

# ETHIOPIAN REGIONAL ASCENSION: ETHIOPIA'S FOREIGN POLICY FROM MENGISTU HAILÉ MARIAM TO ABIY AHMED ALI

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## Introduction

The African Horn is located at the eastern end of the African continent, in a peninsular formation that politically covers eight countries today: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. Historically, the region has always been targeted by foreign powers, due to its strategic geopolitical position, in this case, the connection of the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. However, the history of East Africa included the formation of rudimentary political units that managed to develop the productive forces: among them, the Axum and Abyssinian Empires, which developed on the Ethiopian plateau and along the Somali coast, stand out (Pereira 2007).

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It can be seen from the above that the current borders of the African Horn, as in much of Africa, are the result of political and diplomatic treaties between European powers. However, in the center of the African Horn, the secular empire of Abyssinia survived the Turkish-Ottoman and European attacks, configuring itself as a political bastion of sovereignty, stability, resistance and strength. Thus arose the myth of the Ethiopian force on the African continent, a people who managed to repel the Italian attacks in 1896, at the Battle of Adowa, and guarantee their independence. In this sense that — as will be seen later — Ethiopia constitutes a pillar of stability and development to the politically unstable Horn of Africa, since its presence in the region and its state and military apparatus date back to immemorial times (Visentini 2012).

With a long diplomatic tradition, Ethiopia has also established itself as a bastion of the decolonization of the African continent after World War II, welcoming the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in its capital and advocating for the emancipation of the remaining colonies on the continent. Still, despite diplomatic haughtiness, the Ethiopian state exposed contradictions: governed by a practically absolutist emperor, the majority of the population was still under the control of feudal lords and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This situation changed dramatically in the first half of the 1970s with the beginning of the revolutionary process in the country. After 1974, the monarchy was overthrown and an Armed Forces Committee — the Derg — would lead the Revolution, national development and foreign policy (Halliday and Molineux 1981).

The events from 1974 to the present day built the Republic of Ethiopia, that is, the modern Ethiopian state. Before the 1974 revolution, Ethiopian foreign policy was still tied to the interests of an archaic landed elite and automatic alignment with the West. After the revolution, Ethiopia sought alignment with the East and greater national development, seeking to destroy the archaic structures of the countryside and the clergy. With the end of the Cold War and, consequently, the economic and military support of the Soviet Union, Ethiopia succumbed to its own internal struggles in 1991 and a new period of redemocratization began gradually. To succeed the Derg, the 1991 revolutionaries commanded the country still with the Derg's authoritarian inheritances, with examples of external belligerence, lack of transparency in the conduct of internal politics, repression of popular movements, among others (Visentini 2018).

Since the rise of Abiy Ahmed Ali to the post of prime minister in 2018, there has been an acceleration of reforms and political and economic

opening since the Revolution. It is a fact that such reforms have been underway since 1991, but the speed that such a remodeling took with Prime Minister Ali is remarkable. In this sense, this article seeks to analyze the conduct of foreign policy in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia from the 1974 Revolution to the first year of Abiy Ahmed Ali's administration, investigating in the process to which Ethiopia's regional rise in the African Horn is due. Through a bibliographic review, it appears that this process of political reopening occurs due to the needs of national development and the rise of a new party to the post of prime minister.

The variables of analysis to verify this hypothesis would be (i) the pace of economic growth in the country in recent decades, (ii) the approach to China, (iii) foreign investments in the country, (iv) privatization packages, (v) diplomatic rapprochement with neighbors and (vi) diplomatic offensives. It is concluded in an assertive way that since the end of the Meles Zenawi administration, in 2012, Ethiopia has gone through a phase of greater openness in the conduct of its foreign policy precisely because of the need for subsidies to national development. Finally, this work is justified in view of its effort to understand a recent political phenomenon in the interstate dynamics of East Africa.

## Ethiopian Revolutions and Derg's legacy

From 1941 to 1974, Ethiopia was governed, uninterruptedly, by Hailé Selassié, successor to the Ethiopian Empire. Selassié, after the withdrawal of Italian troops in World War II, sought to restore the status quo ante, trying to preserve the archaic structures of the Ethiopian monarchy, relying on local land leaders, the clergy and the international support of the capitalist bloc, in the context of the Cold War. However, from 1973, the archaic foundations of the monarchy collapsed with the beginning of the 1974 international recession (Tareke 2009; Visentini 2012).

If the year 1973 represented the rise of the Third World with the international inflationary process of commodities, it was not so for the specific case of Ethiopia. In fact, Ethiopian foreign trade has always been based on primary products — such as coffee, cowhide, khat<sup>4</sup> and gold — but in 1973 a long period of drought affected the entire pastoral belt of the African

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4 Narcotic stimulant similar to amphetamine. The World Health Organization (WHO) considers it a drug that causes chemical dependence, which has led many countries to control its trade.

Sahel — especially Ethiopia —, and when the financial instability of the Nixon Shock summoned the periphery to claim the deterioration of terms of trade, Ethiopia had lost much of its annual crop. At first, the Ethiopian emperor, Hailé Selassié, did not seek international help, fearing that a weakened image of Ethiopia would be an opportunity for regional neighbors to project themselves over the country. The emperor's disregard for the critical situation — which claimed the lives of 300,000 Ethiopians — would not go unpunished (Droz and Rowley 1993).

In this context of political apathy, a revolutionary committee (Derg), which emerged from the top of the Armed Forces, which faced the archaic structures, articulated a coup against the Selassié monarchy in September 1974. Selassié tried to negotiate power and delay the end of the monarchy, but on September 12, the parliament was dissolved, and Emperor Hailé Selassié himself deposed and exiled. Apparently confused and apathetic, the political movements of 1974 represented the complete erosion of the Ethiopian monarchy, based on the archaic structures of a feudal aristocracy and a modern political structure. In this context, popular pressures lacked the direction and leadership to call for a unified movement against the status quo — however, the Armed Forces did. The Armed Forces have always been at the forefront of questioning the political and economic contradictions of the monarchy, and since the mid-1960s, they have opposed the emperor (Schwab 1985; Visentini 2012).

In December 1974, the Derg presented the Political Guidelines on Ethiopian Socialism (Ethiopian Tikdem), which include the collectivization of the countryside, the nationalization of all banks, 13 insurance companies and about 70 industries, as well as the creation of an avant-garde party. The measure of greatest impact, without a doubt, was the deep agrarian reform that the committee undertook. In fact, the entire Ethiopian economy and society was based on the primary sector, and thus the Derg needed support from the peasant communities, in addition to undermining the feudal aristocracy (Tareke 2009; Visentini 2012).

It is notable that, from 1974 to 1977, a vacuum of power was established in Ethiopian politics, which reverberated throughout the East African region. In 1974, the insufficiencies of the revolutionary government led to an internal dispute for political preponderance within the vanguard committee itself. In the interim of three years, the rise of Amhara Mengistu Hailé Mariam was sponsored by the most radical wing of the Derg. This three-year political stalemate was due precisely to the committee's indecision between which policy to adopt to the regime. Although it was a declared socialist

regime since 1974, there was still no consensus within the committee whether the Marxist-Leninist line would be taken, a fact that would change the country's entire foreign policy (Schwab 1985; Visentini 2012).

Since 1953, Ethiopia has maintained military ties with the United States and Israel, both desirous of a stable and conservative Ethiopian state that would eliminate the communist threat, by the desire of the USA, and the Arab nationalism, by the desire of Israel. In addition to the common adversaries, the USA saw Ethiopia as a state capable of maintaining order in the African Horn, since it was suspicious of Somalia's political instability. The year of 1977, however, marks the tipping point of Ethiopian foreign policy — at least momentarily. In early 1977, Ethiopia, by adhering to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, broke off with the USA (Visentini 2012).

In July of the same year, the revolution began to reverberate throughout the region: Siad Barre's Somalia invaded the southern portion of Ethiopia, in order to form a large Somalia, bringing together ethnic minorities in the Ogaden desert. Such ethnic minorities, however, have long been areas of resistance to Addis Ababa a long time ago, and therefore the 1977 Somali invasion was an opportunistic attempt by Siad Barre to support these areas of resistance and expand Somalia's borders (Schwab 1985).

Apparently defenseless, due to the instability caused by internal groups, the Derg managed to defend itself from foreign hostilities, relying on a new ally: the Soviet Union (USSR). The adoption of Marxism-Leninism as a doctrine of Ethiopian socialism and revolution had a foreign policy projection character. The USSR, desirous of a more stable political ally in the African Horn region, supported the Mengistu regime to build the new Ethiopian state. At first, Soviet and Cuban advisers tried to reconcile the two belligerents — given that Siad Barre had been a socialist and Soviet ally since 1969. However, feeling betrayed by conflicting interests, in November 1977, Barre expelled Soviet advisers and Cubans and broke off with the socialist bloc. At the same time, the diplomatic and military relationship between Ethiopia and the USSR grew. In March 1978, thanks to Soviet logistical and material support and 16,000 Cuban soldiers, Ethiopian forces expelled the invading Somali forces (Schwab 1985; Visentini 2012).

In the midst of southern problems, Ethiopia also faced areas of internal resistance. The province of Eritrea, a former Italian colony annexed by Ethiopia after World War II, took advantage of the political vacuum to rise against the Ethiopian occupation. Eritrea, in a way, has always been a disparate state in Ethiopia. Although the coastline in the Red Sea has been under Ethiopian rule for a few centuries, ethnic differences have aggravated the

differences between Ethiopians — mostly Amhara and Christian Tigrayan — and Eritreans — mostly Christian and Muslim Tigrayan, influenced by the Ottoman yoke. Thus, the Eritrean political structure eager to emancipate was formed by two pillars of identification: the Ottoman and Italian colonial heritage, and the ethnic-religious differences. Furthermore, the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict, beginning in the 1980s, took on the shape of yet another proxy war in the context of the Cold War on the African continent. On the one hand, the Eritrean insurgents were supported by the USA, China, Somalia, Sudan and Syria, and on the other hand, Ethiopia was supported only by the USSR, North Korea and, to a lesser extent, Israel (Pool 1998; Visentini 2018).

In this context, in 1977, the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) controlled much of the interior of the Eritrean province, while Mengistu, uncompromising about the political fragmentation of his country, controlled only the capital Asmara and the ports of Massawa and Assab (Schwab 1985). This scenario, however, would change with Soviet support. The USSR would not let the Ethiopian central power lose its way out to the sea, precisely because this would mean the loss of a strategic point in the Red Sea. Supported by Soviet logistics, Ethiopian forces, from 1978 to 1982, contained the Eritrean insurrections (Pool 1998).

The situation of the Ethiopian socialist regime began to erode in 1984. This year, another drought devastated the countryside, demonstrating the fragility of the Derg's agrarian reform policies. From 1985 to 1991, the situation became untenable, as Soviet aid dissipated because of the ruin of the socialist bloc and the military escalation that internal conflicts in Ethiopia were taking. From 1985 to 1989, the EPLF took over much of the Eritrean territory and, in addition to military victories, it joined the TPLF guerrilla militia (Tigray People's Liberation Front), which was internal to the Ethiopian territory and representative of the minority ethnic group, in order to both overthrow Mengistu's authoritarianism. In May 1991, Mengistu Hailé Mariam fled Addis Ababa, while the EPLF-TPLF union was victorious over the Ethiopian capital. From this union of guerrilla groups came the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, in its acronym in English), which, since then, has been hegemonic in parliament and in the structures of the Ethiopian state (Visentini 2012).

With regard to discontinuities, the 1974 Revolution succeeded in destroying many of the archaic structures of the monarchy, such as the power of the feudal nobility and the complacency of Ethiopian foreign policy with the capitalist powers. Certainly, the revolution strengthened Ethiopian foreign policy, which, after 1974, sought to be more incisive on regional and

diplomatic issues with foreign powers, giving it a more independent content — unlike Selassié's complacency. In the economic sphere, the Derg was successful in urban organization by managing associations of proletarians — *kebelles* — that would correspond to the rise of state industrialism (Schwab 1985), and in public education, an area in which a deep student reform was applied in 1980, with a view to literacy — a reform that was even recognized by UNESCO with the International Literary Association for Literacy Award (Halliday and Molineux 1981). Although the collectivization of the countryside was disastrous in 1984 with the beginning of the Great Famine, such agrarian reform served to start the end of aristocratic feudalism and the beginning of urbanization. Since the beginning of the revolution, therefore, three variables can be noted: (i) national development and socioeconomic transformation; (ii) change of orientation in foreign policy and (iii) high diplomatic offensive.

## **From Meles Zenawi to Hailemariam Desalegn: national reconstruction**

Indeed, one of the Derg's legacies has endured time: authoritarianism. The authority figure, however, is already an intrinsic feature to the structures of Ethiopian politics since the Axumite emperors. But, particularly this legacy, the Derg not only did not know how to dissolve, but, in a way, used it to balance its power. The figure that marks this continuity of the 1974 legacy is, without a doubt, Meles Zenawi. Zenawi was one of the most prominent leaders of the TPLF, a tenacious and resolute guerrilla for the Tigrayan cause, and responsible for leading the Derg to its ruin in May 1991. Since then, Zenawi, and the bulk of the EPRDF's political elites, have led Ethiopia to internal and external processes to national policy (Dias 2013). Within the variables of analysis, the pace of growth of the country during the 1990s was low and, equally, with low participation of the national and foreign private sectors; due to the end of the Cold War tensions, Africa as a whole was put on the margins of high international politics; Ethiopia faced problems with its neighbors in the African Horn, tarnishing the country's diplomatic image (Visentini 2018).

Internally, the political elites of the EPRDF sought, by increasing state capacities, to implement a project to strengthen the state, by promoting reforms aimed at the integration of the country, in order to avoid the destruction of the nation, as it seemed, to the time, that the entire African Horn was doomed. According to the 1995 Constitution, a regime of ethnic

federalism would prevail in the country, in which both freedom of worship and the right to self-determination would give a greater voice to the amalgamation of peoples that Ethiopia had always been. The regions would be dominated according to the predominant local ethnicity, and their official language would follow according to the majority. Although Article 39 of the Constitution protected this implicit right to secession, Zenawi sought to form a cohesive state, using as a pretext the representation of minorities — given that he himself was a representative of the Tigrayan minority (Dias 2013; Hagmann and Abbink 2011).

In the economic sphere, the Zenawi government sought to accommodate itself to the global order in search of favorable investments and trade agreements that would guarantee the recovery and development of the domestic economy. In this sense, in 1991, the centrally planned economy was abandoned and the process of economic liberalization began. In 1994, the EPRDF announced a Five-Year Development Program with the objective of improving the infrastructure and conditions for making investments and which was assisted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The program focused specifically on health, education, agriculture, road construction and mining projects (Clapham 2006; Vestal 1999).

In the security sphere, the country significantly increased its state capacities, which had a positive impact on its foreign and security policy, starting in the 2000s. In addition, the primacy of national security was maintained, with special attention to security challenges produced by internal insurgent groups and neighboring countries sponsoring the proxies. In this context, a strong internal coercive and repressive apparatus was built to contain the internal threats from the remaining insurgent groups, capable of guaranteeing the country's territorial integrity and external defense. Thus, despite the extensive Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) programs put in place, the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) was formed by the integration of the armed wing of the EPRDF and elements of the Derg forces, based on equitable representation of nations, nationalities and Ethiopian peoples (Cardoso 2020; Vestal 1999).

Externally, the fall of the Derg in 1991 caused yet another rapid power vacuum that shook the entire African Horn, proving, again, that Ethiopia is the pillar of the entire region. As early as January 1991, the Siad Barre regime in Somalia, without any external assistance, could not stand the pressure of internal disputes and collapsed, fragmenting into warlords' struggles. The entire southern part of Somalia — the former Italian administration — was seized by a social upheaval, while the northern part — the former British protectorate (Somaliland) — declared itself independent and maintained relative



political stability, but with little international recognition (Visentini 2012). Since 1991, attempts have been made to re-stabilize the southern portion of the country, carried out by different actors. For example, the UN, in response to the intensification of the conflict and the worsening of the humanitarian crisis, established the United Nations Operation for Somalia (UNOSOM I) in 1991, with the mandate to guarantee the distribution of food to the population and monitor the ceasefire agreement between the fighting factions. However, UNOSOM I failed to restore order in the country (Schmidt 2018).

In this unstable scenario in the Horn of Africa, a regional political project stands out that, although at first glance not apparent, at the limit aims to develop economically the entire region of the African Horn: the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (Visentini 2018). The IGAD was another legacy of the Derg, founded in 1986 to combat the endemic drought in the Sahel region. This is, in fact, one of the most endemic factors for the socioeconomic destabilization of the African Horn (Pereira 2007). Within the analysis of the variables in this article, it is interesting to point out that IGAD was a step towards rapprochement with Ethiopian neighbors, a strong component of diplomatic offensive and an attempt at joint regional development.

In this sense, the Intergovernmental Authority for Drought and Development (IGADD) was first founded in 1986 by Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. A first move towards integration is signaled by the nationalist government of Mengistu and by the other states in the region concerned with the primary economy. Regional integration, in its embryonic stage, seemed to demonstrate a palliative concern, but it had objectives of stabilization and economic development, given the social and economic revolutions that states like Ethiopia were going through. However, the destabilization of the region went beyond the endemic drought of the Sahel, considering that from 1991 onwards the region started to count on the political and military destabilization of the states of Somalia and Sudan, and later, of Eritrea, in 1998, when it entered a collision course with Ethiopia (Visentini 2012; 2018).

In 1994, IGADD was renamed Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), increasing its scope of action, including security and defense issues in the region, in addition to economic development, communications and transport. As such, a regional integration of the Horn of Africa has the impetus to develop economically, bringing together poles of dynamic economy — such as Ethiopia and Kenya —, but rather needs to unite for peace and security. An eclectic analysis makes it possible to verify that such

security integration has, in fact, a view to the union of national markets, given that the region's economic hubs, in addition to having Chinese and American aid, grant the flow of production to the neighboring states. Stabilization is the logical means to achieve the practical economic end (Cardoso 2016; Visentini 2018).

Therefore, since 2002, IGAD, which integrates the African Horn states<sup>5</sup>, has tried to install a transitional government in Somalia to stabilize the region. The Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) was created in 2005 to have such an assignment, that, however, in 2006 it faced resistance from warlords. Ethiopia has sought since 1977 to contain Somali expansionism and, above all, to keep the entire African Horn in a stable manner under its umbrella. In the Zenawi administration, with the Eritrean emancipation in 1993, the subsequent loss of sea access and the beginning of conflicts with Eritrea in 1998, dependence on Djibouti as an Ethiopian foreign trade partner increased — both countries are connected by a railway line since the time of the French administration of Djibouti. To this end, in December 2006, Ethiopia intervened in the neighboring country to support the TFP, seeking to stabilize the entire region. However, even with US diplomatic, logistical and military support, Ethiopia was unable to assert peace in the neighboring country, being forced to withdraw in early 2009<sup>6</sup>, in compliance with the Djibouti Peace Agreement signed in 2008 (Cepik and Schneider 2010).

Again, the 1991 Derg's power vacuum reverberated in another direction: Eritrea. Zenawi — a former member of the TPLF — came to power with the help of the EPLF and, therefore, gave a positive nod to Eritrea, which in 1993, after a popular referendum, opted for political emancipation. On May 24, 1993, the Secretary General of the EPLF, Isaias Afewerki, was elected Eritrean president, which continues to this day as an unchallenged leader. From independence until 1998, Zenawi and Afewerki maintained friendly relations, until political impasses over border disputes and the shared use, between the two countries, of the ports of Massawa and Assab led the nations to the armed conflict in 1998. Both worn out by the conflict, negotiated peace in 2000 and submitted the border dispute to arbitration by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 2002, the Ethiopian and Eritrean Border Commission gave a favorable case to Eritrea and ruled that the Ethiopian occupation of the city of Badme was illegal. Meles Zenawi did not comply with the ICJ's

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5 Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda were members in 2002.

6 The Ethiopian government sent troops back to Somalia in 2014 under the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Currently the country has about 4,395 contingents in AMISOM (Cardoso 2020).

decision, and both states remained without a formal peace treaty until 2018 (Maru 2017; Visentini 2012). Derg's legacy of animosity towards neighboring states is still evident, making the diplomatic projection of the Ethiopian state difficult.

After the formal end of the war against Eritrea, the Ethiopian government put in place a program to reform its foreign and security policy, aiming to provide more assertive responses to the new regional and international context. In 2002, the government drew up a White Paper (the Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy of Ethiopia — FANSPS), which restructured the concepts and approach of the country's foreign and security policy. The document defined that Ethiopian foreign and security policy should follow the principle of Concentric Circles, which established the country's priorities and positions in the different spheres of regional policy. According to the document, we can see three concentric circles: the first, broader, would be the antagonism with Egypt<sup>7</sup> and concerns about a militant Islamic state in the region. The second would be composed of the other neighboring countries, which could threaten the country immediately, through invasions or destabilization, through sponsorship of insurgent groups (proxy). Finally, the third, the innermost circle, refers to the countries with which Ethiopia has unresolved border disputes (Ethiopia 2002; Mohammed 2007).

In line with the principles contained in FANSPS, Ethiopia has projected forces on the civil conflict that had been taking place in Sudan in the regions of Darfur — since 2007 — and Abyei — since 2011. In this context, the country participates in UNISFA (United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei) with 3,900 staff, 1,900 contingents at UNAMID (United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur) and 2,158 staff at UNMISS (United Nations Mission in South Sudan)<sup>8</sup>. It is demonstrated once again that the stabilization of their contiguous territories and the diplomatic offensive have always been a policy shared by Ethiopian leaders. In general terms, the Ethiopian foreign security and defense policy during the Meles Zenawi government was guided by a set of "national defense" principles contained in the 1995 Constitution, which were reinforced in the White Paper published in 2002 (Dias 2013; Woodward 2013).

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7 Egypt plays a central role in Ethiopia's foreign and security policy strategies. A reflection of this can be found in FANSPS, which dedicates eleven pages to the country (Maru 2017).

8 Since January 2016, Ethiopia has been at the top of the ranking of troop contributing countries (TCCs) for UN Peace Operations, worldwide. Currently, Addis Ababa has about 7,554 contingents in three United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNISFA, UNMISS and UNAMID), in addition to about 4,385 staff in the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (Cardoso 2020).

On 20 August 2012, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, died of infectious complications. Immediately, Hailemariam Desalegn, Deputy Secretary-General of the EPDRF, succeeds him to the head of the government. Zenawi represented one of the continuities of Derg's break. With his death, a process of institutional reforms in the Ethiopian state begins to take shape. At first, however, Desalegn's choice as Zenawi's successor was the result of a little ruminated political calculation: first of all, it was necessary to maintain the balance of the ethnic federalism of the 1995 Constitution — Desalegn was a Tigrayan, a northern minority; second, Desalegn was the obvious choice to succeed Meles Zenawi — given that Desalegn was deputy secretary-general of the dominant party in the Ethiopian parliament (Dias 2013).

From 2012 to 2018, however, Desalegn proved to be more skilled in the field of foreign policy than his predecessor. With support from China — which offered low interest loans —, Desalegn undertook the modernization of the country's energy complex, in addition to seeking alternatives to foreign trade logistics by promoting bilateral agreements with Kenya, Djibouti and Somaliland. To this end, Desalegn undertook, through IGAD, the construction of railways, highways and an oil pipeline through a Juba-Lamu corridor — known as Corridor of Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia, or LAPSET, in the acronym in English —, which will link the South Sudanese oil wells and the Kenyan port of Lamu, passing through Ethiopian territory (Cardoso 2020; Visentini 2018). In addition to infrastructure work, Desalegn is also credited for maintaining the Ethiopian economy at growth above double digits in 2013 (10.5%), 2014 (10.2%) and 2015 (10.3%) (World Bank 2020).

In the scope of the variables of this work, Desalegn conducted an administration that accelerated the pace of economic growth in the country, approaching China, attracting foreign capital, partial rapprochement with the neighbors of the African Horn and also a timid diplomatic offensive. At the regional level, one can mention, for example, the creation of various forums and partnerships to assist in building the security capacity of South Sudan, discussing and resolving common security threats. Ethiopia has also trained officers from the South Sudanese Army (SSA), pilots, technical experts and engineers in Addis Ababa and has sent security officers and experts to Juba to support the SSA transformation process. In turn, South Sudan bought light weapons and ammunition, as well as refurbished tanks and other military equipment from Ethiopia (Cardoso 2020; Makonnen and Lulie 2014).

The rapid growth of the Ethiopian economy in the last decade, with the expansion of the services and agriculture sectors, contributed to the increase of public investments in infrastructure and to the increase of inter-

dependence between Addis Ababa and its neighbors. As an example, we can mention the increase in the volume of Ethiopian private investments in neighboring states, particularly in Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya, in the energy and transport sectors. This also contributed to the increase in Ethiopian demands regarding the use of ports in the region, especially in Djibouti, for their foreign trade. In this context, the Ethiopian government recently modernized the railway that links Addis Ababa to Djibouti, and has been expanding the network of capillary roads to access the interior of the country, with plans to expand the internal rail network as well (Cardoso 2020).

In short, this demonstrates that Hailemariam may have started the process of institutional reforms, based on a diplomacy more conciliatory with his neighbors and with a project of a broader and more modern industrial park. However, his performance as Ethiopian Prime Minister proved to be an obstacle to the political process that was taking place, a factor that led him to resign his condition on February 15, 2018<sup>9</sup> (Dias 2013).

## Abiy Ahmed Ali: the regional rise

Indeed, the rise of Abiy Ahmed Ali to the post of Ethiopian prime minister on April 2, 2018, marks the triumph of political and economic reforms. Abiy, of Oromo descent<sup>10</sup>, pursues an even more conciliatory and proactive foreign policy than his predecessors. A fact that confirms the above is the Peace Agreement of July 9, 2018, between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which ended 16 years of a poorly negotiated peace between the two countries and earned Ali the honors of the 100th Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. This attitude, in line with other bilateral agreements with states with coastline in the Indian Ocean, is a reflection of Ethiopia's need to participate in international trade and to project itself into the African Horn region as a key component of peace and stability (Reuters 2018).

In keeping with and continuing with its predecessor, Ali (i) strengthened ties with China to (ii) attract foreign capital in order to continue with infrastructure and modernization projects, such as the Great Dam of the

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<sup>9</sup> One of the reasons that led to Hailemariam Desalegn's resignation was the popular protests against the government that began in 2015, resulting in a serious political crisis with profound implications for the country's internal and foreign policy. In general, the leaders of the movements called for political and social reforms, greater political participation and criticized the supposed privileges of the tigrayan elite (Cardoso 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Oromo is the ethnic majority in the south of the country, which for centuries has been subjugated to the interests of the north of the country.

Ethiopian Renaissance (GDER), (iii) carried out privatization packages in telecommunications, transport, energy and logistics, thus, (iv) maintaining a good economic performance in 2018 (6.8%) and 2019 (8.2%) (World Bank 2020). Furthermore, as a cause and reflection of subsidies to the national economy, it also engendered a reorientation in the stance of internal and external policies.

Ali, since taking office, has taken internal reform measures — such as the appointment of the diplomat Sahle-Work Zewde to the country's honorary presidency in October 2018 — and regional integration — such as the normalization of relations with Eritrea in July, and the multilateral approach with South Sudan and Kenya for the construction of a trade corridor, and with Somaliland for the use of the port of Berbera (Visentini 2012; 2018).

In the economic sphere, Ali implemented a reform of state sectors and opened companies in the areas of telecommunications, transport, energy and logistics. On the one hand, strategic sectors will still be kept with 51% of the shares under state control — such as Ethiopian Airlines, Internet and energy services — meanwhile, less strategic sectors may be completely privatized — such as railroads, industrial parks, hotels etc. (Maasho 2018; Saigal 2018). Ali carries out this movement to maintain the country's external solvency and boost growth, including opening the country's first capital market from 2020 (Zekele 2019).

In the field of regional cooperation, what was observed was a significant deepening of economic projects in the commercial, telecommunications, transport, housing and energy sectors. It should be noted that even before Ali's political rise, the country's economic growth was reaping the rewards of previous administrations, whether in expanding agriculture or with a significant increase in public investments, which led Ethiopia to increase the volume of its private investments in Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya. In addition to agreements between Addis Ababa and Juba, in the areas mentioned above, and the establishment of regular flights between Ethiopia and South Sudan by Ethiopian Airlines, financial corporations such as the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE) and United Bank (UB) began to operate in the neighboring country. The Ethiopian state, which has already supplied electricity (since 2011) and drinking water (since 2014) to Djibouti, has strengthened this supply transmission, which transports about 100,000 cubic meters of water daily (Cardoso 2020).

In this sense, because of the need for national development, that, since 2003, the growth rates of the Ethiopian economy are the second highest in the entire African continent. In addition, the country's population is

one of the largest on the continent and one of the fastest growing annually (Visentini 2007). Adding these two facts to the climate changes that have been occurring in the world since the 1950s, water control by the Ethiopian government has become one of its five-year plan priorities. It is in this respect that the Ali administration, since 2018, has carried out a diplomatic offensive, together with a rapprochement with its neighbors, to guarantee national interests, such as the construction of the largest hydroelectric dam on the African continent, the Great Dam of the Ethiopian Renaissance (GDER), with a production capacity of 6,000 MW, which will supply cheap electricity not only to Ethiopia, but also to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya and Egypt. However, the construction of such a dam breeds an international dispute to the present day with the other riverside countries downstream (Cardoso 2020; Rahman 2012).

As early as 2010, the Zenawi government announced that the construction of a dam on the Blue Nile — a tributary river of the Nile that has its source on the Ethiopian plateau — would be planned — a fact that caused controversy to the governments of countries bathed by the Nile downstream — especially the Egyptian government. In 2014, GDER's works, despite the Egyptian lobby, were started with the help of Chinese capital. After three years of work, with 60% of its installations completed, the Egyptian government still disputes the arbitrariness of the Ethiopian government (Rahman 2012).

The energy dispute over the waters of the Nile Basin dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, when agreements between riparian countries and the United Kingdom were discussed in 1902, but little was formally signed. In 1922, Egypt managed to emancipate itself from England, taking advantage of the fragility of the metropolis after World War I. To this end, in 1929, Egypt signed a treaty with England, which grants unrestricted freedom and monopoly to deliberate on the economic and energy issues of the Nile River. In 1956, Sudan also managed to emancipate itself from the old metropolis, and the Nasser government expertly negotiated the issues of sharing the economic and energy exploitation of the Nile in a 1959 treaty, which divided the possibility of using water advantages between the two states. It has been observed, so far, that the use of the Nile basin as a source of energy resources has been an almost monopoly of the former British colonies that were directly bathed in the main river, while the other states upstream were excluded from diplomatic negotiations, either because they were still colonies — and, therefore, non-sovereign nations —, either because they were states without economic conditions to explore the use of hydropower (Maupin 2016; Rahman 2012).



Therefore, since February 1999, the states upstream of the River Nile have come together to claim their right to use the river and challenge the supposed arbitrary veto right of the Egyptian state. Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda face the hegemonic position that Egypt takes at the mouth of the Nile and together form the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), a regional mechanism for dialogue and river water management. It is notable that the Egyptian state enjoys a comfortable situation, inherited from the English colonial period, which has perpetuated for almost a century. Only recently, with the organization of African states bathed by the Nile River, is the status quo questioned. Ethiopian measures, however, cannot be premeditated and inconsequential, given that GDER, when completed, will take 10 years to fill its reservoir, a period which the countries downstream will lose in water flow. In addition to filling the dam, the formation of the Ethiopian dam lake will cause permanent losses to the downstream countries, due to the increase in the natural evaporation of water through the contact surface (Rahman 2012).

Ali has moved steadily to ensure national interests in the face of Egyptian hegemony. However, to date, the diplomatic dispute over the use of the Nile River's water potential has not yet been resolved between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. From a regional point of view, Ali won other victories, such as peace with Eritrea, modernization of the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway and bilateral agreements for the use of ports in Sudan, Somaliland and Kenya. It is notable that the lack of access to the sea hampers Ethiopian development and, in this regard, Ali seeks to reconnect with neighbors to ensure alternatives to drain subsidies for national development (Visentini 2018).

Still from a regional point of view, Ethiopia makes great use of IGAD to maintain regional peace and thus achieve development and cooperation goals. Regarding the security aspect of the IGAD, it cannot simply be characterized as a regional balance of power, given that there are no external enemies, but internal ones. In a defensive security approach, regional actors would come together to defend a greater threat that seeks to increase power. However, the perceived threat in the African Horn comes from localized conflicts — bankruptcy of the Somali state, South Sudanese civil war, terrorism, etc. — and contesting states — Afewerki's Eritrea and al-Bashir's Sudan. Collective security can, to some extent, be configured as a balance of power in relation to Eritrea and Sudan, since integration guarantees the cohesion of the region, preventing members from seeking the use of force to resolve disputes, instead of peaceful solutions (Visentini 2018).



The IGAD, after the destabilization of the region in 1991, focused its efforts on a security agenda. Four regional factors that threaten the economic development of the African Horn must be highlighted here: (i) the bankruptcy of the Somali state and its internal political fragmentation; (ii) the Eritrean state's belligerence, commanded by Isaias Afewerki since the country's independence; (iii) the Sudanese civil war that led, in 2011, to the independence of the southern portion of the country and (iv) the presence of terrorist groups, which formed armed militias opposed to the governments of the region — among them, al-Shabaab stands out. In this sense, the IGAD, which at first had an environmental and socio-economic agenda, found itself insufficient to alleviate the region's problems, having to move to a scope not only broader, but also more focused on the collective security of the African Horn (Visentini 2018).

However, IGAD does not yet undertake many projects in the economic sense, since economic integration between regional actors is only possible with the harmonization of trade and macroeconomic policies. In fact, IGAD has economic purposes, but such an end is only possible with the political stabilization of regional conflicts. Thus, IGAD has socio-economic purposes to develop the region, but it is still in a stage of regional stabilization, through a security agenda (Visentini 2018).

Finally, another factor of the Ali administration was the recent resumption of diplomatic relations with Eritrea. In the first few months of his government, the Ethiopian Prime Minister formally acknowledged the decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Borders Commission (EEBC) of 2002, on the demarcation of territorial boundaries between the two states, in addition to concluding a new peace agreement with the Eritrean President, Isaias Afewerki, aimed at restoring diplomatic relations between the two nations and reopening their borders. After recognizing the definitions of the EEBC, on 5 June 2018, Eritrean authorities, such as the delegation headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Osman Saleh, and Ethiopians, exchanged official visits and a series of commitments were signed, within the framework of the Peace and Friendship, such as ending the state of war; political, economic, cultural and security cooperation, as well as the reopening of its embassies in the respective capitals; the reestablishment of the lines of commerce, transport and communication; and cooperation to promote peace and security in the region (Cardoso 2020).

Whereas, for Ethiopia, the rapprochement symbolizes the end of the financing of insurgent groups and the proxy war in its territory (threats to the national integrity of the country); and the use of Eritrean ports as alternatives

to the port of Djibouti, for Eritrea, the normalization of diplomatic relations with the neighbor has as a backdrop the end of the country's regional and international isolation and a greater participation in the integration processes underway in the region, with its readmission to IGAD; in addition to attracting foreign direct investments to modernize its infrastructure in strategic sectors, such as the port sector, for example (Cardoso 2020).

By the end of 2018, Ethiopian Airlines flights to Asmara were resumed, granted the use of the Eritrean ports of Assab and Massawa by Ethiopia, the telephone lines between the two states were re-established and troops were withdrawn from their borders. Developments related to Ali's diplomatic role and peace between the two countries were also visible at the regional level, and in September of the same year, a tripartite agreement was signed between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia within the framework of the region's economic, political and security stability, through the establishment of a Joint High-Level Committee, integrated by the ministers of foreign affairs of the three states. An agreement was also mediated by Ethiopia, aiming at the normalization of relations between the governments of Eritrea and Djibouti, broken in 2008, after disputes over the island Doumeira; and a meeting between South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and the leader of the Sudan Opposition People's Liberation Movement (SPLM-IO), Riek Machar, in Addis Ababa (Cardoso 2020).

## Conclusion

As seen, Ethiopia, due to its strategic geographic position and capabilities, remained a relevant player in regional politics after 1991, playing a central role for polarization in the Horn of Africa. After the wear and tear of decades of wars, the EPRDF's political elite sought to rebuild the state's capabilities to respond more assertively to internal and external challenges. Thus, since the early 2000s, the country has significantly increased its state capacities, which has had a positive impact on its foreign policy and, consequently, on the political, economic and security dynamics in the African Horn.

Therefore, Ethiopian foreign policy in the post-2000 period has focused on situations that are directly linked to the country's internal problems and stability. Participation in UN and AU Peacekeeping Operations in neighboring countries (Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan) and unilateral military intervention in Somalia are indicators that seem to support this perception. In addition, cooperation with central powers, especially with the

United States, in combating terrorism in the region has reflected this attitude of using diplomacy in a pragmatic way for national interests.

Abiy Ahmed Ali has been in office as Ethiopian Prime Minister since April 2, 2018 and has already implemented reforms in domestic, economic and foreign policy. Since 1974, with Mengistu Hailé Mariam, Ethiopia has built the foundations of a modern state and, slowly, from Meles Zenawi to Abiy Ahmed Ali, the Derg's legacy is transformed, dialectically, into the foundations of national development in 21st century Ethiopia, characterized as a reformist for uniting and transforming the socialist heritage of the revolutionary period internally and externally.

Abiy Ahmed Ali (i) strengthened ties with China to (ii) attract foreign capital in order to continue with modernization projects (iii) carried out privatization packages in telecommunications, transport, energy and logistics, in this way, (iv) maintaining a good economic performance in 2018 (6.8%) and 2019 (8.2%) (World Bank 2020). In addition, as a cause and reflection of subsidies to the national economy, in foreign policy, Ali (v) re-approached its neighboring states, establishing peace and bilateral trade, logistical and defense cooperation agreements in a (vi) diplomatic offensive aimed at guaranteeing national interests. These variables reinforce and corroborate the hypothesis of this work, and it can be concluded that the reforms of Desalegn and Abiy occur due to the need for modernization and national development, changing the country's foreign policy orientation. Through a bibliographic review, this article, therefore, achieves its objectives in elucidating the conduct of Ethiopian foreign policy from Mengistu Hailé Mariam to Abiy Ahmed Ali, in order to verify the causes and processes of the modernization of the Ethiopian state as a phenomenon of the reforms undertaken by Ali. Notwithstanding, this work was justified by the need to understand recent phenomena in the African continent.

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the conduct of the foreign policy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia from the 1974 Revolution to the first year of Abiy Ahmed Ali's administration, investigating in the process to which the country's greatest political and economic openness is due. Through a bibliographic review, it appears that this process of political reopening occurs due to the needs of national development and the rise of a new head of state. The variables of analysis to verify this hypothesis would be the country's growth rate in recent decades, the approach to China, foreign investments in the country, privatization packages, diplomatic rapprochement with neighbors and diplomatic offensives. It is concluded in an assertive way that since the end of the Meles Zenawi's administration, Ethiopia has gone through a phase of greater openness in the conduct of its foreign policy precisely because of the need for subsidies to national development. Finally, this work is justified in view of its effort to understand a recent political phenomenon in the interstate dynamics of East Africa.

## KEYWORDS

Regional Rise. Interstate Dynamics. Horn of Africa.

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