

ETHIOPIA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE AU: TIME TO LOOK BEYOND UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS & SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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Ethiopia has a well articulated foreign and security policy called the Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy (FANSPS). Its substantive anchor on development and stability as well as geographic focus on the Horn of Africa and Egypt reflects divergence from previous regime's assessment of the state of affairs of Ethiopia and the means (including diplomacy) necessary to move forward.

However, Ethiopia's detailed policies towards the Horn of Africa and to that matter the entire Africa are not a substitute to its policy towards the AU for the following reasons:

First, the AU, like any multilateral regional governance institution, constitutes more than a summation of the member states. AU's norms, institutions and procedures do not readily aggregate the preferences of each member states, rather they look for an overlapping consensus as stated in the AU Constitutive Act and its various decision and policy making, and implementation organs. Thus, AU offers opportunities to countries like Ethiopia to influence, shape and impact continental policies that have bearings internally and regionally.

Second, Ethiopia has always been home to the AU headquarters. This entails in the wording of FANSPS, 'a special responsibility.' In this regard, the most substantive statement in FANSPS reads: "Ethiopia all along steadfastly championed the cause of Africa and Africans dating back to a time when it stood virtually alone." There has never been a time when Ethiopian governments shied away from taking up their responsibilities towards Africa. It can also be said that there was hardly any occasion when Ethiopia was refused political and diplomatic support from Africa when it was needed. This emphasises on historical support of the OAU/AU to Ethiopia's interest, ensures AU's continued and robust support to Ethiopia in the future.

Third, indeed Ethiopia has hugely sacrificed its national interest in many occasions in support of Pan Africanism albeit only with general principles and ad hoc reactions dictated by dynamic circumstances. In spite of being the seedbed for Pan Africanism, the principal force for the establishment of the OAU, and the host of the AU for five decades, Ethiopia lacks a self-contained comprehensive policy toward the AU that clearly articulates its national interest and how to strategically pursue these interests in the AU.

Despite the absence of a full-fledged and self-contained policy, throughout the past five decades, Ethiopia's commitment, overall direction and contributions have been that of continuity and consistency.

Addis Abeba: *The Diplomatic hub of Africa*

Since May 1963 (*de jure* since July 1964), Addis Abeba has served as the Headquarters of the OAU. In the earliest times of the OAU, Ethiopia provided not only land and buildings, but also offered all the human and physical facilities that the OAU required. In 1963, Nigeria, and in the early inception of the AU, Senegal and later on Libya under Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, attempted to move the seat of the OAU/AU from Addis Abeba.

Despite these attempts however, the AU rules governing the hosting of AU summits designated Addis Abeba as the only headquarters of the AU, and agreed Ethiopia to host the January/February summit every year. However, individual member states could apply to host the June/July summit. The rotation of the June/July summit was originally devised to reduce the pressure from Colonel Qaddafi as a compromise deal to have two summits per annum and the rotation of the June/July to allow member states such as Libya to host summits.

As Africa's diplomatic centre, Addis Abeba hosts the most important of all AU organs and Pan African institutions. Chief among these include, the AU Commission, the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) of the all AU member states, the Peace and Security Council (PSC), and the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services in Africa (CISSA). Other Pan African institutions include the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), UN office to AU, the Eastern African Brigade Headquarters, and Eastern African Standby Force Logistic Base, Pan African Chamber of Commerce, IGAD programmes such as Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), IGAD Security Sector Programme (ISSP), and Liaison Offices of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Other accredited diplomatic representations to the AU include the United States, the European Union, China, India, Brazil and the United Nations agencies and other international multilateral and humanitarian organizations. While the US and EU have two heads of missions – a bilateral Embassy to Ethiopia and a multilateral Permanent Mission to the AU, China and other countries are considering establishing separate missions to the AU. On average, Addis Abeba also serves more than 1,100 meetings annually, related to Pan-African issues. During the January AU regular Summits, Addis Abeba hosts an average of 7200 delegates, and more than 40 heads of states and governments.

Addis Abeba's special responsibility for the AU

In the words of FANSPS, Ethiopia's opportunity to host the AU comes with "a special responsibility for the organization." Nonetheless, what constitutes 'special responsibility' is not defined in the FANSPS or any other policy document. Ethiopia regularly pays its assessed contribution (for 2014, USD 1.8 million) based on the country's GDP. Ethiopia is one of eleven AU Member States that has not only fully paid its contributions for 2014, but also one of the five that usually makes advance payments. Traditionally, Ethiopia, not necessarily for the sake of the OAU or AU, has provided a secure and enabling environment

for the OAU and AU. Exemplary in many ways, these, however, do not constitute 'special responsibilities' of Ethiopia to the AU.

A consequence of the absence of a policy in regard to the AU, despite putting forward some of its prominent ministers and diplomats as candidates, so far, Ethiopia has failed to assume any visible, influential professional and elected posts at the AU Commission. In a bid to offer leadership to the AU Commission, Ethiopia unsuccessfully proposed several candidates (including to the posts of commissioner of peace and security in 2012, and political affairs of the AU Commission in 2003). Due to a weak nomination process and nearly non-existent campaigning strategy, unlike other significant countries, Ethiopian candidates were destined to fail.

Beyond unique contributions & special responsibilities

Signifying the genuine commitment of Ethiopia to the causes of the OAU/AU, regardless of their diametrically opposed internal policies, successive rulers of Ethiopia have continued to pursue the same policy on the OAU and AU. Ethiopia's approach to the OAU/AU is characterized by continuity throughout many decades albeit in the significant changes in the internal underpinnings of Ethiopia foreign policy.

While the Pan-African positions promoted by the last three regimes were equally solid, nevertheless, their policies foundations and ambitions in relation to the AU were unambiguously divergent. While the regimes of Emperor Haile Selassie and Colonel Mengistu were outward looking and excessively externalized Ethiopia's internal problems, the current regime is extremely inward looking. The former two also reduced Ethiopia's domestic problems to what they termed 'historical enemies', and thereof used OAU to mitigate these external threats. Rooted in its ideological beliefs about the root-causes of Ethiopia's internal troubles and perceived solutions, for the EPRDF, the AU and the IGAD remains another platform for solving regional challenges that affects Ethiopia's internal governance and development problems. Consequently, unless directly affecting Ethiopia's developmental agenda, Ethiopia's current approach to the AU and continental affairs is un-ambitious and self-restraining. It is narrow as well *asad hoc*. For this reason, Ethiopia has no grand strategy regarding the AU.

For Ethiopia, a country with a population of 90 million, projected to reach 120 million in the next 20 years, a strategy that proactively deals with its challenges with foresight is not only vital for its economic transformation, peace and stability, but also critically important for the peace and security of the entire region. Extreme poverty, internal political stability, economic development and regional integration, security in water, energy, food and climate change, the Nile River Basin, access to the sea and port services, as well as transnational threats dictate the need for grand strategy towards AU and even IGAD.

Thus, in order to maintain and increase Ethiopia's influence in the AU, in addition to and beyond the personal capacity of its leaders, Ethiopia needs strategic long-term policies and institutions anchored inwardly not only to protect, but also promote its interest at the AU level. Enough has been changed to demand a grand strategy for Ethiopia regarding the AU. FANSPS needs a fundamental rethinking and reorganization to ensure Ethiopia benefits from the AU. Less concerned about ideological positions, grand strategies on the AU would detail how Ethiopia should make use of the AU in fostering peace, security, prosperity and stability. Anchored within the inward looking foreign policy along the lines of the national interest of Ethiopia, such a grand strategy to the AU need to be an outward looking pursuing multilateralism in vigorously promoting economic and integrative opportunities and dealing with threats proactively. Such a strategy would take Ethiopia's history, large population, strategic geographic location, military strength and economy, but primarily on mega trends that will define Ethiopia in the future.

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