, the changing global power dynamics has exerted influence on

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² Lyons, T. (1990). Internal Vulnerability and Inter-State Conflict: Ethiopia's Regional Foreign Policy. In M. Ottaway (Ed.), *The Political Economy of Ethiopia* (pp. 157-173). New York and London: Praeger.

Negussay Ayele (1990). Some Aspects of the Significances of the Blue Nile and the Red Sea to Ethiopia. Symposium on Problems of Politics and Development in Ethiopia (pp.81-96), held between December 29-30, 1990.

_____ (1977). *The Foreign Policy of Ethiopia*. In O. Aluko (Ed.), *The Foreign Policies of African States* (pp.46-71). London and Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton.

the state's drive to secure its interest. To do away with the burdened state's external relations, the successive governments developed a range of strategies.³ Ethiopia under the Imperial and the Military governments, for instance, tried to play a regional role where "international legitimacy was an indispensable component of Ethiopia's regional supremacy"⁴ amid unfolding security uncertainties. Nevertheless, some of the problems enmeshed with the domestic-cum-regional contexts persist. At worst, the lingering civil war in the northern part of the country during '70s and '80s costs the country, thereby making a diminished state territorially compared to the periods prior to 1991 and deprived its hitherto sea outlets.⁵ Indeed, with a varying degree, the changing global order in the wake of the collapse of the former Soviet Union also contributed to the vulnerability of the state by taxing the military regime's capability to continue fighting the insurgencies due to the dwindling of military supply. This in turn constrained the state's capability to maintain the territorial integrity legitimized by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN) and subsequently led to the collapse of the regime and the de facto independence of Eritrea.⁶

With the overthrow of the Derg regime in May 1991, the newly installed government led by the then ruling party-the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)- re-casted the state society relationship along ethno-linguistic lines⁷ run counter to the political order of pre-1991 and reoriented the foreign policy accordingly. After consolidating the power internally in tandem with internal physical and economic development, the government began to aggressively look to the region to assert its influence through peacekeeping diplomacy, projecting domestic values

Yaacob Arsano (1990). Arab Alliance in the Red Sea Region and Ethiopia's Response. Symposium on Problems of Politics and Development in Ethiopia (pp. 168-194) held between December 29-30, 1990.

³ Berouk M. "Ethiopia's Role and Foreign Policy in the Horn of Africa". *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 6(1/2):87-113. 2012.

⁴ Iyob, R. "Regional Hegemony: Domination and Resistance in the Horn of Africa". *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31(2). 1993.257-276.

⁵ Keller, EJ. "The politics of state survival: Continuity and change in Ethiopian foreign policy". *The American Academy of Political and Social Science* .489(1): 76-87.1987.

⁶ Anderson-Jaquest, TC. "Restructuring the Soviet-Ethiopian Relationship: A Case Study in Asymmetric Exchange". A Thesis Submitted to the University of London in Conformity with the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2002.

⁷ Kassahun B. "Ethiopia: The Quest for Transformation under EPRDF". In Bereketab, R(ed), 203-217. *National Liberation Movements As Government in Africa*. London and New York: Routledge, 2018.

and revitalizing regional and continental institutions in particular.⁸ From 1991 onwards, the EPRDF began to engage with the West. Notwithstanding the experience of a period of relative peace, the foreign policy of the state during this time was not far from “riddl[ing] with ambiguities and contradictions”.⁹ Put more directly, the state’s regional foreign policy was entrenched in the state failure in Somalia and diplomatic tit for tat engagement with Eritrea subsequent to 1998 years until the diplomatic rapprochement in 2018.

Over the past couple of years, the internal conflict in the northern part of the country has brought security challenge to the tranquility of the domestic political order. The repercussion of the crisis was not limited to the domestic context. Rather, the crisis has brought difficulties to the management of the external relations of the country.¹⁰ Accordingly, the government had to deal with the pressure coming from the international community. The conflict also in part resulted in the turbulent period in the country’s foreign policy since the time of outbreak of conflict in November 2020 vis-à-vis the West. The foreign policy of Post-2018 periods had to grapple with securing the developmental needs of the country by harvesting the Nile Water by constructing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in the face of mounting pressure from the downstream countries. Additionally, Ethiopia had to manage the resumed diplomatic relationship with Eritrea, pressure on its peacekeeping diplomacy as well as Khartoum’s incursion into Ethiopia’s western part. Aside from the domestic-cum-regional challenges confronting contemporary Ethiopia’s foreign policy, the *changing* global order is also causing stress to the country’s foreign policy. Some of these challenges would continue to pose difficulties to the navigation of the country’s foreign policy in a murky environment in the foreseeable future.

This paper is focused on issues and challenges that continue to burden the country’s foreign policy in post 2018 Ethiopia. In fact, some of the challenges existed prior to 2018. Nevertheless, the current government has inherited some of the challenges from its predecessors. The paper is organized in the following way: firstly, the domestic challenges that have ramifications for the country’s foreign policy is discussed; secondly, the regional security challenges such as security externalities from neighboring states, diplomatic pressure originating from the downstream states of the

⁸Gouriellec, SL. “Regional power and contested hierarchy: Ethiopia, an “imperfect hegemon” in the Horn of Africa”. *International Affairs* 94(5),2018. 1059–1075.

⁹ Verjee, A. “The Crisis of Ethiopian Foreign Relations: From ‘Imperfect Hegemon’ to Occupied State”. *ACCORD* 2. 2022.

¹⁰ Verjee, A. “The Crisis of Ethiopian Foreign Relations: From ‘Imperfect Hegemon’ to Occupied State”. *ACCORD* 2. 2022.

Nile Basin, the difficulty of eschewing awkward diplomatic relation rooted in border and geopolitical challenges of security regionalism are examined within the framework of regional geopolitical challenges; thirdly, the changing global dynamics and the difficulties associated thereof is analyzed. The paper argues that the interplay of domestic, regional and global dynamics continue to strain Ethiopia's foreign policy and hindering it from accruing economic and security benefits from making interactions with the outside world.

Domestic Challenges

The *modus operandi* of Ethiopia's foreign policy course is not only determined by the regional and global contexts. The domestic factor remains a dominant variable not just to explain the internal politico-security situation, but also to discern the identity, interest and preference of the state in the regional geopolitical space. These conditions in turn determine the role the state seeks to play and the actual challenges confronting the foreign policy move accordingly. Otherwise, it is unlikely to clearly draw a vivid picture of the foreign policy burden of the Ethiopian state without paying attention to the domestic challenges.¹¹

For nearly half a century, the domestic conundrum of the Ethiopian state is in part predicated on the way the political elites perceive the formation of the state and the subsequent nation-building projects throughout the modern history of the country.¹² The divergent historical narratives vis-à-vis the state-cum-nation building project dominating the political landscape of the country have remained the bone of contention between elites from different political spectrums.¹³ The differences among the political elites are indeed a natural phenomenon in political life of any community. The problem however lies in overcoming the differences is not settled through peaceful means rather violent way that has remained the peculiar feature of Ethiopian body politic. The polarized political milieu is still making a stable political order with significant consent difficult.¹⁴ The existing internal contradictions often make the state vulnerable to external pressure thereby orienting the state's foreign policy towards addressing domestic challenges. For instance, it is important to mention to

¹¹ Keller, EJ. "The politics of state survival: Continuity and change in Ethiopian foreign policy". The American Academy of Political and Social Science .489(1): 76-87.1987.

Mesfin W. The Horn of Africa: conflict and poverty. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1999.

¹² Merera, G. "The State, Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and Democratization in Ethiopia". African Journal of Political Science 9(1),2004: 27-50.

¹³ Merera, G. "The Elite and the Quest for Peace, Democracy, and Development in Ethiopia: Lessons to be Learnt". Northeast African Studies 10(2).2003.:141-164.

¹⁴ Tegbaru Y. "Getting to grips with Ethiopia's ethnic and political violence is vital for stability". ISS Today, 17 January 2022.

what extent Ethiopia's foreign policy vis-à-vis Somalia over the past six decades is in part determined by domestic political consideration that is the keen interest to keep a unified polity in the face of *irredentism* spearheaded by Pan-Somali nationalism political force.¹⁵ In this instance, the nature of state formation has compelled the Ethiopian state to remain a status quo state in the face of attempt to overturn the existing arrangement.¹⁶ This is in fact continued to be determined at the current moment with a varying degree of intensity. Hence, no one could afford to overlook the domestic factor to analyze the conundrum facing contemporary Ethiopia's foreign policy.

To touch upon the burdening aspects of the foreign policy of the country, this part of the paper has paid particular attention to conflict formation in the northern part of Ethiopia because of the outbreak of conflict between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front since November 2022 and how this crisis has taxed Ethiopia's external relation with the outside world. The costs are manifested in different instances among which economic, security and the image of the state are noticeable. The state level is a dominant variable in analyzing Ethiopia's foreign policy and the burden it is facing.

From the beginning of the conflict between the Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front in November 2020, America, the European Union (EU) as well as the African Union (AU) had expressed their desire to the settlement of the dispute. The EU and America applied sanctions to pressure the Federal government.¹⁷ The security situation was exacerbated overtime and brought the humanitarian condition to the close attention of external actors. The intensification of conflict in the northern part of Ethiopia further deteriorated the diplomatic relationship between Addis Ababa and the West as a result. Its deterioration was manifested in the economic interaction between the state and the West in general and the United States

¹⁵ Negussay Ayele. "Somalia's Relations with Her Neighbours: From "Greater Somalia" to "Western Somalia" to "Somalia Refugees" to -----". In S. Rubenson (Ed.), Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (pp. 657-66), held in University of Lund, 26-29 April 1982, 1984. Addis Ababa and Uppsala: Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Institute of African Studies.

Negussay Ayele. "Somalia's Relations with her Neighbors". In S. Rubenson (Ed.), Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (pp. 66-90), held in University of Lund, 26-29 April 1982. Addis Ababa and Uppsala: Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Institute of African Studies, 1982.

¹⁶ Negussay Ayele. "The Foreign Policy of Ethiopia". In O. Aluko (Ed.), The Foreign Policies of African States (pp.46-71). London and Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977.

¹⁷ Adem K. "A Blueprint for Peace in Ethiopia". Foreign Policy, 12 November 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/12/ethiopia-peace-blueprint-tigray-conflict-resolution/>, Accessed on 12 June 2023.

in particular. Ethiopia was among the thirty eight African states that had benefited from the preferential trade agreement that is known as Africa Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA). AGOA has been in place since 2000 under Bill Clinton's administration. Notwithstanding the domestic constraints, Ethiopia had got an opportunity to access US duty free market. The apparel sector was benefited from the duty-free market. In 2020 alone, according to the Africa Report¹⁸, Ethiopia was "one of the fifth beneficiaries of the AGOA program". During the same period, the manufacturing sectors in Ethiopia generated \$237 million from exporting to the US duty-free market. Its preferential access to the US market however faced with stark realities of difficulties of sustaining the benefit amidst the intensification of the conflict. Amidst the increasing crisis, the Washington administration employed the removal of trade privilege given to Ethiopia as a means to influence the domestic circumstance. In this regard, Ethiopia's termination from AGOA Trade Preference Program is selected as one of the cases of economic disincentive used by the United States. On 1 January 2022, the Washington administration declared that Ethiopia together with other two African states namely Mali and Guinea removed from the privileged accorded by the AGOA trade preference program on the ground that these states stand "in violation of the AGOA Statute".¹⁹

Removal from the trade privilege scheme costs Ethiopia and has affected the textile manufacturing sector employed youths. The recent report estimated that "the suspension could take away 1 million jobs, disproportionately hurting young women who make up most garment workers".²⁰ Even after the signing of the Pretoria Agreement two years after the outbreak of the conflict, the country is not yet reinstated. America's action in the aftermath of 1 January 2022 marked the economic disincentive it used to pressure on Ethiopia's economic diplomacy and hence to exert political influence. No one is sure regarding the effectiveness of Washington's action to exert pressure on Addis Ababa to comply with the stated demands. Nevertheless,

¹⁸ The Africa Report. "Ethiopia Asks US to Reinstates AGOA Trade Benefits as Blinken Heads to Addis, Niger". 10 March 2023. <https://www.theafricareport.com/291256/ethiopia-asks-us-to-reinstate-agoa-trade-benefits/>, Accessed on 7 April 2023.

¹⁹ Office of the United States Trade Representative. "U.S. Terminates AGOA Trade Preference Program for Ethiopia, Mali and Guinea". 01 January 2022. <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2022/january/us-terminates-agoa-trade-preference-program-ethiopia-mali-and-guinea#:~:text=U.S.%20Terminates%20AGOA%20Trade%20Preference%20Program%20for%20Ethiopia%2C%20Mali%20and%20Guinea,-January%2001%2C%202022&text=WASHINGTON%20%E2%80%93%20The%20United%20States%20today,violation%20of%20the%20AGOA%20Statute>, Accessed on 30 April 2023.

²⁰ Fortune. "Ethiopia's AGOA-Exit: Looking beyond the Headlines". .06 May 2023. <https://addisfortune.news/ethiopias-agoa-exit-looking-beyond-the-headlines/>, Accessed on 1 May 2023.

the policy move that remained for fifteen months costs Ethiopia's ability to benefit from the economic interaction it had built since 2000 until it was delisted in the beginning of 2022. Although it is too early to comprehensively assess the unintended and intended consequences of the removal of the privileged enjoyed by the sectors from the hitherto duty-free market, thousands of jobs are lost and the light manufacturing sector is continued to severely affect. In response to the economic pressure originating in part from depriving the duty-free market, Ethiopia reiterated the need to reinstate the AGOA trade benefit by rationalizing "the Pretoria peace deal made between the Federal Government and the TPLF on 2 November 2022, the African Union's monitoring and verification, the start of unfettered humanitarian access to the war-ravaged area, social service as well as the beginning of the transitional justice."²¹

The internal precarious situation not only jeopardized the state's international economic interactions with the outside world, particularly the American market. The diplomatic pressure mounted following the outbreak of conflict in the northern part of the country has also cost the state's capability to translate its ambition of developing naval power through making a security arrangement with France. In the wake of 2018, the Ethiopian government envisaged to build a navy after the country lost its navy in the immediate aftermath of the separation of Eritrea. To realize its project, Addis Ababa entered into a military cooperation deal with Paris in March 2019. This deal however failed to translate into practice when France suspended its military agreement with Ethiopia in July 2021 in response to the intensification of the conflict.²² Paris policy measure vis-à-vis the handling of the domestic conflict in Ethiopia affected the security benefit the country could generate.

In addition to the economic and security costs Ethiopia incurred as a result of political development in the wake of November 2020, the violent confrontation in the northern part of Ethiopia has tarnished the image of the state which was often portrayed as "as a regional peacekeeper and developmental leader", an "anchor state" in the Horn of Africa".²³ Over the past couple of years, conflict in the northern part of Ethiopia has caused disastrous consequences for the human lives, social and physical infrastructures. The war also compelled the state to remain in a precarious security

²¹ The Africa Report. "Ethiopia Asks US to Reinstate AGOA Trade Benefits as Blinken Heads to Addis, Niger". 10 March 2023 <https://www.theafricareport.com/291256/ethiopia-asks-us-to-reinstate-agoa-trade-benefits/>, Accessed on 7 April 2023.

²² Daily Sabah. "France Suspends Military Cooperation Deal with Ethiopia". Daily Sabah, 13 August 2022 <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/africa/france-suspends-military-cooperation-deal-with-ethiopia>

²³ Verhoeven, Harry and Michael Woldemariam. 2022. Who lost Ethiopia? The Unmaking of an African Anchor State and U.S. Foreign Policy. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 43(4): 622-650.

situation and will take the state nearly two years to return to normalcy when both parties to the conflict, the Federal Government and the TPLF, signed a cessation of hostility in Pretoria, South Africa. The consequence related to the deadly conflict has not only limited to the domestic context, but also damage the reputation of the state hitherto regarded as an anchor state amidst political upheaval in the region. Contrary to the dominant narration, the unfolding crisis in the northern parts of Ethiopia prompting the international community to associate Ethiopia, as report by the New York Times stated, “a state at war with itself”²⁴ and an entity struggled for its existence. This has an inevitable consequence for the image of the state. The dreadful pictures associated with the domestic crisis and the challenge facing the state’s monopoly of the use of violence in its jurisdiction jeopardized the state’s ability to project power. In short, a two-year conflict taxed the potential of the state to pay a closer attention to the regional geopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, the way the conflict managed had also taxed the foreign policy of the country by depriving “the trust of other countries in the region” as Verjee²⁵ noted. This in turn has implications for Ethiopia’s regional security policy which is the subsequent subject of discussion.

Regional Geopolitical Milieu

Over the past seven decades, Ethiopia’s presence in the Horn of Africa has brought opportunities and challenges to its national security and foreign policy. The challenges outweigh the opportunities through the passages of time.²⁶ The regional geopolitical dynamics indeed cost the state economically, politically, and diplomatically. At worst, it poses risks to the very survival of the state. Since the regional system is subservient to the Middle East power rivalry and the extra-regional actors’ intervention, Ethiopia is often found itself in a precarious security environment.²⁷ The state’s susceptibility to external shock and the subsequent pressure on its foreign policy has continued unabated.

Currently, Ethiopia’s foreign policy has continued to suffer from security challenges originated from the regional geopolitical dynamics during the transition period. In fact, the country has also confronted opportunities. Nevertheless, the focus of this

²⁴ The New York Times. “Ending a Civil War”. 11 December 2022.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/11/briefing/ethiopia-war-tigray.html>

²⁵ Verjee, A.. The Crisis of Ethiopian Foreign Relations: From ‘Imperfect Hegemon’ to Occupied State.

²⁶ Berouk M. “Ethiopia’s Role and Foreign Policy in the Horn of Africa”. *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 6(1/2):87-113. 2012.

Mesfin W. *The Horn of Africa: conflict and poverty*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1999.

²⁷ Mesfin W. *The Horn of Africa: conflict and poverty*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1999.

section is aimed to pay a closer attention to unsettled boundary, transboundary water resource, the involvement of extra-regional actor, fragility of statehood as well as the return of Eritrea into the regional system and their implications for the country's regional position.

Troubled Factors: Unsettled Boundary and Trans boundary Water Resource

One of the contemporary foreign policy challenges of Ethiopia is related to the troubled diplomatic relationship developed with Sudan in the aftermath of the latter's incursion into the western part of the country when the former was mired in conflict. Indeed, diplomatic relation between Khartoum and Addis Ababa often tended to remain low, especially when the latter political situation gets worse. Khartoum has tended to pursue a foreign policy of overt or covert intervention when Addis Ababa is in precarious security situation irrespective to the regime type. For instance, Khartoum had the tradition of openly supporting insurgents fighting the Derg regime. During the early periods of '90s, the Ethiopian government accused Khartoum for the latter role in backing Islamist groups.²⁸ Lack of reciprocal treatment has been the dominant feature of the diplomatic relation between Khartoum and Addis Ababa, thereby has significantly impacted on their state to state interactions for decades.²⁹ This is in fact to put pressure on Ethiopia to comply with Sudan demands. During '80s, Sudan opted for a policy of backing insurgents battling the military government, specially the Ethiopian state was a tense security risk.³⁰ These situations have taxed Ethiopia's foreign policy. Above all, Khartoum's policy of weakening the Dergue government compromised the very survival of the state *per se* by midwifing the separation of Eritrea as an independent state in early 1990s.

Recognizing the domestic vulnerability of the Ethiopian state in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of conflict in the northern part of Ethiopia between the TPLF and the Federal Government, Sudan's took step of a military incursion into the western part of Ethiopia on the mid-December 2020 reminiscent of Khartoum's foreign policy tradition vis-à-vis Addis Ababa during the latter's difficult situation. Sudan militarily invaded the western part of Ethiopia what is known al-Fashaga/Mazega in the subsequent days of the outbreak of war in the northern part of

²⁸ Woodward, P. *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations*. I.B. Tauris: 2002.

²⁹ Belete B. "Ethiopia's Troubled Relation with the Sudan, 1956-1983". *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 10(1&2).2016.67-88.

Woodward, P. *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations*. I.B. Tauris: 2002.

³⁰ Belete B. "Ethiopia's Troubled Relation with the Sudan, 1956-1983". *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 10(1&2).2016.67-88.

Ethiopia. Indeed, the border clash between the two states was not a recent phenomenon. Rather, the problem is still a bone of contention between the two states. Nevertheless, the two sides previously developed “a relatively amicable land-use arrangement that had governed the area for more than a decade”³¹ until they reach amicable solutions that satisfy both parties. This short-lived mechanism was unheeded by the Khartoum government under the Transitional Military Council. Contrary to the spirit of addressing contested borders through pertinent conventions sanctioned by the African Union (OAU), Khartoum has seized the internal crisis as an opportunity to conquer the territory. The repercussion following this incursion is not only limited to posing challenge to the internal capability of the Ethiopian state to thwart external encroachment on its sovereignty. Tension surrounding the land will continue to affect Ethiopia’s future relations with its the Sudan in so far as both sides are failed to reach amicable solutions.

The troubled diplomatic relationship between the two states further strained in the subsequent months when Khartoum officially called upon the United Nations to secure the withdrawal of Ethiopian peacekeepers deployed in Abyei.³² Khartoum’s a two pronged strategy towards Addis Ababa in the form of military incursion and subsequent diplomatic influence on Ethiopia’s peacekeeping diplomacy has further strained the relationship between the two states. In response to the call, Ethiopia began to withdraw its troops from the area. This was indeed a challenge to the geopolitical presence of the country in the region in general and Ethiopia’s peacekeeping tradition in particular.

Apart from the boundary dispute and the attendant consequences, the GERD has dominated the pattern of diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and Sudan. Contrary to the time of al-Bashir, Sudan under the Military Council seemed to distance itself from the limited support given to Ethiopia’s position on the GERD. During the time of President Omar al-Bashir, Sudan did not want to openly side with Egypt’s intransigent position vis-à-vis the utilization of the Nile River. It was rather conceded to Ethiopia’s drive to harvest the water for its development endeavor. In this regard, it did not critically oppose to the commencement of the construction of the GERD in 2011 as Egypt out rightly rejected the project as inimical to its national interest.³³ Egypt’s opposition to the kick off the dam project on the Blue Nile

³¹International Crisis Group (ICG).” Containing the Volatile Sudan-Ethiopia Border Dispute”. 2021.1.

³² Attia, H. and Saleh M. “The Political Deadlock on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam”. German Institute of Global and Area Studies 4.2021.

³³ Mbaku, J. “The Controversy over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam”. The Brookings Institute, 5 August 2020 August 2020 .<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/08/05/the-controversy-over-the-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam/>, Accessed on 10 April 2023..

allegedly grounded on it would divert the natural flow of the water thereby causing water falls. During the initial periods of the commencement of the hydro-electric project until the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir government, Sudan did not out rightly share the concern of Egypt on the ground that “the GERD could alleviate the threat of annual floods and improve drought control to sustain year-round agriculture and attract foreign investments from the Middle East and Arab Gulf states”.³⁴ Rather, the construction of the dam was believed to reduce the flood frequently visiting the people living across the stream. Hence, it was considered as an advantage. The divided position of the downstream countries vis-à-vis Ethiopia’s harvest of the transboundary water to its development needs partly relieved the country for a while from the possible joint diplomatic pressure.

Over the past couple of years, Sudan seemed to relinquish its previous soften approach to the river and repositioned itself to stand with Egypt against Ethiopia’s subsequent attempt of finalizing the dam. Over the course of the time, disagreements over the “planning and execution”³⁵ of the dam has intensified and served as a bone of contention between Addis Ababa and the downstream countries, particularly Cairo. Ethiopia has responded to the concern of downstream states in different forms. In response to the concerns harbored by political elites of Sudan, Egypt and the concomitant diplomatic pressure on Ethiopia and its foreign policy, the Ethiopian government has reiterated that the filling of the reservoir and the duration it takes will not cause harm to the demands of the downstream countries and security in relation to food, agricultural production and water supply. Furthermore, Ethiopia argues “the hydroelectric project will significantly improve livelihoods in the region more broadly.”³⁶

Notwithstanding Ethiopia’s participation in a trilateral meeting and negotiation undertaken under the aegis of the African Union with the aim of reaching a compromised solution, Egypt in particular has not shied away from causing stress for Ethiopia’s foreign policy in different ways. Since the return of normalcy to the political order that had been shaken in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring, Cairo has got the opportunity not to be constrained by domestic situation and to look beyond. As a result, Egypt under Sisi has proactively engaged in causing stress to

³⁴ Darwisheh, H. “The Role of Sudan in Egypt’s Waning Hegemonic Position in the Nile Basin”. IDE Research, 2023.

³⁵ Engelke, P. and Passell, H.. Water Security in an Arid Region. In From the Gulf to the Nile. 11-14, 2017.

³⁶ Mbaku, J. “The Controversy over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam”. 5 August 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/08/05/the-controversy-over-the-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam/>, Accessed on 10 April 2023.

Addis Ababa's foreign policy by making a closer diplomatic and military relationship with Ethiopia's neighboring states: Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti. Cairo signed military and security partnership with different Horn of African states since 2014. The Arab League has also served as a foreign policy vehicle of Egypt in the basin. Egypt has made use of the organization to Arabize the River by elevating the uninterrupted flow of the river with the security of the Arab world. Resistance to Ethiopia's continual activities to construct the dam and to fill the reservoir is not only come from the downstream states and the Arab League. The United States was also taking a punitive measure of suspending financial support designed to deliver to Addis Ababa for the "lack of progress in talks with Egypt and Sudan"³⁷. It is within this context that the burdened of the foreign policy of the state should be viewed.

Dealing with Eritrea's return to regional system

Ethiopia's contemporary foreign policy challenges and the ability to overcome them cannot be understood merely by looking at the fragility of statehood, issues related to unsettled boundary and transboundary water resource management as well as the involvement of extra-regional actor. Hence, it is not advised to brush aside the periods following Eritrea's comeback to the regional system after quitting its membership in the regional security arrangement that is IGAD and its security concern as well as the concerns of others. This helps identify one of the burdens of contemporary Ethiopia's foreign policy and the attendant consequences.

Indeed, overturning the hitherto hostility dominating the interstate relationship between Asmara and Addis Ababa that lasted for nearly two decades has brought an opportunity to ease the security burden imposed on the latter. Until the diplomatic rapprochement was put in place between the Addis Ababa and Asmara, both states had suffered from the reciprocal mistreatment they unleashed against each other. Although the intensity of the security burden Ethiopia had dealt with is relatively smaller compared to Eritrea, the former had to extensively engage in diplomatic activities to reduce the possible and actual security burden emanating from the latter in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. The first phase of Eritrea's engagement with the region was basically a (re)learning process of the regional security structure and mending the ties with Ethiopia in particular. Next to this move, it decided to rejoin IGAD. The country's deep engagement with the region has been manifested in

³⁷Al Jazeera. US suspends millions in aid to Ethiopia over Nile dam dispute. 16 January 2021 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/3/us-suspends-aid-to-ethiopia-over-blue-nile-dam-dispute> , Accessed 16 March 2023

strengthening the bilateral ties with countries neighboring Ethiopia. This could help the state to relatively enhance its regional visibility.

Currently, it seems that Eritrea can no longer afford to return to the status quo ante in that the period of diplomatic isolation from the regional geopolitical arena and international forums. This diplomatic isolation severed its economic, trade and political ties it built with other nations and institutions for brief period of time in the aftermath of separation in 1993. Overcoming the regional isolation would be an advantage to the wider regional tranquility through oiling the state to state interaction by building trust. Nevertheless, the question would be raised regarding charting Asmara's foreign policy will converge or diverge with the foreign policy priorities of Addis Ababa. Taking the role of Asmara that was siding with the Federal government in the northern Ethiopia conflict, the international community continuously blamed the former for activities in contrary to international law governing the conduct of war.³⁸ Furthermore, Ethiopian government compelled to deal with mounting diplomatic pressure from the diplomatic community for the withdrawal of Eritrea troops during the course of the war.³⁹ As a result, the West is still tempted to view the return of the state to regional space after its retreat with a modicum of suspicion. Nevertheless, the geopolitical space has seemed to experience the increasing role of Eritrea that is trying to catch up other actors by charting its regional foreign policy. Now more than ever, it is in the best interest of both Ethiopia and Eritrea to further strengthen constructive partnership. Indeed, managing future uncertainty of the diplomatic relationship between the two states will remain the challenge to Ethiopia's future regional policy.

Egyptian role

Another contemporary Ethiopia's foreign policy stress in particular is related to Egypt's role in the Horn. Since the earliest period, Egypt has pursued a strategy that aspires to secure its absolute dominance on the Red Sea and the Nile River. Regarding the Red Sea, Egypt was successful in making Ethiopia a landlocked state by depriving the latter's perennial quest for access to the sea through offering support to insurgents fighting for independence of Eritrea.⁴⁰ What is left is securing its monopolistic

³⁸ Foreign Policy. "Did Eritrea Commits War Crimes in Ethiopia?" 3 March 2021 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/03/eritrea-ethiopia-tigray-war-crimes-abiy-ahmed/>, Accessed on 30 April 2023

³⁹ Foreign Policy. "Did Eritrea Commits War Crimes in Ethiopia?" 3 March 2021 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/03/eritrea-ethiopia-tigray-war-crimes-abiy-ahmed/>, Accessed on 30 April 2023

⁴⁰ Daniel K. "Egypt and the Hydro-Politics of the Blue Nile River". *Northeast African Studies*, 6(1/2).1999.141-169.

dominance over the Nile River. To this end, in 1929 and 1959 Cairo entered agreements with United Kingdom and Sudan, respectively. These two treaties aimed to secure the monopolistic aspiration of Cairo vis-à-vis the Nile water and in return to thwart any attempt of downstream states' aspiration to harvest the water for the developmental needs.⁴¹ Apart from supporting the ambition by the legal instruments in which no downstream states are party thereto, Cairo pressurized Addis Ababa through applying different modus operandi that obstructed the latter's ambition to put itself on the path of development.⁴²

Until 2011, Ethiopia's perennial quest for harvesting the Nile Water was a remote possibility. The inception of the construction of the GERD has heralded the state's capacity to utilize the river for developmental needs. Aside from the developmental benefits generated from the finalization of the project, this flagship project is also considered by some scholars as part of nation-building project in the sense that it is deemed as "a symbol of unity in the face of poverty and perceived backwardness".⁴³ The start of the Dam however was not without pressing challenge. Since the start of the construction of the GERD in 2011, Egypt has persistently viewed it as representing the challenge to its entrenched assumption and practice of monopolizing the river remained for centuries.

Since 2014, Egypt has consistently engaged in intensive diplomacy with states of the Horn, the Western countries and international organizations. In the aftermath of the inception of the project, Egypt took diplomatic visit to upstream states and countries neighboring Ethiopia, although some of them are not sharing the water. In this regard, diplomatic officials of Egypt visited Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. Those diplomatic attempts were designed to strengthen its diplomatic ties with these states through signing bilateral agreement on the domains of trade, irrigation, investment, education, health, and development ties with these states and other upstream countries.⁴⁴ Beneath the signing of the deal lies in Cairo's bid to put diplomatic pressure on Addis Ababa by making closer ties with those states.

⁴¹ Tesfaye, T. *The Nile Question: Hydropolitics, Legal Wrangling, Modus Vivendi, and Perspectives*, 2002.

⁴² Daniel . "Egypt and the Hydro-Politics".

⁴³ Gashaw Ayferam. "The Nile Dispute: Beyond Water Security". 19 January 2023. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

⁴⁴ Abdel-Halim, Amira Mohamed. (2018). *New Departures in Egypt's relations with sub-Saharan Africa*. The Center for Africa-Europe Relations. Retrieved from <https://ecdpm.org/work/north-africa-hope-in-troubled-times-volume-7-issue-4-autumn-2018/new-departures-in-egypts-relations-with-sub-saharan-africa>

Besides the signing of bilateral ties, Egypt has also pursued a manifold strategy tilted towards putting pressure on Ethiopia at best and inching it to diplomatic isolation at worst. Forging military and security partnership with neighboring countries of Ethiopia such as Sudan, South Sudan⁴⁵, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti has taken as one of the effective mechanisms to suffocate Ethiopia. The bilateral security cooperation will have security implications for the bilateral relations signatory states have had with Ethiopia in particular and the Horn region in general. The chief reason for this move, of course, lies in Egyptian obsession to maintain their hydro-hegemony in the region at the expense of the development needs of the upstream states, particularly Ethiopia.⁴⁶

Contemporary Egypt's Nile-centered foreign policy strategy seemed to be graduated by securitizing and internationalizing Ethiopia's utilization of the Nile River. It frequently claims that its water security is jeopardized by Ethiopia. This diplomatic position count on not only its diplomatic activities but also the support secured from the Arab League. Egypt is aggressively working on making GERD to be considered not just a national security concern of Egypt alone extend to Arab states' security. To put differently, the security of the Arab states is linked inextricably linked with the uninterrupted flow of the River and Egypt's intransigent position of monopoly. In this regard, the recent Arab League resolution could be mentioned as noticeable. On 9 March 2023, the Arab League passed a resolution that militates against the interest of all-riparian states.⁴⁷ Along pressing the Nile issue as a security concern in the Arab League, Egypt and Sudan insisted on the involvement of external actors-USA, UNSC and Gulf states in the tripartite negotiation over the dam. The downstream countries, Egypt and Sudan aggressively engaged the UNSC (United Nations Security Council) to give attention to the GERD. These states sought to elevate the water issue to the security level that falls within the jurisdiction of the Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

⁴⁵ Khartoum together with Cairo managed to undertake different joint military exercises in both states at different times. On 2 March 2021, both states signed a military cooperation agreement to deepen their ties in the security domain against "common security concerns". In 2021 alone, both states undertook four joint military exercises in the months of April, May, June and October. The joint military drills carried the names of "Guardians of the Nile", "Nile Eagles-1 & 2" as well as "Guardians of the South-1". As part of deepening their security and military cooperation, the chiefs of staff of both states met in Cairo in March 2022. Reports indicated that the military officials of both states agreed to address their "mutual concerns". Although they did not clearly specify what their real mutual concern was, the Nile and the GERD will definitely take primacy. The last month of this year, December, has also witnessed a joint military exercise dubbed "The Guardian of the South-2".

⁴⁶ Tesfaye, T. *The Nile Question: Hydropolitics, Legal Wrangling, Modus Vivendi, and Perspectives*, 2002.

⁴⁷ Fana Broadcasting Corporation (FBC). "Ethiopia Expresses Dismay on Resolution of League of Arab States". 10 March 2023 <https://www.fanabc.com/english/ethiopia-expresses-dismay-on-resolution-of-league-of-arab-states-on-gerd/>, Accessed on 30 April 2023.

Indeed, they were successful in presenting the issue as an agenda item at the UNSC, although it was failed to bring a binding resolution.

To summarize, the overall objectives of Cairo's diplomatic engagement with states in the Horn of Africa and those inducement packages are aimed to increase its geopolitical influence in the region by causing stress to Ethiopia's neighboring policy and maintain its monopolistic position over the utilization of Nile River. This could be achieved through increasing the trust and the degree of cooperation between Cairo and the rest states in the region. Egypt's multi-track approach to the Nile River has demonstrated so far that Ethiopia's foreign policy vis-à-vis the realization of *equitable and reasonable utilization* of the transboundary water to fulfill domestic needs has faced stress. Cairo's monopolistic ambition will continue to put pressure on Ethiopia's regional diplomacy.

The Changing global Order

Aside from the domestic and regional determinants, contemporary Ethiopia's foreign policy is vulnerable to the very nature of the global order and its dynamics. Looking back to the past major global power transitions, Ethiopia's national interest was either affected positively or otherwise by a state assuming the global hegemonic position. In the early decades of the mid-twentieth century, for instance, the Imperial government had got the opportunity to redeem the lost territory and regain the historical quest for access to the sea via building a closer diplomatic relation with the newly emerging superpower, USA.⁴⁸ Contrary to this historical circumstance, the global power transition from bipolar to a unipolar power configuration had compromised the national interest Ethiopia sought to secure. Needless to say, Ethiopia had deepened ties with the erstwhile Soviet Union during the last decade of the cold war period in which the former used to heavily rely on the latter militarily to dampen the perceived and actual threats posed to the regime and the state.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the transition from the bipolar to a unipolar world dried up the support of the military government thereby in part contributing to stress to the country's foreign policy and the subsequent regime change itself.⁵⁰

The newly installed government in lieu of the *Derg* recognized the ascendancy of the West led by America and consequently it forged closer diplomatic relationships. Such a cozy diplomatic relationship between the two sides helped the EPRDF's

⁴⁸ Bahru Z.A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991. London and Athens: James Currey and Ohio University Press, 2002.

⁴⁹ Ottaway, M. Soviet and American Influence in the Horn. New York, NY: Praeger, 1982.

⁵⁰ Patman, R. The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: The diplomacy of intervention and disengagement. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

government to generate legitimacy for its role in the region. Accordingly, it was successful in securing the status of anchor state amidst a turbulent region. Apart from such benefit, it also secured the support of institutional structures of the global order to finance development imperatives.⁵¹

Over the past decade, the global power configuration seems to change in that the non-West power has increased significantly in relation to the power of the West. The increasing power of the non-West, particularly China has increasingly challenged the existing international liberal order.⁵² The waning of the power of the West has both advantages and disadvantages for states like Ethiopia. This part of the paper is not intended to identify both the pros and cons of the changing global circumstance for Ethiopia. It is rather to briefly scrutinize the implication of the Ukraine-Russia war that is seemingly reflecting one of the dynamics of global power transition for the foreign policy of the country. This global power dynamics in international forums has implication on the domestic situation. Indeed, the international circumstance gets momentum when there are precarious situations manifested in domestic and regional levels.

Ever since the outbreak of the conflict in the northern part of Ethiopia, the situation catches the attention of the international community, particularly the UNSC and the EU. During different meetings of the SC, various resolutions were sponsored to condemn the situation and intended to impose sanctions on the Ethiopian government. The Russian Federation played prominent roles blocking resolutions stood against Ethiopia in different instances resulted in shielding the latter from the imposition of a comprehensive sanction while other members, both permanent and non-permanent, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, and Ireland are among the league that sought pressure on Ethiopia.⁵³ This indicated Ethiopia was benefited from the Russian Federation's diplomatic position at the UNSC.

Moscow's policy in the UNSC is currently influenced by its desire to resist the global liberal order. Hence, it is possible to argue that there is realist calculation is taking prime place during the meetings.⁵⁴ Indeed, it is also possible to argue that Moscow

⁵¹Cheru, F. "Emerging southern powers and new forms of South-South cooperation: Ethiopia's strategic engagement with China and India". *Third World Quarterly* 37(4).2016.592-610.

⁵²Jones, K. *China's Challenge to Liberal Norms: The Durability of International Order*. Palgrave Macmillan: UK, 2018.

⁵³ Fasil, H. The Divisions within the UN Security Council will Harm Ethiopia. 5 September 2021. <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/09/05/the-divisions-within-the-un-security-council-will-harm-ethiopia/>, Accessed on 15 April 2023.

⁵⁴ Nikitin, A. "Russia as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council". Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012.

has always displayed a firm position on the principles of “the inviolability of sovereignty and non-interference” as well as developed manifold relationships with Ethiopia dating back to the seventeenth century. These factors could also play important roles in the calculation of Moscow’s international position as far as Ethiopia is concerned. Ethiopia abstained on the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia’s “annexations of Ukrainian territory”.⁵⁵ This diplomatic move seemed to reciprocate to the Russia’s commitment to veto any resolution on Ethiopia concerning the crisis in the northern part of the country in the subsequent periods of the outbreak of the war between Moscow and Kyiv.

The war between Moscow and Kyiv is not merely a war between the two states. It is rather a war with international dimension since different actors are involved in the war and has had a global implication. The outbreak of the war does not only bring a military threat to the West’s security concern, but also perceived as an “attack on international norm” and is still considered as Russia’s continual “assault on the liberal order”.⁵⁶ Siding with Moscow is considered as a tantamount to partner with the transgressor of the existing international liberal order which is currently facing a resistance from revisionist states. Ethiopia’s diplomacy has operated amidst such tense diplomatic situations manifested at different global forums. In this regard, it is possible to mention the difficult diplomatic position of Ethiopia when the United Nations General Assembly held a meeting on 7 April 2022 to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council.⁵⁷ Indeed, this resolution could be considered as one of the means to put pressure on Russia. More importantly, the resolution should be viewed within the framework of sustaining the global liberal hegemony in the face of increasing pressure originating from Moscow against the enlargement of NATO. During this meeting, Ethiopia was among the twenty-four states standing against the resolution that was primarily initiated by the US. Since the onset of the war, Ethiopia’s diplomacy has confronted challenges of choosing between the two sides that remain the unwritten norm of the current international politics. To put differently, developing countries likewise Ethiopia is compelled to walk on the tight diplomatic trop.

To summarize, the degree of influence the changing global power transition which necessitates support either to the hegemon or the rising state has implication on the

⁵⁵ Africanews. African Countries Divided over UN Vote against Russia. 13 October 2022. <https://www.africanews.com/2022/10/13/african-countries-divided-over-un-vote-against-russia/>. Accessed on 20 June 2023.

⁵⁶ Way, L. “The Rebirth of the Liberal World Order?” *Journal of Democracy* 33(2).2022.5.

⁵⁷ United Nations (UN). UN General Assembly Votes to Suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council. 7 April 2022 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115782>. Accessed on 15 April 2023.

country's foreign policy drive to secure national interest has increased when the following conditions prevail. First, when the internal situation gets worse, it invites pressure from abroad seeking the state to conform to international human rights instruments since it is in part necessitated by normative and material interests. Second, when the internal situation is getting complicated and the pressure is mounting on the state amidst the spiral conflict situation, the state seeks to alleviate the multiple kinds of pressure by demanding the support of the rival global powers at different forums of international institutions. Third, Ethiopia's navigation to search for support in the face of mounting pressure is further complicating the burden of the country's foreign policy while the West urges the support of other states in the increasingly tense global rivalry.

Conclusion

In analyzing the taxing contemporary foreign policy of Ethiopia over the couple of years, this paper has sought to assess the factors of domestic, regional and global power transition on the capability of the state to secure economic and security benefits through interactions with the outside world. The domestic conflict in the northern part of Ethiopia, for instance, has significantly affected the state's drive to maintain the economic benefit accrued from trade interaction through AGOA's scheme, thereby causing thousands of layoff in apparel manufacturing sector and the loss of millions of dollars. Apart from the economic cost, the state's ability to maintain its image amidst the intensification of the conflict was difficult, which, in turn affects its ability to project peacekeeping and peacemaking capability in the neighborhood. Furthermore, the cost associated with the incumbent's foreign policy is also manifested when the nascent external military deal aimed to build a navy force failed to translate into practice grounded in the reason that the parties to the conflict did little to engage themselves in cessation of hostilities in the face of mounting humanitarian problems.

Alongside the domestic constraints, the regional factors that are related to unsettled boundary dispute, transboundary water resource, and Asmara's return to regional system as well as Egypt's regional role are selected as issues that continue to challenge Ethiopia's foreign policy navigation in a murky regional context. The paper also attempts to briefly touch upon the global power dynamics by taking the war between Ukraine and Russia as one of instances without which it would have been difficult to identify the difficulties associated with Ethiopia's contemporary foreign policy difficulties. Certainly Ethiopia needs to extricate itself from domestic security conundrums. Indeed, despite some of the challenges, the recent cessation of hostilities signed between the Federal Government and the TPLF ushered in the termination of violent conflict that lasted for two years, which, in turn, would reduce the negative

consequences associated with it. Furthermore, it would address the image of the state related to the conflict and attendant consequences. This may have given a space for the state to secure economic and security needs as well as reposition the state amidst unfolding regional and international uncertainties.

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