



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs to address the mismatch between its policy focus on the IGAD region, and the human and material resources apportioned through commensurate allocation of resources corresponding to the prominence FANSPS confers on the region.
- For Ethiopia to seize economic and trade opportunities in its immediate neighbourhood, the rationale for the allocation of resources (ie, diplomats and financial resources) to missions in neighbouring countries needs to be reconsidered so that it aligns with the primacy of economic diplomacy as clearly accentuated in the FANSPS.
- For Ethiopia to become a hub for regional integration in the IGAD region a shift of focus to economic and trade diplomacy in the region is required, as is the case with other regions, without undermining the importance of its role in regional peace and security.
- The FANSPS should move away from a disproportionately inward-looking orientation when it comes to economic and trade opportunities, access to the sea and port services, and reconsider external threats emerging to Ethiopia's peace and development from Eritrea, Somalia and potentially other neighbouring countries, and Egypt.

Ethiopia's Regional Diplomacies: A Dominant Interpretation of the Horn of Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shares borders with the eastern African countries Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. A founding member of the UN, the African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Ethiopia pursues its regional interests multilaterally through these organisations, albeit mainly through a dominant role in IGAD.

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia has a long diplomatic history and extensive experience in foreign relations. The external threats to the country, as identified by four administrations, namely Emperor Haile Selassie, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the current administration of Hailemariam Desalegn, have generally been quite similar. While the regimes of Haile Selassie and Mengistu were outward-looking, Ethiopia under Zenawi and now Desalegn appears more inward-looking. Previous Ethiopian regimes, particularly Mengistu's military regime, externalised almost all the country's problems by focusing on building military defence capabilities against the 'historical enemies of Ethiopia'.² For an extended period, Ethiopia's main focus has therefore been aimed at addressing external threats, and collaborating with regional and global actors for collective security. Entrenched in its ideological perspectives about the root causes of Ethiopia's internal troubles and possible solutions, the Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front- (EPRDF) led government

regards regional diplomacy as another platform for solving regional problems that affect Ethiopia's internal governance and development challenges. Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy (FANSPS) rightly and explicitly underscores foreign policy as subservient to Ethiopia's internal policies, which prioritise economic development, stability and democratic governance.³ Therefore, the country's regional diplomacies are pursued through a dominant interpretation of the country's role in the region.

DRIVERS IN DIPLOMACY: BILATERAL TO REGIONAL

The FANSPS implicitly espouses the belief that a country that is not peaceful domestically cannot enjoy peace with its neighbours. First, Ethiopia needs to focus on its peace and security challenges so that it can also have peaceful relations with other countries. Similarly, for the establishment of a peaceful, integrated and prosperous region, Ethiopia deems it equally necessary for its neighbours to enjoy domestic peace and stability.

Ethiopia has therefore signed comprehensive co-operation agreements with Somalia,⁴ Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya, Yemen, Nigeria and South Sudan, reflecting its close relations with both close and distant African and Arab countries. However, at a regional level, IGAD is a key regional institution through which Ethiopia pursues its regional objectives. Since 2008, Ethiopia has been the chair of IGAD. As one of the leading founders and main architects of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Ethiopia's rich history served as the seedbed for pan-Africanism.

This legacy is sustained by active participation, a disciplined position, intellectual competence and continued engagement with the AU and IGAD. Ethiopia has also used the charismatic personality and international fame of Haile Selassie, and the intellectual competence, persuasive skills and confidence of the late prime minister to promote its national interests at the AU, IGAD and other global forums.⁵

Ethiopia has six missions in IGAD member states and the 36 diplomats serving in them constitute 11.5% of the total number of Ethiopian diplomats abroad. With an average of 6.24 diplomats serving in Ethiopian missions worldwide, Ethiopia's missions in IGAD countries have slightly fewer diplomats per mission than the average number of Ethiopian diplomats serving

elsewhere. Whereas Ethiopia's prominence and influence in international and regional diplomacy depend heavily on the country's successful role in IGAD peace and security activities, its deployment of diplomats does not match this role. Increasing diplomatic staff is crucial, as Ethiopia's pivotal role within IGAD and, to a limited extent, in the AU will continue to grow.

KEY DRIVERS OF ETHIOPIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Ethiopia's inward-looking foreign policy orientation and efforts to address longstanding internal political instability loom large in its external relations. Ruled by a highly centralised military dictatorship under Mengistu, who hijacked the revolution of 1974 that toppled Haile Selassie's monarchy, Ethiopia has endured protracted conflicts, particularly in its northern and south-eastern provinces. Since 1995, the EPRDF has promoted a constitution establishing a federation of linguistic and cultural communities, reflecting the social bases of the armed forces that toppled the Mengistu regime. Despite improvements in governmental effectiveness and minority rights, and addressing major sources of national conflicts in previous years, the current political space is characterised both by the fear of politics and the politics of fear. Thus, on the political front, there are many challenges concerning human rights, political participation, good governance and corruption.

Nonetheless, Ethiopia's recent promising economic performance offers hope for its people, and the country is increasingly attracting aid, trade and investment. It recently added a new area of focus on regional integration in IGAD through internal infrastructure development, and the export of hydroelectric power and water concessions to neighbouring countries.⁶ This approach may constitute a major improvement in addressing the shortcomings of Ethiopia's regional diplomatic practices, regardless of its current policy orientation.

In remarks made during a meeting with Prime Minister Desalegn, US President Barack Obama pointed out the 'enormous progress in a country that once had great difficulty feeding itself. It's now not only leading the pack in terms of agricultural production in the region, but will soon be an exporter potentially not just of agriculture, but also power because of the development that's been taking place there.'⁷

Ranked first in sub-Saharan Africa, third (next

to Egypt and Algeria) in Africa and fortieth in the world,⁸ Ethiopia's military strength and role in regional peace and security, and an impressive track record in peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and mediation create demand for long-term partnerships and alliances in the region and beyond. In actual troop contribution, with a total of 12 247 troops (4 395 troops in the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)),⁹ and 7 852 in UN missions,¹⁰ Ethiopia is the biggest troop-contributing nation in the world. As the third contributor to UN peacekeeping missions in, for example, Darfur (UN AU Mission in Darfur), Abyei (UN Interim Security Force for Abyei or UNISFA¹¹) and South Sudan (UN Mission in South Sudan), Ethiopia's focus has been on peace and security in Africa.¹²

Ethiopia has been subjected to a series of external and internal terrorist attacks, making it a natural ally in the fight against terrorism in the IGAD region. With this overlapping interest, all African, Western and Eastern countries partner with Ethiopia in this fight.¹³ Ethiopia played a decisive role in the imposition of UN sanctions against Somalia and Eritrea by mobilising other IGAD member states, lobbying the AU and by influencing the UN Security Council. The Ethiopian chief of the IGAD-led mediation for South Sudan,¹⁴ and Ethiopia's role in the mediation talks between South Sudan and Sudan¹⁵ are a few examples of Ethiopia's leadership prominence in the region.¹⁶ This strategic role attracts significant interest from Western and Eastern powers in terms of Ethiopia's responsibility in the region and beyond.

Within a pan-African outlook, Ethiopia has recently increased its effective use of multilateral platforms. Located in this troubled region, with its own internal political history marked by violent conflicts, Ethiopia previously faced serious foreign aggression not only from Italy, Egypt and Britain, but also from its neighbouring countries Somalia and Eritrea. Said Barre's regime in Somalia instigated the border war of 1977, and through terrorist attacks by Somali extremist groups such as the defunct Al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya and Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahedeen (Al Shabaab).¹⁷ Ethiopia has remained in a state of war with Eritrea since the 1998 border conflict. In addition, state failure in Somalia allowed for armed groups from Ethiopia, such as the Ogaden National Liberation Front, the Oromo Liberation Front and the Islamic Front for Liberation of Oromia, to operate and launch attacks against Ethiopia.¹⁸ Eritrea exploited these stateless armed groups as proxies to weaken Ethiopia's

focus on the border war.¹⁹ The rivalry with Egypt over the Nile River also threatened to destabilise Ethiopia when Egypt exploited the various armed conflicts in Ethiopia.²⁰

Thus, peace and security in the region will also benefit Ethiopia by ensuring its own economic development. Emanating from a history of victimisation and repeated external threats to its independence, Ethiopia strongly supported collective security and multilateral platforms and institutions such as the UN and its predecessor in order to pursue its own interests and seek solutions to threats to its sovereignty.²¹

CONCLUSION

In a total break from the past, the EPRDF-led government not only internalised the challenges that besieged the country's overall development, but also pointedly identified protracted conflicts, extreme and rampant poverty, and technological backwardness as major threats to Ethiopia's survival. Furthermore, the FANSPS aptly characterised these domestic predicaments as issues of national survival. Nevertheless, Ethiopia's regional diplomacy is sluggish in seizing economic and trade opportunities in the region. The Ethio-Eritrean border war of 1998 and the weak economic activities of Ethiopian businesses in the IGAD region are also attributable to the country's detrimental and excessively inward-looking foreign policy.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 Tekle A, 'The determinants of the foreign policy of revolutionary Ethiopia', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27, 3, 1989, pp. 479–502; Ethiopia, Ministry of Information, FANSPS (Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy). Addis Ababa, 2002, pp. 34–38.
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