

Review of Ethiopia's Foreign Policy Responsiveness Capacity to Red Sea Militarization between 1991-2018

Alula Nerea GEBEREMESKEL*

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Corresponding author, gebremeskelalula20@stud.ase.ro

Maruf Mohammad Sirajum MONIR

*Department of Education Economics and Management, Huazhong Agricultural University,
Wuhan, China*

maruf.david@gmail.com

Nicoleta-Elena CRISTEA

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

cristeanicoleta19@stud.ase.ro

Abstract *This article aims to assess responsiveness capacity of Ethiopian foreign policy on political and militarization dynamics in the Red Sea region from 1991 to 2018. Primarily, the evaluation employs the Effectiveness and Adequacy policy measurement criteria to assess the foreign policy's responsiveness. The review employed explanatory and argumentative approaches to examine different sources. The study also designed a logical framework of analysis by incorporating relevant IR theories like Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) and Realism. The analysis then divided foreign policy objectives into General objectives and specific objectives which include Eritrea, Somalia, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula. Consequently, Adequacy and effectiveness policy evaluation criteria are used as to examine whether or not Ethiopian foreign policy assumptions are aligning with the Red Sea political dynamics and effectively achieve the stated objectives. The study shows shortcomings in responsiveness of both adequacy and effectiveness criteria. This is due to change in prior policy assumptions caused by rapid global and regional power dynamics. nevertheless, country specific findings are different. In country such as Eritrea and the Arabian Peninsula the policy is found to be is ineffective and inadequate; where as in Somalia it's both effective and adequate. on the other hand, policy towards Egypt bound to have adequate assumptions but not effective. Therefore, revision and adoption of a holistic policy towards Red Sea region recommended.*

Keywords: Foreign Policy Evaluation, HST, IR, Realism, Adequacy, Effectiveness

Introduction

Ethiopia had never a consolidated foreign policy document until the Derg regime came to power. According to Tsegay (2018), a comprehensive official policy and strategy were released in 2013 with the titled "The Foreign Affairs and National Policy and Strategy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia." The policy give priority combating poverty, promoting rapid economic development, democracy, and peace. The policy emphasizes on the importance of addressing domestic matters effectively to strengthen international relationships. mainly it reduces susceptibility to foreign interference and enhance national pride. Moreover the policy focuses on sustainable economic development and economic integration with neighboring countries.

There are three fundamental pillars which Ethiopian foreign policy is built. These are Development and the establishment of a democratic system, fostering national pride and prestige,

DOI: 10.2478/picbe-2024-0039

© 2024 A. N. Geberemeskel; M. M. S. Monir; N.-E. Cristea, published by Sciendo.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.

and embracing globalization. However, the concept of globalization under a unified global order is challenging by escalating polarization of economic and political ideologies and national interests of great and regional powers. Mainly China's expanding influence, which presents an alternative perspective on economic development and governance. Moreover, the increasing sense of nationalism in the Western world adds layers of complexity to international relations dynamics. Consequently, Ethiopia's foreign policy and security strategy find itself navigating uncertain terrain amidst these rapid and multifaceted dynamics.

The geopolitical context in which Ethiopia exists exposes the country to various factors which lead to potential instability. In particular, increasing attractiveness of the Red Sea corridor to of militaries of regional and great powers due to its strategic relevance in a global trade is the main factor. According to Xander, (2018) the corridor accounts approximately 20 percent of global trade. Therefore, evaluating the impact and relevance of Ethiopia's policies toward the dynamics in the Red sea is paramount in addressing the growing political and security concerns associated with this vital region.

Numerous studies highlight security concerns for Ethiopia, attributed to the extensive deployment of military installations by global and regional powers with diverse interests in the area. According to Tsegay (2018) growing militarization in Eritrea and the Red Sea could increase risk of unnecessary confrontations between countries in the region and threat peace and stability in the Horn of Africa.

Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of Ethiopia's foreign policy and national security document, employing criteria for policy measurement. Additionally, the paper explores the connection between global dynamics, ideological and theoretical principles of international relations, and Ethiopia's foreign policy and national security framework. This examination aims to determine the framework's capacity to adapt and respond to evolving dynamics in the Red Sea region.

Literature review

Realism

Realism is one of predominant IR theory which helps us in comprehending and navigating international politics. It is based on two assumptions: International system is anarchy; all nation-states are driven by their national interests, and really concerned on moral concerns in their international engagements. Within this framework, realism posits, nations power is at the core of achieving national interests in international relations (Bell, 2017). Moreover, power is fundamentally measured in relative to the other countries.

This emphasis on relative power instead of absolute power comes from the realist understanding of the international system as anarchical environment. According to Vincent (N.D.) Realist believe that there is no overarching authority which governing all nation-states. In such condition states must rely on their own resources to protect and advance interests and enforce agreements with other states, and maintain a desirable domestic and international order.

In adherence to realist tenets, global powers are anticipated to persistently seek dominance, advancement, and the sustenance of their respective national interests. The current landscape of international relations is undergoing a shift from a unipolar to a multipolar world order. The contestation of the U.S. and Western global roles in the economic and political arena by southern regional powers like Russia and China contributes to the volatility in many countries' policy directions.

Similarly, recent developments in the Red Sea can also be interpreted as reflections of ideological contestation. Moreover, looking at Military presence of U.S, China, France and UK and regional powers such as Qatar, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, adds complexity to the dynamic nature the geopolitical landscape. Therefore, such dynamics nature of the region makes it imperative to assess foreign policy effectiveness and relevance using realist principles.

Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST)

Hegemonic Stability Theory or (HST) argues the international system is more likely to maintain stability when a single nation state has the dominant position or hegemony over the rest of the world (Goldstein et al., 2005). On contrary, the theory claims that absence of a hegemonic power jeopardizes the stability of international economic and political relations due to anarchic nature of International system.

According to Neoliberals, a hegemony seeks to uphold its dominant position while minimizing enforcement costs. It achieves this by establishing a system that credibly limits the returns to power, ensuring that losers do not lose all, and committing to neither dominate nor abandon others. This commitment is facilitated through institutions, which, being sticky or hard to change, favor the hegemony while providing protection and stability for the rest of the world (Ikenberry, 1998). The more open this world order, the less likely a challenger will emerge.

Despite these positive assertions, numerous arguments challenge the sustainability of hegemonic stability, as noted by Vincent (N.D.) One key challenge is the collective good nature of the system, plagued by a "free rider" syndrome. The hegemony must induce or coerce other states to support the system, especially since it promotes democracy and capitalism, championing human rights and free trade. However, other nations may attempt to enjoy the benefits while avoiding the costs, requiring the hegemony's sustained commitment. If the hegemony erects barriers to trade, the system may collapse.

The other critic on the sustainability of a hegemonic state involves on the uneven growth of power within the international system over time. This happen due to technological change, economics and other factors that erode the system stablished by the hegemony. Moreover, the hegemony can be challenged as other countries believe the benefits they get from the system is disproportionate or unfair. This further contribute to the instability of hegemonic order. (Vincent, N.D.).

Highlight on Global political economy dynamics

As highlighted in framework, the hegemony in the global political economy is undergoing a significant transition. The Neo liberal global institutions which govern international political and economic relations are facing challenges from emerging regional powers such as China and Russia. Furthermore, the credibility on leadership of liberal world order has diminished due to the negative results of prior political and military interventions. For instance, failures of US military interventions in Iraq and Libya are the major once. In addition, negative consequences of economic interventions by Hegemonic interventionist institutions like the IMF and World Bank such as Structural Adjustment Programs in Ghana and various West and Central African countries. in the meantime, growing nationalism in Western powers like the US and EU seems reducing their involvement in managing international affairs and pushing them prioritize in domestic socio-economic matters.

On the other hand, the institutions associated with liberal world order hegemony, such as the WTO, IMF, WBG, and UN system are under pressure to make fundamental reforms in a way which reflect the current international power dynamics. For instance, the trends among African countries

mainly in countries like South Africa, Burundi and Gambia's plan to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2017 shows growing pressure for reform (The Guardian, 2017).

On the other side of the question, the "global south" is demonstrating increasing challenge the Western economic and political world order. However, critics argue that sustaining this opposition against the West may be challenging due to divided interests within the global south. Nonetheless, proponents reject this argument by taking the BRICS as an example. Member countries share a common feature such as having critical view on neoliberal development model promoted by the Western dominated IMF and World Bank. Major countries such as China registered rapid development over the past decades using their own economic and political model.

Global political economy dynamics and its impact on globalization

As highlighted in the above section, the ideological struggle against the liberal world order has in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. Moreover, over the last decade, the momentum has intensified due to a confluence of internal and external factors. This can be well captured by the notion of Hegemonic Stability Theory that states internal capacity of a hegemonic state to sustain dominance is likely to diminish. The cost of maintaining a global order would lead to economic and political inefficiencies internally. Simultaneously, the system witnesses a growing frustration among free riders, stemming from the excessive abuse of the hegemonic state, ultimately pressuring the hegemonic state to lose its sustained dominance.

Recent decade effectiveness of global order is challenged due to plummeting economic and political capacity of US to keep the liberal world order. Especially, after Trump administration has announced plans to decrease its involvement in international matters. According to Trump's speech during the first 2016 presidential debate held at Hofstra University, he expressed dissatisfaction on majority of NATO member states for not paying their fair share (2% of GDP). He officially mentioned "US pay approximately 73 percent of the cost of NATO, which is a lot of money to protect other countries" (CNN, 2016). He also underlined "US cannot afford to be world's police; let NATO allies pay". Even under Biden administration and the current conflict in Ukraine, republicans resembled to reduce US involvement in international affairs. These trends together with potential Trump reelection depicts the current US role in international order is a contested bipartisan issue.

Other indications of the U.S.'s waning interest in maintaining the global world order include anti-liberal economic policies, extending beyond rivalry countries such as China. The decision to withdraw from tripartite trade agreements like NAFTA signals the country's reduced willingness to sustain its hegemonic role. The administration's adoption of protectionist measures shows further shift in its approach to globalization. For instance, tariffs imposed over 50 billion-dollar worth goods imported from China and the introduction of new limits on Chinese investment in U.S. high-tech industries aiming to curb Chinese acquisition of U.S. technology are prominent ones (David J., 2018).

Therefore, globalization landscape is different in the last decade in comparison of the previous two decades. The traditional institutions of the hegemonic state are being challenged and became less function in comparison with earlier times. This is due to decreasing political and economic capacity of the hegemonic power. Therefore, continuous assessment of foreign policy is important to align strategies with uncertainty and changes of globalization.

Developments in Red Sea and Ethiopian foreign policy

As discussed above Red Sea is one of the most important trade routes that serves as the shortest channel which connects Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea through Suez Canal. Its strategic significance has made it highly attractive military destination. However, in recent years it has become focal point for global and regional powers due to increasing geo political competition. According to Shehab (2018),

four out of five permanent UN Security Council members have military base in Djibouti and Sudan. Other western countries like Italy and Spain also wants to open military base. In addition, regional actors such as Turkey and United Arab Emirates have established economic agreements to own ports. Similarly, Israel, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are also military players in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa.



Figure 1. Red Sea Militarization

Such substantial military presence of global and regional powers has significant threat to Ethiopia's national security. Specifically, the existence of countries such as Eritrea and Egypt who have historical enmity with Ethiopia could exacerbate security challenge in the region.

East African Political and Security Analyst Kahsay suggests that Eritrean government may use financial gains earned due to its geo strategic importance to destabilize the region by providing financial support and technical training to terrorist and oppositions groups (Tsegay, 2018). Specifically, financial gains from countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt could be invested in malicious activities. For example, the conflict in Yemen which is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran geopolitical give a chance to Eritrean government exacerbate the situation by directly involving in the conflict to secure financial gains (Tsegay, 2018).

Therefore, the extensive military buildup and the presence of historically rooted enmity with countries like Egypt is imminent threats to Ethiopia. Besides, the unpredictable behavior and provocative nature of the Eritrean government compel a reassessment of Ethiopian foreign policy in the Red Sea region.

Ethiopian foreign policy document clearly states “The relations [Ethiopia] have with a given country or group of countries is based on national interests and as such, is linked to our democratization and development goal. With our eyes firmly on fundamental national interests, we need to draft a policy on the basis of a sober analysis of the value and role of these countries vis-a-vis our own interests” (MOFA, 2002).

Research Methodology

The review applied qualitative research methods to assess the responsiveness capacity of Ethiopian foreign policy based on effectiveness and adequacy criteria. The evaluation involves comparing the stated policy's objectives with its actual outcomes between 1991 and 2018. However, qualitative policy evaluations are susceptible to personal biases and lead to wrong conclusions if not constrained

by a structured framework. Therefore, an analytical framework is essential to provide a standardized reference point and maintain objectivity by explicitly acknowledging limitations.

The first step is the development of an analytical framework which gives a structure to synthesizing diverse sources of information through the lens of relevant International Relations theoretical like Hegemonic Stability Theory and Realism. Figure 2 shows the process, starting with a review of the theoretical foundations of analysis and baseline assumption of globalization dynamics.

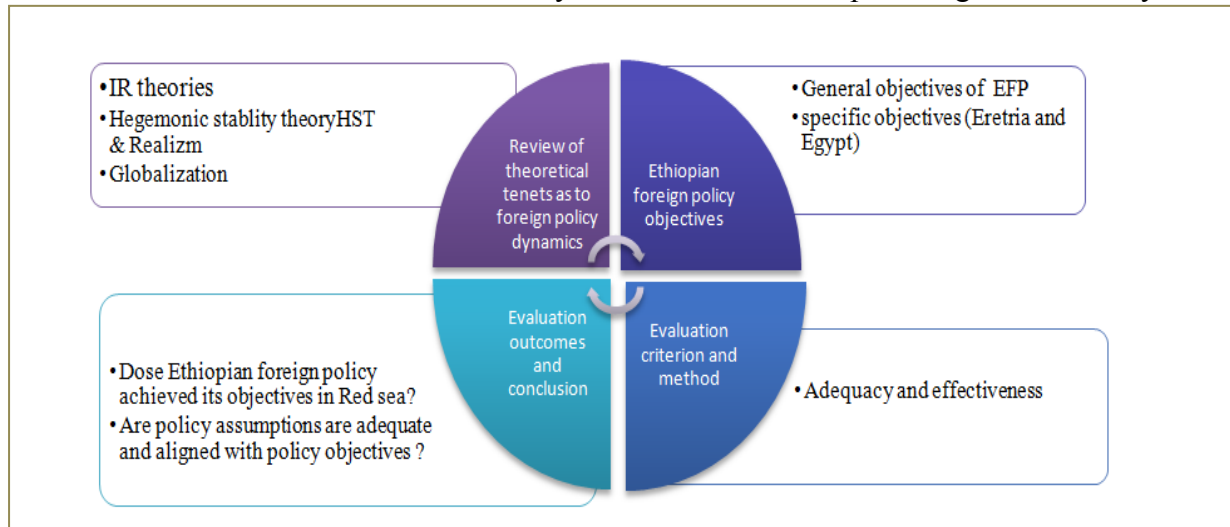


Figure 2. Analytical framework

The next step involves sorting, organizing and summarizing relevant policy statements from Ethiopian foreign policy document to describe and assess policy objectives. This will be followed by categorizing policy objectives into two general Ethiopian Foreign Policy objectives and specific objectives including to Eritrea, Somalia, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula. Next, adequacy and effectiveness criteria will be used as the policy evaluation criteria to determine whether or not Ethiopian foreign policy are effective and has sufficient assumptions aligned with the intensity and nature of challenges created by geopolitical dynamics in Red Sea region.

Result and Discussion

The general policy objective is two: the first is to contribute to and benefit from international conditions that enhance development and democratic objectives. The second one is to minimize external security threats of the nation. This focus reflects the aim to promote stability, progress, and democratic governance both domestically and internationally.

Specific policy intentions and objectives are targeted various regions and countries. In the Horn of Africa, the policy underlines the importance of understanding neighboring countries role as neither hindering nor significantly helpful to Ethiopia's utilization of water and other natural resources. Concerning Eritrea, the policy recognizes Eritrea's limited influence on Ethiopia's major tasks. Nevertheless, it emphasizes the importance of maintaining focus on development and democratization goals without allowing potential conflicts to divert attention. Similarly, regarding to Somalia which disintegration has led to high security risks, Ethiopia aims to ensure peace and stability through participation in regional peacekeeping efforts and proactive military interventions when necessary.

Regarding Egypt, the policy underlines the risk of engaging in disputes that perpetuate poverty. Also, it calls for full implementation of agreements to increase trust and cooperation among neighboring nations. In the Arabian Peninsula, the policy recognizes that Ethiopia faces

challenges in creating meaningful relationships due to external influences and misunderstanding. Thus, the policy aims to bust up effort to correct distorted perceptions; enhance knowledge about regional states, and collaborate with global powers to promote peace and stability in the peninsula.

These specific policy objectives reflect Ethiopia's commitment to effective diplomacy, conflict prevention, and regional cooperation in aiming broader development and security interests. Through strategic approach and diplomatic initiatives Ethiopia aims to address complex geopolitical dynamics in the red sea and protect its national interests by contributing to regional peace and stability.

Based on effectiveness and adequacy policy assessment criteria the policy has produced a number of important successes. In general, the policy has supported economic integration and collaboration with the neighboring countries over the years which contribute to maintain a semblance of peace and stability. Also, Ethiopia has demonstrated its commitment to regional stability by actively involving in peacekeeping missions in areas like South Sudan and Somalia. Furthermore, Ethiopia has actively participated in regional conflict resolution efforts through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in disputes like in Darfur Sudan.

Nevertheless, when examining country specific policy outcomes many challenges emerge. For example, In the case of Eritrea the policy has got obsolete to in addressing country's growing relative importance in the Red Sea and growing threat to Ethiopia's development and democratization agenda. As a result, Ethiopia's policy towards Eritrea is becoming less effective and inadequate which necessitates a reassessment of prior policy assumptions.

On the other hand, Ethiopia's foreign policy toward Somalia remains effective and adequate, with interventions effectively addressing security challenges posed by groups such as Al-Shabab. However, regarding Egypt, despite the alignment of policy assumptions with objectives, the Agreement on declaration of principles reached in 2015 between Sudan, Ethiopia, and Egypt remains unimplemented, leaving Ethiopia vulnerable to continued security threats.

The policy in Arabian Peninsula can be expressed by the lack of meaningful economic and political relationships. Besides, efforts to correct distorted perceptions about Ethiopia in the region are found to be ineffective. Ethiopia's independent stance on Middle East security issues could also contribute to ineffective performance of diplomatic relations with countries in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, Ethiopia's policy toward the Arabian Peninsula is ineffective and inadequate. so requires strategic celebration to effectively address emerging challenges and harness opportunities.

Conclusion

The foreign policy performance under Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has showed significant level of effectiveness and adequacy in upholding peace and fostering development over the past two decades. Mainly, in economic integration with neighboring states, successful engagement in peacekeeping missions across region including Somalia and South Sudan, and diplomatic leadership in conflict resolution initiatives using platforms such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Nonetheless, the evolving dynamics in the Red Sea region resulted a change in policy assumptions which reduce the effectiveness of future endeavors. Thus such complex interplay between global forces, particularly the swift dynamics of globalization, was a clear indicator of the moment which needs Ethiopia to recalibrate its foreign policy strategies in response to emerging challenges and opportunities. Nevertheless, foreign policy establishments didn't proactively work to revise the policy. Particularly concerning nations like Eritrea, the failure to adequately respond

to significant security concerns has become apparent. Mainly by looking at Eritrea's active role in the Ethiopian civil war in the Tigray region in 2022 that resulted the loss of more than millions of lives. Therefore, more robust and responsive foreign policy approach is required despite complicated relation the current government led by Prosperity Party has with the Eritrean regime.

Regarding to Egypt the policy took in to account the historical relations. Moreover, it acknowledges Egypt's unconstructive engagement to put the country into perpetual cycle of conflict. In addition, it criticized its approach of force and intimidation to influence its interest on utilization and operation of Nile river. Nevertheless, the policy was optimistic in a way that Egypt would change long standing policy on Nile river utilization. Moreover, it was focused on reducing vulnerability instead of simultaneously engage in efforts which reduces Egypt's capacity to inflict damage. As manifested in later years, the policy didn't lead Egyptian foreign policy establishment to change approach towards Ethiopia.

Generally, the policy was more of inward looking and focused on reducing vulnerability instead of being simultaneously proactive and out ward looking. This single-handed approach reduced its flexibility, limiting recourse and foreign instruments to effectively and adequately respond to swift changes in the Red Sea militarization. Therefore, simultaneously out-ward looking, flexible and proactive policy approach is relevant to insure security and best serve high priority development and democratization agendas.

References

- Bell, D. (2017). Political realism and international relations. *Philosophy Compass*, 12, e12403.
- David J. Lynch. (2018). *Trump announces tariffs on China, tech crackdown ahead of key trade meeting*. Washington.
- Desai A. (2013). The BRICS Are Building a Challenge to Western Economic Supremacy. The guardian retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/02/brics-challenge-western-supremacy>
- Tsegay. (2018). Ethiopia: Red Sea Militarization - Caution to Preclude Confrontation. AllAfrica. Retrieved from <https://allafrica.com/stories/201802230701.html>
- Shehab M. & Cafiero.G., (2018). *The Militarization of The Red Sea*/ Retrieved from <https://lobelog.com/the-militarization-of-the-red-sea/>
- CNN. (2016, September 26). First 2016 Presidential Debate at Hofstra University, (Trump, Interviewer)
- Vincent. A. (N.D.). *The theory of hegemonic stability*. Retrieved from <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pol116/realism.htm>
- Goldstein, J. S., & Pevehouse, J. C. (2008). *International Relations*, 8/e.
- Xander S. (2018). *The Red Sea, Where Alliances Shift With the Tide*. Retrieved from <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/red-sea-alliances-shift-tide/>
- Guardian. (2017, January 31). African leaders plan mass withdrawal from international criminal court. Addis Ababa.
- Ikenberry, G. J. (1998). *Institutions, strategic restraint, and the persistence of American postwar order*. *International security*, 23(3), 43-78.
- MOFA. (2002). *National-security-policy-and-strategy*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Retrieved from <https://chilot.me/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/national-security-policy-and-strategy.pdf>