

Ethiopian Foreign Policy: A Weak State or a Regional Hegemon?

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journals.sagepub.com/home/jas**John James Quinn**

Truman State University, USA

Seyma Akyol

St. Olaf College, USA

Abstract

When foreign policies of states are examined, pride of place often goes to what are called high politics: the politics of diplomacy and war. However, for most developing nations, especially those in the region of sub-Saharan Africa, economic foreign policy, or low politics, may be as, or even more, important. In fact, the foreign policies of African nations are often seen as an extension of strategies to consolidate domestic political power. African leaders routinely place themselves in charge of foreign policy as a means of controlling these resource flows as well as to create some autonomy from competing domestic political forces. This is not to say that external state forces do not impinge on the ability of leaders to stay in power; however, in sub-Saharan Africa, this has been less of a priority, perhaps with the significant exception of Ethiopia. This paper seeks to show that the general foreign policy perspectives of Ethiopia from 1991 to the present have been an extension of the leaders and ruling elites trying to obtain significant sources of financial resources by exploring the general trends of how Ethiopia has engaged in international flows of resources. Examining Ethiopian foreign policy on three levels—international, regional, and domestic—this paper explains how, despite being a potential regional hegemon, Ethiopia has significant problems stemming from domestic issues of poverty and legitimacy. Moreover, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will be highlighted as a case to explore how it affects, and is impacted by, all three levels.

Keywords

Ethiopia, foreign policy, Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, resource flows

To understand Ethiopian foreign policy, we should think about its similarities as well as its differences with other sub-Saharan African countries.¹ As African nations emerged from colonization in the post-WWII international order, it became the case that the greatest threat to any current ruling regime was domestic, from such sources as poverty, ethnic strife, and crises of legitimacy. Very few African ruling regimes found that they had sufficient domestic political and economic resources to maintain themselves in power and most needed external assistance of some form or another

Corresponding author:

John James Quinn, Truman State University, Kirksville, MI 63501, USA.

Email: jquinn@truman.edu

(Clapham, 1996). In fact, a series of emerging states in the post-WWII period were recognized internationally as having (de jure) sovereignty, but in reality they were in fact “weak states” without de facto sovereignty (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Quinn, 2016; Reno, 2000). As Clapham (1996: 62) argued, the search for external support for the maintenance of domestic power “was central to the foreign policies of . . . African states.” These sources included both bilateral and multilateral official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI), remittances, or military assistance to keep themselves in power. Like other African countries, Ethiopia has been quite dependent upon aid for government revenue (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). In fact, it emerged from its time under the Afro-Marxist Derg regime as one of the poorest nations in the world. In 1989, just a few years before the start of Meles’ rule in 1991, Ethiopia had a per capita income of US\$120, which was the second lowest of all other countries (World Bank, 1991).²

By contrast, Ethiopia can be viewed as different from most other sub-Saharan African countries vis-à-vis its foreign policy for several reasons. First, Ethiopia, as well as Liberia, was never colonized (though Ethiopia was briefly occupied by Italy during WWII).³ It was often seen as a nation-state earlier on than other African states; in fact, Ethiopia was a member of the League of Nations as well as founding member of the United Nations and Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Clapham, 2018; Lansford, 2019). Second, Ethiopia is found in the Horn of Africa, which places it in proximity to the Middle East. Moreover, as a majority Christian nation, it finds itself bordering many majority or nearly majority Muslim countries. In addition, the Horn of Africa has recently become a region where significant secessionist movements have achieved de jure or de facto independence from their colonial boundaries, such as Eritrea, South Sudan, and Somaliland (Clapham, 2018). The geopolitical and geographic realities of the Horn place Ethiopia in a strategic neighborhood of interest to many great and superpowers, as well as creating an environment of potential external threats.⁴

Third, and related to the above point, Ethiopia has fought interstate wars, suggesting that external threats to the Ethiopian regime have been more pressing than they were for other African nations. For most sub-Saharan African countries, strong support for colonial boundaries was a prevailing and strong norm which was rarely violated. This norm of *uti possidetis* was adopted by most African leaders, and it was even enshrined in the OAU (Englebert, 2000, 2009; Herbst, 2000: 104). *Uti possidetis* is the norm that holds that pre-independence boundaries are sacrosanct (Young, 2000). As a result, sub-Saharan Africa has experienced relatively few interstate wars; in fact, Lemke suggested that there was a zone of African Peace in terms of such wars (Lemke, 2002). Nonetheless, Ethiopia has fought wars against Italy in the 1930s, against Somalia in the 1970s, and against Eritrea from 1998 to 2000.⁵

Fourth, and also related to the above, Ethiopia was part of the Cold War struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States. Ethiopia had begun as a strong US ally, though with the rise of the Afro-Marxist Derg, it soon allied with the Soviet Union, and the US swung its alliance to Somalia. Soon after taking power, the Derg nationalized most industries and began centralizing power under its control (Ottaway, 1987). Ethiopia would also implement land reform, eliminating landlordism and tenancy as well as nationalizing urban land (Rahmato, 1987). Although resistance would emerge, the Derg had significant control over most aspects of the economy. This significant control over the economy has continued ever since, though current Prime Minister Abiy has recently raised the possibility of privatizing much of the state-owned sectors in Ethiopia. Most large firms continue to be state owned or owned by firms with very strong ties to political elites.

Fifth, Ethiopia has the potential to be a regional hegemon, though it currently has significant issues of poverty and domestic instability which limit its ability to become one. Herbst (2000) suggested that Nigeria, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Ethiopia would likely become regional hegemony, and Ethiopia clearly has the potential to become one (see also

Gouriellec, 2018; Verhoeven, 2015). Ethiopia is the second most populous state after Nigeria, and it is the most populous state in the Horn. Moreover, it has the third-largest army in sub-Saharan Africa, with both conventional and peacekeeping abilities (Verhoeven, 2015). It is also seeking to start a navy based out of Djibouti (Olewe, 2018). As of 2012, it had the sixth-largest CINC (Composite Index of National Capability) scores in Africa, behind Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, DRC, and Morocco.⁶ In the larger Red Sea/Middle East area, it is the third, behind Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Moreover, it had been growing quite quickly and dynamically prior to problems associated with COVID-19. Ethiopia averaged 9.9% growth per year from 2007 to 2017—much higher than the 5.4% regional average (World Bank, 2020). Diplomatically, Ethiopia has a significant influence in African international affairs as it hosts the African Union (and the OAU before it). This is a significant source of soft power as the venue for so many diplomats (Mesfin, 2012). However, given its high levels of poverty and potential domestic instability, Ethiopia may have a difficult time realizing its potential as a regional hegemon, as recent events in Tigray underscore.

Despite an implicit contradiction, Ethiopia's foreign policy position post-1991 can usefully be viewed as both a rising potential hegemon as well as a weak state in the region seeking support from outside sources. Therefore, we examine recent international relations where Ethiopia seeks to expand diplomatic power as well as its economic foreign policies which seek to bring about development for the country as well as to keep the ruling elite in power. The evidence of such will be through illustrating trends of Ethiopian international flows providing empirical evidence of foreign economic policy outcomes, at least in terms of trade, aid, FDI, and remittances, as well as its diplomatic ties with other nations.

In overviewing these above points, we will echo the focus of the Ethiopian white paper of 2002 that suggested that Ethiopia's security concerns involve three levels (Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2002). First, there are the distal potential threats, such as strategic challenges posed by Egypt and militant Islamist movements rising in the Arabian Peninsula. The second level of potential threats comprises those posed by Ethiopia's immediate neighbors, particularly Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan (and now South Sudan). The third level of threats include those domestic issues that can provide a spark for conflict, which may then escalate out of control or diffuse (Lobell and Mauceri, 2004; Mohammed, 2007). Although these can be seen as distinct, as we will see in the case of the dam, effects from each of the three levels can interact. Moreover, it is important to realize that, at each level, Ethiopia has had to concern itself with economic development as well as regional security. Significant threats to weak regimes are more often domestic than foreign and economic development helps incumbent regimes stay in power. Given Ethiopia's high levels of poverty and political fragmentation, development is of paramount importance, even for foreign policy. In fact, Meles Zenawi, the first post-Derg leader and architect of Ethiopia's more recent foreign policy, explored the benefits of a "democratic developmental state" (De Waal, 2012: 151; Zenawi, 2006). However, given its neighborhood in the Horn, foreign threats to its territory are also quite salient.

First level: beyond the immediate neighborhood

In terms of the first level, distal (or near distal) relations with Egypt are probably one of Ethiopia's most important security concerns. Although Ethiopia has long ties with Egypt, particularly between the Egyptian Coptic Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Egypt and Ethiopia have been rivals for control of the Nile, upon which Egypt depends. Ethiopia controls the headwaters of the Blue Nile, one of the two major tributaries of the Nile, providing over 80% of the water to the lower Nile. Two issues animate potential conflict: first, Ethiopia did not sign the 1959 water agreement regulating freshwater usage, and second, a developing Ethiopia will use more water resources,

especially in its programs of electrification (Woldemariam, 2020). Currently, Ethiopia utilizes a small fraction of the water of the Blue Nile for irrigation and hydroelectric power. However, Ethiopia has built on the Blue Nile what will be the largest hydroelectric dam in Africa, which is quite concerning to Egypt (see section on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) below).

A second security concern for Ethiopia at this level is the possibility of the rise of radical Islamism in Egypt, elsewhere in the Horn, or on the Arabian Peninsula. Although majority Christian, Ethiopia hosts a relatively large Muslim population (31.3%), and Harar, in eastern Ethiopia, is an Islamic holy city (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2020). Though Ethiopia has sought to maintain good relations with its Islamic neighbors, a radical Islamic regime in Egypt, Yemen, or elsewhere nearby would represent a profound security threat. However, despite Egypt being a majority Muslim nation, it too views rising radical Islamic movements as disruptive to the political and economic equilibrium. In this manner, Ethiopia could be an ally against rising radical versions of Islam, depending on the leadership of Egypt.

We should expand the distal concerns to include Ethiopia's relations with the great powers, superpowers, and multilateral international institutions. As a potent regional hegemon, and with its large population and potentially large market, it is of interest to great powers and superpowers. Since the ascension of Meles and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Ethiopia has sought pragmatic engagement with the US as well as its Europe allies (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). As we will see below, Ethiopia has received quite a bit of aid from Western nations despite its origins as a revolutionary movement. In fact, in 2009, collectively, the Economic Commission (EC) and European Union (EU) member states were the largest donors to Ethiopia (Hackenesch, 2013). Although Ethiopia's levels of political and civil rights are clearly below expectations of Western donors, with its apparent success in developmental strategies and support for antiterrorism efforts, neither the US nor the UK have openly criticized Ethiopia (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020).

As the rebel forces that overthrew the Derg in 1991 had a revolutionary ideology, the EPRDF (and especially the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) component of the EPRDF) may have had a more natural ideological affinity with either China or the Soviet Union (Clapham, 2018). However, given the rise of the EPRDF at the end of the Cold War, and with the US seen by many as the sole remaining superpower, neither China nor the Russian Federation would have a strong foreign policy or presence in the region prior to 2000 or so (Fourie, 2015: 300).⁷ The stronger ties with China would emerge later, as China itself emerged as a greater economic and foreign policy presence.

The US, for its part, has long been supportive of post-Derg Ethiopia. In fact, the US helped the EPRDF come to power in 1991 (Kibsgaard, 2020). Despite US backing in his ascension to power, Meles opposed strict neo-liberal developmental approaches and much of Ethiopia's economy remained in state hands (Clapham, 2018; Zenawi, 2006). Relations with the West remained quite cordial until the 2005 crackdown on political activity, resulting in rising Western criticism. Despite such criticism, the US has avoided breaking ties with Ethiopia given its strategic importance in the war on terrorism. However, quite recently the Trump administration suspended aid to Ethiopia over the GERD. The war on terror also helped Ethiopia justify its draconian anti-terror legislation that severely curtails domestic freedoms, while keeping the US as an ally (Kibsgaard, 2020).

The US has often seen Ethiopia as a stable ally and an oasis in the troubled Horn of Africa region (Ademo and Smith, 2018). Especially after 9/11, African leaders realized they could be illiberal while maintaining access to Western aid by achieving developmental goals and by helping in the war on terrorism (Fisher and Anderson, 2015; Lyman, 2009). Ethiopia's role as a regional power willing to participate in peacekeeping operations is also seen as helpful to Western views of regional security. Moreover, Ethiopia's engagement in Somalia had led to increased training and

support among Western nations, the US chief among them. During the Meles regime, Ethiopia helped channel military and logistical support to rebels in South Sudan in an attempt to undermine Sudan (Fisher and Anderson, 2015). In addition, by cooperating with the US in the war on terror, Ethiopia gained space for its domestic political and economic programs, which likely would have been under more scrutiny otherwise.

Post-Derg Ethiopia has benefitted from this partnership with the US over security and development issues in other ways. Matfess (2015: 198) states that Ethiopia and the US cooperated in the training of Ethiopian defense forces and police officers in counterterrorism strategies and collaborated on intelligence and military initiatives. For example, Ethiopia plays a crucial part in the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT), a US-funded program focused on developing counterterrorism capacity in the region through military training and improved governance programs, which aims to increase security capacity in each country against regional and domestic threats. Similarly, Odinga (2017) argues that the US and Ethiopian intelligence cooperation against insurgents in Somalia emphasized the role of Ethiopia as an ally. Ethiopia's cooperation with the war on terror has brought a significant amount of foreign assistance: about one-third of Ethiopia's budget comes from donors (Matfess, 2015).

Other important and rising states, such as China, India, Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Turkey are seen as among the major sources of resources for Ethiopia's quest for state-led development (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). For example, the UAE pledged a US\$3b package of aid and investment in 2018 (Marks, 2020). Of these countries, the strongest relationship has been with China. From China, Ethiopia has received support for infrastructure and industrialization, while it offers business opportunities for Chinese firms. Hackenesch (2013) suggests that China deals with Ethiopia as a partner, while Western nations treat it like an aid recipient. Ethiopia has also supported China in international forums, and it is following a developmental model not unlike that of China (Kibsgaard, 2020; Venkataraman and Gamora, 2009). For China, Ethiopia is an important ally as the latter hosts the African Union and was one of the only countries not to have been colonized.

The relationship with China also allowed Ethiopia more flexibility in foreign relations. In fact, when the EC suspended budget support and the World Bank froze new lending following election violence in 2005, China made up for much of the lost aid monies (Kibsgaard, 2020). Chinese FDI increased from negligible levels in 2004 to nearly US\$74m annually in 2009 (Kibsgaard, 2020). Moreover, the relationship with China has served Ethiopia's developmental foreign policy goals by improving access to international markets. For example, China funded the Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway completed in 2018. This railway improved efficiency and lowered the costs of port access, through which 90% of Ethiopia's external trade flows (Kibsgaard, 2020). Moreover, China has helped finance over 70% of most road projects. Notably, China also built, or help build, the national sports stadium (estimated costs at US\$160m), Ethiopia's first six-lane highway (US\$800m), the metro system, and several skyscrapers in Addis Ababa (Marks, 2020). However, as a result, China now holds over half of all Ethiopian external debt and lent Ethiopia around US\$13.7b from 2000 to 2018 (Marks, 2020).

However, following Abiy Ahmed's election in 2018, and following two years of the protests that led to his predecessor resigning, China began to limit its exposure in Ethiopia. In fact, a few months after Abiy was elected, China announced that it would scale back investment in Ethiopia (Kibsgaard, 2020). Lending from Beijing has also begun to decline: in 2013/2014, China invested over US\$1.47b, though this declined to US\$630m by 2017 (Marks, 2020). Marks (2020) writes that China was disappointed in the low returns on some investments. Moreover, high levels of indebtedness to China has led Ethiopia to reconsider its dependence on China. Recently, Abiy criticized the terms of the Chinese railroad loan that required repayments before the railroad opened (Marks, 2020).

Second level: immediate neighbors

Second-level threats and opportunities are those concerning bordering nations. Ethiopia initially had good relations with Eritrea as the leaders of EPRDF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) had cooperated in the struggle against the Derg. With their victory, Ethiopia agreed to allow Eritrea to secede, despite Ethiopia becoming landlocked as a result. The two countries then signed agreements to allow duty-free trade and the free movement of people, signaling strong relations. An agreement was reached even to use the Ethiopian birr as a common currency (Aberra, 2016; Mulugeta, 2011). Importantly, before the war, 90% of the business at the port of Assab was Ethiopian (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018).

Open hostilities broke out over a border dispute between the countries from 1998 to 2000 in the Badme region (Abbink, 1998; Mekonnen and Tesfagiorgis, 2011; Mulugeta, 2011). By June 2000, Ethiopian ground forces had destroyed much of Eritrea's military capacity and, rather than marching on Asmara, the Ethiopian government declared a cease-fire and settled for international arbitration to resolve the dispute over the contested border (Iyob, 2001). The international commission ruled in favor of Eritrea's territorial claims, but Ethiopia did not evacuate the area. Despite arguments over the exact causes of the war, it greatly affected the political economy of both nations (Mesfin, 2012; Steves, 2003). An estimated 70,000–100,000 people were killed as well as over a million displaced (Mesfin, 2012: 97) in what many consider to have been a pointless war.

Once the war began, Ethiopia clearly could no longer export through Eritrea, and Djibouti came to be the hub for 90% of Ethiopian international trade. Relations with Eritrea remained strained even after open hostilities ended in 2000: Ethiopia moved to a policy of containment and isolation of Eritrea (Mesfin, 2012). Given Eritrea's prior military orientation vis-à-vis other neighbors (Sudan, Yemen, and Djibouti) as well as its support for militants acting in Somalia, Djibouti, and even Kenya, ready allies were in the waiting (Mesfin, 2012: 98–99). Finally, Ethiopia imposed sanctions against Eritrea through the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union, and even the UN Security Council (Mesfin, 2012: 99). However, with the Abiy regime, things with Eritrea have changed significantly. Abiy opened overtures towards Eritrea, resulting in a peace deal as discussed below.

As Ethiopia became landlocked in 1991 and so dependent upon Eritrea (and then later Djibouti), two major Ethiopian foreign policy goals emerged: (a) to diversify its access to international trade so it is no longer so dependent on one port; and (b) to lower its costs in exporting. In 2018, Ethiopia engaged in negotiations with Sudan to obtain access to its Red Sea port (The Maritime Executive, 2018). Ethiopia has also agreed to cooperate with Sudan to help renovate Port Sudan, Sudan's main Red Sea port, even to the point of seeking partial ownership (The Maritime Executive, 2018). In addition, Ethiopia is investing in a port in Somaliland, obtaining up to a 19% share (The Maritime Executive, 2018). Finally, with warming relations with Eritrea, Ethiopia agreed to resume trade and economic ties after 2018 as part of the peace deal (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018).

In pursuit of the second goal of lowering costs of exporting, Ethiopia has built, with Chinese backing, a new railway line linking Addis to Doraleh (extension of Djibouti's port) (Olewe, 2018). In addition, Addis has intent to acquire shares in the Port of Djibouti, gaining more control over this vital port.

Other regional concerns have included the threat posed by militant Islamic groups in Sudan as well as groups rising in the collapsed state of Somalia (such as Al Shabaab). Regarding Sudan, post-Derg Ethiopia had experienced relatively good relations until 1995, when terrorists who attempted to kill President Mubarak of Egypt in Addis were later found hiding in Sudan (Africa South of the Sahara, 2011). Relations with Sudan would later improve in the wake of the Eritrean–Ethiopian War given poor Sudanese relations with Eritrea. A later normalization of bilateral

relations would result in Sudan supplying Ethiopia with much-needed oil (Africa South of the Sahara, 2011). In addition, once Sudan distanced itself from Al Qaida affiliated groups, relations between the two countries improved even more. At the formal ending of the Sudanese civil war, prior commitments to development and security agreements started being put into action (Africa South of the Sahara, 2011). By 2010, Ethiopia had all of its oil supplied by Sudan (Mesfin, 2012: 94). Moreover, by 2018, Ethiopia had agreed to work with Sudan to work jointly to improve its main port on the Red Sea. Finally, Ethiopia plans to sell electricity to Sudan from its future hydro-electric dams, especially from the GERD.

In the case of Somalia, Ethiopia has long had tense relations, including war. The collapse of the neighboring Somali state after 1991 transformed the nature of its threat to Ethiopia, when radical Islamic groups took root in the country. However, Ethiopia has not hesitated to take direct military action against extremist groups on Somali soil. These included strikes against the bases of the al Itihad al Islami group in 1996 and 1997 as well as attacks on the Eritrean-backed militia in Somalia during the Ethiopian–Eritrean war of 1999 (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). Further, in 2006 the Ethiopian military directly intervened to depose the Al Shabaab regime that had established itself in Mogadishu, and again in 2010 in conjunction with Kenya to wrest control of Al Shabaab of Southern Somalia. Mohammed (2007) argues that Ethiopia, like the West, seeks the emergence of a unified and stable Somalia, even though a weak and compliant Somalia reduces the Somalia threat to Ethiopia's territorial integrity.

Especially with the Abiy regime, Ethiopia has tried to maintain good relations, diplomatic and commercial, with all of its neighbors, though it showed it would meet force with force when necessary as the war with Eritrea demonstrated. Abiy has opened overtures at regional reconciliations with visits to Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). He was able to obtain the release of many Ethiopians held abroad. Relations with most neighbors are quite improved thanks to Abiy's efforts, though GERD has caused an increase in tension with Egypt, as discussed in the case study below.

The very recent developments concerning the conflict in Tigray region affects Ethiopia's relations with its neighbors. Eritrea, Sudan, and Egypt are countries that have high stakes in this conflict. Eritrea is particularly interested in this conflict as Eritrean President Isaias engaged in warfare with the TPLF 20 years ago, and he recently signed a peace agreement with Ethiopia when Abiy came to power (which had been opposed by the TPLF). This suggests that Abiy and Isaias share hostility towards the TPLF (De Waal, 2020; Manek and Omer, 2020), and this hostility led Eritrea to send troops to the capital of the Tigray region, Mekelle (Solomon, 2021). Moreover, the involvement of Eritrea in the Tigray crisis puts the Eritrean diaspora in Tigray in a vulnerable situation as "Eritrean refugees are killed, abducted or forcibly returned to Eritrea" since the fighting has begun (Al Jazeera, 2020a), which has the potential to affect Ethiopian–Eritrean relations.

Sudan, on the other hand, could have strategic reasons to support the TPLF given the country's inability to find a common ground with the Ethiopian government on the GERD issue, as well as the decades-old border dispute that has recently been escalating (Arora, 2021). However, Ethiopia could retaliate against any Sudanese support for the TPLF by supporting Sudanese rebels (Manek and Omer, 2020). Additionally, due to the crisis in Tigray, over 50,000 Ethiopians have fled to Sudan (Ram and Swanson, 2020), which may further escalate tension between these governments. Lastly, a strong Ethiopia challenges Egypt with regards to the control of the Nile with the GERD project; therefore, Egypt could benefit from an unstable Ethiopia (De Waal, 2020) should it delay the project or improve its negotiating position.

Domestic elements of foreign policy

At the third level, Ethiopia has struggled with nation building as have most sub-Saharan African nations. As Clapham (1984) reminds us, foreign policy for African nations exists at the intersection of the interactions of domestic state structures and external linkages so domestic issues can clearly affect foreign relations. Ethiopia's attempted solution to issues with nation building was to reconcile competing ethnic aspirations through an ethnic federalism in the post-1991 regime. The current polity, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, is a federal state, with nine ethnically based regional states within a parliamentary system (CIA, 2020). Ethiopia has more than 80 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which feel that they should have their own regional state on a par with other groups (Gebreluel, 2019; Wilson, 2019). Interestingly, the constitution adopted in December 1994 includes a provision that allows for the right of self-determination and even secession (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). This could have destabilizing effects, especially if neighbors who share ethnic kin become involved in the conflict, resulting in a diffusion and/or escalation of the conflict.⁸

Within this system, the EPRDF has held power since 1991 with solid or supermajorities the whole time (Ademo and Smith, 2018). Until recently, the dominant party EPRDF had comprised a four-part ethnic coalition reflecting the ethnofederalism of the system: the TPLF, the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) (later Amhara Democratic Party, ADP), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) (later Oromo Democratic Party, ODP), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPPDM). Until quite recently, the TPLF was dominant in politics, generating ethnic resentment and tension (Clapham, 2018; Gebreluel, 2019). In fact, Meles Zenawi, who led the rebel forces that overthrew the Derg, led the TPLF as well as the EPRDF. However, the peace accord with Eritrea following the war evoked strong opposition inside and outside the EPRDF, especially within the TPLF. Abiy's insistence on pursuing this peace seems to have sown the seeds of some later discontent. The opposition to the peace plan, as well as the relative power of leaders of the TPLF, briefly made resolution nearly impossible (Khisa, 2019: 549), though clearly Abiy would overcome this resistance. Nonetheless, in the most recent election, the EPRDF and its allies won 545 out of 547 seats.⁹

The legitimacy of the EPRDF was a mixture of having overthrown the Derg, committing to an ethnofederal system in which ethnic groups would have independent voice, and being a developmental state (Clapham, 2018). The pursuit of development is a major goal of nearly any sub-Saharan African state in the modern era (Sutton et al., 1989). Ethiopia could be seen as emulating China, which has moved its primary base of legitimacy of rule away from a Marxist-Leninist basis to one of growth and development. However, any legitimacy that Ethiopia's leadership might gain from growth and development also requires that these positive fruits be perceived as being fairly shared among and between the constituent elements of the ethnofederal contract.

Given that the EPRDF emerged out of a peasant-based guerilla movement (Clapham, 2018), and that its leanings were to the left, it began an economic policy based upon peasant production leading to state-led industrialization. This 'agricultural development-led industrialization' (or ADLI) was a logical choice of development path (Clapham, 2018). However, this approach did not generate enough surplus for funding development, and Meles turned to more outside sources for development funds, reflecting more a Far East approach than a Maoist one (Clapham, 2018). Nonetheless, from the Derg onwards, most large enterprises were state owned. However, there are a few companies, closely aligned with, and partially owned by, the constituent parties of the EPRDF (now the Pan-Ethnic Prosperity Party, PP), called endowment companies. These companies are tied to the state and the fortunes of the EPRDF (Clapham, 2018). One of the largest, called the Endowment Fund for Tigray (EFFORT), was owned though the TPLF and its leaders

(Clapham, 2018). Thus, the EPRDF has had tight control over both economic and political levers of power until quite recently. In fact, according to Lefort (2013), the leaders of the TPLF, through the EPRDF, control or own two-thirds of the non-agricultural economy of Ethiopia. Politically, Harbeson (1998: 66) argues that control by the EPRDF was so complete that it should be considered to be a “bureaucratic-authoritarian regime dependent upon the EPRDF’s superior military muscle”. In fact, following recent elections, “top opposition leaders [were kept] in court for treason and people identified as opposition supporters lost access to government services and jobs” (Arriola and Lyons, 2016: 81). Moreover, restricting access of state resources (land, fertilizer, higher education, and civil-service jobs) to party membership virtually resulted in a merger between the government and the party (Arriola and Lyons, 2016). The perception that party members are favored for positions and access to resources is widespread (Plummer, 2012).

However, with Abiy’s announcements of plans for privatizing much of the public sector, and the recent conflict with the TPLF’s leadership, a significant move towards the decentralization of economic power might be in the offing. Privatization is at odds with Meles’ critique of the Washington consensus as well as the EPRDF’s long-standing development policy. Abiy argues that he is privatizing state owned enterprises (SOEs) in order to increase access to foreign exchange, including “lucrative state-owned mega companies, such as Ethio-Telecom, the electrical company, and the booming Ethiopian Airlines, to start liquidating minority stakes to private investors” (Desta, 2019: 48).

Ethiopia having a strong military means with the potential for becoming a regional hegemon also means that it can use its military to repress internal armed insurgencies as well as to handle foreign policy problems (Englebert, 2009; Herbst, 2000; Khisa, 2019). Thus, a strong military and robust police apparatus within an authoritarian political system was seen as the answer to both internal and external security threats (Khisa, 2019: 549).

Nonetheless, with Abiy’s election in April 2018, important changes were made in domestic politics with implication for foreign relations. Under his leadership, the EPRDF implemented the accord signed with Eritrea in 2000, requiring the return of territories to Eritrea (Woldemariam, 2018). This was likely possible only with the decline of the TPLF within the EPRDF, following Abiy becoming its leader. In fact, Abiy removed two long-standing TPLF lions from power: Samora Yunis, army chief of staff, and Getachew Assefa, intelligence chief (Fisher and Gebrewahd, 2018), shifting power his way within the EPRDF.

Importantly, Abiy is of Oromo heritage and the first non-Tigrayan since 1991 to become prime minister or leader of the EPRDF. He became the head of the OPDO (recently renamed the Oromo Democratic Party, ODP), and then, through that, head of the EPRDF (Fisher and Gebrewahd, 2018; Gardner, 2020). After consolidating power, he disbanded the EPRDF and replaced it with the Pan-Ethnic Prosperity Party (PP) in 2019, though the TPLF refused to join it (Gardner, 2020). Unlike the EPRDF, the PP is a single national and political entity, potentially moving away from ethnic underpinnings of the party with potential implications for the long-term stability of the multinational federal order (Allo, 2019; Gardner, 2020). Abiy has also advocated for more economic liberalization and privatization, which could be linked to both development and inflows of FDI (linking Ethiopia’s economy to other nations and the world), while the TPLF would prefer continued state control of the economy, including state ownership of all land (Gebregziabher, 2019).

In a country with ethnic divisions and authoritarian political culture, change does not come easily, and the recent events provide example of this. Tension between the TPLF and the central government began to emerge when the TPLF opposed the peace deal with Eritrea, and it deepened when the TPLF refused to join the PP, leading to open opposition in September 2020 when regional elections were held in Tigray despite Abiy’s move to postpone them due to COVID-19. Finally, it became a conflict in November 2020 when Abiy initiated a military campaign against the Tigray region (Dahir and Walsh, 2020): this quickly became a full-scale civil war between the central

government and the Tigray region. The postponement of the elections was only the tipping point of this conflict; however, with Abiy's efforts to democratize the country, Bieber and Goshu (2020) argue that, in a democratic Ethiopia, the TPLF knows that they could not enjoy the political power they used to have prior to the 2018 elections. Being unable to hold dominant power at the federal level is unquestionably not a desirable situation for the TPLF leaders, who have long enjoyed possessing political and economic power. Melesse (2020) argues that this conflict is primarily for the control of Ethiopia's economy, natural resources, and the aid that comes from international donors. As the conflict in Tigray intensified, violence erupted in several other regions, including Wollega (Abiy's home region) and Benishangul-Gumuz (the region where GERD is located) (Gardner, 2021).

Additionally, many fear that Abiy's centralization of authority may result in an environment as oppressive as the time of the TPLF. Interestingly, members of the Oromo community are displeased with Abiy as they think he did not achieve much progress for them despite prior promises (Dahir and Walsh, 2020). Since these critiques come from the Oromia region (Abiy's own heritage), it may illustrate a meaningful vulnerability as they should be a pillar of support moving forward, especially with the loss of support of the TPLF. Perhaps the Oromo feel that ethnic federation may be of benefit for them as the largest ethnic group in the nation. Even if public opinion of the Oromo is critical of Abiy's policies, the support (or lack of support) he receives from the ODP is more significant. When the selectorate theory (Buono de Mesquita et al., 2003) is applied to the case of Abiy, what is critical for his political survival is to make sure that he does not upset this important part of his potential winning coalition—which, in this case, is the ODP.

Linking the three levels: patronage and politics

Foreign policy formation in sub-Saharan Africa has been seen as being under the purview of the chief executive, especially given past personalization of power (Clapham, 1996; Jackson, 1990; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Khadiagala and Lyons, 2001; Quinn, 2017; Wright, 1999). Therefore, African foreign policy is just one of several venues or opportunities for leaders to raise revenues in "the politics of state survival" (Clapham, 1996). African leaders seek resources to rule from both domestic and international sources (Clapham, 1996; Dunn, 2000; Quinn, 2016; Reno, 2000), though Clark (2001) argues that the interests of leaders and their domestic political needs dominate any foreign policy arena. Most scholars writing in the neopatrimonial (or personalist rulers) tradition would hold this view almost as a stylized fact of the subcontinent (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Englebert, 2000; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982).

Ethiopia seems to fit part of this pattern as Meles was very much in charge of foreign affairs within Ethiopia (as were later leaders) (Abbink, 1998), though Meles often argued against patronage and rent seeking and said he was trying to root them out (De Waal, 2012), though he also argued that rents could build the developmental state. Allowing Eritrea to secede from Ethiopia, for example, ran against popular domestic sentiment, yet it was permitted. Moreover, Meles had nearly uncontested power during his reign. He came into power through a successful military overthrow of the Derg as the military leaders of the EPRDF. Meles then led the transitional regime from 1991 until 1995. The first set of elections produced a strong victory for Meles and his allies, with over 80% of the seats in the legislature. He became prime minister with the support of 80% of the national assembly. In the most recent Ethiopian elections, and with Abiy at the helm, the EPRDF and its allies gained all the seats (Arriola and Lyons, 2016). Even with the disbanding of the EPRDF and the formation of the PP in December of 2019, Abiy is still very much in charge of both party and foreign policy (Gardner, 2020). As discussed above, the EPRDF, and then the PP after it, enjoy a supermajority in parliament, though elections were due this past year and postponed given

the pandemic of COVID-19. Although Meles pushed and argued for a meritocratic state, as discussed elsewhere, most of the non-agricultural economy was in the hands of the leaders of the TPLF, and access to land, resources, loans, and positions was mostly limited to EPRDF members (Arriola and Lyons, 2016; Lefort, 2013).

Economic aspects of foreign relations

Since development is one of Ethiopia's primary foreign policy objects, Ethiopia's major economic interactions with the outside world, by major flows, are examined. Trade, FDI, remittances, and ODA are aspects of economic foreign relations influencing Ethiopia's development and they represent resources to be used for development or to enhance the legitimacy of the regime (Reinert, 2007). Even military aid can influence development through substitution effects, freeing other monies for developmental purposes.

Major trade partners

Ethiopia has had a wide range of nations with which it trades, though its exports are more diversified than its imports. For example, in 2017, Ethiopia's exports went to China (10%), Somalia (9%), USA (8%), Saudi Arabia (7%), Germany (7%), the Netherlands (7%), UAE (4%), Switzerland/Liechtenstein (4%), Japan (4%), and Djibouti (3%). This is a diversified list with the top market only comprising about 10% of Ethiopia's exports (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). This list also represents a mix of markets by region, including two immediate neighbors (Somalia and Djibouti) and two nearby countries (Saudi Arabia and UAE), as well as the larger economies of the world. Most of its exports were animals, animal products, or agricultural, with coffee, tea, and spices comprising the largest components of agriculture (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). Moreover, its state-owned national airlines also earn foreign exchange, and manufacturing earns about 8% of earnings (CIA, 2020). Coffee has long been the most important export, often comprising about two-thirds of foreign exchange earnings (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). However, between 2015 and 2017, coffee only represented between 27% and 33% of exports.

Ethiopia's main sources of imports were as follows: China (33%), USA (8%), India (7%), Japan (5%), Italy (4%), Turkey (4%), Kuwait (3.8%), Saudi Arabia (3%), Malaysia (2%), Morocco (2%), and Germany (1.6%). Thus, it is less well balanced, and it shows a small dependence upon China, relative to other trading partners. In fact, by 2012, China had become the largest trading partner with Ethiopia for both imports and exports, as well as a more important source of FDI (World Bank, 2012: 3). Nonetheless, Ethiopia retains a mix of countries and regions from which it imports, and most imports (by value) comprise machinery, chemicals, petroleum, and iron and steel.

Beyond diversifying its markets, as discussed above, Abiy's peace overtures with Eritrea as well as projects with Somaliland, Kenya, and Sudan should lessen its dependence upon a single port for trading, though the new rail lines to Djibouti may still remain the most cost-effective choice.

Finally, with Ethiopia planning to build several hydroelectric dams, it could earn quite a bit of money from the export of electricity as well as create conditions to draw in more FDI. Ethiopia has planned to export electricity to Sudan, Kenya, and Djibouti (World Bank, 2010), and more plans to build a grid between Ethiopia and Kenya are already underway.

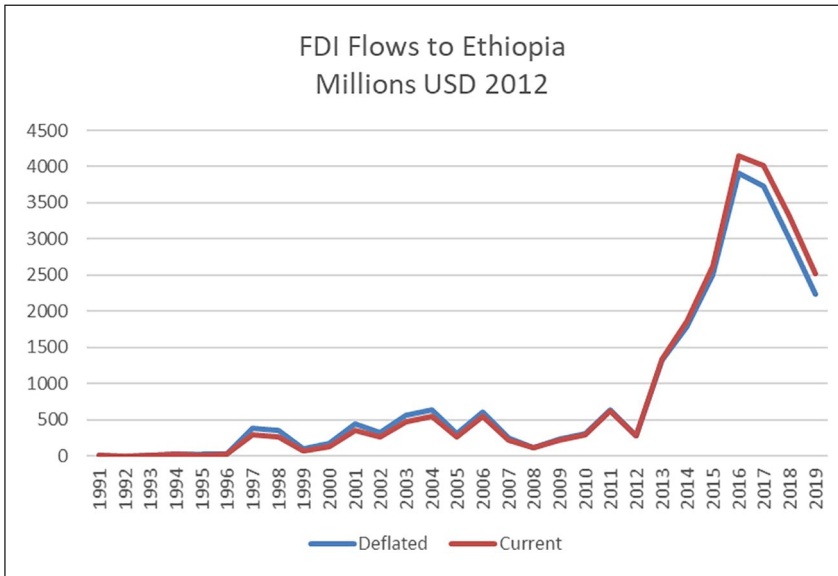


Figure 1. FDI flows to Ethiopia. USD millions (US\$2012).

FDI

FDI is one means for a country to attempt to develop by drawing in international financial flows to invest domestically. As we can see from Figure 1, FDI into Ethiopia was stable and low from 1991 to about 1996, when it spiked upwards and increased from US\$21.93m to US\$288m, representing more than a tenfold increase (UNCTAD, 2012; World Bank, n.d.-a). As Figure 1 shows, FDI inflows increased from 1996 onwards, but they were unsteady: a zigzag pattern is apparent until 2013. The average level of FDI from 1997 to 2011 was US\$281m, while it was US\$6.9m prior to 1997. However, from 2012 onwards, FDI to Ethiopia changed dramatically in magnitude, increasing by over 380% in real terms from 2012 to 2013. The trend continued upwards to a peak of US\$4143m (in constant 2012 US dollars), though dropping to US\$2239m in 2019. The average level of FDI to Ethiopia during 2013-2019 was US\$2643m (US\$2012). In real terms, this lower level in 2019 is still about three and a half times higher than its prior pre-2012 peak of US\$643m in 2004.¹⁰ In fact, Ethiopia was the third largest recipient of FDI in Africa in 2013 (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020).

In terms of the sources of FDI, between 1992 and 2005, most came from Saudi Arabia, representing 50.1% of all FDI during this period (Woldemeskel, 2008: 35).¹¹ The next highest countries were the UK (9.1%), India (7.3%), USA (5.4%), France (5%), and China (2.4%). However, between 2008 and 2013, the largest sources of FDI (by capital) were Turkey (US\$967 million), China (US\$545 million), Saudi Arabia (US\$279 million), India (US\$254 million) and France (US\$96 million) (Chen et al., 2015: 25) Most recently, FDI inflows were greatest from China (24.9%), Saudi Arabia (17.1%), Turkey (10.3%), India (8.1%), and the EU (7.7%) (US Department of State, 2019).

China has become a significant player in FDI in Africa, with Ethiopia being one of its largest beneficiaries. In 2004, the amount flowing from China to Ethiopia was relatively small, at US\$0.4m, but it rose to US\$4.9m in 2005 and to US\$24m in 2006. It briefly turned down in 2007 and 2008 to US\$13.3m and US\$9.7m respectively, climbing again to US\$74.3m in 2009, and

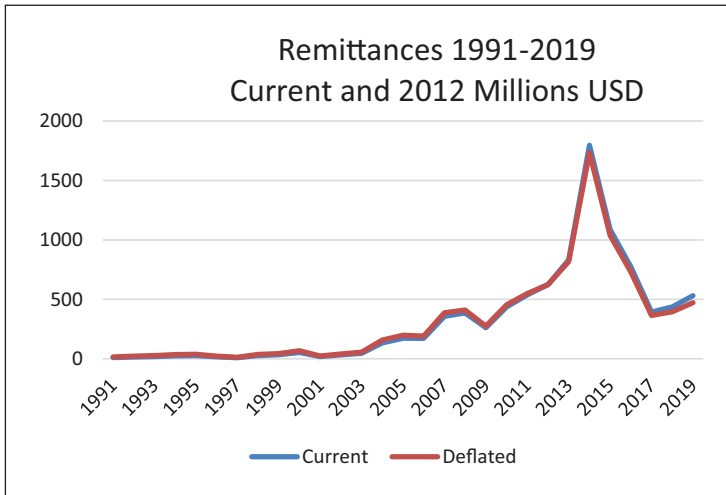


Figure 2. Remittances 1991–2019. Current and 2012 US\$ millions.

dropping slightly to US\$58.5m in 2010 (World Bank, 2012: 5). Importantly, China provided US\$4.5b for the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway (UNCTAD, 2012: 33). China invested in over 1000 projects in Ethiopia from 1998 to 2014 (Cheru, 2016: 597). The largest in number and value were in manufacturing, representing 657 of the projects, and 65% of the value of the investments. Recently the amount of Chinese FDI has risen to US\$2.2b. In fact, China was the largest international investor in 2019, with over “60% of newly approved FDI projects, with significant realized investments in manufacturing and services” (UNCTAD, 2020: 34).

Under Abiy, FDI from many sources could continue, and even increase, given the announced plans to privatize parts of Ethiopia’s economy. Ethiopia is hoping to raise over US\$7.5b through the sales of assets in the Ethiopian Sugar Corp., the phone networks, railroads, and other infrastructure projects (Bowker, 2020). The US has announced its intentions to invest another US\$5b in Ethiopia in the next few years, mostly in the privatizing sectors (UNCTAD, 2020: 33). In addition, the UAE said it would invest US\$2b in Ethiopia’s economy as well as making a US\$1b deposit into Ethiopia’s banking system (Fick and Cornwell, 2018).

Portfolio investment: Ethiopia has no recorded portfolio investment (World Bank, n.d.-b). However, it was planning on opening up a stock market in 2020 (Gebre, 2020).

Remittances

As Figure 2 shows, remittances are important to Ethiopia for external financing. They began rising in 2003 and peaked in 2008. Ethiopia is among the top 10 recipients of remittance-receiving countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020).

ODA

Ethiopia has been quite dependent upon aid for government revenue (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). In 2018, for example, it received US\$4.9b, with about two-fifths bilaterally, and about three-fifths from multilateral organizations (OECD).¹² The top donors, both multi- and bilateral, were these: World Bank (US\$1620m), USA (US\$927m), UK (US\$413m), EU institutions

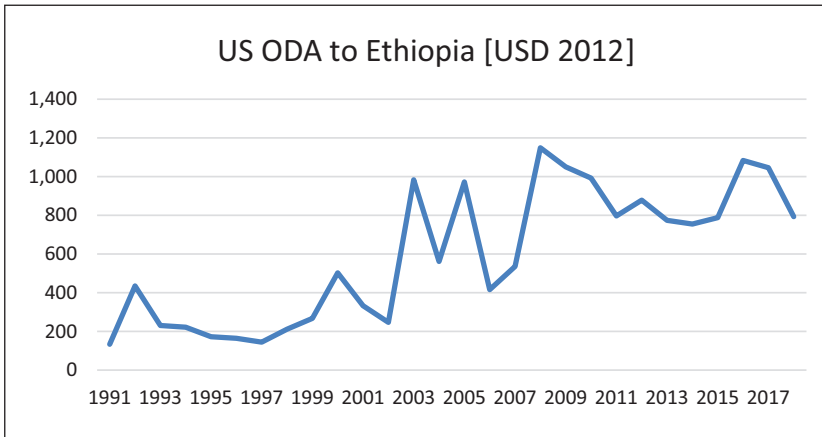


Figure 3. US ODA to Ethiopia (in millions, US\$2012).

(US\$246m), African Development Fund (US\$213m), Germany (US\$165m), Global Fund (US\$157m), Canada (US\$90m), Netherlands (US\$81m), and Sweden (US\$80m). Averaging for the past 10 years, the largest donors were the World Bank (US\$962m), USA (US\$773m), UK (US\$437m), EU institutions (US\$243m), African Development Fund (US\$197m), Global Fund (US\$164m), UN (US\$113m), Canada (US\$112m), Germany (US\$103m), Japan (US\$84m), and the Netherlands (US\$80m).¹³

Looking at just US ODA (see Figure 3), it was relatively stable up through 2002, when it averaged about US\$220m per year. From 2003, it climbed significantly, though with seesawing, averaging almost US\$700m per year through 2007. From 2008 to 2018, it averaged US\$919m per year. The strong and rising support from the US is likely related to Ethiopia’s participation in the new war on terror, its place in the Horn, and its participation in the war in Somalia, where it helped defeat the Islamic Court Union, viewed by many as supporting US interests in the region (Africa South of the Sahara, 2020). Ethiopian troops began skirmishes with Somali troops in small cross-border disputes in 2002, and Ethiopia clearly invaded Somalia in 2006 and remained there until 2009.

ODA, FDI, and remittances compared

Comparing three major sources of hard currency not linked to exporting, by far the most important flow to Ethiopia has usually been ODA. As we can see in Figure 4, ODA was the highest amount for nearly every year, aside from 2016 and 2017. Remittances were quite important and nearly matched FDI for most years until 2015, when FDI rose to levels on a par with ODA, though they dropped in 2019. Moreover, remittances actually were more important than FDI from 2007 through 2010 and in 2012, which is quite remarkable (UNCTAD, 2012).

US military aid

US military aid is another important source of hard currency for Ethiopia. Since 2002, Ethiopia has received over US\$20m in military aid from the United States, making it the largest recipient of such aid in Africa after Djibouti (Slavin, 2007). Many see this US aid as a quid pro quo for Ethiopia’s participation against Islamic extremists in Somalia. Ethiopia invaded Somalia in

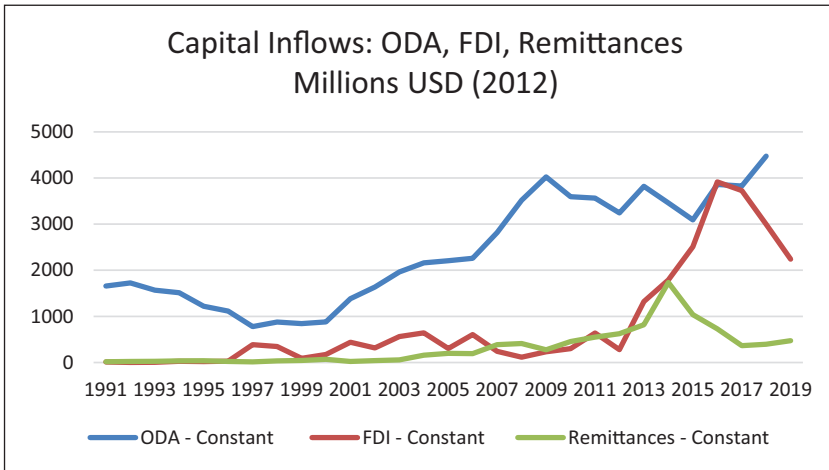


Figure 4. Capital inflows: ODA, FDI, remittances (in millions, US\$2012).

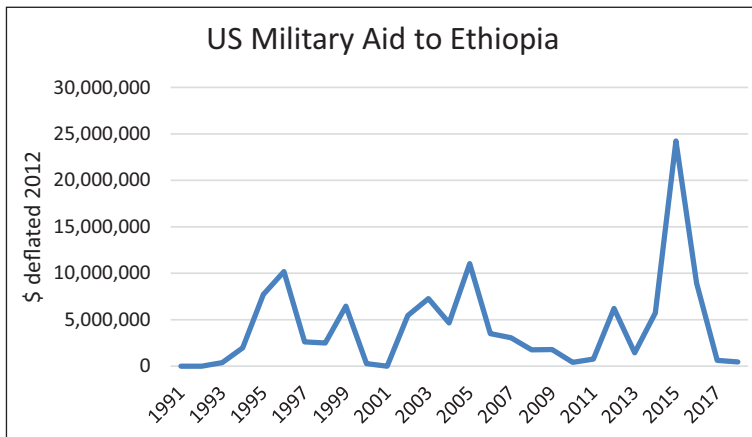


Figure 5. US military aid to Ethiopia.

December 2006 (Gettleman, 2010). In 2008 alone, Ethiopia received over US\$1b from the US (Tepperman and Mclure, 2009); US\$996m was in economic aid.¹⁴

The US views Ethiopia as one of four anchor states in Africa, along with Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa (Chau, 2007). This categorization from the US perspective is unlikely to change, especially with Ethiopia's being a US ally on the war on terror. Ethiopia is helping the United States deny a haven to Al Qaeda in Somalia, which could draw jihadists from around the world (Gettleman, 2010).

Given Ethiopia's strategic role in the Horn, and its cooperation with the US on the war on terror, it is likely immune from US pressure for significant democratization. However, it has adopted many of the institutions of multiparty rule, often the minimum requirement for international aid linked to democracy. One recent bump in this road has to do with the GERD as the Trump administration took Egypt's side towards the filling of the dam, though Trump is no longer president.

Case study: the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

The GERD can be seen as an interplay of all of the levels of Ethiopian foreign policy. It also seems consistent with most African foreign policies as well as Ethiopia's 2002 white paper. At the lowest level, the building of the dam will help Ethiopia prosper and develop. The US\$4.6b dam project can provide electricity for most of its population. Currently, only about 25% have irregular access, and more than 95% rely on wood for cooking and heating (Ighobor and Bafana, 2014). The GERD should produce over 6000 MW of electricity (Water Technology). Importantly, the dam construction will provide jobs and resources as well as cheap and reliable electricity to allow for more industrial development.

Moreover, as the dam was financed by Ethiopians themselves (the government—with bonds and taxes—and diaspora Ethiopians), it can also be seen as part of a nation-building strategy (Ighobor and Bafana, 2014). About 20% of it was financed from local bonds, and the rest from taxes (Veselinovic, 2015). This is a symbolic example of Ethiopian self-help and development. When the GERD is finished, it will become Africa's largest hydroelectric dam (Manson, 2012).

Dams are among the most important and visible nation-building projects for several reasons. They provide a means of sustainable energy, they enable provision of water for irrigation, and they can provide flood control. Moreover, they are clear symbols of national power and technical ability (Drake, 2016).

In the wake of the 2005 elections where the opposition gained nearly 40% of the seats, the EPRDF reacted by creating a vigorous state-led development agenda called the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), with the state having the lead role (Khisra, 2019: 551). The plan emphasized infrastructure, linking ODA or Chinese FDI to domestic policy goals. Therefore, like China, Ethiopian leaders are seeking legitimacy through development and cooptation. In 2005, the EPRDF also began the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), which is among the largest social welfare programs in sub-Saharan Africa (Lavers, 2019).

Although Ethiopia has been growing, bottlenecks associated with unreliable energy should be removed with the GERD and open the economy to even more investment and later growth. Currently over 65% of Ethiopia's population does not have access to regular electricity (Samir, 2020). Given its fractious politics, growth and electricity provided by the dam would give additional legitimacy to the leaders to help them smooth over ethnic conflicts, which tend to be exacerbated during economic downturns. The World Bank estimated that the GERD could generate a billion dollars a year through the exportation of electricity (Veselinovic, 2015). As Ethiopia is built upon a complex mixture of ethnicities embedded in the body politics through federalism, and since it is one of the poorest countries in the region, foreign policies for Ethiopia have to be developmental. The GERD should be an unqualified success.

Looking at the second level, the dam carries with it both opportunities and concerns. The export of cheap and reliable electricity should help other nations with their own developmental constraints and bottlenecks. Sudan has signaled that it would purchase such electricity, and in 2012, then-President Bashir of Sudan even endorsed the GERD (Woldemariam, 2020), though relations with Sudan soured with Bashir's departure (Mwakideu, 2020). Nonetheless, the GERD could benefit Sudan and Egypt by improving flood control as well as having less Nile water lost to evaporation (Woldemariam, 2020). Even Rwanda and Kenya have already agreed to purchase thousands of megawatts once the project is finished (Veselinovic, 2015). Ethiopia under Meles (who started the project) had been planning to sell electricity to Djibouti, Somaliland, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt (Verhoeven, 2015: 94). In addition, with the reconciliation, Eritrea could become a market for energy.

Moving to the next level, the dam affects the third tier of relations, the distal potential threats, though still in the region. Most clearly, the relations between Ethiopia and the two down-river nations of Sudan and Egypt are most impacted. Egypt sees its access to Nile water in an existential sense as it relies upon the Nile for over 90% of its needs (Zane, 2020). Egypt claims that a 1929 treaty gives it the right to veto any upstream changes in water, but Ethiopia disagrees. From Egypt's perspective, the building of the GERD could set a bad precedent as other upstream countries could dam the White Nile unilaterally. After the resignation of Mubarak, and the disruption of Egyptian politics, Ethiopia seemed to have felt freer to pursue its water claims as Egyptian leaders deal with internal issues (Manson, 2012).

Egypt's greatest fear is that it will lack water during the dam's filling as well as during droughts. This was seen as such a threat that, during President Morsi's administration, "several politicians were caught on live television in Cairo . . . saying it might be better to bomb the dam or to arm Ethiopian guerrillas to pressure the government in Addis Ababa" (Manson and Daragahi, 2013: 9). President Morsi said in a later television appearance, "all options are open" (Manson and Daragahi, 2013: 9).

Nonetheless, an initial declaration of principles was signed in 2015 between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan setting out 10 principles which the dam and subsequent negotiations should follow (Ahramonline, 2015; Johnson, 2015). As the dam neared completion, however, Egypt pressured Ethiopia to delay filling the dam until assurances were made concerning timing of filling and protocols for droughts. Egypt even asked the Security Council to become involved in June 2020 (Pilling and Saleh, 2020; Walsh, 2020). Although no formal treaty has been signed over how quickly it will be filled, Ethiopia began to fill it in July 2020, with promises of not disrupting water supplies downstream (Pilling and Saleh, 2020). Despite Egypt's protests, some argue that it has no specific threats to its water security, but it is seeking legally binding assurances that would kick in should a prolonged drought emerge (Walsh, 2020).

Although no final agreement has been reached among the three nations, the foreign minister of Sudan has said "they had reached 90 per cent of an agreement during U.S.- and World Bank-facilitated talks that stalled in late February" (International Crisis Group, 2020). A consensus even exists that Ethiopia can fill the GERD when sufficient rainfall comes, though the issues of drought mitigation protocols and a dispute resolution mechanism are still outstanding and a significant source of tension (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Finally, the dam has affected its relations with great and superpowers outside the region. The US tried to mediate negotiations among the three countries Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt—though Ethiopia walked away, arguing that Washington was on Egypt's side. Ethiopia did not sign the final agreement and the Trump administration later suspended aid worth US\$100m (despite opposition within the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)) (Al Jazeera, 2020b; Gramer, 2020; Sudan Tribune, 2020). This marks a clear departure from earlier strong ties between the US and Ethiopia with its willingness to participate in the war on terrorism, which will likely reverse when the Biden administration takes office.

Conclusions

Should Ethiopia continue to follow its pragmatic approach to foreign relations as a major source of resources for domestic power consolidation and economic development, we should see continued attempts to draw ODA, FDI, and other official flows from the US, China, the EU, and other rising powers such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and India. We should also expect to see continued attempts to diversify their export markets, their access to export markets, and their sources of aid and FDI. With the GERD increasing access to a consistent form of electricity, FDI leading to more

industrialization will also be likely. However, when it comes to democracy, *per se*, it is unlikely the new leadership will desire a significant change away from electoral authoritarianism unless it can create a stable new basis of power based upon a pan-ethnic coalition that can be seen as legitimate for most of Ethiopia's people and groups. Until then, it will need to keep the foundation of ethnofederalism intact, even as many protests and uprising in Tigray erode its foundation.

Ethiopia has so far successfully increased ODA, FDI, and other sources of international capital, despite facing a slight setback with the US's aid (which should soon disappear with the new Biden administration). Nonetheless, since 2000, from the US, Ethiopia has been able to attract significant increases in international financial flows, especially in ODA. This contrasts strongly with the very low levels under the Derg. Moreover, Ethiopia has been among one of the faster-growing nations in Africa for the past decade or so. From 2003 to 2011, Ethiopia had an average growth rate of 9.2%, with six of these years in double digits.¹⁵ Therefore, it seems unlikely that Abiy would jeopardize the foreign relations that had led to these economic resources that have helped the country grow—and which have no doubt increased the legitimacy for the ruling elite. Regionally, it seems that the government will also be pragmatic, but carry a big stick for challenges that require military solutions—though any military “solutions” would have to keep the international community from frowning upon Ethiopian adventurism (or self-defense). However, the recent uprising in Tigray may jeopardize regional stability, depending on Abiy's ability to assuage the TPLF and to continue to shift the basis of power towards the PP as a means of ensuring his continued rule.

In sum, Ethiopia is likely to continue to act as a weak, but growing, regional power, aligning itself with great and minor powers that help it develop and gain access to resources and markets. Ethiopia's potential Achilles heels for current approaches are these: (a) domestic or regional sources of radicalized Islamic mobilization which target the current leadership; (b) an escalation of the conflict with Tigray which could lead to a protracted civil war; (c) problems of legitimacy with any perceived sudden movement away from ethnic federalism leading to large-scale protests or conflict; (d) a shift in international perspectives such that Ethiopia is no longer seen as a necessary partner in the war on terrorism or if the international community privileges human and civil rights over good economic stewardship; and (e) an open conflict with Egypt over the dam, though this does not appear likely.

Ethiopia has thus far grown fairly well with a top-down state-led development program, though it does not have much of an independent private sector. Moreover, as discussed above, most of the large companies are state owned and may create bottlenecks in growth in the long term. Abiy has announced plans to privatize many of these sectors, but as other leaders in other countries have learned, privatization of some sectors can cause political backlash (Tangri, 1999). Moreover, as in other formerly majority state-owned economies in sub-Saharan Africa, many of the losers of privatization are politically well connected and would likely oppose such reforms.¹⁶ In sum, privatization could become economically necessary for continued economic growth, but the actions of privatization could be politically perilous.

Given these potential vulnerabilities, Ethiopia will likely continue to maintain ties with China as well as its regional partners, while maintaining its good standing with the West as a responsible developer and partner against terrorism—all while pursuing a non-democratic, but pragmatic solution to development issues. This requires keeping an independent streak while not alienating powerful international actors—unless they demand the leadership to do things they would unlikely agree to, such as give up domestic power.

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Notes

1. For three classic treatments of Africa foreign policy see Aluko (1977), Clapham (1996), Khadiagala and Lyons (2001), and Wright (1999). For an overview of the comparative literature, see Quinn (2017). For Ethiopian foreign policy, see Clapham (1999), Keller (1987), Negera (2018).
2. Of countries included in the World Development Report that year.
3. With the caveat that Eritrea, which was part of Ethiopia until recently, had been colonized by Italy.
4. For an overview of recent issues associated with the Horn, see Sharamo and Mesfin (2011).
5. Correlates of war, Interstate Wars, <https://cow.dss.ucdavis.edu/data-sets/COW-war/inter-state-wars-list>
6. For CINC scores, see Singer et al. (1972) updated by Singer (1987).
7. The EPRDF saw itself as a vanguard Marxist-Leninist party. For American primacy/ unipolarity shaping African views, see Quinn (2016).
8. For escalation or diffusion of conflicts in general, see Lobell and Mauceri (2004); for within Africa, see Quinn (2004).
9. See IPU Parline: Ethiopia (2015 election). Available at: https://data.ipu.org/node/58/elections/election-results?chamber_id=13389&election_id=27832. Another source suggested that, including allies, they had 100%; see Arriola and Lyons (2016).
10. Real \$2012.
11. From Ethiopian Investment Commission (as reported by Ethiopian Economic Association), 2007.
12. OECD data, QWIDS Query Wizard for International Development Statistics, S.V. Ethiopia.
13. For overview of distribution of aid, see Alesina and Dollar (2000); Hook (1994); Maizels and Nissanke (1994); McKinlay (1979); Quinn and Simon (2006); and Schraeder et al. (1998).
14. (USAID, n.d.) http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/foreign_commerce_aid/foreign_aid.html
15. Taken from World Bank Indicators, S.V Ethiopia accessed April 2013. (in \$2000) <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx>
16. For a model of which sectors of an economy would support such reforms, see Quinn (2002), chapter 9.

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Author biographies

John James Quinn (PhD UCLA) teaches and researches at Truman State University. He is author of *Global Geopolitical Power and African Political and Economic Institutions: When Elephants Fight*. His research focusses on the political economy of majority state ownership of industry, mining, or oil in sub-Saharan Africa. He has also written on the determinants of corruption, the determinants of French ODA in Africa, links between development and democracy in Africa, the electoral performance of formerly dominant African political parties, African foreign policy, and how the Rwandan genocide diffused and escalated – leading to Mobutu's overthrow.

Seyma Akyol (PhD, University of North Texas) is a Visiting Assistant Professor at St. Olaf College. Her primary research focuses on the intersection of conflict management, peacebuilding, and human rights with a specific emphasis on the Middle East and Africa.