Ethiopia's Foreign Policy in the Post-2018 Period: Understanding Drivers and Challenges

Abdurahman Edao

Researcher and expert at the Ethiopian Customs Commission

Abstract

The post-2018 Ethiopian foreign policy has undergone a significant change. The paper used both primary and secondary sources for data collection. Primary data were gathered through interviews with key informants, while secondary data were obtained from various sources such as books, journal articles, official speeches, published and unpublished documents, and internet sources. The paper emphasizes that Ethiopian foreign policy underwent a significant change after the country embraced political reform in 2018 and the subsequent Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement, ushering in a new era of regional peace and cooperation in shared areas of interest. However, the initial rapprochement efforts were hindered by the signing of the Pretoria Peace Agreement between the Federal Government and the TPLF. Foreign policy has been greatly impacted by internal conflicts, diplomatic tensions, pressures, terrorism, and border disputes. These challenges are hindering the country's foreign relations and diplomatic goals, affecting Ethiopia's international reputation. In conclusion, based on the empirical discussions, the study suggests that Ethiopia's foreign policy should prioritize 'peace at home first' and pursue assertive diplomacy abroad.

Introduction

Ethiopia's foreign policy has undergone several changes, especially after 2018 due to domestic, regional, or global political transformations. When changes occur in the making and execution of the country's foreign policy, many radical shifts have been made. For instance, after 1991, the newly established EPRDF government shifted its foreign policy from a 'siege mentality' to good neighborliness, and from 'outward looking' to inward-looking. The inward-looking approach, as outlined in the 2002 foreign policy white paper, focused on addressing economic needs instead of externalizing the country's problems. Similarly, in the post-2018 period, Ethiopia experienced a significant shift in its foreign policy. Initially, the country took proactive measures to address problems in neighboring countries and promote peace in the region. For example, Ethiopia has played a crucial role in mediating peace processes in South Sudan and Sudan, contributing to resolving longstanding conflicts in these countries. Moreover, the most notable change in foreign policy after 2018 was the rapprochement with Eritrea, which ended the two-decade-long stalemate between the two neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa.

Perhaps, relations between the two countries are complex and multifaceted due to historical facts. Every effort to explore policy options for Eritrea has to, at least, involve a deep understanding of historical facts and a thorough assessment of current realities. Failure to grasp these realities, such as historical events, the interests of the regime in Asmara towards Ethiopia, and its capabilities, as well as determining whether it is independently pursuing its interests or not, are crucial considerations in the context of relations with Eritrea. On the other hand, economic diplomacy, regional integration, and multilateralism have emerged as dominant features in Ethiopia's foreign policy. However, persistent national security challenges still affect Ethiopia's foreign policy. The nation has upheld strategic partnerships with major global powers like the United States, China, Russia and the European Union. These partnerships have provided economic and military assistance to Ethiopia, as well as diplomatic support on various issues. Nevertheless, recent conflicts within the country have hindered Ethiopia's diplomatic relations, particularly with the United States.

The paper makes a dual contribution. Firstly, it examines the post-2018 developments in Ethiopia's foreign relations and its challenges. Secondly, it offers insights into the relatively understudied area of the country's foreign policy compared to other Ethiopian studies. The paper seeks to outline the main driving forces and obstacles influencing Ethiopia's foreign policy since 2018. In doing so, the paper comprises an introductory part, methodology, and research methods, understanding meanings and patterns of the terms, levels of analysis, and theoretical perspectives. This is followed by the post-2018 foreign policy and driving factors, challenges facing the country's foreign policy, and concluding remarks.

Methodology and Methods

Methodologically, this paper employed a qualitative approach. It offers an insightful definition, metaphor, and deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. The qualitative methodology aids in exploring issues from various perspectives (Klotz and Prakash, 2008). In terms of data collection, the paper utilized both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through interviews with three key informants, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Ethiopia and Fredrich Ebert Stiftung, while secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, published and unpublished documents, speeches, and internet sources.

The Post-2018 Foreign Policy and Driving Factors

Here, the study analyzes the factors that have contributed to Ethiopia' re-orientation of its foreign policy. Specifically, the section examines the following factors: the politics surrounding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and its impact on the Nile politics, and the Red Sea, rapprochement with Eritrea, the country's foreign policy in the face of the regional dynamics, and challenges facing the country's foreign policy.

Hydro politics: The GERD

For years, the Nile Basin has been shaped by the hydro-supremacy of colonial masters and

the Egypt-Sudan alliance in sharing the river's resources (Darwisheh, 2021). Downstream countries have enjoyed uncontested control over the river's water, while Ethiopia has rejected Egypt's attempts at hydro-political and geopolitical dominance (ibid). The Nile River has historically influenced regional politics, intrastate relations, economic development, poverty, geopolitical dynamics, alliance formation, external intervention, and geo-strategic power struggles. The Nile Basin has been identified as a potential source of conflict due to unequal water usage instigated by colonial treaties that have led to strained relationships between Ethiopia and downstream countries, namely Egypt and Sudan. The absence of an inclusive legal and institutional framework for managing the limited water resources has worsened tensions. Despite the existence of international water laws, individual claims and actions continue to prevail in the basin (Dereje, 2017). The colonial-era treaties, known as the Nile River Agreements, have become a point of contention with upstream countries denouncing them as outdated and irrelevant to their national interests. Egypt seeks to bind these countries to agreements that were made without their input and did not consider their interests (Kimenyi and Mbaku, 2010).

The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was established in 1999, and the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), also known as the New Nile Treaty, adopted in May 2010, is a significant achievement that continues to shape the legal landscape, geopolitical dynamics, and future water utilization agreements in the area. The NBI was launched in February 1999 by water ministers from countries like Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, the DRC, and Eritrea (as an observer). Establishing a regional institutional framework is essential for ensuring sustainable development through longer-term cooperation. The NBI has aimed to 'achieve this by creating the CFA to replace previous bilateral treaties and formalize the transformation of the NBI into a permanent Nile River Basin Commission' (Yakob, 2007:22). Although Egypt and Sudan have rejected the document, the attempt was a significant milestone in the history of the Nile River politics by introducing new frameworks for water cooperation.[1]

Ethiopia has been actively engaging in diplomatic efforts with Egypt and Sudan to resolve issues surrounding the GERD. Ethiopia emphasizes the importance of the Dam for its development and economic growth, while also acknowledging the concerns of downstream countries. To address these differences, Ethiopia has participated in several rounds of negotiations with Egypt and Sudan, under the auspices of the African Union, to reach a mutually beneficial agreement on the filling and operation of the Dam. However, Ethiopia's diplomatic engagement is not as active as its counterpart, Egypt.[2] The latter has been actively seeking support from the League of Arab Nations (Arab League) to pressure Ethiopia to reach a binding agreement on the GERD. In July 2020, the Arab League passed a resolution supporting Egypt's position on the GERD and called on Ethiopia to resume negotiations with Egypt and Sudan. The

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[1] MoFA Amb, 2022 Interview.

[2] Fredrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2022 interview.

country has also been using its influence within the Arab League to prevent Ethiopia from gaining support from other African countries. In June 2020, Egypt successfully lobbied the Arab League to reject a resolution by the African Union (AU) supporting Ethiopia's right to fill the dam's reservoir.

Egypt's actions within the Arab League can be seen as an attempt to gain international support and pressure Ethiopia to reach a resolution on the GERD that is favorable to Egypt. Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ambassador Hossam Zaki, has revealed that on 21 October, 2022 Egypt and Sudan have proposed a draft resolution to support their interests regarding the GERD. The Resolution was discussed by permanent delegates of the Arab League during their meetings in preparation for the upcoming Arab League Summit in Algeria on November 1-2. Up on a call by Egypt, the League has been accusing Ethiopia of having 'obstinate stance' on GERD, to which Egypt objects due to concerns it may significantly reduce its "traditional share" of Nile waters.

The Council of the Arab League Summit in Jeddah has recently issued a resolution that highlights the significance of water security for Egypt and Sudan as an essential component of Arab water security. The Resolution firmly opposes any activities that impede their rights to the Nile Waters. The content is referring to the GERD dispute between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. The Resolution calls for all parties to refrain from taking unilateral actions, such as continuing to fill and operate the Dam without reaching an agreement on the rules for doing so. It also urges the UN Security Council to intervene and take necessary measures to ensure a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The decision also includes making this issue a permanent agenda item for the Arab League Council summit until a peaceful settlement is reached.

On the other hand, Ethiopia is dismayed by the 'Resolution' of the Executive Council of the League of Arab States on the GERD issued on 15 June 2021 after its meeting held in Doha, Qatar. Ethiopia firmly rejected the 'Resolution'. In fact, this is not the first time the League of Arab States has issued a statement regarding its misguided positions on the GERD. Due to its unwavering support for the unfounded claims of Egypt and Sudan regarding the GERD, the League of Arab States has already wasted its opportunity to play a constructive role. It should be abundantly clear that futile attempts like this to internationalize and politicize the GERD will not result in sustainable regional cooperation in the utilization and management of the Nile. The League of Arab States should be aware that the utilization of the Nile waters is crucial for Ethiopia's existence. It is essential for lifting millions of its people out of extreme poverty and meeting their needs for energy, water, and food security. Ethiopia is exercising its rightful use of its water resources while respecting international water laws and the principle of avoiding significant harm. Ethiopia strongly believes that cooperation and dialogue are the only means to achieve water security for any of the Nile Basin states. The Nile is a shared resource and not the exclusive property of Egypt and Sudan.

Nevertheless, Egypt kept influencing Ethiopia through United Nations Security Council. Accordingly, on 19 June, 2020, Egypt officially requested the United Nations Security Council's involvement in restarting tripartite

negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan regarding the GERD. This request came shortly after the then Ethiopia's Foreign Minister, Gedu Andargachew, stated that his country would proceed with filling the dam without an agreement (Elias, 2020). President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt later explained that Egypt's appeal to the Security Council is meant to continue the political and diplomatic process. Gedu emphasized the need for a strong move towards concluding negotiations and reaching an agreement that benefits all parties involved (ibid). Negotiations between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan have been stalled, with multiple rounds of talks held. However, the attempts have been complicated by issues such as water rights, environmental concerns, and political tensions. Egypt has called for international mediation, while Ethiopia has insisted on continuing the talks under the African Union's mediation framework. The GERD will significantly impact the future of Nile politics, as it remains a source of tension between Egypt and Ethiopia, and is likely to continue causing tensions in the future. The GERD will have a major impact on the water supply of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, and it remains unclear how the three countries will resolve their differences over the dam.

The Rapprochement with Eritrea

The Ethiopian Prime Minister, announced on June 5, 2018, that the Ethiopian government had accepted the border ruling of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) and was willing to implement it unconditionally. He also extended an invitation to the Eritrean government to establish peace and resolve the ongoing 'no war, no peace' situation. Surprisingly, on June 20, 2018, the Eritrean President declared that Eritrea would send a delegation. A few days later, the delegation, headed by the foreign affairs minister, arrived in Addis Ababa. The two leaders signed a peace agreement, which ended the stalemate between the two countries. The peace was greeted with surprise by the people of both countries, as they hoped it would restore their historical spirit of brotherhood. Upon the peace agreement between the countries, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, commented on the new development in the region, thus: *There is a strong sense of hope sweeping through the Horn of Africa.* The hope that swept through was unlike any other, with its dynamics, scope, and momentum impossible to forecast. Starting as a gentle breeze, it quickly escalated to unprecedented speeds, with numerous vectors of change emerging.

Resolving the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia would be a crucial first step in addressing the ongoing conflicts in the region. This was evident in the immediate spread of reconciliation to Somalia, Djibouti, South Sudan, and Sudan. Despite the growing recognition of the need to address disputes between the countries as a prerequisite for easing tensions in the region, no serious effort was made to resolve it (Redie, 2019). The main challenges of Ethio-Eritrean rapprochement include unresolved border disputes, lack of trust between the two governments, and domestic opposition to the normalization of relations (ibid). Although it was a promising hope, some have already expressed concern about the lack of institutional guidance and transparency in the agreements. Though, these two leaders have played a dominant role in the peace deal, they have not taken steps to institutionalize the

renewed relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea. For Belete, the absence of clear policy guidance may hinder the practical implementation of the peace building process on the ground that the agreements made in Asmara and Dubai were not guided by institutions, which poses a risk to the sustainability of peace between the two countries. In order for a peace process to succeed, institutions must be in place to ensure long-term stability. Therefore, the absence of such institutions poses a major challenge in the practical application of border demarcation on the ground.

Leaders have crucial roles in shaping their nation's foreign policy by determining key objectives and priorities. They must assess global challenges, regional dynamics, and national interests to establish a strategic framework. The effectiveness of a leader's influence on foreign policy ultimately depends on their ability to navigate complex international relationships, communicate effectively, and make decisions that align with their country's best interests. Acknowledging the leader's role, building a strong diplomatic capability, and establishing responsible institutions are critical components for effective governance and international relations. Without a robust institution, foreign policy decisions may lack a consistent and coherent approach. Leaders and policy makers often have specialized knowledge and expertise in specific regions or issues. Without institutionalism, there may be a lack of expertise and understanding of complex international dynamics, making it difficult to effectively navigate and address global challenges. Institutions provide a mechanism for accountability and oversight in foreign

policy decision-making. And decision-making processes that lack transparency and accountability, potentially would lead to decisions that are influenced by personal or political interests rather than the country's long-term strategic objectives. In essence, a leader's personal decision-making approach can shape the state's trajectory by setting policies, priorities, and strategies that have far-reaching effects on the country's interests and well-being over time. It's crucial for leaders to consider the long-term implications of their decisions and to balance immediate concerns with future goals.

Ethiopia's Diplomacy in the Face of the Regional Dynamics

Since the late 19th century, modern Ethiopia has based its foreign policy on several strategic pillars that prioritize national sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual interest and equality among countries, non-alignment, and fostering friendly relations with other countries and peoples. These principles have been outlined in various national documents and are explicitly stated in Ethiopia's current Constitution, as well as, its foreign and national security policies and strategies. The political situation in the region of the Horn has important consequences for Ethiopia's foreign policy. Being situated in this volatile region, which is marked by internal instability and external intervention, the country's foreign relations must navigate these challenges. Consequently, major powers are eager to exert their influence in both Ethiopia and the broader region. Therefore, Ethiopia's foreign policy is shaped by a need to balance the interests of various powers while also pursuing the country's national interests. For example, Ethiopia has maintained close ties with China,

which has invested heavily in the country's infrastructure. At the same time, Ethiopia has also strengthened its ties with the United States, which views the country as a key ally in the fight against terrorism. Despite intra-Gulf competition, Ethiopia has managing and maintain friendly relations with them. Ethiopia's foreign policy is likely to continue to be shaped by geopolitical competition in the coming years, as major powers seek to establish influence in the region.

In the face of geopolitical dynamics, the new leadership not only implemented noteworthy domestic reform measures, but also redirected the country's foreign policy towards its neighboring countries. The EPRDF regime had developed separate foreign policies for each country in the Horn of Africa, classifying neighboring nations into different groups such as economically unviable, as in the case of Somalia, or unfriendly, as in the case of Eritrea. This approach was not diplomatically sound and did not serve to safeguard Ethiopia's interests in the divided region.[3] However, in the post 2018 period Ethiopia made significant change in its approach toward Eritrea. The improved relationship between the two countries brought about significant positive changes in the Horn of Africa.

The once amicable relations between Ethiopia and the West quickly deteriorated due to their critical position regarding the GERD and the war in the northern part of Ethiopia. In 2020, Ethiopia declined to sign a 'binding' agreement before the filling. Despite unsuccessful attempts to convene the Security Council at the request of Egypt and Sudan to halt the filling of the GERD's reservoir and establish a binding agreement between all parties, the relationship continued to strain (Ashenafi, 2023). On the other hand, Ethiopia and China have had close diplomatic ties for several decades, and China is one of Ethiopia's largest trading partners and investors. In recent years, the relationship between the two countries has deepened, with China providing significant investment finance in the form of loans to Ethiopia for infrastructure development, including the construction of roads, railways, and industrial parks.

Ethiopia has become a focal point for China's Belt and Road Initiative, a development program aimed at expanding Chinese influence by funding and constructing infrastructure in developing countries. The majority of Ethiopia's air, rail, and road infrastructure has been funded and constructed by the Chinese. This deep economic involvement has made China, Ethiopia's principal trading partner (Sany and Sheehy, 2022), a significant ally to Ethiopia. Nonetheless, concerns have been raised regarding the sustainability of Ethiopia's estimated $13.7 billion debt to China, the second highest in Africa, next to Angola (ibid). This debt burden may strain the bilateral relations in the long run.

The country has also been pursuing a diplomatic game with the Gulf countries. Despite the domestic rift, Ethiopia has strong economic and political relations with these countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. These relationships are primarily based on trade,

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[3] Abenezer Dawit, interview 7 April, 2023.

investment, and aid. For years, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have pursued comparable approaches, sometimes in collaboration, when dealing with Ethiopia.[4] Both countries have long invested in agricultural initiatives to enhance their domestic food security. Although they began to extend their investments into the manufacturing, tourism, and energy industries after 2000, it was not until 2018 that their efforts gained significant traction (ibid).

Following the signing of the peace agreement, between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have shown a keen interest in investing heavily in Ethiopia due to their apprehensions about Iran and Qatar's presence there. A significant player in this investment surge is the UAE, which has committed a remarkable $3 billion in funding and aid, with a billion dollars being deposited in the National Bank of Ethiopia immediately after the coming to power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Accordingly, Ethiopia is anticipated to reap the rewards of infrastructural projects financed by the UAE, which include the enhancement of Berbera (Somaliland) and Assab ports, and the establishment of an oil pipeline from the Red Sea to Ethiopia.

Qatar and Ethiopia have also maintained relations despite Qatar's strained relations with other Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In light of the blockade, Qatar expanded its outreach to Ethiopia, particularly in the area of food imports. Following Ethiopia's steadfast commitment to maintaining impartiality in non-African conflicts, Ethiopia has avoided aligning itself with any faction involved in the blockade of the Qatar-Saudi confrontation. This led to increased investment by Qatari business people in Ethiopia's agro-food sector, as well as expressed interest in the hospitality and health industries (Cafiero, and Cok, 2020).

Finally, it is worth noting that Turkey has established a robust and enduring relationship with Ethiopia. In addition to providing aid to schools and mosques, Turkey has invested six billion dollars in Africa, with two and a half billion going to Addis Ababa, making it the first African city to receive Turkish foreign direct investment (ibid). Officials from both countries have also signed a military cooperation agreement in the presence of their leaders. Moreover, a skill-sharing agreement and financing resources for water management and several memorandums of understanding were signed, covering military cooperation, finance, and water resources. The military agreement which was given a green light by the Turkey's parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee aims to enhance military relations and intelligence sharing between Ethiopia and the Turkish republic (Addis Standard, 2022).

Challenges Facing Ethiopian Foreign Policy

It has been over six years since the much-celebrated Ethiopian peaceful transition took place. During this time, the nation has witnessed a surge in domestic violence, the challenges of the COVID crisis, economic difficulties, and external pressures that have hindered the long-awaited political and

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[4] MoFA, Interview, on 26 December, 2022.

economic reform of the country. Some of the key challenges include ethnic tensions, border disputes, regional conflicts, and terrorism. Ethnic tensions have been a recurring issue, leading to clashes and violence between different ethnic groups. Ethnic tensions in Ethiopia have been a longstanding issue rooted in historical, political, and socio-economic factors.

One of the major sources of ethnic tension in Ethiopia is the struggle for political representation and control. Historically, power has been concentrated in the hands of a few dominant ethnic groups, leading to the marginalization and exclusion of other ethnicities. This has fueled grievances and demands for self-determination from various ethnic groups. In recent years, there has been an upsurge in ethnic tensions and conflicts, particularly since the appointment of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018. In the beginning, the Ethiopian people were attracted to the idea of unity, as indicated by the slogan 'medemer'. The focus was on promoting a united Ethiopia rather than one divided by regions. Eventually, the EPRDF coalition was replaced by a new political party called the Prosperity Party, which aimed to foster unity (Lowings, 2022). Though his tenure initially brought hopes of political reforms and reconciliation, it also opened up space for long-suppressed ethnic grievances to resurface. This has resulted in violent clashes, displacement of communities, and a resurgence of ethno-nationalist movements. The government's handling of the issue has been insufficient. It mainly blames corruption and a stagnant democratic process for this problem. As a result, it has implemented significant but inadequate actions, including the release of political prisoners, starting discussions with opposition groups, and demoting officials (Biniam, et al, 2018).

To effectively address Ethiopia's ongoing political crisis, it is necessary to move beyond mere democratic reform and consider the political economy and institutions that influence elite competition based on ethnic lines. The allocation of power and resources, including cabinet seats and leadership roles in universities, is frequently determined by an informal ethnic quota system. Ethnic politics in this sense come at the expense of meritocracy and economic efficiency (Goitom, et al, 2018). Consequently, any inequality that arises in accessing administrative positions, state benefits, and illegal advantages tends to have an ethnic communal nature. Party officials from different sides have continuously and strategically portrayed conflicts in nationalist terms and rallied their ethnic supporters in their quest for power and resources. Political figures primarily engage in personal and factional relationships, where the influence of friends and supporters is disproportionately significant. Tensions among political elites result in a dispersion of power, while interactions between politicians are shaped by patron-client connections (Yohannes, 2020). The way forward must involve addressing the crisis in Ethiopia, which requires a comprehensive approach involving political, social, and economic reforms, as well as dialogue and reconciliation among various stakeholders. To achieve this, two crucial reform actions should be taken without delay. Firstly, there should be a greater decentralization of power to the regional states in alignment with the Constitution. Secondly,

it is essential to remove ethnic factors from the competition among federal-level elites.

Domestic political instability often significantly impacts the development and implementation of foreign policy. Particularly in regions like the Horn of Africa, where states lack autonomy and proxy wars are common, conflicts in one country are often used as leverage by others. This dynamic was evident when Egypt and Sudan supported both EPLF and TPLF during their guerilla warfare, Ethiopia backed SPLA, and Eritrea was involved in recent events. These occurrences shape the country's foreign relations with these nations and other stakeholders. Coupled with internal unrest, the rise of nationalist sentiments can lead to international pressure, potentially isolating the country and prompting diplomatic challenges. The other effect that involves political instability is the decline of the country's global image. Since the start of the destructive conflict in Tigray, Oromia, and Amhara regions, Ethiopia has been accused of severe human rights violations by the international community. This has damaged the country's worldwide reputation, leading to significant negative impacts not only on its diplomatic relations but also on its social and economic status.

Terrorism is another significant concern in the Horn of Africa region, with several extremist groups operating in the area. One prominent group is Al-Shabaab, an Islamist militant organization based in Somalia. Al-Shabaab has been responsible for numerous attacks in Somalia and neighboring countries, including Kenya and Ethiopia. Another group is the Islamic State in Somalia (ISS), an affiliate of the global ISIS network. ISS emerged in 2015 and has conducted attacks mainly in northeastern Somalia, targeting security forces and civilians. Since the collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991, the Horn of Africa has experienced ongoing instability for over two decades. This has resulted in Somalia becoming a sanctuary for various terrorist organizations including Al-Ittihad Al-Islamiya (AIAI), Islamic Court Union and Al Shabab. These groups have carried out attacks within Ethiopia, particularly in the Somali region and along the border with Somalia.

In the recent past, al-Shabaab militants have capitalized on the ongoing civil conflict in Ethiopia and initiated an attack in the eastern part of the country in mid-2022. They asserted responsibility for the deaths of numerous Ethiopian soldiers during the subsequent clashes. Despite the Ethiopian military successfully putting a stop to the invasion, al-Shabaab continues to pose a threat in the border area. According to sources from both security agencies and former al-Shabab members, approximately 500 fighters from al-Shabab, a militant group, crossed into Ethiopia. Many of these fighters are originally from Ethiopia's Somali and Oromia regions. This incursion is considered the largest operation conducted by the group within Ethiopia[5]. According Harun Maruf (2022)[6] and Oumar Faruk (2022)[7] quote from the

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[5] Maruf, H. (2022). Why did Al-Shabab Attack Inside Ethiopia. Available at;
https://www.voanews.com/a/why-did-al-shabab-attack-inside-ethiopia/6674783.html.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Faruk, O. (2022). In a First Somalia Based Al Shabab is Attacking Ethiopia. Available at;

Horn of Africa analyst Matt Bryden the current offensive seems to mark the beginning of a significant strategic effort to establish a combatant presence in Ethiopia, particularly in the southeastern Bale Mountains. Bryden noted that despite experiencing some tactical setbacks, the group has accomplished important goals, primarily by demonstrating al-Shabab's capability to conduct major military operations within Ethiopia. In its recent attack on Ethiopia's soil, Al-Shabab units have successfully infiltrated Ethiopia, reaching a distance of 100 kilometers, and they may still be active.

Terrorism, like domestic turmoil, has a detrimental impact on the country's foreign policy choices in several ways. It may compel Ethiopia to prioritize security in its foreign policy, leading to increased border control, militarization, and the establishment of a robust counter-terrorism strategy. However, this approach requires communication and cooperation with other countries, including those perceived as sources of terrorist groups. Ethiopia, a country exposed to terrorist attacks originating from Somalia, has been actively involved in the peace process in Somalia since 1991, shortly after the EPRDF's government came to power. The recent disagreements and diplomatic strains between the two countries could provide a significant advantage for the imminent attacks of terrorist groups. Additionally, the strained relations with the USA, a significant ally of Ethiopia in combating terrorism, are also contributing to the fragility in the country's foreign policy in addressing these serious challenges.

Border issues are another fueling matter in Ethiopia's foreign policy. The country has experienced long-standing border disputes with neighboring countries, including Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan. These disputes have occasionally escalated into armed conflicts, posing a threat to national security. For the sake of this paper, I would like delve in to discussing the post-2018 border skirmishes between Ethiopia and the Sudanese army. Ethiopia and Sudan are currently in a precarious situation regarding al-Fashaga, a fertile border area where thousands of Ethiopian farmers were forcefully removed by Khartoum in December 2020. The ongoing clashes between the troops of both nations have resulted in the loss of numerous lives, including both combatants and civilians. The origins of the al-Fashaga dispute can be traced back to the 1902 Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty. This treaty, which was created during the colonial era, aimed to establish the boundary between Ethiopia and Sudan, which was then under British control. The negotiations for the treaty took place between Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia and the British government. According to the treaty, the territory that currently forms the border region of Benishangul-Gumuz was assigned to Ethiopia. The treaty also addressed the issue of the flow of Blue Nile waters from Ethiopia's Lake Tana. Ethiopian claims to al-Fashaga extend approximately 40-50km west of a loosely defined border line between Sudan and Ethiopia, which was only vaguely described in the treaty and roughly marked by the British[8].

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https://apnews.com/article/africa-ethiopia-somalia-al-shabab-26a2426642f9eebc0b4280a4d749acd7.

[8] The text of the 1902 agreement and the border as indicated on the map or as it had been demarcated

At the onset of the Tigray conflict, Lt. General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, the leader of Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council, deployed more than 6,000 troops to the Ethiopian border. This action was per a November 1, 2020 agreement, between the Ethiopian government and Sudan, whereby the later agreed to seal its borders to prevent any armed party, specifically the TPLF, from infiltrating Sudan or crossing the border (Africa Confidential, 2021).[9] The deployments involved Sudanese soldiers being stationed in a historically disputed area along the international border between Gedaref state in Sudan and the Amhara and Tigray regions in Ethiopia[10]. For decades, Ethiopia and Sudan have been in conflict over the 260 sq km al-Fashaga borderland, also known as Mazega by Ethiopians. Sudan claims that this region, which lies on the eastern border of Sudan's Gedaref state and the western borders of Ethiopia's Amhara and Tigray regions, belongs to Sudan based on colonial-era maps drawn up over a century ago. However, the boundaries were never clearly marked. In 2007, President Omar al-Bashir and the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who were the leaders of Sudan and Ethiopia at the time, reached an agreement allowing citizens from both countries to cultivate the land. They agreed to formally demarcate the borders at a later date. Recent changes in leadership and political unrest in both countries have

reignited old rivalries and brought the al-Fashaga dispute to the forefront once again.

In the midst of ongoing conflicts and assaults in the region since 2014, this agreement was ultimately terminated when Sudanese troops were sent in November 2020. However, there have been allegations that these forces expelled Amhara farmers (as well as Tigrayan farmers in the northern areas of Al Fashaga) following the redeployment of Amhara forces to support the federal government in its conflict with the TPLF in the northern Tigray region. The Sudanese army's leadership is probably using the conflict for their political advantage, rather than being genuinely concerned about land ownership. This implies that both Khartoum and Addis are not eager to escalate the fighting. However, there is a possibility that the ongoing conflict will gain momentum and develop its logic. According to an informant from the MoFA-Ethiopia taking advantage of conflict in one country to deploy soldiers into disputed land is a long trend in Ethiopia's and Sudanese border dispute. Sudanese army officials exploited Ethiopia's problem to seize Al Fashega for the sake of political legitimacy. Though currently facing a significant problem, Ethiopia may find it relatively straightforward to regain control of the land. Ethiopia is now prioritizing diplomacy more than ever to settle the border dispute. [11]However, efforts to resolve the border issues between the two nations have been disrupted by the conflict

on ground display significant difference. For example, see Edward Ullendorff (1967). The Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1902. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies. 30 (3) pp: 641-654
[9] https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/13206/Abiy_risks_more_war

[10] Ahmed Younes (2020). Al Fashqa Returns to Sudanese Sovereignty After Agreement with Ethiopia. Asharq Al-Awsat. Available at; https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2230021/al-fashqa-returns-sudanese-sovereignty-after-agreement-ethiopia.
[11] MoFA, Interview on 20 April 2023.

between the Sudanese Armed Forces led by Al Burhan and the Rapid Support Force under the leadership of Hemedti.

Conclusion

The most significant shift in the foreign policy of post-2018 was the rapprochement with Eritrea, marking the end of a two-decade-long deadlock between the neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa. The initial cheering of peace and cooperation with Eritrea was short lived, and the contentions have raised once again. The main factor for contentions is the means to end the war in the Tigray region, which the Eritrean soldiers have involved in. The Pretoria Agreement excluded the participation of the Eritrean government. The other issues like border demarcation and trade and economic relations. The focus on sea access has also gained prominence as a key aspect of the country's foreign policy. However, the absence of institutionalization of foreign policy and ongoing national security challenges continue to impact Ethiopia's foreign policy. The nation has maintained strategic alliances with key global powers such as the United States, China, the European Union and Russia. These alliances have provided Ethiopia with economic, humanitarian and military assistance. Nevertheless, recent conflicts in the country have impeded Ethiopia's diplomatic engagement, especially with the United States. Given its central location in the Horn of Africa region, the country's foreign policy should prioritize the promotion of peace domestically and the pursuit of a proactive foreign policy internationally. To achieve this, the country needs to embrace a comprehensive and inclusive approach to address domestic politics and foster reconciliation. History tells as that Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia are sources of security threats against Ethiopia. As these countries are economically weak, politically fragile, and dependent our foreign policy towards them needs serious consideration. Domestic violence, terrorism, and border disputes and disagreements are challenging factors for Ethiopia's foreign policy. Furthermore, to navigate the ever-changing global and regional political landscape, Ethiopia should pursue assertive diplomacy in its foreign policy, emphasizing the enhancement of military capabilities and the maintenance of stability.

About the Author

Abdurahman Edao obtained an MA in International Relations and Diplomacy from Addis Ababa University. He is a researcher and expert at the Ethiopian Customs Commission Moyale Branch Office.

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