



Ethiopia's new foreign policy challenges: scope for India's engagement

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopia is witnessing new twists and turns both in its domestic and foreign policy domain of late with the incumbent government in power adopting political and economic reforms aimed at fostering changes to bring about development. This has invariably provided an opportunity for India to consolidate its relationship with Ethiopia further. The new domestic political and economic reforms and the friendly gestures that the present government under Abiy Ahmed has made with its neighbors has drawn the attention of the international community to the extent of awarding him with Nobel Peace Prize. Such reform measures of Ethiopia have given India with wide scope to engage itself constructively and extend political and economic support in areas where both countries stand to gain. India's active engagement with Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular is all the more important given the China factor that has been competing with other countries of the region. This paper describes the domestic political developments in Ethiopia during the post Cold War era and its struggle to maintain the intricate ethnic balance that has characterized its nation-building process by tracing it from the days of King Haile Selassie I. It further analyzes the steps taken by the government to remove obstacles to peace and development through adopting economic liberalization measures and foreign policy changes. These are discussed in a chronological manner starting with a conceptual framework and using predominantly secondary sources and relying on personal observations.

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Introduction

A cursory glance at the post 1991 political developments in Ethiopia would tell any casual observer that the country has been caught in serious domestic problems with periodic unrest and violence. Since the formation of the new government led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991 Ethiopia has been witnessing frequent political struggle for power between various ethnic groups. What has changed of late, in view of the struggle, is the leadership – from Meles Zenawi to Hailemariam Desalegn, and now to the new incumbent Dr. Abiy Ahmed, but not the political party that governs the country. In fact, the recent change in leadership itself was not very peaceful,

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and was a product of prolonged unrest by certain ethnic groups demanding more power, which forced the government to declare a state of emergency. Coupled with this was the conflict with neighbouring countries that added to political instability and economic problems. Achieving peace both domestically and in the neighbourhood was therefore a necessity for Ethiopia to realize any meaningful development. Ethiopia's core national interests, therefore, rest on the need to achieve domestic political and economic security, and its foreign policy aims at realizing this national goal. The question, therefore, is how did Ethiopia approach this? What strategies were followed to achieving the national priorities? And what changes were attempted from the past? Does India have any role to play in assisting Ethiopia in its endeavours and strengthen bilateral relations? This article aims at answering these questions by describing and analyzing the domestic and foreign policy challenges faced by Ethiopia in a chronological manner using literatures, documents and online sources. This is done by first tracing the domestic context of Ethiopia's foreign policy as a backdrop to the ongoing tussle and then describing the post-1990 foreign policy prerogatives both during the Meles Zenawi era and thereafter in order to understand the approaches and strategies used, and then analyzing the scope of India's role with the help of some statistical data where possible. But first, a conceptual framework would be in order.

The framework

It will not be an exaggeration to state that today, the foreign policy concerns of all countries, irrespective of the kind of political system in place, operate from within the domestic context. Africa has been ruled by different regimes, and their international relations to a great extent are influenced by the type of regime ruling it. In Africa, one can observe all types – military dictators, civilian governments, democratic, authoritarian, revolutionary, and populist administrations ruling, and some of them staying in power for decades, too (Chazen and Rothchild 1988, 4–5). Ethiopia can be said to be a 'hybrid regime combining elements of democracy and authoritarianism where one can observe the presence of democratic institutions in name, but where violations are common (Levitsky and Way 2002, 53–65). Not only that, ethnic communities living across borders and divided in the aftermath of colonial rule have added to even more security concerns as and when regimes have altered power in their respective countries. Therefore peace and security in Africa are closely intertwined with development and promotion of good neighbourly relations as well.

However, at the core lies protection and promotion of national interests, the priorities or 'core-values' of which is the defense of countries' or states' sovereignty or national independence, and state or regime security (Clapham 1996, 4). To some, it is survival such as in the case of Ethiopia, where regime security and survival have been a considered priority while to some other countries the goal is to achieve big power status while to many others it can be more about meeting the basic needs. Whatever the case, fulfilling domestic economic priorities and goals have now become the focus of attention and national priority for all countries. Hence we see politics and economics working in tandem, and the constant struggle between these two realms playing out both internally and externally, creating convergence and divergence of interests between the developed and developing countries.

In the immediate years following the end of the Cold War, it was Africa, of all other regions of the world, which got embroiled in the challenge of meeting the above mentioned political-economy dynamics. The success of the West over the East and thereby the Western ideology of democracy, human rights and economic liberalization penetrated the developing and underdeveloped world alike as the only available option. Thereafter most developing countries were forced to embrace market liberalization, which in turn compelled them to adjust their economic policies to fit the global trend that is perceived as a viable alternative to escape economic underdevelopment.¹ India and China are examples of this trend from the developing world, and both utilized this opportunity well. Even if there might be drawbacks in economic liberalization measures,² both India and China pursued economic liberalization policies and opened up to foreign investment by adopting a market-oriented economic system. Indeed such measures resulted in immense economic benefits. Of course, this may not be true for all regions and all countries for reasons including, but not limited to, the uneven spread and integration into globalization, besides differing perceptions on whether such ideological dispositions could hold water to the African context. As pointed out by Falola and Kalu (2018, 4–6) in their perceptive analysis on the impact of globalization, there are a host of reasons for Africa's lowered benefit from globalization as compared to other regions, such as its inability to diversify its economy, unfair international competition and trade practices, resource exploitation and western-backed institutional conditions and constraints.

Parallel to the above was the penetration of western-centred liberal ideologies such as democratic governance and respect for human rights. Again, controversies notwithstanding on the kind of democratic systems to follow, the trend today is that most countries have embraced the democratic path and have observed human rights and human values. Nonetheless, even if there is a general agreement on the need to protect human rights and democratic values when it comes to implementation, the problem is that there is a general disagreement, particularly when situations go out of control to the level of threatening the very survival of ruling regimes. At such instances, any call or action against human rights abuses by the international community are considered as interference in internal affairs (Donnelly 1993, 607–640).

Therefore, the foreign policies of states are challenged by a combination of the domestic and external environment. There is on the one hand the need to provide economic development, while on the other hand sustaining regimes that are in power. In this context the issue is to sustain the core national interests of providing economic development while, at the same time stabilizing the regime in power. As power is distributed differentially among the nations of the world, big powers wield a lot of influence over small powers, and hence power acts as an influencing factor in how nations strengthen their bilateral relationships. For example, within sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia is a regional player in the Horn, and hence wields power over other small countries (such as Djibouti) surrounding it. Similar is the case of other major powers in Africa such as Nigeria in the West and South Africa in the southern region. Similarly outside of Africa among the developing countries, India is a major power and hence it is logical to think that it can wield its economic and political power on states in Africa including that of Ethiopia. Also, China is another factor that African countries have started to bank upon as an alternative to the West.

The domestic context

In Ethiopia one can see an interesting experiment of state building through conquering, and nation building through the accumulation of political power and its consequent repercussions on domestic politics and foreign policy. Unlike many other African countries Ethiopia is unique in the sense that it has remained independent, except of course for the brief period of Italian occupation during World War II. Therefore state and nation building in Ethiopia was not externally imposed, rather one that was built by local expansion and consolidation of empires. Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic society with a population of about 100 million. As is common in many sub-Saharan African countries, poverty and unemployment is an enduring feature. However, nature has gifted Ethiopia with not only a large territory and fertile land and natural resources like river water systems, but also high mountains in the northern frontier acting as a natural barrier to foreign attacks. This explains how Ethiopia in its long history remained an independent nation never to be colonized by any European power, except for the brief period of Italian control mentioned above.

Governing such a country was indeed a big challenge to many past rulers, be it a monarch like Haile Selassie or a dictator like Mengistu Hailemariam, or even subsequent governments led by Meles Zenawi and the present incumbent Abiy Ahmed for that matter. In essence, as we will see below, the approach to build a solid nation was through aggrandizement of political power by measures detrimental to the interests of large segments of society and their cultural and ethnic values that contributed to the failure of a successful nation-building experiment. In hindsight, whatever justification was made for these strategies due to which the outcome was a failure was largely due to errors committed by the leadership. It is here that one can see the roots of Ethiopia's foreign policy. It is therefore essential to briefly highlight the post-World War II narrative which can help us capture its undercurrent.

Starting from the rule of the last Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I one can note the making and unmaking of foreign policy driven by domestic compulsions. The highlight of Emperor Haile Selassie's rule was the annexation of Eritrea into Ethiopia, which led to domestic rebellion and subsequent problems in the region. Actually, the annexation of Eritrea in 1962 after the end of British Military Administration (BMA) was meant to provide Ethiopia with access to the port of Massawa and Azab, which is now part of Eritrea bordering the Red Sea. Ethiopia is a landlocked state and hence there was a dire need for access to the sea.

Until its annexation Eritrea was under Italian colonial rule (Yemae Mesghenna 1989, 65–72) and soon after the defeat of Italy in World War II, the issue was taken up at the UN General Assembly to decide on the fate of Eritreans as to whether to support their self-determination or federate Eritrea with Ethiopia. The federation proposal was supported by UNGA resolution 390-A(V) according to which Eritrea would be an autonomous state with its own constitution (Semere Haile 1987, 9–17). However, Emperor Haile Selassie progressively dismantled Eritrea's federal powers and went on to annex it, which culminated in a civil war led by the Eritrean liberation movements, which sprang up thereafter. The civil war and the centralized control of the Emperor led to disgruntlement among the military, who under the leadership of Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, staged a coup toppling his government in 1974 (popularly called the Derg

regime) (Koehn 1975, 7–21). Further domestic turmoil ensued as Colonel Mengistu's socialist-oriented economic policies and political programmes along the lines of Marxism-Leninism through establishing a command state only ruined the country's prospects of economic development that contributed to opposing forces within Ethiopia joining the fight against the Derg regime.³ The Derg regime hence fought both the Eritrean and Ethiopian liberation forces.

What emerged from the civil war was the rise to prominence of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) (Medhanie and Young 2003, 389–403) which spearheaded the movement against the Derg regime. Other local and regional political parties such as the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement now called the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) and the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) got organized, and subsequently joined to form the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1989. Hence in what was Africa's longest armed struggle against the military rule of the Mengistu regime the EPRDF emerged victorious in 1991. In fact, there was military cooperation between the TPLF and the Eritrean liberation movements that led to success against the Derg. It was this cooperation that later contributed to the referendum for independence of Eritrea which was overwhelmingly accepted in 1991, and by 1993, under the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) took power in independent Eritrea and the TPLF dominated EPRDF that formed government in Ethiopia. Since then and until this day, it is the EPRDF that has been in power and ruling the country.

Post 1990 developments

Important to note in the post-1990 Ethiopian government formation is the intricate ethnic balance, as the Tigrays, who are a minority ethnic group in Ethiopia dominated the government even though other partners the Oromos and the Amharas are majority. The World Population Review in its country study report stated that Tigray ethnic group constitute 6.1% of the estimated 107.53 million people and according to this report they constitute fourth next to Somali's who constitute 6.2% of the population (World Population Review 2018). Ethiopia also has more than 80 other minor ethnic groups spread across the country. This was due to the predominant role played by TPLF in the civil war. The new government under the leadership of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi re-organized the society along ethnic-based federalism with a centralized form of democratic governance. Political dissent by other parties or ethnic groups was not tolerated as it was discerned to delay developmental measures and prospects. In other words, the strategy was one of 'revolutionary democracy' perceived to be the panacea for a multi-ethnic society like Ethiopia that is caught in poverty and underdevelopment (Plaut 2012, 645–654).

Furthermore, the new constitution in 1994 provided scope for self-determination to the regional states (Turton 2005, 88–101). It should be underlined here that the policy of ethnic-based federalism only contributed to the rise of ethnic identity and consciousness among other ethnic groups residing in the country's nine different Federal regions as minority groups (Mahmood Mamdani 2019).⁴ This policy has led to periodic ethnic unrest besides providing scope for divide and rule by the government, rather than bringing about any meaningful inter-ethnic solidarity. A good example of this is the ongoing unrest between the Wolaita's and the Sidamas in Ethiopia's Southern Nations and

Nationalities People's Republic (SNNPR) state besides others (Davison and Kursha 2018; Abbink 1998; Aalen 2006). The Sidamas have long been demanding a new federal state (Aalen 2011, 55–69). Although such internal struggles sapped Ethiopia's economic strength, they were nevertheless a blessing in disguise for the minority party led by TPLF to gain political legitimacy through the EPRDF by quelling such internal disturbances through force.

Regime security therefore became a priority over national security and development. Hence any hindrances to the government such as demand for autonomy, more political space by ethnic groups, media freedom, rights for the minorities etc., were 'perceived' to hamper development programmes and were not tolerated. Even though the constitutional provisions did guarantee human rights and freedom of speech they were not practiced in reality and stringent measures were taken by the government to curb them.

Notable examples of the above include the anti-terrorism proclamation and the Society and Charities Act (Ethiopia 2009). The anti-terrorism act in essence permits the law enforcement agencies to arrest and detain any person on charges of terrorist acts against the state while the society and charities act prevented the civil society from operating freely on issues relating to the political aspects of the country besides curtailing media freedom and arresting several political activists and journalists. So the government followed democratic centralization through concentration of power and state controlled or directed economy. Notwithstanding all this Ethiopia was one of the fastest growing economies in Africa recording double-digit growth (Crabtree 2018).

The restriction of political space for other political parties was amply reflected in the national elections too. For example, in the 1998 national elections, opposition parties won a significant number of seats, but in the 2005 national elections the ruling TPLF dominated EPRDF party took all the seats. The results were challenged and there were protests that turned violent (Venkataraman 2009). The author is a personal witness to the developments that took place during that time while serving in Addis Ababa University. Subsequent elections in 2010 and 2015 too have been challenged but quelled with force. Therefore, despite measures taken to remove poverty and provide economic development, the restrictive measures followed by the state led to dissent and unrest, posing serious challenges to foreign investment and economy (Marthe 2016). Hence achieving domestic peace and providing economic development through democratic means has been a challenge to Ethiopia's foreign policy.

In the foreign policy arena there were notable modifications as compared to the Derg. Accordingly, the transitional charter, notably, mentioned that the transitional government 'will conduct its foreign relations on the basis of the principles of respect for the sovereignty and equality of states and non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs as well as the promotion of mutual interest' (Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia. *Negarit Gazetta* 1991, 2) Subsequent constitutional principles have also reiterated, among others, the need for promoting development and operating within the broader globalized world by way of 'creating a conducive environment for making use of available market and investment opportunity and getting technical assistance, loans and aid for the development and democratization endeavor of the country' (The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Foreign Affairs And National Security Policy and Strategy 2002, 16–18).

The foreign policy document also mentions the need for realizing the twin objectives of democracy and development for which external economic support through economic diplomacy is needed (FDRE 2002, 23–24). In fact, Ethiopia wields significant influence in African international affairs as it happens to be the seat of African Union, having headquarters in its capital city Addis Ababa. Besides, Ethiopia has a strong military, the estimates of which are not revealed (Berouk 2012, 87–113)

Another notable aspect that affects its foreign policy is its geo-political location. The country is basically landlocked (with the independence of Eritrea) and has porous borders complicating its foreign relations. To the north is Eritrea, the state which attained de-facto independence in 1991 and de-jure in 1993, to the east it is bordered by Djibouti, to the West by Sudan and South Sudan and to the Southeast and Southwest are Somalia and Kenya respectively. Hence its land locked state makes it dependent on Djibouti and Eritrea for access to sea. Until the recent thaw in relations with Eritrea, it was Djibouti port from which about 95% of Ethiopia's in-bound trade took place. That apart, Ethiopia is endowed with a vast and fertile land with rich natural resources, particularly river water systems like the Nile, besides oil and natural gas discovered in the East of the country called the Ogaden region. All this has added to the geo-political and strategic significance of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region where the Red Sea is located, which acts as a transit route through the Strait of Bab –el Mandab for shipping between Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East. The strategic significance of the Horn region has also invited extra-regional powers such as the U.S. and China for influence – the U.S. as part of its war against terror after the September 11 attack with military forces stationed in Djibouti, (Plaut 2012, 651) and China which has taken control one of the Djibouti's port terminals as part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and placed its military forces there, the first of China's overseas naval bases (Lee 2019).

Within this neighbourhood Ethiopia's bilateral relations have encountered problems as conflicts flared up over border issues with most of its neighbours⁵ – with Somalia as early as 1977 due to claims over Ogaden region of Ethiopia during the rule of Siad Barre, which has now descended into chaos after his overthrow in 1990; with Eritrea over the claim of Badme for which three rounds of war were fought between 1999–2000; with Sudan an uneasy relationship owing to sharing of river water prevails affecting smooth bilateral relations; and with South Sudan due to the influx of refugees owing to its civil war and with Kenya over the sharing of river water in Omo – Turkana basin. All these have complicated Ethiopia's relations with its neighbours.

Developments – post-Meles Zenawi era

The death of PM Meles Zenawi in 2012 prompted several changes in the domestic political front with political power changing hands to a Southerner named Haile Mariam Desalegn who belonged to the Wolayta ethnic group. Even if the change of guard was handled deftly and smoothly the biggest challenge to the incumbent was to bring back to order the domestic ethnic fault lines so as to spearhead the foreign policy goal of achieving economic growth through democracy and diplomacy. Haile Mariam Desalegn inherited these unresolved problems and in tune with its foreign policy objectives promoted economic diplomacy along with regional peace and security (Economic Diplomacy n.d.). His term was a short-lived one.

As pointed out above, measures taken towards economic development did register progress. During his first ever visit to the country the former US President Barack Obama acknowledged Ethiopia's economic progress, saying that it has 'one of the fastest growing economies in the world and one of the largest in Africa' (Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn 2018). With regard to regional security, efforts were made by Haile Mariam Desalegn to resolve issues in Sudan through peaceful negotiations between North and South Sudan, and by hosting summit meetings.

Despite some success, the biggest challenge was to remove domestic apprehensions of ethnic groups which tested the resolve of the government, and brought back the long marginalized ethnic communities (in particular the Oromos and Amharas) into mainstream politics. It was not a big success either as mass protests and demonstrations in Oromia and Amhara regions continued in 2015 and turned violent, leading to use of force that killed several hundreds and arrests of many apart from imposition of a state of emergency (What is behind Ethiopia's Wave of Protests 2018; Human Rights Watch 2018). Soon after, the continued unrest forced the resignation of Haile Mariam Desalegn as Prime Minister of the country in early 2018.

New initiatives under new leadership

What was different in the change of leadership this time was the assumption of power by a person from the majority Oromo ethnic group Dr. Abiy Ahmed in April 2018, signalling reconciliation among the ruling EPRDF coalition on the need to be inclusive of someone from the majority ethnic group as well. The hallmark of his takeover was not only that he is an Oromo (born from an inter-faith parenthood) but that he brings with him a liberal idea of democratic governance, and with that establishing peace and development for the country. The discourse that the current PM has been putting forward in areas of economic and political policies show a radical shift from that of his predecessors.

A notable feature of his leadership are the changes that he brought about in domestic political, economic, and at the foreign policy realms. Speaking at Davos at the World Economic Forum meeting, Abiy Ahmed pointed out the reforms that he intended to bring in to Ethiopia which he called 'medemer reforms' which in the Amharic language meant 'coming together' or 'synergy'. And the three interrelated pillars of reform which he mentioned were that of a vibrant democracy, economic vitality and regional integration (A Conversation with Abiy Ahmed 2019). Understandably, it was imperative for Ethiopia to bring about national reconciliation in order to achieve economic stability and growth in its fight against poverty. As noted elsewhere, the challenges facing Ethiopia are many and varied and they are inextricably connected to foreign policy issues as well. In line with this at the domestic political level the state of emergency that was declared months before his assumption to power was lifted (Council of Ministers 2018). This reveals his intention to reconcile with the different ethnic groups as an essential aspect of bringing about economic development. Moreover, steps were taken to release political prisoners including journalists who were held for long time under anti-terrorism laws, as well as amnesty for Ethiopian dissidents living abroad and allowing them to Ethiopia (Michael 2019). Besides, an announcement was also made to accept the voice of opposition political leaders as genuine competitors, as well as amnesty for armed opposition groups such as Oromo National Liberation Front (ONLF), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and

others (Temin and Badwaza 2019). These and many more have had a remarkable impact at the domestic front gaining all round appreciation and support. But then the recent rise in ethnic tensions and the attempt at toppling the government through a military coup in the northern Amhara region in June this year in which the Army Chief was shot dead (Attempted Coup leaves Ethiopia's Army Chief and 3 Senior Officials Dead 2019; Ethiopian Army Chief 2019) do reminds us of the continued challenge that Ethiopia faces in its reform path.

In the foreign policy realm, too new reforms were initiated both at the regional and extra-regional levels. As part of the medemer reforms the need for regional integration and inter-dependency that could lessen prospects of conflicts through active participation in regional organizations such as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) were outlined. Besides he also took steps to mend fences with neighbours that changed the contours of Ethiopia's international standing. Soon after taking over power the new Prime Minister dealt with the long pending border issue with Eritrea, announcing reconciliation and implementation of the Algiers Accord signed in 2000 and accepting the international court's verdict on the boundary demarcation that was delivered in 2002 (Ethiopia Eritrea n.d.).

As was noted above, their relations were severed following the border war that took place in May 1998 over the disputed border village called 'Badme' and thereafter two other rounds of war happened in May 1999 and in May 2000. After nearly two decades of severed relations, reconciliation has stepped in with both countries agreeing to bring back normalcy in their relations. It took the world by surprise when the Ethiopian Prime Minister visited Asmara and meet with the Eritrea President Isaias Afeworki on 8th of July 2018, signalling not only the end of hostilities but also reversing the prevailing perception of a hot spot sub-region that is prone to proxy wars and is conflict-ridden. The opening up of borders with Eritrea and the resumption of diplomatic ties as well as resumption of air traffic between the two capitals facilitated the movement of people across the borders, and have put what used to be brotherly relations back on track (Ethiopia Eritrea n.d.).

That apart, noticeable improvement in relations could also be seen towards other neighbours such as Somalia and Sudan, both of which have been problematic. With Somalia diplomatic and consular offices were agreed to be reopened along with agreeing to remove bilateral trade barriers, in addition to securing the use of the Somali port of Berbera (Ethiopia Somalia n.d.). A similar note of cordiality was also established with neighbouring Sudan. In addition to this, Ethiopia also played host to bringing rival factions within South Sudan to negotiating table and brokering peace between them. Examples include that of the South Sudan factions headed by Riek Machar and Salva Kiir and that of Eritrea – Djibouti (Golubski, Christina. Africa in the news 2018). Ethiopia also struck port deals with all its neighbours including Djibouti, Eritrea, the Sudan and Kenya so as to ensure unhindered trade access with the outside world (Daniel Mumbere 2018, 2019).

New developments could also be seen in Ethiopia's relations with extra-regional players. Of importance to note are the close relations with the UAE that Ethiopia was slowly drawn into in the aftermath of the split among the Gulf States over support to ISIS and their rivalry that spread into Horn of Africa. Besides, visits to the U.S and

European countries were productive, aimed at the diaspora and image building. As we will see below, relations with traditional allies like India have also been given a fillip.

On the economic front also several reforms have been undertaken. Of significance to note is the liberalization measure taken by the government on some of the country's leading economic enterprises, seen as a big departure from that followed by Abiy Ahmed's predecessors. The announced liberalization was in the agriculture, manufacturing, telecommunication, energy and aviation sectors including the privatization of enterprises like Ethiopian Airlines and Ethio-Telecom (Mohammed 2019). This move is an indication that such reforms would usher results in the form of attracting foreign direct investments, promote competitiveness and enhance skill development that is needed for the country. It is also a marked departure from the previous governments that resisted this level of economic liberalization. Whether or not this will sustain and bring about the desired results remains to be seen. But there is a clear indication on the part of the current government in power to bring about socio-political and economic development through measures not conceived of by its predecessors.

Scope for India

India's scope for engagement with Ethiopia could best be understood from the wider perspective of its foreign policy towards Africa as a whole, and the challenges encountered by India from other rising powers such as China, whose economic presence has far outweighed India of late. Even then, India's size and military strength and a robust economy have lent a major power status to its international affairs. As we will see below, India has been providing meaningful assistance in the economic development of African countries in general and Ethiopia in particular. India's interests have spanned across regions requiring an active role to sustain them. In this the economic potential of Africa in India's calculations and vice-versa cannot be ignored. That apart, the security dimension and the potential for a security partnership with African countries including that of Ethiopia is another aspect. India is a maritime power with a formidable navy and seeks to secure its maritime resources in the Indian Ocean region. Other notable areas of cooperation are in the areas of politics and governance, besides the wide scope for strengthening economic relations that could act as a platform for mutual benefit.

At the outset it is important to share some of the commonalities that exist between India and Ethiopia. The underlying fact is that in many ways India too shares some of the pressing problems that Ethiopia has been facing. India is not only a federal country like that of Ethiopia but even more diverse. In India too problems of poverty and unemployment abound besides inimical relations with some of the neighbouring countries in the South Asian region. Even then the scale and magnitude of the advantages that India possesses in many areas could act as a potential learning lesson for Ethiopia to strengthen bilateral partnerships. Examples are in the area of manufacturing and technology, industrial growth, space and nuclear energy, and defence, besides soft power. More importantly India's success story in federalism as against the ethnic-based policy followed in Ethiopia and managing its huge diverse population is an area from which Ethiopia could learn.

Ethiopia has also been one of the fastest growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa and in the world, averaging high growth rates close to 9 per cent. Notable areas of expansion

have been in the agriculture and industry sector that subsequently acted as a catalyst to this level of growth rate. The second phase of the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) which covers 2016–2020 envisions a wide array of broad based inclusive economic growth concentrating on manufacturing and service sectors. (National Planning Commission, Addis Ababa) That apart, the recent move by the Prime Minister of Ethiopia Abiy Ahmed to further liberalize its economy has further widened the scope for India's engagement. Hence it is time that India capitalizes on these advantages to build relations with Ethiopia.

Actually, India's bilateral political and economic relations with Ethiopia can be traced back to at least two centuries. Economic ties had taken place way back during the 6th century AD when the Indian Ocean served as a main highway for commercial interaction. In fact, Indian traders flocked to the ancient port of Adulis to trade silk and spices for gold and ivory. Ethio-Indian direct maritime trade relations intensified during the rule of the ancient Axumite Kingdom in Ethiopia, which was one of the first African empires to establish trade relations with the Indian sub-continent. The Aksumite port of Adulis was one of the nexus of these early Afro-Indian maritime trade relations (Ali 1987, 10). Subsequently, in the 16th century AD, the Portuguese assisted the Christian King in Ethiopia to repel Muslim invaders, and with them came Indians from Goa.⁶ Thereupon several developments took place to strengthen political and economic ties both before and after the Second World War.

It is well known that school teachers from India were recruited to teach and train Ethiopians in the aftermath of the Second World War, during the rule of King Haile Selassie. Since then, Indians have been continuously recruited to help Ethiopia in its human resource development. Currently, Indian professors are recruited to teach in higher education institutions. Be that as it may, the political ties saw a huge leap when India took steps to organize the first ever India – Africa forum summit of 2008 held in New Delhi and thereafter issuing a Delhi Declaration affirming that such summit meetings will be held every three years.⁷

This new focus on Africa (especially Ethiopia) largely owes to the increasing Chinese footprint in the continent. China consolidated its relations with Africa as early as 2000 through the creation of a Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), whereas India's initiative came later. For that matter, China is a recent comer to Africa but it has gained large access to Africa's market. The author is a witness to some of the huge infrastructural projects taken up by Chinese companies in Ethiopia such as the Addis Ababa ring road development, the impressive \$200 million African Union Headquarter building funded by China State Construction in addition to the Ethiopia – Djibouti railway line project costing something like \$ 4billion. These are indeed massive amounts of money pumped in by China which India is not equipped with. It is along this line that one should note the recent focus of India to catch up (or compete) with China, as could be seen from the series of high-level visits to each other's capitals, the recent one being the visit by the Indian President Ramnath Kovind in 2017 soon after taking over as President of India, during which a trade pact was signed between the two countries, (India Ethiopia Trade Pact gets ex-post facto cabinet approval n.s.) and by Prime Minister Modi to several other African countries as well.

India's leverage over China comes in the form of instilling democratic values and institutional support and imbibing of a democratic culture that Ethiopia has so far been

deprived of. China cannot do this as it follows non-interference in internal affairs as its professed foreign policy. Although India too abides by this policy (Panchsheel 2019) yet, in the wake of the ongoing domestic political reforms that the current Ethiopian government is undertaking in areas of human rights, democracy, etc., there is immense scope for India to exert further pressure and penetrate the new political reforms as relations deepens in areas of capacity building, human resource development and such others. Therefore, one cannot rule out the prospects of this spilling over to other fields, particularly in economic sectors, which the Chinese have now taken advantage.

In view of the above, the India – Africa summit not only solidifies political relations but also economic ties. For example, soon after the first summit, India announced a preferential trade agreement granting preferential access to some of its products under the Duty Free Trade Preference Scheme (DFTPC) which came into force in 2008. This step is to encourage and increase bilateral trade with Ethiopia, which focussed on manufacturing products such as metals, drugs/pharmaceuticals, machinery, food items, iron and steel products etc., and importing primary products from Ethiopia such as hides and skin, pulses, scrap metals, leather etc.⁸ This also explains the reasons for deficit as of today. According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, Ethiopia's exports in 2016 totalled USD 44.15 m and imports stood at USD 1.43 billion in the same year.⁹ This was an increase from USD 17.4 million in 2001. It has also been expanding its economic foothold even more in several other areas. The statistical data released by the Indian embassy in Ethiopia tells us that in 2017–18 India's total bilateral trade with Ethiopia were USD 1.27 billion, of which exports constituted USD 1.224 where as imports from Ethiopia amounted to USD 47.45 million only (Embassy of India n.d.). These are indicative figures on the bilateral trade competitiveness that exists between them.

The trade deficit that Ethiopia faces with India cannot be seen in the negative sense alone as there are a lot of areas that India could support Ethiopia with, and the latter can take cues from India by way of diversifying its economy. Moreover, one should understand that the Ethiopian economy is not an export oriented economy, and much of what it exports are primary products, as compared to that of India. Whereas the economic strength of India far outweighs many other countries of the world, and it has emerged as a manufacturing and service oriented economy making a mark in niche areas like IT, medicine, science and technology, space and many more. However, with appropriate incentives for increased bilateral trade coupled with policy measures and committed economic reforms on the part of Ethiopia this deficit could tilt in due course. Currently, the present government of Ethiopia has embarked on these reforms by identifying sectors that need focus and competitiveness plus efficiency. This is new and hence acts as push factor for India to make use of the opportunity. As noted above the duty free preferential trade agreement initiated by the India-Africa Forum has already been revised and has taken root, focussing on particular products for African countries including Ethiopia to access Indian market. Furthermore the Lines of Credit (LOC) that New Delhi has offered to Ethiopia at USD 1 billion in 2015 was the largest among other countries in Africa to be used in projects such as the sugar industry, railways and energy (Chitra. India's Economic Diplomacy 2018a). Besides, the programme on Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) is a huge success in terms of increase in allotment through Export-Import Bank Line of Credit (LOC) from its branch office based in Addis Ababa. These are the areas that India can exploit both to tie over the bilateral

trade deficit and help in Ethiopia's economic growth, and to narrow the gap that India has with China vis-a-vis Ethiopia, and make itself competitive.

In the area of human resource skill development, the Pan African e-network project to help cooperate in areas of medicine and educational services called the tele-medicine and tele-education services conceived by India's former President Abdul Kalam have been in operation since 2009 focussing on Ethiopia's socio-economic development. Apart from Indians teaching and training in Ethiopian institutions of higher learning there are large numbers of Ethiopians who are enrolled in Indian higher education institutions each year through scholarship programmes sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in Universities such as Andhra University, University of Madras, Pune University, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi etc., Such an endeavour is both an enhancement of human resource skills, and also imparts democratic values to these young Ethiopian students who get educated in India. Moreover, Indian private investors recognize the importance of Ethiopia in value creation (Embassy of India n.d.).

With regard to Indian investments in Ethiopia large numbers of them have invested in wide sectors including that of infrastructural development. There are more than 584 Indian companies in Ethiopia investing in various sectors and with an investment worth US \$ 4 billion investing in areas like 'agriculture and floriculture, engineering, plastics, manufacturing, cotton and textiles, water management, consultancy and ICT, education, pharmaceuticals and healthcare' (India-Ethiopia Commercial Relations 2019). Besides, India supports Ethiopia in a range of economic activities through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme (ITEC), which are capacity building programmes (Chitra. India's Economic Diplomacy 2018b). In the area of defence too close cooperation is being contemplated. The two countries have also signed an MoU on bilateral Foreign Service training during the joint commission meeting in New Delhi in May 2018 (India Ethiopia Review Bilateral Ties 2018). Ethiopia is also one of the first countries to join the India-led International Solar Alliance (ISA), and India is also supporting Ethiopia in achieving energy security, and helping to improve energy infrastructure.

Ethiopia being the seat of African Union and a host of other international organizations offers India the gateway to strengthening its economic and defence diplomacy, which is now conceived as the focal aspect of India's foreign policy towards Africa and to remain a competitor along with other countries such as China. It is also strategically important for India to play a more productive role both to check challenges that arise in Indian Ocean region from countries such as China, which is fast expanding its presence and influence in the region as well as to cooperate with African countries as part of South – South solidarity. The Asia – Africa Growth Corridor conceived in 2017 at the Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank between India and Japan to enhance connectivity, promote development, increase human resource skills and support partnership between Asia and Africa ¹⁰ is another landmark dimension that provides India with strong reasons for its active role in Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. Even though this is at an incipient stage it nevertheless provides an opportunity for India to play a major role commensurate with its major power status.

What can be deduced from the above is that India's contribution to Ethiopia's development so far has been meaningful and productive. Their bilateral political relations have never been hostile and Ethiopia has always been appreciative of India's

understanding of Africa's woes and the constant support lent by India in various ways (India-Ethiopia Relations 2019). The presence of a large Indian Diaspora in Ethiopia made up of businessmen, traders, artisans, teachers, technologists and others and their assimilation with the Ethiopian language and culture is very much acknowledged by Ethiopians, leaving a lasting positive imprint on people-to-people ties. Besides, Ethiopia also need India's continued support in voicing problems of Africa at international fora.

Conclusions

The above analysis reveals the interconnected relationship between Ethiopia's domestic politics and foreign policy dynamics and the struggle it underwent to bring the country to better prospects. Bereft of colonial intervention, Ethiopia designed its own political path to development. However, as could be seen it was unfortunate that the measures undertaken did not yield the desired result of achieving its core national interests. Changes were demanding and problems inherited had to be dealt with. The need of the hour was one of accommodative politics rather than divisiveness and this was precisely the lesson learnt by the new generation leaders in the aftermath of Meles Zenawi. A visionary leadership was needed which could steer the country to prosperity, and accordingly new policy measures were undertaken to address the pressing domestic problems as well as in the foreign policy arena where one could see Ethiopia softening its stand with its neighbours, re-establishing diplomatic relations besides bringing about a certain amount of confidence among other neighbouring countries such as Djibouti, Kenya and both Sudan and South Sudan. This is indeed a signal that not only Ethiopia wishes for good neighbourly relations but that its intention to promote economic development to its people is real.

Now is the time for India to capitalize on the policy reforms initiated by Ethiopia as it has widened the scope for engagement tremendously, be it in the area of foreign direct investments, manufacturing industries, in the agricultural sector or even in defence. Technological help and capacity building is another lucrative area that India has advantages to be shared. It was only in the early 1990s that India chose to liberalize its economy and since then there have been remarkable strides that India has achieved in various fields. Today, India is among the rising economies of the world and is ranked among the top 10 world economies. It is fast catching up with the others surpassing even European countries such as Germany and France. Hence it would be an experience-sharing endeavour for Ethiopia as it has now taken steps to privatize its enterprises like telecom and so on. The potential to encourage Indian private companies and industries to bid and have shares in the enterprises/sectors that the Ethiopian government is now privatizing is very much present, and for this, the requisite support and encouragement is from Indian government is vital.

At the political level India is the largest and diversified and functioning democracy in the world and hence some of the common features that India and Ethiopia have including ethnic diversity and federal government structure could be the basis upon which a bilateral partnership between the two states could be solidified.

To conclude, the new foreign policy initiatives that Ethiopia has undertaken of late have struck a positive note for establishing regional peace and security. Domestic challenges notwithstanding, the scope for development has therefore widened, giving room for regional and extra regional players such as India to invest and provide strong hope of support as part of South – South solidarity in the developmental aspirations of Ethiopia. What

remains to be seen is how far these new initiatives by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed would be sustained in the long run, as tackling the delicate ethnic Tigray community who would want to scuttle the process will require political astuteness and skill to sustain Ethiopia's new success story.

Notes

1. For an excellent analysis on the impact of globalization on economic development see, Mimiko and Olorunfemi (2018).
2. The drawbacks can range from creating income inequality, deprivation or marginalization of some segments of the society to getting caught in indebtedness as in the case of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. There are a volley of literatures on this and a good reading is the one by Falola and Kalu (2018). See also Prabhat Patnaik (1997).
3. Several literatures point this out. The reasons of failure of economic policies are aptly summarized by Admasu Shiferaw (2017). See also for another excellent discussion on this theme, V. Ancharaz, Ghisu, and Frank (2014).
4. Mahmum Mamdani opines that this policy should be discarded if Ethiopia should look for real progress and embrace a federal system based on territory rather than on ethnicity in order that people get their rights realized based on their residence and not on ethnicity.
5. See for a good account on these issues Bruchhaus and Sommer (2008).
6. See, http://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indian-Ethiopia_Relations.pdf accessed 31s July 2014.
7. The third such summit meeting is slated to be held in December 2014 at New Delhi. In fact, the forum is a sequence to the China – Africa Forum (CACOF).
8. http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1325:a-subtle-engagement-ethiopia-and-india&catid=58:asia-dimension-discussion-papers&Itemid=264 accessed 20th November 2014
9. <https://tradingeconomics.com/ethiopia/exports-by-country> accessed 12th January 2019.
10. See for greater details on the vision document, “Asia Africa Growth Corridor: Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development”, <http://www.eria.org/Asia-Africa-Growth-Corridor-Documents.pdf> May 2017, accessed 28th October 2019.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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