Ethiopia's Evolving Foreign Relations, 1855-1991: Shifting Alliances and Partnerships

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Abstract

Ethiopia's foreign relations have continuously evolved because of changes in domestic politics, geopolitical forces, and global political dynamics. This article analyzes and infers insights from these crests and fuzzes. The study employed a constructivist theoretical framework and qualitative research methodology. The study used both primary and secondary data. The primary data was generated from key informant interviews and secondary data was gathered from relevant archives, documents, and literature. Based on this, the historical analysis of Ethiopia's foreign relations revealed that Ethiopia's external partnerships from 1855 to 1991 were shaped by its struggle to maintain domestic socio-political cohesions, its status as a non-colonized African nation, Horn geopolitical dynamics, imperialism, colonialism and Cold War great power rivalry which resulted in a different approach to its international relations. The country adopted a "distance state" strategy, aligning with distant powers to counterbalance regional pressures while keeping a siege mentality towards its immediate neighbors due to historical conflicts. However, Ethiopia's alignments with global powers fluctuated based on the ruling regimes' survival policy, leading to shifts between Western (1855-1974) and Eastern Bloc countries (1974-1991). On the other hand, the country's engagement with other African nations remained limited, as it focused on cultivating relationships with more powerful global allies. Regional tensions, with countries in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, further complicated Ethiopia's foreign relations, stemming from border disputes, religious, and ideological debates, Nile River rivalry, and power dynamics. These historical ups and downs in partnerships significantly influenced Ethiopia's foreign policy after 1991, creating both challenges and opportunities in its efforts to foster regional stability and cooperation in the Horn of Africa and beyond. Thus, Ethiopia's foreign policymakers should consider these antecedent challenges and opportunities.

Introduction

Though the precise timeline is disputed, Ethiopia's diplomatic legacy is believed to extend over three millennia, linking to ancient Egypt and Israel (Aklilu, 2022). Following that, the kingdom maintained long-lasting diplomatic ties with several Asian, European, and Middle Eastern nations during the Axumite civilization (Broich 2017 and Phillips, 2019). The kingdom also maintained religious and commercial ties with these nations. However, Ethiopia's modern diplomatic relations started under the reign of Emperor Tewodros II (Crummey, 1969), and the emperors that followed made efforts to advance Ethiopia's diplomatic standing abroad. Ethiopia continues to preserve state-to-state ties and its independence in the modern period. Ethiopia promoted African autonomy even during the European "scramble for Africa," driving off Italian attempts to take over Ethiopia at Adwa in 1896 (Getachew, 2009) and ending Italian occupation after five years in 1941 (Cambell, 2021).

Ethiopia's foreign relations from 1855 to 1991 left an endurable mark on its diplomatic setting, shaping its approach to international affairs well into the post-1991 era. This period witnessed Ethiopia steering complex global dynamics while fiercely maintaining its independence. The legacy of this era is so multifaceted, encompassing strategic partnerships, tactical alliances, proxy wars, tensions, competitions, and cooperation with near and distant states at different times which is not exhaustively scrutinized. Some of these legacies left opportunities while others remained challenging for Ethiopia's foreign policy. Thus, this article explored the backings of Ethiopia's foreign policy partnership legacies from 1855 to 1991. The general objective of this article is to examine the legacies of partnerships in Ethiopia's foreign policy from 1855 to 1991 and to implicate the implications of these partnerships on the country's foreign relations in the post-1991 period.

Theoretical Framework

Ethiopia's Foreign policy from 1855 to 1991 passed through various political trajectories (MOFA, 2024a and MOFA, 2024b) and scholars applied different theories suited to specific periods (Getachew, 2009 and Marcus, 1966). However, for this study constructivism better

underpin the legacies of Ethiopia's foreign relations from 1855 to 1991. The reasons for selecting constructivism as a theory underpinning this study are the following;

First, constructivism serves as an operative theoretical framework for analyzing the legacies of Ethiopia's foreign relations and partnerships from 1855 to 1991 due to its emphasis on identity formation and the social constructs that shape state behavior (Jung, 2019 and Wendt, 1992). Ethiopia's inimitable identity, deeply rooted in its ancient history, religion, and resistance to colonialism (Adamu, 2009 and Folkers and Van Buiten, 2019), significantly influenced its foreign policy decisions and relationships with other nations. The theory highlights how norms and values impact foreign relations (Bjorkdal, 2002), which is particularly relevant for Ethiopia whose foreign relations was shaped by historical values and experiences, such as the victory over Italy at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 (Getachew, 2009), expelling Italy after five years (Cambell, 2021), and fostering a sense of solidarity with other African nations.

Second, constructivism encourages an understanding of the historical context and narratives that shape current relations (Nicholas, 1989 and Young and Collin, 2004), emphasizing that Ethiopia's foreign relations were often reactive to evolving regional and global dynamics, including imperialism, colonialism, Cold War, and decolonization (Interview with KII-1, 2024 and Interview with kii-19, 2024). Unlike realism, which focuses primarily on material power and military might, constructivism considers non-material factors such as culture, state resilience capacity, religion, and ideology (Pouliot, 2007). In these line, Ethiopia's relationships with superpowers like the Soviet Union and the United States were shaped not just only by strategic interests but also by ideological alignments and cultural ties, reflecting the complexity of its diplomatic engagements which constructivism better explains.

Third, constructivism accounts for the flexibility in international relations (Buzas and Graham, 202 and Nicholas, 1989), diagnosing that Ethiopia's foreign relations evolved significantly over time, reflecting shifts in identity, alliances, and the global geopolitical landscape. The theory also acknowledges the agency of individual and collective actors (Buzas and Graham, 2020, Pouliot, 2007, Wendt, 1992 and Young and Collin, 2004); Ethiopian leaders, such as Emperor Haile Selassie and his Foreign Affairs ministers, played crucial roles in advocating for African unity

and promoting the nation's interests on the international stage. Fourth, constructivism allows for an understanding of how global and regional norms (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998 and Jung, 2019), such as anti-colonialism, pan-Africanism, and self-determination, influenced Ethiopia's foreign relations and its role in regional and international organizations such as the League of Nations, United Nations, and the Organization of African Unity (Buzas and Graham, 202 and Ruggie, 1982). Thus, applying constructivism to explore Ethiopia's foreign relations from 1855 to 1991 provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyze its partnership legacies.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach to analyze Ethiopia's foreign relations over the past century from 1855 to 1991. The qualitative research methodology allowed for a rich, contextual, and nuanced exploration of the historical, political, and diplomatic factors shaping the country's engagement with the international community. Tracing historically shifting alliances and partnerships, the study thoroughly examined Ethiopia's foreign relations legacies over the past hundred years. It investigated various aspects of the country's diplomatic practices, historical developments, shifting alliances and partnerships, and the impact of regime differences on its foreign relations for which qualitative research gives a plant of opportunities to integrate multiple data sources.
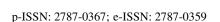
To gather primary data, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 13 key informants including senior diplomats, ambassadors, academics, and researchers with expertise in Ethiopia's foreign policy. The secondary data sources were collected from books, journal articles, reports, official documents, and archives. The study utilized a historical-descriptive analytical approach to thoroughly process and integrate the collected historical qualitative data from multiple sources. This enabled the researcher to develop a pattern for the complex and multifaceted nature of Ethiopia's foreign relations over the past century.

Discussion of the Findings

The discussions on the legacies of partnerships in Ethiopia's foreign relations from 1855 to 1991 were focused on the general patterns of Ethiopia's partnerships, alliances, and counter-alliances with global forces within these timespans. For clarity, the discussion would categorized under

five geographical areas: the Horn of Africa, Africa in general, the Western world, the Middle Eastern, and the Eastern world. These five geographical areas have had complex relationships with Ethiopia including warfare, diplomatic crisis, multiple strategic relations, geopolitical tensions, and proxy wars, and hence these geographic areas have determinant roles in shaping Ethiopia's political culture, Foreign policy orientation, Foreign policy traditions, and state system. The patterns of Ethiopia's relations with these geographical areas are discussed below;

The Horn of Africa

The immediate region that determines Ethiopia's foreign relations is the Horn of Africa geopolitical region. Ethiopia's relations with the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region from 1855 to 1991 were predominantly defined in terms of tension, proxy conflicts, competition, cooperation, and outright war (Schwab, 1978). This period saw the emergence of complex geopolitical dynamics in the region that continue to shape events today. During this period, Ethiopia navigated a challenging regional scene, often finding itself at the center of competing interests and rivalries between various powers; horizontally, among regional states, and vertically among global powers that had interests in the region (Telci, 2021) what I call in this article as distance neighbors[1]. The country's strategic location along the Red Sea coast made it a key player and stripper taster in the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa and the broader Red Sea arena (Interview with KII-1, 2024 and Interview with KII-18). Ethiopia's foreign relations with the Horn of African countries have therefore been left with several historical legacies.

To be more specific, Ethiopia's relationships with Somalia and Sudan were anxious, marked by conflict and proxy warfare (Schwab, 1978). Ethiopia and Somalia engaged in two major wars[2] between the 1960s and 1991 and ongoing proxy conflicts which saw the involvement of

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[1] The idea of distance neighbors is used to represent states who do not share boundary with Ethiopia but determine Ethiopia's boundary issues, security and others as the neighbors. It is used to represent distance countries who have direct stake in Ethiopian neighbor countries on issues that directly implicated on Ethiopia's national security such as military bases, military training, advisors, weapons and other supports to Ethiopian neighbors. For instance, during colonial period France, Italy, and Britain were Ethiopia's distance neighbors while USSR and USA were Ethiopia's distance neighbors during the Cold War Period.

[2] The first war, known as the Ethiopian-Somali War, occurred in 1964. This was followed by the Ogaden War of 1977-1978

superpowers during the Cold War rivalry, with the Soviet Union and Cuba supporting Ethiopia, while the USA backed Somalia (Broich, 2017). The senior researcher on the Horn of Africa affirmed that the primary causes of tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia were Somalia's irredentist claims, border disputes, and ideological differences (Interview with KII-21, 2024). Ethiopia's relationship with Sudan was similarly tense (Interview with KII-1, 2024), with both nations supporting opposition groups within each other's territories. Ethiopia backed the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in its struggle against the Sudanese government, while Sudan provided support to Eritrean, Tigray, Oromo, and Somali rebels (Interview with KII-29, 2024 and Interview with KII-30, 2024). These mutual destabilization efforts were driven by a complex mix of factors, including ethnic tensions, border disputes, ideological differences, and competition over Nile River resources (Aalen, 2014 and Schwab, 1978).

In contrast, Ethiopia's relations with Kenya and Djibouti were smoother (Interview with KII-21, 2024), although not entirely free from tensions (Interview with KII-1, 2024). Ethiopia and Kenya cooperated on regional issues such as countering Somalia's irredentist movement (Interview with KII-21, 2024). However, border disputes and concerns about potential interference in each other's internal affairs occasionally strained their relationship. Ethiopia's ties with Djibouti were characterized by close economic cooperation, with Djibouti providing sea access to Ethiopia. Nevertheless, tensions related to the cross-border Afar ethnic group persisted (Aalen, 2014).

The Horn of Africa's geopolitical setting has also been significantly shaped by the involvement of extra-regional powers (Aalen, 2014, Broich, 2017, Schwab, 1978 and Telci, 2021), particularly during colonialism and the Cold War eras. Britain, France, and Italy shaped the Horn of African countries' political boundary during the colonial period (MOFA, 2024a) while the United States, the Soviet Union, and various Middle Eastern states sought to expand their influence in the region, providing military and financial support to different factions during the Cold War era (Broich, 2017). This external involvement exacerbated tensions and instability. Ethiopia and Somalia, in particular, engaged in a pattern of alignment and counter-alignment with the Eastern and Western Blocs (Schwab, 1978), creating further tension between these neighboring countries.

The other sources of external power involvement in the Horn of Africa are the competition over the Red Sea geostrategy and the Nile River resources (Ylonen, 202). The ongoing struggle over Nile water resources has been a major source of tension, particularly between Ethiopia, the source of the Blue Nile, and Egypt which is an extra-regional power or distance neighbor (Interview with KII-15, 2024). This rivalry has manifested in various forms, including diplomatic tensions, outright war (with Ethiopia fighting Egypt in 1875 and 1876), and proxy conflicts. Since 1876, Egypt has reportedly sponsored forces aimed at destabilizing Ethiopia, both directly and indirectly (Interview with KII-1, 2024, Interview with KII-18, 2024, and Interview with KII-21, 2024). This competition has also involved Sudan and Somalia, further complicating regional dynamics (Interview with KII-1, 2024). These legacies have collectively contributed to the complex and often volatile geopolitical situation in the Horn of Africa, influencing interstate relationships, resource conflicts, and the broader strategic importance of the region in global politics.

In general, the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region experienced complex and volatile geopolitical dynamics, with countries aligning themselves with different superpowers and tensions rising among neighboring states (Interview with KII-20, 2024). These continuous rivalries, proxy conflicts, and occasional confrontations have fostered an environment of mistrust, hostility, and siege mentality among the nations in the region (Interview with KII-19, 2024 and Interview with KII-21, 2024). The legacy of these tensions and proxy wars continued to influence Ethiopia's foreign relations and regional standing (Interview with KII-2, 2024). The perceptions developed during this unrestrained period have persisted, contributing to misunderstandings and unpredictable relations between Ethiopia and its neighbors. Senior Ethiopian diplomat and former Ministry of Foreign Affairs state minister (Interview with KII-2, 2024) confirmed this and noted that the discrepancies between how states in the region perceive themselves, how Ethiopia perceives them, and how they perceive Ethiopia remains a significant source of misunderstanding, mistrust, and instability in inter-state relations in the horn of Africa. These paved the way for Ethiopia to follow a siege mentality policy approach toward the Horn of African countries.

African Legacy

Ethiopia's foreign relations with Africa from 1855 to 1991 encompass several important eras in Ethiopian history from the reigns of Emperor Haile Silassie I to the end of the Derg regime. Several factors influenced Ethiopia's African approach during this time. Pan-Africanism, anti-colonialism, Cold War dynamics, regional security, modernization efforts, OAU establishment, personal diplomacy, and the prestige of ancient civilization were among the major factors that shaped Ethiopia's foreign relations with African states from 1855 to 1991 (Schwal, 1978, Telic, 2021, Ylonen, 2022 and Yeshitla, 2023).
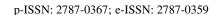
Though early Ethiopian emperors denounced Ethiopia's African identity and limited Ethiopia's partnership with Africa, Adwa's victory created a turning point (Interview with KII-19, 2024). Adwa was celebrated as a black victory and black people started to symbolize Ethiopia as a model of struggle and independence (Yeshitla, 2023). Gradually, Ethiopia came to represent African causes at the international forum. In this case, the reign of Haile Selassie I was a determinant period when Ethiopia started to champion pan-Africanism and African unity (Interview with KII-1, 2024 and Interview with KII-29, 2024). This ideology shaped Ethiopia's engagement with other African nations, promoting cooperation and solidarity (MOFA, 2024b). Ethiopia's status as the only African nation to successfully resist European colonization (except for the brief Italian occupation) (Woolbert, 1936) gave it moral authority. Haile Selassie used this position to advocate for the decolonization across Africa.

Ethiopia's leading role in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 significantly boosted its influence in African affairs further (Interview with KII-5, 2024). A senior diplomat in the FDRE Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that due to Ethiopia's immense roles in the decolonization process and realizing pan-African institutions, Africans and Caribbean countries see Ethiopia as a black representative while the West accepts this and first, deal with Ethiopia if they have an issue with African and Caribbean countries (Interview with KII-7, 2024). Ethiopia provided diplomatic and sometimes material support to various African liberation movements fighting against colonial rule (MOFA, 2024b). Ethiopia's long history as an independent state and ancient civilization added to its diplomatic weight in African affairs.

Ethiopia offered scholarships to students from other African countries, fostering long-term relationships with future African leaders (Interview with KII-5, 2024 and Interview with KII-7, 2024).

These factors combined made Ethiopia a significant player in African diplomacy since Haile Selassie's reign, often positioning it as a leader and mediator in continental affairs. This spirit of pan-Africanism continued during the Derg regime irrespective of ideological and partnership shifts. However, Ethiopia's foreign relations with Africa remained political and diplomatic while economic interaction was limited (Ministry of Information, 2002). Ethiopia's cordial ties with African countries left a legacy of leader of African diplomacy for consecutive Ethiopian leaders—the legacy of brotherhoods.
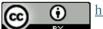
Western Legacies

Ethiopia's foreign relations with the West, particularly the United States and Western European states, had a complex and evolving trajectory from 1855 to 1991. These relations can be defined in three terms: aspiring as a model (Crummey, 2013), partnerships, and diplomatic tensions (Marzagora, 2017). The European model of modernity has significantly influenced modern Ethiopian foreign policy which manifested through the adoption of Western ideas, cultural and educational reforms, political aspirations, economic changes, and narratives of progress. This pursuit often led to disconnection from indigenous traditions (Mersiehazen, 2016), as many educated elites were trained in Western institutions or influenced by European missionary education.

From the reign of Tewodros II in 1855 to the Post Second World War, consecutive Ethiopian leaders aspired to European modernization such as modern bureaucracy, and took Europe as their government model. For instance, Tewodros II aspired to reform Ethiopia by introducing a European stylish military and firearms and developed the national motto of 'catching up with Europe'. His letter to Queen Elizabeth of British was the showcase (Caulk, 1972). Yohannes IV continued to aspire to introduce a modern military and bureaucracy that styled Europe (Zewde, 1975). Menelik II urged for a modern military which he successfully achieved from Europe and introduced other modernization into the country (MOFA, 2024a and Marcus, 1966). Haile

Selassie I continued with this aspiration and conducted a European tour in 1924 to look at European administrations to replicate the same in Ethiopia (Paulos, 2006).

The establishment of the first modern schools and efforts to reform the Ethiopian script and language under Haile Selassie I (1930-1974) could reflect influences from Western education systems and cultural norms. Then, modern Ethiopian education was modeled in Europe, the French model from the early 1900s to 1941, (Mersiehazen, 2016 and MOFA, 2024b), and the British education model since 1941 (MOFA, 2024b). Ethiopian military, airlines, and others were established based on the Western model mainly the USA (Broich, 2017).

Ethiopia also sought closer ties with European powers like Britain, France, and Italy, and emulated their diplomatic and foreign policy approaches (MOFA, 2024b). Furthermore, Ethiopia developed more formalized government ministries, departments, and civil services, drawing inspiration from Western models of bureaucratic organization (Interview with KII-18, 2024). Also, attempts were made to codify Ethiopian civil and criminal laws, which were influenced by Western legal traditions (MOFA, 2024b). The model of a unified national legal system including the promulgation of the 1931 and 1955 constitutions was undertaken during the reign of Haile Selassie.

Beyond emulating as a model, Ethiopia under the rule of monarchy, had long-standing diplomatic and economic partnerships with Western powers, dating back to the late 19th century (Crummey, 2013). The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw an increase in Western missionary activities and commercial interests in Ethiopia, which helped to establish closer ties with countries like the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, engaging in trade, cultural exchanges, and occasional military cooperation. However, the Italians' invasion of Ethiopia was a significant event that strained Ethiopia's relations with the West. The international community, including the Western powers, failed to take decisive action to support Ethiopia's sovereignty (MOFA, 2024b). This perceived betrayal by the West contributed to a growing sense of distrust and a shift in Ethiopia's foreign policy orientation towards the Eastern Bloc in the following decades. Above all, Haile Silassie's historic speech in the League of Nations and the deaf ear of European powers tested Ethiopia's aspiration of the European model. A senior diplomat in the FDRE MOFA

argued that despite offending with League of Nations' silence in the post-Second World War Ethiopia's cordial relations with the West/USA bore fruits for Ethiopia (Interview with KII-22, 2024); supported Ethiopia to become a founding member of the UN, Eritrea federation with Ethiopia, removing Britain from Ethiopia, introduced modern schools, Ethiopian airlines, modern army, and modern Bureaucracy.

However, since the beginning of the Ethiopian Students Movement in the early 1960s, anti-Western, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, and anti-colonialism champions the Ethiopian political discourses and gradually shifted to search for alternative models from the East became prevailing thoughts in Ethiopia (Marzagora, 2017). Kebede Micheal's book entitled 'How Japan Developed?' (Kebede, 2001) and the Ethiopian Students' Movement's famous motto of 'Let us make Ethiopia Japan today' were the provoking thoughts that shifted the developmental model for Ethiopia from West to East and created tension with the former. This tension matured and reached state-to-state in 1974 when the Derg regime took power and introduced proletarian internationalism as the guiding principle of the country's Foreign policy (Interview with KII-2, 2024). From 1974- 1991, Ethiopia's relations with the Western world were full of tensions but economic relations such as trade and humanitarian affairs remain intact.

Since 1974, Ethiopia's relations with the West have declined and diplomatic tensions prevailed. A researcher at the FDRE Institute of Foreign Affairs claimed that in the Derg era, Ethiopia's foreign policy underwent a significant shift, as the country aligned itself with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc (Interview with KII-19, 2024). This alignment was driven by the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Derg regime and Western pressure in the name of human rights (Messay, 2008). As a result, Ethiopia's relations with the United States and other Western powers became strained, as they were seen supporting the regime's opponents.

The Derg regime's repressive policies, and human rights abuses, were cited as factors that further strained Ethiopia's relations with the West. The United States and European powers were critical of the Derg's authoritarian rule and its crackdown on dissent, which led to a deterioration of diplomatic ties. Despite the political tensions, the West, particularly the United States, maintained a degree of engagement with Ethiopia, primarily through limited economic and

humanitarian aid. These ups and downs relations left the legacies of mixed feelings about the West in the minds of Ethiopian elites (Interview with KII-25, 2024). The over-propagated evilness of imperialism, colonialism, and other associated Western practices developed perceptions of animosity while the aspiration of Western modernization as human destiny left legacies of positive feelings- some sort of anomaly[3]. These mixed feelings have partly driven Ethiopia's foreign relations with the West since 1991.

Middle East Legacies

The relationship between Ethiopia and the Middle East has a long and complex history that spans from antiquity to the end of the Cold War in 1991. Ethiopia had close cultural, economic, and religious ties with the Middle East. The impact of the Middle East on Ethiopia's foreign policy is more prominent than that of the African countries (Ministry of Information, 2002). The Middle East has both positively and negatively influenced Ethiopian history due to the country's proximity to the region. The great religions that originated in the Middle East have had a great impact on Ethiopia since ancient times (Interview with KII-1, 2024). It is noted that as a political community, Ethiopia embraced Christianity preceded by only Armenia and Constantinople. Christianity came to Ethiopia from the Middle East, and for more than 1600 years, Ethiopia's religious leaders, the patriarchs of the Orthodox Church, came from Egypt. Christianity, besides being the religion adhered to by millions of Ethiopians, has formed an integral part of Ethiopian history and culture (Ministry of Information, 2002).

Islam was born in Saudi Arabia but Ethiopia was the first country to allow its believers to practice it, even before Saudi Arabia did what the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiyi Ahmed depicted as the first Hijira. Because they were persecuted in their own country, the followers of the Prophet Mohammed were ordered by him to seek refuge in Ethiopia (Prime Minister Abiyi Ahmed, on Saudi-Africa Summit, 2023). It was after this that the Prophet ordered his followers not to touch the Ethiopians except in self-defense. Since then, Islam has not only become the religion of millions of Ethiopians but also has come to form an integral part of Ethiopian history and culture (Ministry of Information, 2002). Similarly, an ancient version of the Jewish religion

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[3] People talk about Western evilness, at the same time aspire to live in beautiful western cities, want to live European and American like life styles and live and learn in their beautiful cities and universities.

was practiced in Ethiopia and this also influenced Ethiopia's history and culture. These are the backdrop of Ethiopia's shared language, history, and culture with the Middle East.

 On the other hand, one researcher from the FDRE Institute of Foreign Affairs reasoned that Ethiopia's relations with the Middle Eastern countries were negatively shaped by Nile water politics, religious extremist discourses, ignorance and suspicions, and Arab-Israel conflicts (Interview with KII-18, 2024). Thus, Ethiopia's deep-rooted connections with the Middle East have been a defining feature of its state identity and have significantly shaped its foreign policy approach over the centuries, from ancient times to the post-Cold War era.

Eastern Legacies

Ethiopia's foreign relations with the Eastern world, particularly the Soviet Union and its allies, underwent a significant transformation during the latter half of the 20th century. Before the 1970s, Ethiopia's foreign policy was primarily Western-oriented, with limited engagement with the Eastern Bloc countries (Marzagora, 2017). The Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie maintained smooth but distant relations with the Soviet Union and other Eastern European nations (Interview with KII-1, 2024). However, since the 1960s, the Ethiopian students' movement's aspiration for the Eastern development model, and socialism ideology dominated Ethiopia's political discourses. The 1974 overthrow of the Ethiopian monarchy by the Derg marked a shift in the country's foreign policy orientation (MOFA, 2024b). The Derg regime, with its Marxist-Leninist ideology, sought to align Ethiopia with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. This alignment provided the Derg with significant military, economic, and political support, which it used to consolidate its power and project regional influence (Messay, 2008). The Derg's close relationship with the Soviet Union resulted in a substantial increase in military and economic aid from the Eastern Bloc (Interview with KII-27, 2024).

Several key factors dictated Ethiopia's relations with the Eastern world from 1974 to 1991 (Tsypkin, 2022), which attributed to five themes; ideological alignment, military and security cooperation, economic and development assistance, geopolitical consideration, and diplomatic and political support. Ideologically, the Derg regime, which came to power in 1974, adhered to a Marxist-Leninist ideology and sought to create a socialist state. This ideological affinity with the

Eastern Bloc, especially the Soviet Union, provided a strong foundation for developing close political, economic, and military ties (Interview with KII-5, 2024). The Derg's commitment to socialist principles and its rejection of Western capitalism and imperialism aligned it with the Eastern Bloc's geopolitical and ideological interests. The Soviet Union and its allies provided the Derg with ideological and political support, helping to legitimize its Marxist-Leninist agenda both domestically and internationally. This included diplomatic backing and the promotion of the Derg's revolutionary rhetoric and policies within the Eastern Bloc's sphere of influence.

Second, The Derg regime's need for military aid and support to consolidate its power and to contain regional influence was another key driver of its relations with the Eastern Bloc. The Soviet Union and its allies provided the Derg with substantial military assistance, including the supply of advanced weapons, military advisors, and training. This military cooperation strengthened Ethiopia's capabilities and enabled it to win its regional conflicts, such as the Ogaden War with Somalia (Interview with KII-18, 2024 and Interview with KII-21, 2024). Ethiopia's alignment with the Eastern Bloc enabled it to successfully defeat Somalia's irredentism in the Ogaden War and contain the Eritrean War of Independence (Interview with KII-2, 2024).

The third factor for Ethiopia's alignment to the Eastern world is economic and development assistance. The Eastern Bloc, led by the Soviet Union, offered Ethiopia modest economic and development aid, including infrastructure projects, industrial investments, and technical expertise (Broich, 2017). This economic support was critical for the Derg regime, as it sought to counter the Western economic influence (MOFA, 2024b). The Derg's socialist economic policies and its rejection of Western-led development models further reinforced its alignment with the Eastern Bloc (Interview with KII-21, 2024).

The fourth factor was geopolitical concern. The Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union shaped the regional dynamics in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea (Schwab, 1978, Telci, 2021 and Ylonen, 2022). By aligning with the Eastern Bloc, the Derg regime positioned Ethiopia as a counterweight to Western influence in the region, allowing it to assert its regional power. This geopolitical calculus, driven by the desire to maintain autonomy and

balance against Western hegemony (interview with KII-13, 2024), was a key factor in Ethiopia's relations with the Eastern world.

The fifth key factor is diplomacy and political support. The Eastern Bloc, particularly the Soviet Union, provided the Derg regime with valuable diplomatic and political support in the international arena. This included backing Ethiopia's positions on regional conflicts, defending its authoritarian policies, and promoting its revolutionary agenda within the global communist movement (aalen, 2014). The Derg regime, in turn, reciprocated by serving as a reliable ally of the Eastern Bloc in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region. These multifaceted factors, ranging from ideological alignment to security, economic, and geopolitical considerations, formed the basis of Ethiopia's close relations with the Eastern world, especially the Soviet Union, during the Derg regime. This ideological, cultural, and common aspiration continued as factors positively contributed to post-1991 Ethiopia's engagement with the Eastern world.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ethiopia's external partnerships from 1855 to 1991 were the result of the complex interplay of geographical, ideological, and strategic factors. The country's position as a non-colonized African nation, the nature of horn geopolitics and global political dynamics, and Ethiopia's distinguishable responses led to a distinct approach to its international relations. Ethiopia often aligned itself with distance states, seeking allies far from its borders to counterbalance regional pressures. This "distance state" strategy was partly driven by a siege mentality towards its immediate neighbors, stemming from historical conflicts and territorial disputes. The country's relationships were further shaped by regime survival, which shifted over time depending on the type of ruling regime. These regime survival leanings influenced which global powers Ethiopia chose to align with, whether Western countries or Eastern Bloc countries during the Cold War era. Notably, Ethiopia's engagement with other African countries remained limited partly its focus on more powerful global allies.

Tensions with neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East were another feature of Ethiopia's foreign relations during this period. Border disputes, regional power dynamics, and competition for resources all contributed to strained relationships with countries

like Somalia, Sudan, and Egypt. These tensions, combined with the siege mentality approach, created a lasting impact on Ethiopia's approach to regional diplomacy. The legacy of these historical patterns significantly influenced Ethiopia's foreign policy after 1991. This historical context is crucial for understanding the challenges and opportunities in Ethiopia's contemporary foreign relations, particularly in its efforts to foster regional stability and cooperation in the Horn of Africa and beyond. Based on the above discussions, the study recommends the following;

- Ethiopian Foreign policy decision-makers should consider antecedent challenges and opportunities when formulating current and future policies.
- The study suggests that Ethiopian Foreign policy implementers and diplomats should work to improve perceptions between Ethiopia, its neighbors, and the Middle East.
- The article emphasized the importance of further studies on specific cases relevant to Ethiopia's Foreign policy legacies which are yet understudied.

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