The 'Calculus' of Expansion
The Content, Context and Consequences of the EAC Integration Strategy

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Abstract

The commitment by East African States to pursue regionalism led to the establishment of the EAC in 1967 which later collapsed in 1977 due to a combination of exogenous causal factors and endogenous causal factors. However, the EAC was re-established in 1999 as Partner States perceived regionalism as a means towards the region's development trajectory. The East African Community (EAC) stands at a pivotal juncture in its quest for regional integration and cooperation. This study explores EAC'S widening and/or deepening relations, examining key indicators, examples, and references to elucidate the organization's strategic direction.

This study employed both primary and secondary data in its analysis. The study employed a qualitative analysis of the EAC's policies, agreements, and initiatives, supplemented by data from official sources and scholarly literature. By scrutinizing membership expansion, intra-regional trade dynamics, and collaborative projects, the study aimed to discern patterns and trends indicative of the EAC's approach to widening or deepening relations. Content analysis and descriptive historical analysis were used to analyze the data. The aforementioned analysis unearthed the following:

The EAC has adopted a distinct strategy, characterized by simultaneous efforts to widen and deepening relations. While the expansion of membership, exemplified by South Sudan's accession, underscores the organization's commitment to inclusivity, deepening intra-regional cooperation through initiatives such as the EAC Customs Union and infrastructure projects like the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) highlights the emphasis on strengthening existing ties among member states. These findings drew the following conclusions:

The East African Community adopts a two-pronged strategy of widening and deepening relations to promote regionalism. While augmenting its membership is crucial for inclusivity and pan-East Africanism, aggravating intra-regional cooperation through trade agreements, infrastructure projects, and policy harmonization is equally essential for achieving sustainable development and economic growth. By leveraging the synergies between widening and deepening relations, the EAC can navigate the complexities of regional integration and unlock the full potential of cooperation for the benefit of its member states and citizens. This study therefore recommends that:

A balanced approach that combines membership expansion with efforts to deepen institutional mechanisms and foster closer ties among existing members is vital. Moreover, enhancing the implementation of existing agreements and initiatives to maximize their impact on regional integration and economic development is equally important.
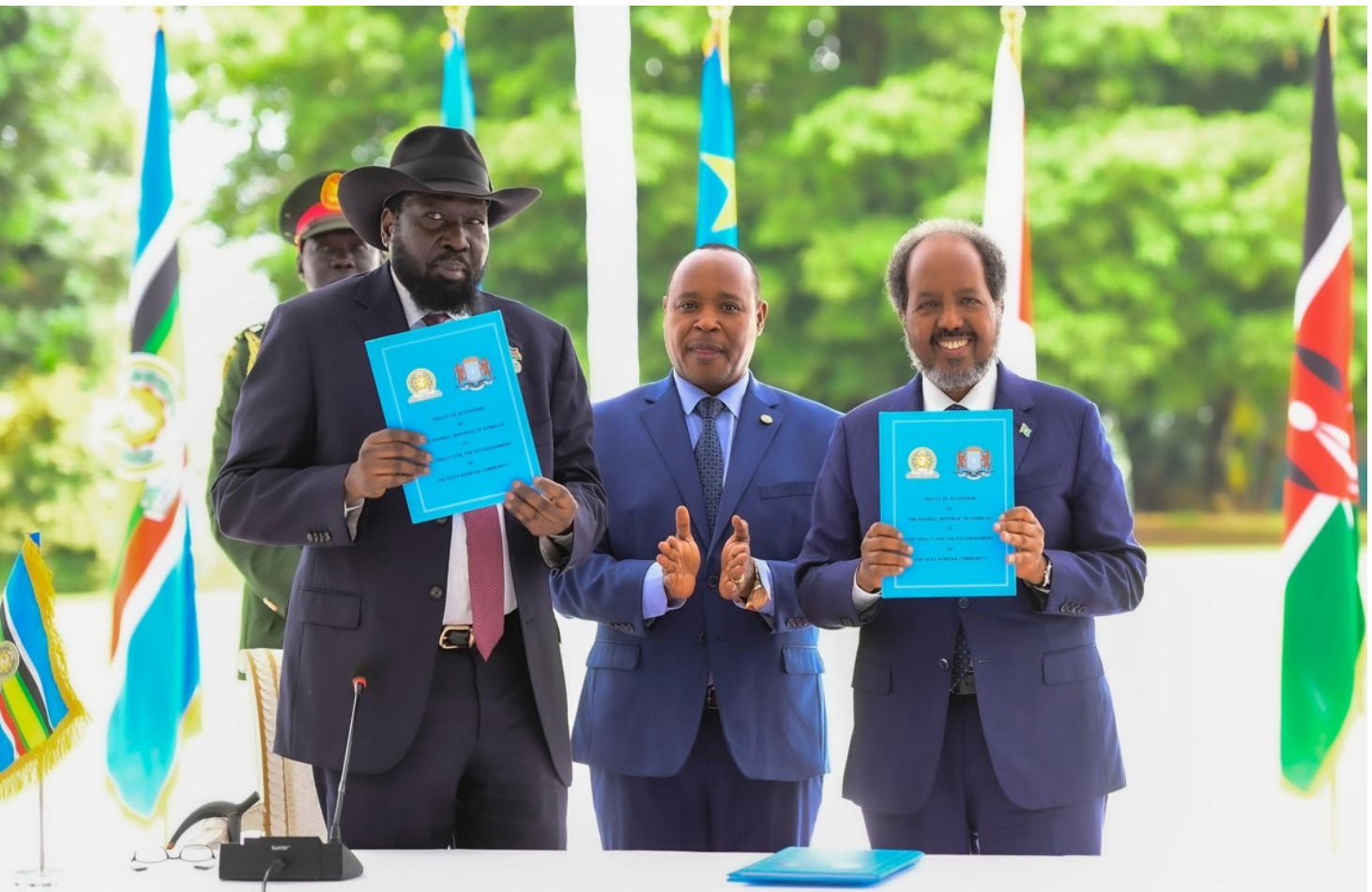
South Sudan and Somalia officially become members of the East Africa Community. EAC Chairman and South Sudan President Salva Kiir, EAC Secretary General Peter Mathuki and Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud at State House, Entebbe, Uganda on December 15, 2023. (Photo Credit: EAC)

Introduction

After the three East African States (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) had gained independence, their urge to pursue regionalism led to the establishment of the East African Community (EAC). The East African States were optimistic that regionalism was vital towards the region's development trajectory. The Partner States stood to gain more benefits from the organization. The EAC seems to be really growing fast, especially with indications that Ethiopia will be joining just like DR Congo and Somalia who are recent members. This will not only change the meaning of EAC as an organization of former British colonies but also transform it into an African regional body. It has the potential of becoming a continental force like the European Union if those who join embrace the initial EAC spirit that entailed dreams of political federation.

The East African Community (EAC) represents a dynamic regional bloc comprising eight member states - Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, DRC, and Somalia. Since its revival in 2000, the EAC has pursued ambitious goals of regional integration, aiming to foster economic growth, political stability, and social development across East Africa. Central to the EAC's mission is the strategic balance between widening its relations through membership expansion and deepening cooperation among existing member states.

Scholars and policymakers have long debated the nature of the EAC's approach, questioning whether the organization is primarily focused on widening or deepening its relations. Widening relations entail expanding the membership base of the EAC by admitting new countries, thereby increasing the geographical scope and diversity of the community. Conversely, deepening relations involve strengthening intra-regional cooperation and integration among existing member states through initiatives such as trade agreements, infrastructure development, and policy harmonization.

The literature on the subject offers valuable insights into the EAC's strategic direction and sheds light on the factors shaping its approach to regional integration. Wanyande (2017) argues that the EAC has predominantly focused on widening its membership as a means of promoting inclusivity and pan-East Africanism. Wanyande highlights the accession of South Sudan in 2016 as a significant milestone in the EAC's expansion efforts, signaling the organization's commitment to embracing new members

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despite the challenges posed by political instability and economic fragility.

Conversely, other scholars such as Ngugi (2020) contend that the EAC's primary emphasis lies in deepening relations among existing member states to consolidate the gains of regional integration. Ngugi points to initiatives such as the EAC Customs Union, Common Market Protocol, and infrastructure projects like the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) as evidence of the organization's commitment to deepening intra-regional cooperation and promoting economic convergence.

Building on these perspectives, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on whether the East African Community is widening or deepening its relations. By analyzing key indicators, examples, and references, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the EAC's strategic direction and offer insights into the implications for regional integration and cooperation in East Africa.

The Widening Relations

The EAC has demonstrated a commitment to widening its relations through the expansion of its membership. In 2016, South Sudan became the newest member of the EAC, highlighting the organization's inclusivity and aspiration for pan-East African cooperation. However, South Sudan's accession has been accompanied by challenges, including political instability and economic fragility, which have hindered the full integration of the country into the EAC.

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its relations through the expansion of its membership. Drawing on insights from scholars and examples from recent developments, this article explores how the EAC is embracing inclusivity and diversifying its membership base to advance regional integration.

The accession of South Sudan, in 2016, Democratic Republic of Congo in 2022 and most recently Somalia in 2024 marked a significant milestone in the organization's expansion efforts. Despite the challenges posed by political instability and economic fragility, the new membership reaffirmed the EAC's commitment to embracing new members and promoting regional solidarity.

The EAC continues to actively engage with other countries in the region, such as Ethiopia which has shown interest in joining the body. While progress has been incremental, these engagements underscore the EAC's commitment to widening its relations and fostering inclusive regional cooperation.

Implications For Widening Relations

The inclusion of new member states brings diverse perspectives and experiences to the EAC, enriching the regional dialogue and enhancing the organization's capacity to address complex challenges.

Regional integration means a large and wide market because of the increased population from the new members. A larger membership base creates new opportunities for trade, investment, and economic cooperation within the region. By integrating economies with varying levels of development, the EAC can promote inclusive growth and shared prosperity across East Africa. The EAC aims to create a common market, customs union, and ultimately a monetary union. This facilitates the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor among member states. Economic integration fosters trade expansion, economies of scale, increased investment flows, and overall economic growth. It

also enhances the region's competitiveness in the global market.

The widening relations would mean a more politically stable region. Enhanced cooperation among member states will promote political stability and peace in the region. It will provide a platform for resolving disputes through diplomatic channels and cooperation rather than confrontation. This will mean the EAC peace and security arm will have to do better in terms of securing the by ending some of the long conflicts like that of Somalia and DRC to achieve a safer and more secure region. Additionally, shared economic interests reduce the likelihood of conflicts arising from competition over resources.

As the East African Community continues to evolve, its commitment to widening relations through membership expansion remains a cornerstone of its integration agenda. By embracing inclusivity and diversifying its membership base, the EAC strengthens its position as a regional leader and paves the way for a more united, prosperous, and resilient East Africa.

However, analyzing the organizational structure of the EAC, widening relations could present a monkey wrench in the works. The decision-making process within the EAC has over time proven to be a hard nut to crack (Adar, 2017). Consensus in decision making slows the integration process (Ndungu, 2017). The aspect of consensus decision making within EAC has been mistaken for unanimous decision making. The fact that for a decision to be reached within the EAC all Partner States must agree gives the Partner States the power to veto any decisions that they do not agree with. This creates an impediment in the decision-making process as changes requiring unanimous support, which the EAC perceives to be consensus, are difficult to attain (Adar, 2017). Therefore, if it has been difficult to reach a decision with just three Partner States, imagine how easy that will be with eight.

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EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

- Republic of Burundi
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Republic of Kenya
- Republic of Rwanda
- Federal Republic of Somalia
- Republic of South Sudan
- United Republic of Tanzania
- Republic of Uganda

Source; The East African Community

The Deepening Relations

While widening membership is significant, the EAC also places considerable emphasis on deepening relations among existing member states. The dream of the EAC was the creation of one political federation that would serve the interests of the region. With deepened relations EAC envisions a regional body like the European union by strengthening intra-regional cooperation. However, the realization of the East African Political Federation will *ipso facto* mean the surrendering of national sovereignty of Partner States, *albeit* in limited areas, to the supranational body (Harelimana, 2011). This implies that if the Political Federation will come into place, Partner States will lose their autonomy and independence of decision making to the regional government. For instance, the index and main principle of Kenya's foreign policy is sanctity of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Kenya and as a result Kenya passionately guards her sovereignty. The attainment of a political federation presents fears of loss of sovereignty. With the political federation in place Kenya may lose at the political level in the EAC and her flexibility in exercising power at the national level. So, do we deepen relations to achieve the elusive dream of a political federation, or do we stick to

our foreign policy principles? It is worth noting that the East African Political Federation cannot be attained if Partner States are not willing to cede their sovereignty to the supranational body. The reason as to why the East African Political Federation which was to be achieved in 2013 has not been achieved yet is because Partner States have been adamant to cede their sovereignty.

Initiatives such as the EAC Customs Union and the East African Common Market Protocol, aim to promote free movement of goods, services, and people within the region. The launching of the EAC Customs Union (EACCU) in 2005 has had positive benefits for Partner States. The Customs Union sought to liberalize intra-regional trade in goods on the basis of mutually beneficial trade arrangements among the Partner States (SID, 2007). It is from this vantage point that the Protocol on the Establishment of the East African Community Customs Union provides for a Common External Tariff (CET) articulated under article 12 of the Protocol. The adoption of the CET has led to increased flows of cheaper extra regional imports. These imports have significantly lowered consumer prices with positive welfare effects. Additionally, the EAC has made strides

in enhancing infrastructure connectivity through projects like the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) and One Network Area (ONA), facilitating trade and economic integration.

The East African Community (EAC) stands as a testament to the power of regional cooperation, with six member states committed to deepening relations and fostering economic, political, and social integration. Drawing on insights from scholars and examples from recent developments, this article explores how the EAC is strengthening intra-regional cooperation and promoting deeper ties among member states to advance the agenda of regional integration.

The adoption of the EAC Common Market Protocol in 2010 marked another important step towards deepening relations within the EAC. The Protocol aims to create a single market for goods, services, labor, and capital, fostering greater mobility and economic integration among member states. These seems to be working especially between Kenya and Uganda. The free movement provision of the CMP has also ensured that students can freely study in any institution within the EAC Partner States. This has contributed to the increasing stock of human capital and diffusion of knowledge (Alper, 2016).

Regional integration encourages infrastructure development projects such as transportation networks (roads, railways, ports), energy grids, and telecommunication systems. Improved infrastructure enhances connectivity within the region, reduces transportation costs, and promotes trade and investment. There have been talks between Kenya and Uganda about the standard gauge railway (SGR) being extended to Uganda to interlink the region. This is a positive step towards deepening the region. The lapsset project which is to connect South Sudan and Ethiopia which are land locked countries to Lamu port is also another milestone towards deepening regional relations as it is seen to be unlocking the region and interconnecting it thus making it easily accessible.

The establishment of the one stop border point could be another key aspect of deepening relations. This is because this has eased the movement of people and goods between the founding members of the EAC (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania). This in turn promotes people to people relations thus exchange of culture leading to increased understanding among diverse populations, and the development of a shared regional identity.

The recent development and introduction of the East African passport is another key milestone towards the EAC dream of deepening relations. In relation to this Kenya and Uganda have an agreement that one only needs a national ID to visit either of the countries. The most recent agreement on deepening relations is where Rwanda allowed visa free entry by any citizen of any African country. These could be positive developments towards deepening relations if all member states can adapt and implement them.

Deepened relations are likely to foster for social development. Regional integration initiatives often include provisions for social development such as education, healthcare, and social welfare programs. Collaboration in these areas can lead to the sharing of best practices, improved access to services, and overall improvement in the quality of life for citizens across the region.

The East African Community continues to deepen relations among its member states, it reinforces its position as a regional leader and catalyst for integration in East Africa. By fostering closer economic, political, and social ties, the EAC lays the foundation for a more cohesive, resilient, and prosperous East Africa, where countries work together to address common challenges and seize shared opportunities for the benefit of all.

Looking back at the decision-making process aforementioned herein, a case in point of the decision-making imperative is the decision to sign the European Union-EAC Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Only Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda (the 'coalition of the willing') signed the agreement. The remaining three countries with Tanzania being the 'patron' were reluctant to sign the agreement. This meant only one thing; that Kenya being the only developing economy in the region, won't be able to enjoy a free market in the European Union. As a result, on one hand Kenya has been able to develop good relations with the other two members of the 'coalition of the willing'. On the other hand, Kenya's relations with the other three Partner States, especially Tanzania has somehow been strenuous. Another case in point is the 2006 EAC Protocol on Environmental and Natural Resource Management. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania signed the protocol before Rwanda, Burundi

and South Sudan joined. When it came to ratification, Tanzania refused to ratify the Protocol. As such, if you were Kenya the relations with the other Partner States won't be as deepening as it is purported to be.

The establishment and adoption of One Network Area (ONA) policy in 2014 within the EAC region has been a milestone towards integration. ONA promotes easier communication among the business community who have to span the entire region while transacting merchandise or services. These unique tariffs, competitive on a regional scale, will significantly reduce the costs of cross-border communications within the EAC and thereby integrating the people more. The framework-imposed price caps on roaming charges and called for the removal of surcharges on cross-border telecommunications traffic originating and terminating within the East African Community.

The recent entry of Burundi will reduce the high cost of mobile roaming charges in the region and strengthen the integration process because East Africans can now communicate more easily without fear of high billing charges on mobile calls whether at home or in another Partner State. The region looks forward to a time when all the eight (8) Partner States will be fully on the network now that already six are on board. This will be a big boost on our journey towards not only widening but also deepened relations.

The unceasing efforts to achieve and implement the four integration pillars have led to the formation of the 'coalition of the willing' that comprises of Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda to fast track the integration process. The question here is, does deepening relations lead to fragmentation of the EAC? With the coalition of the willing, it is apparent that there are two factions within the EAC. Does this integrate or disintegrate?

The Dual Strategy of the EAC

This begs the question should the region focus on deepening, widening or it should strike a balance of both? EAC's approach can be characterized as a dual strategy of widening and deepening relations, reflecting the organization's commitment to comprehensive regional integration. While the expansion of membership broadens the EAC's reach and diversity, deepening intra-regional cooperation strengthens the foundation for sustainable development and prosperity. By striking a balance between these two objectives, the EAC aims to

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create a cohesive and resilient East African community that leverages its collective strengths for the benefit of all member states.

The East African Community (EAC) navigates a complex landscape of regional integration, balancing its dual strategy of widening and deepening relations to foster cooperation and advance its integration agenda. Drawing on insights from scholars and examples from recent developments, this article examines how the EAC strikes a balance between expanding its membership and strengthening cooperation among existing member states.

The accession of South Sudan as the newest member of the EAC in 2016 exemplifies the organization's commitment to widening relations. Despite challenges, such as political instability and economic fragility, South Sudan's membership reaffirms the EAC's inclusivity and pan-East Africanism.

Initiatives such as the EAC Customs Union, Common Market Protocol, and infrastructure projects like the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) demonstrate the EAC's dedication to deepening relations among existing member states. By fostering economic integration and policy harmonization, these initiatives strengthen cooperation and promote shared prosperity within the region.

The EAC has adopted the use of One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) to facilitate trade and movement of people within the region. The OSBPs have helped in widening and deepening cooperation among the Partner States

in the economic and social fields for the benefits of the citizens of the region (Cheruiyot, 2018).

By balancing widening and deepening relations, the EAC maximizes synergies between membership expansion and intra-regional cooperation, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of its integration efforts. A dual strategy enables the EAC to adapt to evolving challenges and opportunities, building a more resilient and cohesive regional community capable of addressing shared concerns and harnessing collective strengths.

Challenges to deepening relations

The East African Community has made significant strides toward regional integration, but it still faces numerous challenges that slow down progress. These include economic disparities, political instability, non-tariff barriers, and a lack of harmonized policies. For the EAC to realize its full potential, member states must address these challenges through stronger political will, improved infrastructure, and more consistent policy implementation.

Political Instability

Political unrest and instability continue to be an issue in some EAC member states thus hindering

integration efforts. Conflicts and governance issues create an unpredictable environment for cooperation and economic development. Political instability reduces investor confidence, disrupts regional projects, and diverts resources away from integration efforts to address domestic challenges. Countries such as DRC, Somalia and South Sudan which are involved in civil conflicts find it difficult to fully participate in EAC initiatives. The violence has hampered efforts to integrate infrastructure and establish secure cross-border trade.

Lack of political goodwill

Most regional economic blocks suffer slow or stunted growth because of the lack of political goodwill from most of the heads of states. Some doubt that there is the political will among African leaders to promote genuine regional integration, or believe that political deals are

Long Distant trucks in a queue at the border of Kenya and Uganda awaiting inspection and compliance with border regulations (Photo Credit: Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations (FEAFFA)

made without much consideration of the economic actions required: 'In developing countries integration processes often initially start as a political goal and effort, which in most cases leads to unsatisfactory economic results (Eduard, 2015).

Regional organizations are state-driven and elite-driven, and this explains the uneven levels of political will within REC member-states to implement policies aimed at far-reaching economic and political integration that would boost intra-African trade. Thus, most RECs depend on the kind of leaders they have in respective member states for their success. The success of RECs is conditional upon prevailing political and economic conditions around and within them. We should not over-estimate the ability of REC administrations to achieve results when national governments are in fact reluctant to cooperate or domesticate regional integration policy decisions, nor can RECs be expected to quickly overcome poor regional transportation networks and other engrained economic structures. (Wright, 2017)

Different Economic Development Levels

The member states of the EAC have varying levels of economic development. For example, Kenya has a more advanced and diversified economy compared to countries like Burundi and South Sudan, which are still grappling with post-conflict rebuilding and poverty. These disparities make it difficult to implement uniform policies and harmonize trade agreements. Wealthier countries may dominate regional markets, while poorer members struggle to compete, exacerbating inequalities.

Recently, Uganda and Tanzania raised concerns that Kenya is more developed manufacturing sector could unfairly benefit from the EAC customs union, hurting smaller economies in the region.

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)

Despite the creation of a Customs Union in 2005, non-tariff barriers (NTBs) such as administrative procedures, lengthy border inspections, and varying regulations continue to impede the free movement of goods and services across the region. NTBs increase the cost of doing business, reduce trade efficiency, and create delays in cross-border trade, undermining the region's competitiveness. Kenyan truckers have faced lengthy delays and additional costs due to different standards for road safety in Tanzania and Uganda, frustrating efforts to create a seamless transport corridor.

Infrastructure Gaps

Poor infrastructure, particularly in transport and energy, poses a significant challenge to regional integration. The lack of efficient roads, railways, and energy grids makes it difficult to facilitate trade and the movement of people within the region. Without modern infrastructure, transportation costs remain high, limiting trade opportunities and slowing down economic growth in the region.

The Northern Corridor, the main trade route that connects Kenya's port of Mombasa to Uganda, Rwanda, and beyond, has suffered from poor road conditions and inefficient border crossings. These issues delay shipments and increase costs for traders.

Language and Cultural Differences

The EAC is home to a diverse set of languages and cultures, including English, Swahili, French, and indigenous languages. While this diversity is an asset, it can also be a barrier to seamless communication and collaboration. Language barriers can hinder effective communication in regional forums, policymaking, and cross-border business dealings, slowing down the integration process.

Rwanda and Burundi, whose official languages include French, have faced challenges in engaging with English-dominant partner states like Kenya and Uganda in regional negotiations and trade talks.

Slow Implementation of Protocols

The organization has quite a number of policies and protocols, but the problem is always the actual implementation of these agreements at the national level is often slow or incomplete.

The gap between policy formulation and implementation weakens the effectiveness of the EAC as a whole, undermining trust and cooperation between member states.

A critical example is the Common Market Protocol, which was signed in 2010, aimed to allow the free movement of goods, labor, services, and capital. However, some member states have been slow to remove restrictions on labor mobility and the movement of services, limiting the full potential of the agreement.

Limited Institutional Capacity

Many EAC member states face limited institutional capacity to implement regional agreements and policies effectively. This includes insufficient technical expertise, inadequate resources, and weak administrative structures. Enhancing institutional capacity is crucial for the successful implementation of regional initiatives.

Recommendations to deepen the relations

To deepen integration and cooperation, EAC must address existing challenges through strategic initiatives. Strengthening political stability, investing in infrastructure, enhancing policy harmonization, reducing non-tariff barriers, building institutional capacity, and promoting private sector involvement are critical steps toward achieving deeper regional integration. By implementing these recommendations, EAC can foster sustainable economic growth, improve living standards, and enhance regional stability.

Strengthening intra-regional cooperation is crucial for fostering economic growth, political stability, and social development across our member states. For the EAC to deepen its relations it needs to employ various strategies and emulate successful regional blocs around the world such as the European union.

There is need to enhance trade integration by establishing a comprehensive customs union that eliminates tariffs on intra-regional trade and simplifies rules of origin to encourage local production and integration into regional value chains. A good example is the European Union single market as a model. Implement policies that reduce trade barriers, harmonize customs procedures, and promote the free movement of goods and services within the EAC.

For EAC to further deepen its relation then there is need for it to adopt a common language, either Swahili or English. This will help enhance people to people relations and it is likely to boot trade as there would be no language barrier. For instance, it should adopt either Swahili or English as the official language among the member states.

Since infrastructure plays a vital role in integration EAC should invest in Infrastructure Development. It should increase investments in regional infrastructure projects, focusing on transport, energy, and communication networks. Adequate infrastructure is essential for facilitating trade, investment, and the movement of people. Improved infrastructure will enhance connectivity and reduce transaction costs within the region. It could do this by prioritizing key infrastructure projects such as the LAPSSET project, SGR in its quest to connect member states. It should also seek partnerships with international financial institutions and private sector investors to fund infrastructure development.

EAC should enhance efforts to promote political stability and good governance in member states. This is because political instability and governance issues can significantly disrupt regional integration efforts. Strengthening political stability and governance is crucial for ensuring a conducive environment for economic cooperation and development. This can be achieved through establishing and supporting mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, as well as promoting democratic governance and the rule of law through capacity-building programs and peer reviews. EAC should strengthen political dialogue and institutional frameworks within the EAC to address regional challenges, resolve conflicts peacefully, and promote democratic governance and human rights.

Promote People-to-People Connectivity by simplifying visa procedures, harmonize residency rights, and promote cultural exchange programs to enhance solidarity and understanding among East African communities. Like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) EAC should implement visa-free travel for citizens within the region, promoting tourism and cultural exchange.

There is need for Collaboration in Education and Research. EAC should Establish regional centers of excellence in key sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and technology. Encourage collaboration among universities and research institutions to address common challenges and promote innovation.

Promote environmental sustainability within the region. Implement joint environmental policies and initiatives to combat climate change, preserve biodiversity, and promote sustainable resource management within the East African region especially on shared resources like Lake Victoria.

In conclusion, by implementing these recommendations, the East African Community can deepen its regional integration efforts, enhance economic growth, promote

Regional leaders push for amendment of the EAC Treaty to fast-track the use of Kiswahili as an EAC official language "Kiswahili Kitukuzwe!" at EACHeadquarters, Arusha, Tanzania, July 8, 2024 (Photo Credits: PR & EAC)

political stability, and improve the overall quality of life for its citizens. I urge all member states to work collaboratively towards these goals for the collective prosperity of our region.

Conclusion

Being among the oldest regional economic blocs, the EAC has been used by its Partner States as a framework for regional integration. The East African Community pursues a dual strategy of widening and deepening relations to promote regional integration and cooperation. While expanding its membership is crucial for inclusivity and pan-East Africanism, deepening intra-regional cooperation through trade agreements, infrastructure projects, and policy harmonization is equally essential for achieving sustainable development and economic growth. By embracing this balanced approach, the EAC endeavors to overcome challenges and seize opportunities for the advancement of the East African region as a whole.

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The Sudan Crisis: An Opportunity to Depart from the Tragic Past

By: Mutasim Abualbasher Ali

Abstract

In April 2023, another round of vicious violence broke out in Sudan. At the heart of the conflict this time is a power struggle between Sudan's two most potent forces, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), formerly known as *Janjaweed* led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti). Both have actively sought to subvert the democratic transition. Sudan's conflict seems to be between two armed forces, the SAF and RSF. However, the elites and the intelligentsia are also at its center. This article underscores the repeated mistakes that Sudan's political elites and the international community fail to avoid—and that is their insistence on a bilateral and transactional approach to resolving conflicts in Sudan. The article, therefore, begins by offering historical context. The article will analyze the conflict drivers and review major peace agreements and interim constitutional documents to demonstrate the bilateral and transactional approach to conflict resolution in Sudan. The role of the international community, especially its failure and contribution to conflicts in Sudan will also be highlighted. The article advances the argument that the current war should serve as an opportunity for the Sudanese and the international community to depart from past failures. It is high time to begin a comprehensive, participatory and inclusive approach that may have a chance to resolve conflicts in Sudan once and for all.

Contextual Background

The consequences of the ongoing conflict in Sudan can hardly be over-emphasized. Estimates indicate that since the beginning of the conflict in April 2023, approximately 19,000 people have been killed (Action Center for Preventive, 2024) (Human Rights Council, 2024), and 2.5 million Sudanese are expected to die this year due to starvation (Gaasbeek, 2024). Famine has been declared in some parts of the country—it was the third time since the famine monitoring system was set up twenty years ago (Ferguson, 2024). More than 10 million people have been forcibly displaced, the largest displacement in the world (AP, 2024). All qualifying Sudan to be the single largest humanitarian crisis in the world (Walsh, 2024). These estimates are vast undercounts given the difficulty accessing information from the country. The actual numbers remain unknown.

The current war is a manifestation of Sudan's failed attempts to properly manage its diversity. Throughout history, to the exclusion of others, dominant political elites projected national identity as Islamic and Arab (Deng, 2008). The plan was to create a homogenous Islamic and Arab state where power, wealth and resources were inequitably and unjustly distributed at the expense of the minority racial, ethnic and religious groups (Deng, 2008). The result was imbalanced development and the creation of marginalized ethnic populations in the peripheries. In addressing these issues, subsequent central governments in Sudan, without exception and often with the support from the international community, held a series of roundtable conferences to bring the Sudanese together, and as it will be discussed later, many peace agreements were signed. To that effect, the people of Sudan have yet to find a workable national framework and agreeable social contract to answer the question of how to manage diversity properly.

As mentioned above, numerous peace agreements have been signed between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and armed resistance movements in the last seven decades. The most notorious are the Addis Ababa Agreement (AAA) in 1973, the Khartoum Peace Agreement (KPA) in 1997, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in 2006, and the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) in 2020. The following sections will discuss these agreements in greater detail.
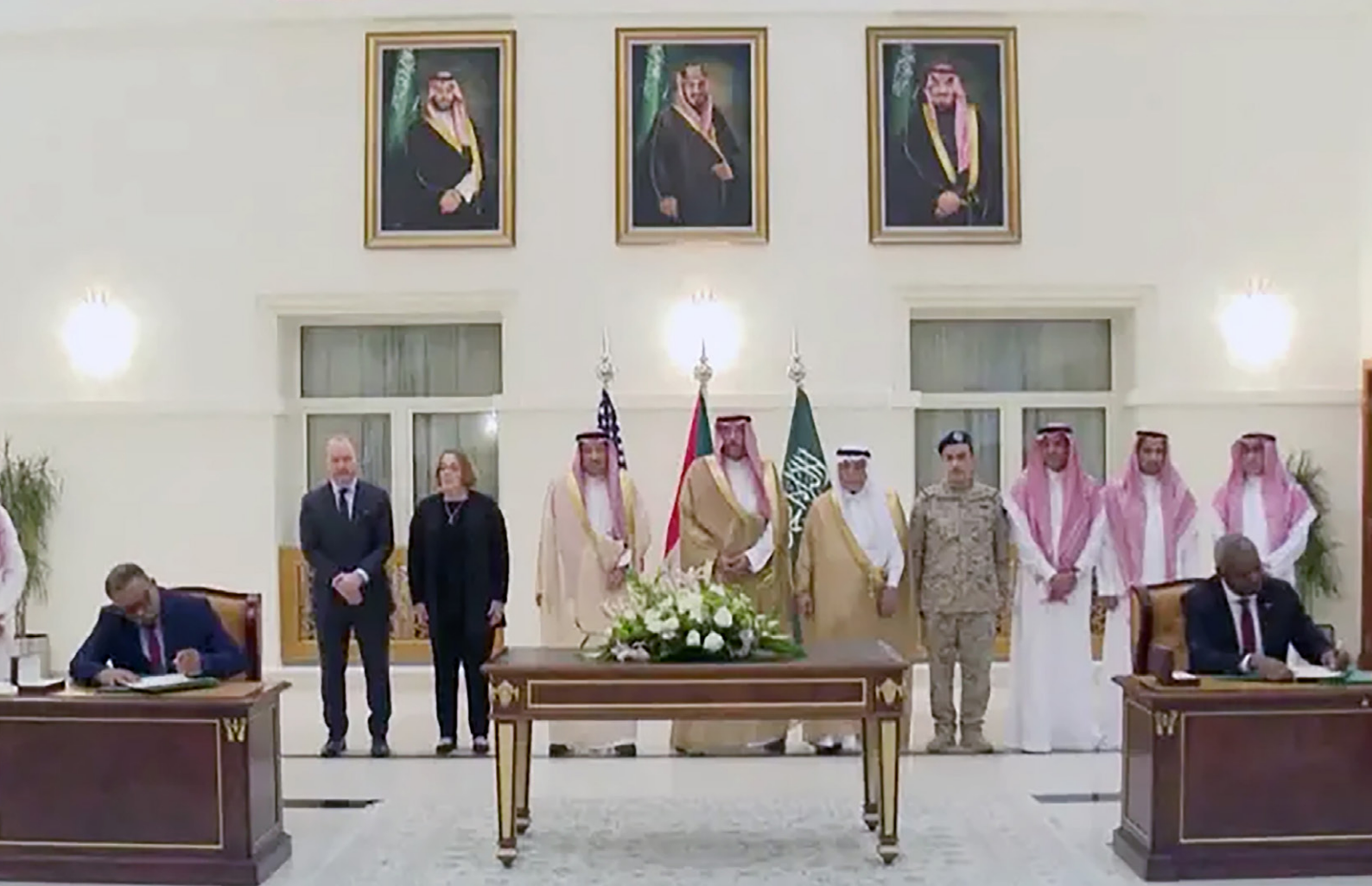
Sudan army and rival paramilitary rapid support force sign a declaration to protect the civilians of Sudan in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, May 11, 2023. (Photo Credit: Reuters)

Many less impactful agreements with minor splinter groups between these agreements. Attention is only drawn to these agreements because of the significant changes, especially constitutional ones accompanying their signature. The United States (US) government and its allies are facilitating talks between the SAF and RSF (Hansler, 2023). The US initiative is designed to bring the warring parties to negotiate a ceasefire and allow easier and unfettered access to humanitarian aid (Hansler, 2023). It must be noted that the parties have already engaged in ineffective talks in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, and Manama in Bahrain (Abdelaziz, 2024). In 2009, the Obama administration led similar efforts referred to as the New Sudan Strategy (U.S. Embassy in Sudan, n.d.). The strategy consisted of three core principles: a) achieving a definitive end to the conflict, gross human rights violations, and genocide in Darfur; b) implementation of the CPA, including orderly cessation of South Sudan; and c) ensuring that Sudan doesn't provide safe haven for international terrorists (U.S. Embassy in Sudan, n.d.).

A closer look at the previous peace agreements and the corresponding constitutional changes reveals three common features which define Sudan's peace-making and constitution-making approach: bilateralism, transactionalism, and transitionalism. The following sections will be unpacked these terms and discuss them more detail. This approach reinforces the top-down approach. It also suggests that internationally imposed solutions not only raise legitimacy concerns but defeat the very purpose of peace-making in the long run. Such an approach is inherently exclusionary and suffers significant legitimacy problems; accordingly, Sudan's peace agreements failed to meet the purposes they were meant to achieve. The people of Sudan thus continue their quest for sustainable peace and a durable constitution.

A Repeat Failed Approach Leading to Appeasement Not Peace

An adequate analysis of Sudan peace-making and constitution-making processes requires a look back at the earlier days of Sudanization. In April 1946, the British Governor General Charles George Gordon, convened a conference in Khartoum (also known as the Sudan Administration Conference) to determine whether southern Sudan would remain a separate region or be part of northern Sudan (Abdel-Rahim, 1969, p. 159). Participants were predominantly northern Sudanese working for the colonial administration (Abdel-Rahim,

1969, p. 159). Instead of establishing an advisory council to assist in the State administration (like the one in northern Sudan), the conferees decided and recommended that Sudan be united (Abdel-Rahim, 1969, p. 159) (Alier, 1991). It all happened without consultations with the southern Sudanese, and they were not represented at the conference because the conference was mainly designed for the northern Sudanese (Abdel-Rahim, 1969, p. 159).

Simply put, the colonial administration and their aides (northern Sudanese) designed the future of Southern Sudan with total disregard for their voices (Abdel-Rahim, 1969, p. 169). A year later in 1947, the colonial rule convened another conference in Juba, the capital of Southern Sudan (the Juba Conference) (Abdel-Rahim, 1969, p. 159). The aim was to inform southern Sudan's local and traditional leaders about the decisions and recommendations of the Sudan Administration Conference (Abdel-Rahim, 1969, p. 159). During the Juba Conference, local and tribal leaders expressed concerns that northerners would not welcome them, they rejected the notion of imposing the Arabic language and Islam as a national framework, and they felt threatened by replacing "trusted" British district commissioners with northerners (Deng, 2008). While Sudanization was underway, the British authorities replaced hundreds of their commissioners with Sudanese, and only four were from the south (Deng, 2008). Southern Sudanese elites lost hope for a peaceful, unified, and independent Sudan since (Deng, 2008).

The feelings of resentment and exclusion would later lead conflict and political instability as southern Sudanese established numerous armed movements to express their frustration (Machar, 1995). The most notable was the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), a political unity of several armed resistance groups united under General Joseph Lagu (Alier, 1991, pp. 24-26). Against this backdrop comes the discussion about peace-making and constitution-making in Sudan. As demonstrated above,

> " ... despite many peace talks and roundtables, the conflict in Sudan was never genuinely resolved—partly because the Government of Sudan (GoS) attended these negotiations for tactical reasons

despite many peace talks and roundtables, the conflict in Sudan was never genuinely resolved—partly because the GoS attended these negotiations for tactical reasons (Alier, 1991, p. 55).

1. The Addis Ababa Agreement

In 1972, following a lengthy process, the AAA was signed between the GoS and SSLM in Ethiopia. During the negotiations, the GoS preconditioned peace in the south on the unity of Sudan. The Sudan delegation rejected the Southern Sudanese request that the government would be federal (Alier, 1991, pp. 98-99). The GoS consistently refused to consider Southern Sudanese fears: the domination of the Arabs and Muslims, marginalization and exclusion. As a result, the SSLM demanded that Southern Sudan be given autonomy (Alier, 1991, pp. 98-99). It must be noted that the Southern Sudanese were always skeptical that the negotiations were in good faith, for there had been numerous talks and peace agreements that ended up with Sudanese military intelligence killing their leaders (Alier, 1991, pp. 55-60).

The AAA contained a few significant settlements for the south, one of which was granting Southern Sudan semi-autonomy (UN Peacekeeper, 1972). The agreement was later codified in the Regional Self-Government Act of 1972 (Johnson, 2021, p. 41). Many Southern Sudanese opposed the AAA — they perceived it as a betrayal of their cause, especially when the SSLM gave up on the independence of Southern Sudan. Accordingly, many Southern Sudanese continued bearing arms. The northern Sudanese on their part, distrusted the AAA on the ground that it would integrate rebel groups and terrorists into the army, police, and other security agencies.

In September 1983, the GoS promulgated *Shari'a* laws (September laws), which eventually led to the nullification of the AAA. The immediate impact was the increased distrust between northern and Southern Sudanese (Kebbede, 1997, pp. 23-27). Accordingly, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was established, marking the beginning of the second civil war. While it lasted for more than ten years, the AAA did not lead to a permanent resolution of the Sudan conflict but rather led to appeasement until another brutal war broke out.

2. The Khartoum Peace Agreement

Following the failure of the AAA in 1983 and as the civil war was ongoing, a political impasse and economic

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deterioration ignited popular protests that led to the fall of General Ga'afar Mohamed Nimeiri (Sudan's President 1969-1985) in April 1985 (Associated Press, 2019). As often seen in Sudan's history, the removal of the Nimeiri regime was by army generals led by Abdelrahman Suwar Aldahab. The coup leaders suspended the constitution and adopted an interim one (Kebbede, 1997, p. 23). The plan (the stated plan, at least) was for an elected government to draft the new constitution and resolve the South-North divide (Fadall, 2011). An election was held and a civilian Prime Minister, Alsadig al-Mahdi, was elected as the new leader of Sudan. During his election campaign, he made the resolution of the Sudan problem in the south, central in his agenda (Fadall, 2011, p. 7). As Sudan was seemingly moving toward democracy, to the disappointment of many, especially Southern Sudanese, al-Mahdi did not reverse the *Shari'a* laws (Kebbede, 1997, p. 27). Instead of responding to Southern Sudanese demands, the elected Prime Minister recruited Muslim Arab militias (*al-Maraheel*) to counter insurgency in the South. To generate further support against Southern Sudanese, al-Mahdi portrayed the problem in the South as between the Arabs and non-Arabs (Kebbede, 1997, p. 28). In 1988, he told the Arab world that "the Arab soil has been invaded from the South" (Kebbede, 1997, p. 28).

It is in this context and before a permanent constitution was drafted, that then-Brigadier Omer al-Bashir staged a *coup d'état* in June 1989. Like his predecessors, the new *de facto* authorities reinforced the *Shari'a* laws and continued with military approach to the resolution of the conflict in the South (Kebbede, 1997, p. 30). The Bashir regime created the Popular Defense Forces, a militia to support the army in its fight against Southern Sudanese (Salmon, 2007, p. 8). It however became clear that the war could not be won militarily. In 1994, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGAD), the regional peace and security body in the Horn of Africa prepared a Declaration of Principles (DoPs) outlining principles for resolving the conflict in the South

(Hussein, 2006, p. 18). The DoPs were presented to the Bashir government but refused to sign for including the Southern Sudanese right to self-determination and stipulating secularism as a pre-requisite to talks (Hussein, 2006, p. 18). After major military operations between 1995 and 1996 when the SPLM/A captured several government-controlled areas, it became evident to the government that negotiations were inevitable (Ofuho, 2006). The military setbacks coupled with international and regional pressure, the GoS and the South Sudan Democratic Salvation Front (UDSF), an SPLM/A splinter group, signed the Khartoum Peace Agreement (KPA) in 1997 (Ofuho, 2006).

While KPA acknowledged the Sudan's diversity, Sharia laws remained the source of legislation (UN Peacekeeper, 1997). It is fair to say, however, that the agreement was unexpectedly reasonable as a matter of substance. The agreement ensured freedoms particularly religious freedom, secured participatory democracy and established a decentralized form of governance (UN Peacekeeper, 1997). For example, the agreement stated, "[t]he parties to this agreement shall be guaranteed full participation in the political and constitutional processes in Sudan" (UN Peacekeeper, 1997). In other words, only the parties or those approved by the parties to the agreement could participate in the constitution-making process.

Despite some of its forward-looking provisions, the agreement failed because of its partial nature, the failure to gain the approval of Southern Sudan's main representatives and main armed groups, the failure to address the root causes of the problem, and the lack of national and international legitimacy. The agreement only served the interests of the Bashir regime and some splinter groups while ignoring the rights and aspirations of most Southern Sudanese, let alone the people of Sudan.

3. The Naivasha Peace Agreement

Signed in 2005 between the National Congress Party (NCP) government and the Sudan's People's Liberation Movement Army (SPLM/A), many considered the Naivasha Peace Agreement (NPA) (best known as the CPA), a breakthrough in Sudan's long history of brutal conflicts. Indeed, it is a significant document not only for ending the war with Southern Sudan but also for the first time, the Southern Sudanese were able to participate in designing the future of their country (BBC, 2011). As mentioned earlier, for the purposes of this article, rather than referring to it as CPA, I will use the NPA, instead. This is both appropriate in that the agreement was incomprehensive as the name suggests, and consistent with how other agreements preceding or succeeding it are named (by the places of their conclusion). Even the chief mediator, General Lazaro Sumbeiywo, stated, "[t]he CPA itself is not comprehensive. Comprehensive, in my understanding, would be the whole of Sudan. That was never on the table: the government would not allow it" (Coalition Resources, 2006).

The NPA continued the previous efforts to resolve the conflict in the South. The process started when IGAD prepared the Machakos Protocol, the basis of the NPA (Hussein, 2006). Despite its significance, the NPA ensured the carryover of the *Sharia* laws in exchange for the Southern Sudanese exercise of the right to self-determination (International Crisis Group, 2005, p. 2), eventually ending in their cessation in July 2011 (Temin, 2011). The separation of the South did not bring lasting peace to the North nor the South.

4. The Abuja Peace Agreement

In 2006, to resolve the conflict that had erupted in the Darfur region in western Sudan, the African Union (AU) mediated a peace process between the GoS and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) chaired separately by Abdulwahid Mohamed Nur

The Sudanese public protested in the capital city Khartoum in an effort to stop and reverse the coup by the military, October 26, 2021 (Photo Credit: ICG)

and Mini Arko Minawi, and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), headed by the late Khalil Ibrahim Mohamed. Following mounting pressure from the AU and the international community, SLMA (under Minawi's leadership) signed the agreement (officially known as the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA)). However, the SLM/A led by Abdulwahid and the JEM refused to sign despite the growing pressure. Abdulwahid's refusal was due to the DPA not reflecting the desires of the people in Darfur (Inernational Crisis Group, 2006). Following the agreement, Minawi was made a senior presidential advisor, supposedly the fourth highest position in the government (Radio Dabanga, 2010). In 2010, presidential elections were held, but Minawi was not reappointed to his position and fled Sudan to South Sudan (Radio Dabanga, 2010). Even worse, the DPA failed to achieve peace, as it heightened the conflict in some respects. Experts described that the DPA was the product of a flawed process, and that the agreement was rushed and not a result of genuine negotiations (Nathan, 2007).

5. The Juba Peace Agreement

The fall of Sudan's former President al-Bashir and the establishment of the transitional government provided a peace-making opportunity. On the basis of a political agreement between political elites and the military in 2019, the parties made peace a priority. Accordingly, the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) was signed between the transitional authorities and armed groups, mainly from Darfur, in October 2020 (Al-Ali, 2021). Further to its bilateral nature, the JPA disturbingly established its supremacy in the governing transitional constitutional charter. It even provided that the JPA prevails in case of conflict between the JPA and the transitional constitutional charter (The Transitional Constitutional Chart, 2019 (amended in 2020)). Neither the transitional constitutional charter nor

> This Constitution shall not be amended unless the amendments are approved by three-quarters of all the members of each Chamber of the National Legislature sitting separately and only after [the] introduction of the draft amendment at least two months prior to deliberations

the JPA has been inclusive and participatory, procedurally or substantively. They predominantly focused on wealth and power sharing rather than addressing the root causes of Sudan's conflicts (The Transitional Constitutional Chart, 2019 (amended in 2020)).

The Evil Trinity: Bilateralism, Transactionalism, and Transitionalism

A careful examination of the Sudan peace agreements discussed above reveals three common features: bilateralism, transactionalism, and transitionalism. Despite the varying periods, subsequent Sudanese governments, political elites, and the international community failed to depart from the repeatedly failed approach.

1. Bilateralism

The term bilateralism stems from the word bilateral. In this context, it refers to an agreement or a political settlement between two or more warring parties. The nature of such agreements is largely to protect the parties' interests. A bilateral agreement restricts any changes to the agreement and the resulting constitutional document without the parties' consent. For instance, the CPA stipulates:

> This Constitution shall not be amended unless the amendments are approved by three-quarters of all the members of each Chamber of the National Legislature sitting separately and only after [the] introduction of the draft amendment at least two months prior to deliberations (The Interim National Constitution, 2005).

Although the Interim National Constitution (INC) provides for amending the Constitution by a two-third majority, the CPA, which led to the drafting of the INC, granted the parties to the agreement collectively 80% of the national assembly (50% to the NCP, and 28% to the SPLM/A) (The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 2005). The parties are the *de facto* super majority of the national assembly. To avoid any ambiguities or even a possibility of amending the CPA or the INC, the parties added: "any amendment affecting the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement shall be introduced only with the approval of both Parties signatory to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement" (The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 2005) (The Interim National Constitution, 2005, p. art. 224 (2)).

2. Transactionalism

A transactional agreement is commonly used in business transactions such as sales, leases, mergers, and acquisitions. It is rarely used to describe political agreements. It is used in this context to indicate their contractual nature and the narrow interests that do not extend beyond the parties involved. They include provisions for admitting new partners. For instance, the Protocol on Interim Arrangements of the AAA provides that "the President of the Democratic Republic of Sudan shall, in consultation with the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) …. appoint the president and members of an Interim High Executive Council" (UN Peacemaker, 1972).

Similarly, the 1998 Agreement, CPA, DPA and JPA have adopted similar provisions. These transactional provisions were codified in the interim constitutions. Further illustrations can be found in peace agreements' power-sharing and wealth-sharing protocols. Due to their contractual nature, these agreements and the resultant constitutional documents appear to be more like partnership or transactional agreements that turned the government into a business enterprise rather than an entity meant to serve the public.

3. Transitionalism

In recent years, using peace-making as a constitution-making tool created a new style of constitutions known as transitional constitutions (Teitel, 1997, pp. 2057-8). These types of constitutions are enacted to respond to "the tension between [the] radical political change [required to end a conflict] and the constraints on such change that would appear to be the predicate of constitutional order" (Teitel, 1997, p. 2052)." Contrary to permanent constitutions which are forward-looking, transitional constitutions are both backward and forward-looking (Teitel, 1997, p. 2053). They constitute a form of revolution by creating a new political order for the new state. In other words, a revolutionary political change means a constitutional change (Teitel, 1997, p. 2053). It is also perceived as an end or a resolution of a conflict. While the modern view of transitional constitutions suggests that they are intended to be foundational, like the American Constitution, they are also meant to be temporary to mediate the process of political change.

As mentioned earlier, Sudan has been in an everlasting state of transition. This is due to frequent political change. Except for eleven years, Sudan has been governed by interim or transitional constitutions or presidential decrees. The failure to adopt a comprehensive and participatory approach to conflict resolution continues to dictate the political processes in Sudan. Excluded groups especially from peripheries thus express resentment, including through armed resistance.

Where Do We Go from Here?

As mentioned earlier, the international community tends to impose solutions, including pressuring parties to conflict into making peace. The Sudan experience demonstrates that while external pressure may lead to a temporary resolution of conflict, it falls short of ensuring a lasting peace. On the contrary, it encourages distrust among the Sudanese people and prolongs their suffering. Instead, the following suggestions should be considered:

First, an inclusive and participatory approach. The root causes of the conflict in Sudan encompass managing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. Given past and current efforts' bilateral, transactional, and transitional nature, a genuine participatory approach is warranted. Negotiating peace processes should include stakeholders beyond warring parties. This is because the Sudanese people are at the receiving end of the conflict and, therefore, most affected by the war, while warring parties are profiteers. Such an approach will displace the dominant practice of using fighters as drafters and, in some situations, appointing warlords or corrupt leaders to public offices. Further, inclusive and meaningful participation will also respond to legitimacy concerns that have plagued past failed democratic transitions in Sudan.

Second, bridging the trust deficit. It became apparent that rushed solutions to complex conflicts like the Sudan conflict not only increased distrust among the Sudanese people but augmented nepotism, tribalism, and regionalism. To properly build trust and encourage meaningful participation, sufficient time should be allowed for people to deliberate about their country's future. A comprehensive peace agreement should be a mirror reflecting the national soul. Accordingly, a resulting constitution or interim constitution should reflect precisely that.

Finally, accountability for past violations. What hindered progress in Sudan was the failure to achieve justice. It is often a deliberate attempt to defer justice. As the saying goes, "Justice delayed is justice denied." Many

Sudanese refugees flee conflict in Darfur. A camp on the border between Sudan and Chad on May 13, 2023 (Photo Credits: Zohra Bensemra/Reuters)

provisions of peace agreements and the resultant interim constitutions have provided justice and accountability for past abuses. However, they have never come into effect, partly due to these agreements' bilateral and transactional nature. Parties to agreements tend to avoid implementing any provisions that may threaten their interest. Accordingly, justice and accountability should be deemed a foundational component of peace-making in Sudan.

Conclusion

The Sudan experience reveals that the dominant peace-making and constitution-making approach (*bilateralism*, *transactionalism*, and *transitionalism*) has failed to achieve a lasting peace and a durable constitution. This approach resulted in bilateral agreements that only secured the interests of the parties involved and ignored the broader population. As such, the final product was a mere transaction or a contract between the parties. Also, due to enormous international pressure during negotiations and as an unintended consequence, the trust deficit among Sudanese has increased. To remedy these shortcomings, particular emphasis should be put on inclusion and meaningful participation, bridging the trust deficit in an already polarized society, and ensuring

that accountability is not a mere token gesture but should be realized to the maximum satisfaction of the victims.

As atrocious as it might be, the current war in Sudan offers another opportunity for the Sudanese to depart from the tragic past by allowing the people to participate and deliberate about the future of their country meaningfully. In previous wars, only particular regions have suffered the consequences of war. Now, nearly every Sudanese, including those in the diaspora, is bearing the brunt of the brutal war. It is high time for the people of Sudan to share and reflect on their grievances in the process of turning this tragedy into an opportunity to make this conflict a last one.

> " ... the current war in Sudan offers another opportunity for the Sudanese to depart from the tragic past by allowing the people to participate and deliberate about the future of their country meaningfully

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Resurgence of African Agency in a Multipolar World

By Peterson Wawerui

Abstract

While the gains made by the emerging powers in Africa have largely gone unchallenged from the developed world in the past decade, something has suddenly changed. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the international system has awakened to the importance of Africa in international relations, or may be the geo-political competition between the great powers has intensified to the point that the US and her allies can no longer ignore Africa. Either way, there are some interesting developments happening that warrant serious examination as to what the future of Africa really holds. At the center of this, are African regional organizations and arrangements that are the primary vehicles of Africa's collective interests in this polarized world.

Introduction

In the words of the ancient Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, "nothing endures but change" and so is the underlying spirit of this article that sets out to understand the sudden changes to an international system that has awaken to an almost unanimous concerted relevance of Africa in international relations. However, before that cross-examination is made, this article will first iron out a few issues important to this discussion: What is a multipolar world and is the current international system multipolar?

Polarity in international relations has been basically described as ways in which power is distributed within the international system and how it changes over time. It is power predisposition among international actors across a certain period in time. The whole concept of polarity is therefore predicated on cognizance to the impact of time and the fact that nothing ever remains the same as changes in a state's economic, military and political power shift over time and thus affects the outcome of how states cooperate or compete with each other.

Generally power distribution has been classified into three different types with varying outcomes for each. The three types identified include unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity. Unipolarity has been defined by scholars like William Wohlforth as a condition in which one state enjoys an unchallenged preponderance of power among its rival competitors. (Wohlforth W. C., 1999). Generally international relations scholars have referred to the era of United States (US) dominance in

the 20th century as a unipolar moment. Bipolarity, has been referred to as distribution of power in which two states have overwhelming preponderance of power, therefore creating spheres of influence. It has been widely recognized that the world was undeniably bipolar during the Cold War (1947-1991). (Wohlforth S. G., 2023).

While debates have been about which of the two types of polarity (unipolarity and bipolarity) are most stable in terms of creation of peaceful outcomes among the states, the question of multipolarity has been examined from a different angle; that is, on whether today's international system can be correctly classified as multipolar. Many within the international affairs circle have increasingly referred to the current system as multipolar; meaning that there are multiple global powers of significant influence, not just two contending superpowers. (Borrell, 2021) (Kukreja, 2020) (Savin, 2020). The rise of China, Brazil, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran and South Korea has elevated the debate on the rise of significant middle powers that are geo-strategically important in a globalized world.

Political scientists William Wohlforth and Stephen Brooks have stated that: "there is perhaps no more widely accepted truth about the world today than the idea that it is no longer unipolar." They argue in their view, the world is neither bipolar nor multipolar, and it is not about to become either. (Wohlforth S. G., 2023). However, not everyone agrees as scholars like Robert Gates have made the claim that today, there are only two countries with the

economic size, military might, and global leverage to constitute a pole, that is the US and China, virtually making today's system more bipolar. (Gates, 2023). Despite whichever side of the debate one would support, it would be reasonable to conclude that middle powers including Turkey, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Brazil, Indonesia and South Korea have significantly caught up with some of the military, political and economic capabilities of the US and China which upsets the geopolitical calculus of what bipolar, unipolar and multipolar definitions are.

The system in its current form, has therefore been referred to as "unbalanced multipolarity" (Emma Ashford, 2023). This is because in assessing the economic capabilities of only the US and China, one could easily come to the conclusion that the world is headed back to an era of bipolar superpower competition as seen in the US - Soviet Union era of Cold War. (Fink, 2014). For example combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of key economic alliances such as the US led Group of Seven (G7) and the Chinese led (BRICS) an acronym for the China allied counties including Brazil Russia India

China and South Africa; shows that in 2023, G7 had a 43% share to the global GDP, while the BRICS accounted for a 29% share. (Statista, 2024). Both alliances combined contribute 72% of all global GDP.

Assessing this data deeply by isolating US and China alone, both economic superpowers contribute to 43% of the global GDP. This means the rest of the world contributes around 57%. (World Bank and International Monetary Fund, 2024). While this is absolutely significant, their combined output in comparison to the Cold War era is lower. For instance both the US - North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allied bloc, and the communist Soviet Union - Eastern bloc combined to 88% of global GDP in 1950. (Mark, 2023). And in isolation the US and Soviet Union combined to approximately 50% of the global GDP in 1970. (Maddison, 2001). The declined combined share of both US and China compared to the US-Soviet era fundamentally indicates that there has emerged a number of other key actors of significant economic strength.

The Group of Seven (G7) leaders meeting at the 2024 summit in Apulia, Italy, June 24, 2024 (Photo Credit: Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters)

Similarly in contrast to the 20th century, current data from the Asian Power Index (API) and Comparative Index of National Capabilities (CINC) scores suggests that power is rapidly diffusing away from superpowers in favor of some of the notable middle powers listed earlier. (Emma Ashford, 2023). Holistic data assessments not only comparing the size of the economies but also combining other power metrics such as demographics, resources, alliance networks, cultural influence and military factors, paint a clear picture that neither the US or China has a firm grip in any of these power metrics. For example due to increased globalization and trade, the European Union (EU) has perhaps the most significant regulatory impact on trade worldwide (Hegde, 2022), while the modern East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea are also major players in a globalized economy. (Nayyar, 2019).

Military expeditions and use of force or coercion by powers such as the US and Russia has also been an ineffective strategy in the 21st century. The diffusion of military technology such as missile technology, drones and rockets alongside emerging transnational threats of terrorism, piracy and insurgency has presented a challenge to even the most powerful militaries. The Russian losses in the Ukraine war as well as the failures of the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq has brought to light the idea of an - unbalance multipolar system - that is supported by the evolving mixture of competition between great powers for the support of small and middle powers, along with cooperation between ad hoc coalitions to address global security challenges. (Melanie W. Sisson, 2020) This lack of clear power distinction in some areas between great and middle powers has caused a chaotic, unstable international environment that seems persistent for the coming decades.

Therefore, for easy of analysis, this article will simply refer to the current system as a multipolar system. In understanding the change in polarity i.e. the power dynamics between the various international actors, one can examine Africa's position in terms of how the continent interacts with the different poles of power. This is the area of interest in this article, and further to that, it is an examination of African agency in the current multipolar system.

African Agency in a Multipolar World

Africa's agency and influence in international affairs has been on the rise over the past decade, both at a continental level and bilaterally. Since 2010 the idea of the continents inclusion into the G7, G20 and the BRICS has been openly discussed. (World bank group, 2010). There has been great use of international organizations in Africa to not only tackle the emerging global problems but also take advantage of the sprawling opportunities that have emerged in the multipolar system. There are a few examples that come to mind, for instance, Africa's plan to work with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on profit shifting and tax avoidance among the G7 members as well as have a representation of its interest in the G20 via South Africa. (Sidiropoulos, 2020).

Although these were noble goals to get Africa's input across the world, there still remained a hampered low level active engagement through third parties instead of direct representative engagement of African actors. African governments as a result still missed out on major geopolitical changes in the last decade such as the increase in voting shares in the World Bank which saw Sub-Saharan Africa's share go from 5.55% to 5.86%. This could be compared to several developing countries including Vietnam, El Salvador, Lebanon and Cambodia that saw their voting power increase by 50%, primarily due to the gains made by capitalizing on the great power competition that has been intensifying over the decade. (World bank group, 2010).

Vietnam's bamboo diplomacy for example has seen the rise of the country to a strategic partner for the US, China and Japan. Bamboo diplomacy which is generally a diplomatic strategy of balancing ties with superpowers, has yielded Vietnam almost everything; from trade and security arrangements with the US in South China Sea, development partnerships with China and critical minerals exports to Japan. This has seen Vietnam grow from $147 billion in 2010 to $408 billion in 2022. (World Bank Group, 2022). This is a 177% increase in GDP growth over the same period where Africa has only grown by 47%. (Statista, 2022).

The onset of the Covid-19 global pandemic however shook Africa to its core when it became clear none of the countries had the financial or development capacity and leverage to sustain external shocks that came with the pandemic. The viciousness of competition among more powerful nations to secure vaccines and other measures to sustain their economies and safe guard citizens exposed just how much African countries needed to work together

to survive. At the time it was quite enlightening that a year into the pandemic three-quarters of all vaccinations happened in 10 countries that account for 60% of global GDP. Collectively, none of the Sub-Saharan African countries by December 2020 had started immunizations. (Kupferschmidt, 2021).

To their credit African leaders acted quickly to mobilize for a response to COVID-19, weeks before it was declared a pandemic. The actions taken during the time reenergized the potential of Africa's collective response as the continent was able to lobby through the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, a coordinated position in the G20 and create the African Union COVID-19 Response Fund. This momentum has been recently used to capture more areas of cooperation within the emerging multipolar framework, from governance, development, conflict resolution and the environment as Africa's agency finally reemerges to take shape in the current decade. (Sidiropoulos, 2020). Various great powers have also realized this shift and have been actively engaged in collaborating with Africa at a collective rather than the bilateral level.

The Resurgence of African Agency in the Multipolar Post-Pandemic Environment

The rise of middle powers that are part of the global South, including the likes of China, Brazil, India, Turkey, Indonesia and South Korea has seen an overall rise in South-South trade dominance since the 2008 financial crisis period. The most apt analysis of this dynamic postulates that around this time the South-South trade surpassed North-North trade for the first time, and 35% of the global trade today is accounted for by South-South merchandise trade and only about 25% by the North-North. This shift has also coincided with China's increased

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bilateral ties with Africa, where investments have moved from $2.7 billion to $209 billion. (Mold, 2023).

The rising economic powers have created avenues for Africa's trade development in several ways. Primarily, there is of course trade with these powers as China has emerged as Africa's largest trading partner, but so too has Turkey expanded trade volume with Africa from $3billion in 2003 to $26billion in 2021. (Karadima, 2022). However, maybe the most important trade development issue is Africa's realization of the significance of intra-African trade. This is inspired by the dynamics of global trade which have shown that concentrating efforts to export and diversify African economies through increasing trade with high income countries of the global North, may no longer be the best strategy.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) established in 2018 is a product of this realization and was established to boost intra-African trade and further deepen the South-South cooperation. In a report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa the AfCFTA was estimated to increase African trade by 52% by 2025, far much more than any anticipated growth in trading externally. (Witschge, 2018). Some scholars (Mold, 2023) (Songwe, 2019) (Emma Ashford, 2023)have attributed the rise of a multipolar world to this shift in Africa's collective development strategy that provides alternatives to the developed Northern programs on external trade liberalization, which since 1980's has failed to aid Africa diversify exports to high income economies.

But the South-South cooperation does not stop at trade. In development financing, China has also emerged with an alternative to the US led World Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which has 20 African members. Collectively the 20 African members account for 60% of the regions GDP and 46% of Africa's population. The vitality of Africa collectively working within the AIIB cannot be underestimated as it offers a viable opportunity to establish new development partnerships between African states as they seek alternative investment avenues. (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), 2021).

While the gains made by the emerging powers in Africa have largely gone unchallenged from the developed world in the past decade, something has suddenly changed. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the international system has awaken to the importance of Africa in international

relations, or may be the geopolitical competition between the great powers has intensified to the point that the US and her allies can no longer ignore Africa. Either way, there are some interesting developments happening that warrant serious examination as to what the future of Africa really holds. At the center of this, are African regional organizations and arrangements that are the primary vehicles of Africa's collective interests in this polarized world.

To start off there are specific reactions by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to engage Africa. The IMF recently offered Sub-Saharan Africa an additional seat on its executive board a move that has been referred to as understanding "the continent's growing importance." Last year the IMF and World Bank annual meetings were held in Africa for the first time in fifty years, as the World Bank also announced its plans to raise the number of African directors to three. (Munyati, 2023). The move has been touted as a measure to improve Africa's representation in international institutions to achieve the regions desired development goals but this article shares a different perspective.

To a large extent the main global issue in much of the developed world in the past two years since the pandemic was the war in Ukraine. From sanctions, street matches, 24/7 media narratives, diplomatic lobbying, financial and military aid the West has done all it can to gather as much global support for Ukraine as it can. Africa has been a target for both sides of the war but the West has particularly failed to gather the support it hoped for. Almost two years into the war much of Africa still has shown reservations to vote in favour of a UN general assembly resolution that condemns Russia. This has been particularly shocking to the West as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken explained last year that there were diplomatic challenges the West would face in winning support for Ukraine in Africa. (Soy, 2023).

The challenge has been attributed to a number of reasons but across the continent analysts have pointed out that there has been long-standing frustration with the failures of Western intervention and many African countries have resented a lack of representation of patient issues in international institutions. (Gathara, 2022). Nowhere is there more prominence in lack of representation, lethargy or complete inaction on existential issues affecting the continent than in the Horn of Africa region. To map it the Horn of Africa is the continents link to Asia and Europe through the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and the

Mediterranean Sea. It is comprised of seven countries; Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Kenya. (Prof. Macharia Munene, 2023).

The region has been facing several crises at the same time including climate change and drought, food insecurity, terrorism, maritime piracy, political instability and civil wars. But there has been no concerted effort by the West to sufficiently handle any of these issues. For example while the world's attention focuses on the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, Sudan suffers through human rights atrocities and ethnic cleansing. (Curtin, 2024). Earlier this year the head of the U.N. Humanitarian and Emergency Relief estimated that 5 million people have been displaced by the war in Sudan and 25 million Sudanese would need humanitarian assistance in 2024. (Griffiths, 2024). However despite this urgent call only 39% of the total funds that the UN required for enabling assistance in Sudan was received and even less than that from key Western donors. (UNHCR and OCHA, 2024).

Russia, Turkey and several countries in the Middle East, including UAE and Iran, have been taking advantage of conflicts in the Horn of Africa. In Sudan and Somalia for instance, there is growing military engagements with some of the factions involved in various wars and political crises. In the ongoing Sudan civil war Iran, Russia, and the UAE are reportedly backing various sides to advance their interests in the region and undermine any US led peace talks. (Karr, 2024). US response to what is happening in Sudan, especially Darfur, has been at best timid, especially when it could play a greater role in pressuring some actors like UAE to cease supplying arms to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which is one of the factions accused of committing ethnic cleaning in this war. (Curtin, 2024).

For this reason top experts have argued that the West needs to build on genuine diplomatic efforts and seek more equal partnerships with African nations, which points to the renewed efforts by IMF and World Bank to prioritize African agency in global frameworks. (Ferragamo, 2023). It is the view of this article that the primary reason for consideration to have better engagement of Africa within these institutions stems from the realization of these geopolitical shifts.

The timing for this understanding of "the continent's growing importance" says it all, and it should not be mistaken as a friendly gesture of concern on Africa's

African heads of state and government at the African Union Summit pose for a group photo after seeing the signing of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement in Kigali, Rwanda, on March 21, 2018. (Photo: STR / AFP)

part. It has taken the Bretton Woods institutions roughly seven decades to realize that Africa could not effectively exercise its agency without proper representation at the executive table, while it should be commended as another opportunity for the continent, it should also be clearly examined for what it is – an attempt for the West to keep Africa as an ally in this polarized international system.

In case this might have seemed farfetched, there is also the European plan to draw Africa way from China with its $340billion investments. Unveiled in late 2021 the Global Gateway has been seen as EU's alternative to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Africa. Just as China has poured billions into building roads, railways and ports worldwide to forge new trade links and diplomatic ties, the EU has taken a similar strategy to infrastructure financing. In Africa, EU has made plans to partner on renewable hydrogen production with an estimated $2.7 billion in grants to Sub-Saharan Africa and $1.2 billion to North Africa. (Cooban, 2021).

The US has also followed suit with its own 2023 version of a BRI project in Africa, termed the Lobito Corridor that plans to finance and develop a new railway line linking a key source of critical minerals in Zambia and DR Congo with a port on the continent's Atlantic coast. The railway infrastructure project that is set to cost $1.6billion aims to establish a trade route for copper and cobalt used in production of green technology and electric vehicles. US, EU and China being the leading consumers of electric vehicles, many experts have expressed that it was only a matter of time before strategic competition expands to Africa. (Hill, 2023).

As China's competitive edge in Africa's infrastructure financing is shrinking due to economic slowdown in the post-pandemic, there is significant weakening in lending capabilities that have caused BRI related investments to fall from a peak of $125 billion in 2015 to $70 billion in 2022. (Stonor, 2023). The US has seen an opportunity to exert its soft power strategy in Africa which reflects its initiatives to invest in strategic infrastructure projects that strengthen its position as the continent's major partner, but most important the question is whether Africa is ready to seize the opportunity that is offered. Again, African agency will be critical to realize this opportunity.

Fortunately at least on one front Africa has made strides to realize a collective push for its common interests. On September 2023 the African Union was made a permanent member of the G20. As stated earlier the only African representation in the G20 was through South Africa, which again should be a call to examination as to why the African Union is suddenly welcomed in this cooperation, 24 years after its formation. Perhaps the answer to this one is simple, as Kenya's President William Ruto stated, it is an "outcome of advancing fundamental reforms in international institutions." (The Guardian, 2023).

This article will add, that it is an acknowledgement of Africa's significance in the current system of great power competition in a multipolar world. Just as African leaders have shown their willingness to take collective action during the Covid-19 pandemic, when they united to loudly criticize the hoarding of vaccines by rich countries, the decision to include AU as a member of the G20 is due to Africa's incessant demands that there be reforms to post-1945 structures in reflection of today's power distribution, or the continent would move on to support new institutions that accommodate it, such as AIIB.

Clearly from this discussion so far there is a noticeable change in interest in Africa coming from external actors. Global rivalries have intensified during the post-pandemic period and in a bid to shape the future both middle and great powers have tried to co-opt African agency to support their future ambitions. Regional programs like AfCTA have been shaped by these geopolitical shifts in the last decade, and so have the continents institutions that have seen a resurgence in agency and relevance in representing Africa at the multilateral institutions such as IMF, World Bank and the G20.

While there are tactical similarities to the geo-strategic competition happening in Africa today compared to the Cold War such as US and Russia competition to offer security partnership to African governments, (Smith, 2021) there are fundamental structural differences. The first is the obvious number of actors where the current system is multipolar, giving Africa and her sub regions in the Horn of Africa, a handful of complex issues to maneuver, chief among them being the threat to political stability and losing collective influence in the current polarized environment. To mitigate this threat and counterbalance it with the opportunities presented by the same anarchic environment, one must also clearly understand what forces drive this change.

Forces Driving the Change

The main goal here is to understand what forces drive geostrategic competition in Africa. There are a number of factors that have been highlighted by analysts observing not only US and China but also increased Russian, French, British and German entities in Africa. There are three critical factors that this article will highlight:

a. Next Generation Green Growth: As previously mentioned, both US and China are in a race to secure the world's vital minerals that ensure their supply chains for minerals such as copper and cobalt are secure. Africa is home to an estimated 15% of the rare earth minerals (Nkrumah, 2024)essential to powering the next generation of innovation and green growth. For the US, the road to a green future and electric vehicles lies in out doing China's current dominance in access to African minerals. To that point, projects such as the Lobito Corridor are not only to bring close ties in US-African relations but also are at the core of US economic and national security interests.

b. The Population Boom and its Implications on Geopolitics, Global trade and Migration: Another important factor is Africa's population boom that is set to be a quarter of the world's population by 2050. (Anoba, 2019). As the largest populations in India and China hit an average age of 29 and 37 respectively by end of 2023, the average age in Africa is about 19 years. (Hajjar, 2020). Africa's urban population is expected to reach 1.3 billion with great anticipation that as age pyramids in the Global North invert, Africa's population boom could help power future economic growth globally.

All the great and middle powers see the potential markets for modern technology and the entrepreneurial opportunities in the future of the continent, as well as catastrophic consequences if development planning is neglected. Thus there are vital interests for some key players to be involved in Africa's future lest the effects of underdeveloped climate change adaptation and political instability further impact migration up North.

c. Largest Voting Block of the UN: Lastly, and perhaps the most immediate factor driving geostrategic competition in Africa is the fact that Africa is the largest voting block of UN member states. (Hudson, 2023). It has more than one quarter of the total votes, and it is increasingly becoming clear that

the West has lost its hold over Africa. Again as earlier explained Africa has shown reservations to vote in favor of a UN general assembly resolution that condemns Russia and its ongoing invasion of Ukraine. This has been consequential to the realization that the US and its allies have no power in global collective action without Africa's collective vote, something Russia and China had already recognized as important to their own geopolitical and economic ambitions.

Together these three factors make a potent attraction of great and middle-power rivalries in the region which could be a significant threat to Africa's stability if it gets pulled into a tug of war between the various powers. Already this has happened before, during the Cold War, a number of African countries were staged for proxy wars by the superpowers. For instance in the Angolan and DR Congo civil wars where both saw the US and Soviet involvement lead to decades of instability and security challenges in Africa. (Rosie, 2020). The inability to stave off superpower influence across the continent spurred a decade of coups, conflicts and political instability that ultimately resulted in Africa's developmental stagnation.

The period has been termed as the "lost decade" a painful reminder of where Africa stalled as other newly independent developing nations in Asia outpaced her and eventually industrialized. This is why it is worrying that there is a similar growing trend of external actors sowing instability and supporting civil wars in the Horn of Africa, where not only Sudan but also Ethiopia has seen a major civil war with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in which external powers have played a key role. (Demissie, 2023). This remains a reminder of the threats posed by the geopolitical competition happening in Africa today, and a warning that Africa needs to exercise its agency effectively to avoid the pitfalls of the lost decade, while being open to any opportunities.

Challenges and Opportunities In A Multipolar World: A Lesson From Vietnam's Bamboo Diplomacy

Thus far this discussion has presented the case that there are potential positive and negative impacts to increased competition among external powers on the continent. So far the foreseeable positive impact of a multipolar system are the greater investments in African infrastructure and development, which could help encourage rapid economic growth. On the flipside, nations do not

hand money with no strings attached and increased competition could also lead to exploitation of African resources and labour, or even worse instability and civil wars as competitive external powers seek to establish or secure their positions of influence in the continent.

In order to mitigate the potential negative effects, African countries would need to be strategic in their relations with external powers such as US and China. It is no secret that Africa's resources are the primary target for these external powers. China has invested heavily in Africa's natural resources in recent years, in a bid to secure its own energy and mineral supplies. (Miriri, 2024). Other countries, such as Russia and India, have also shown growing interest in Africa's resources. (Ferragamo, 2023). (The economic times, 2024). While these resources remain a significant opportunity to attract investment in Africa, they have also been a critical reason for conflict and exploitation in the past.

It would be high time that Africa realized that it should use these resources as bargaining power and leverage in negotiations over the use and distribution of its resources, as more countries compete for access to them. There needs to be a collective action plan to ensure Africa stops exporting raw materials by encouraging investors that manufacture in Africa. While North-South trade has been criticized for its exploitation and fostering dependency, the South-South trade arrangements too have replicated similar negative characteristics.

African exports to China are almost exclusively raw commodities like avocados from Kenya or Cashews from Ivory Coast while imports from China have been manufactured goods. The trade imbalance has seen $148 billion worth of Chinese goods shipped to Africa in 2021, while China imported only $106 billion and out of these it clearly targeted the five energy and mineral-rich nations - Angola, Congo Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo South Africa and Zambia - accounting for $75 billion of the total. (Bavier, 2022). It's also clear that this trade relationship is unsustainable as key sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing in Africa have been sidelined to the detriment of sustainable development.

To turn this around there needs to be a collective push through Africa's agency to manufacture in Africa so as to get better value added products for exports and bring Africa into the global supply chain. In a 2022 press release the African Union made its renewed commitment

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towards steering Africa towards industrialization in the next decade outlining the 10 things Africa needs to do to accelerate its industrialization and diversification. Among them it reiterated that Africa needs to focus on technology transfer so as to enhance its productivity and competitiveness in the future. (Africa Union commission, 2022).

This article finds this plan feasible if it is to be coupled with the African resources leverage that would yield it bargaining power in negotiations to set up supply chains on the continent.

Similarly Africa's population could be a decisive advantage in the future, as explained Africa is expected to have the largest youth population in the world by 2050 and with this young and dynamic workforce it could be a major driver of economic growth and innovation on the continent. As the world ages Africa will also be a critical labour exporter that will help create new industries and businesses in the low birth rate industrial countries. Already the developed economies are looking at the rise of African migration as a key resource and challenge with 26% of migrants moving to Europe being African. (Idemudia, 2020).

Nonetheless for Africa to be competitive in labour exports it needs to invest in its population. Investments in education, food security and climate resilience, health, security and better governance are all priorities to ensure this opportunity is realized. The African Union has again recognized this by ensuring that the continent's Pan-African vision, Agenda 2063, features investments in these areas. (African Union Commission, 2015). The African Union has made plans to lobby partners to invest in Africa's youthful potential and has gained the attention of the main competing powers in Europe, North America and China, all who have invested in at least one of the above areas of interest.

On the whole, possibly the most important challenge and opportunity that Africa needs to explore lies internally.
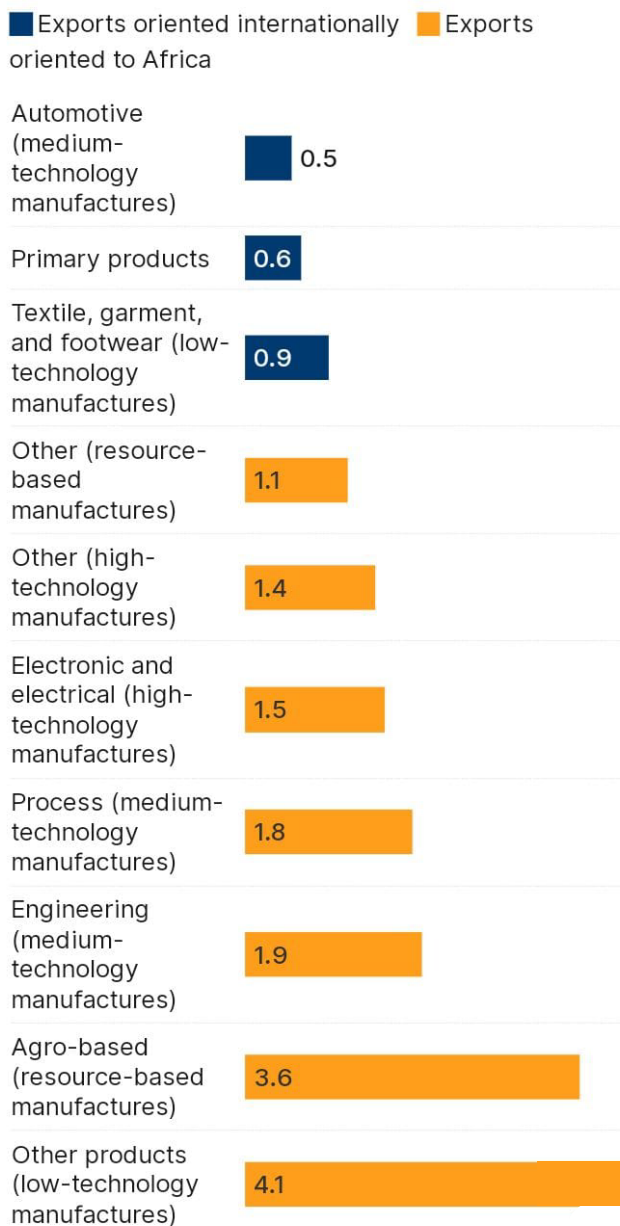
It would be demonstrably wrong to underestimate the importance of Africa's relationship with itself if it is to survive and thrive in the emerging multipolar system. From our prior discussion this article mentioned a key lesson learnt from the dominance of South-South trade in the last decade is that efforts to export and diversify African economies through increasing trade with high income countries of the global North, may no longer be the best strategy. Equally, this has been extended to a realization that external trade with Southern countries like China, still retains the characteristics of exploitation and dependency that are also not ideal.

Thus raises the moment for an internal trade development mechanism where the African market itself can help foster the desired growth and development outcome for Africa. Some scholars have argued that the economic significance of intra-African trade and development has been largely overlooked. According to 2023, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development data, the aggregate exports for the whole continent show that intra-regional exports in Africa are more important than extra-regional exports. (Mold, 2023). Out of a category of 10 African exports, only 3 sectors showed dependency on international markets compared to continental markets.

Refereeing to figure 1, Andrew Mold, the Chief Regional Integration Officer of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa explains that there is great potential to regional trade, as 7 of the 10 sectors he assessed are already more dependent on the African market with the 3 runaway sectors: textile, automotive and primary products being less strategically important as compared to the other seven. (Mold, 2023).

In addition to this data, the economic projections that the AfCFTA is estimated to increase African trade by 52% by 2025, points to a way out of dependency on foreign powers in shaping Africa's destiny. The only question that keeps popping now and then, is whether African agency will be ready to realize this opportunity or will it be another lost decade?

Perhaps a lesson to learn is how Vietnam has managed navigating the multipolar geo-strategic competition between

Exports oriented internationally   **Exports oriented to Africa**

Category	Value
Automotive (medium-technology manufactures)	0.5
Primary products	0.6
Textile, garment, and footwear (low-technology manufactures)	0.9
Other (resource-based manufactures)	1.1
Other (high-technology manufactures)	1.4
Electronic and electrical (high-technology manufactures)	1.5
Process (medium-technology manufactures)	1.8
Engineering (medium-technology manufactures)	1.9
Agro-based (resource-based manufactures)	3.6
Other products (low-technology manufactures)	4.1

Source: Author's computations, from UNCTADStat data (2023)   *Figure 1*

the great powers for decades. It has made the most out of its strategic position mainly by its famously praised "bamboo diplomacy"- a strategic balancing of ties with the great and middle powers all while it maintains its independence and sovereignty. The policy has been hailed as the guiding principle of how Vietnam shares concerns with Washington over Beijing's growing assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea, but it still maintains significant economic links with China, while maintaining strategic ties to Japan. (Nguyen, 2024).

Just like Africa, Vietnam has faced the challenge of remaining neutral amid calls for condemning Russia's invasion of

Ukraine, a decision that has not been received well by the US but has equally not stopped Washington from pursuing greater ties with Vietnam. (Storey, 2024).Bamboo diplomacy has been characterized as a policy that is structured like a bamboo with firm roots but flexible branches or rather the core tenets of firm diplomatic objectives but flexible strategies and tactics. (Nguyen, 2024). All in all, this famed strategy has seen Vietnam rise to a global strategic player in the manufacturing supply chain, arriving as a key exporter to the US market, while maintaining the position as one of China's largest import markets.

Africa needs this kind of pragmatic approach to thrive in the current environment. It would need to ensure that it is getting the best possible deal in terms of investment and trade using similar flexible strategies and tactics, while also firmly protecting its own interests and sovereignty. As global rivalries intensify some African countries will be susceptible to external influence and others will inevitably break from collective agendas in pursuit of their own interests. However, It will take a sustained resurgence of Africa's agency like was seen during the pandemic for the continent to thrive and drive sustainable change.

The balance between looking internally and externally to maintain independence rests in African coalition building through its regional organizations and programs, coordination on the continent's strategic vision with support for industrial specialization among its states and lastly are the investments in the continent's people and resources which are vital to gaining leverage for greater technology transfer.

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Once again, quoting the philosopher Heraclitus, *"nothing endures but change" – It is time to find out if Africa is ready for it.*

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Ethiopian-South African Relations from the Second World War to the Present

By Prof. Michael B. Bishku, Ph.Dr

Abstract

Ethiopia and South Africa are two very important African countries in terms of political and economic power that only established formal diplomatic relations in 1994, yet their history of interactions both in a direct and indirect manner between political agents and/or citizens of the two countries took place well before then. Yet there is no academic study specifically dealing with these ties, either bilaterally or in multilateral situations. This article will examine the political, economic and cultural relations of Ethiopia and South Africa, especially since the mid-twentieth century, in order to fill in this unusual gap in scholarship.

Introduction

Ethiopia and South Africa are two of the largest countries on the African continent in terms of the size of their respective economies in 2023 by gross domestic product, geographical areas and populations. In addition, Ethiopia and South Africa are also important middle powers in their respective regions of the continent. Yet there is no academic study specifically dealing with their ties, either bilaterally or in multilateral situations. Indeed, one study of post-apartheid South Africa's foreign relations devotes little more than a paragraph to ties with Ethiopia, while acknowledging the importance of those relations:

> [Ethiopia]… given its military strength, growing economy and hosting the AU Commission's headquarters, continues to be a leading power, and potential hegemon, in the region…. South Africa built a showpiece embassy in Addis Ababa – its largest in Africa – as a potent symbol of its leadership role in the AU, which again highlights the geo-strategic importance of Ethiopia in African diplomacy (Adebajo and Virk, 2018, 25-26).

There have been interactions both in a direct and indirect manner between political agents and/or citizens of the two countries especially since the Second World War. South African troops participated with other British Commonwealth forces in liberating Ethiopia from Italian occupation.

During the early 1950s, Ethiopia, under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, and South Africa sent forces to Korea as part of the United Nations military operation. A decade later, with establishment of the Organization of African Unity (which was later replaced with the African Union in 2002), Haile Selassie spoke out against continued European colonialism in southern Africa while Ethiopia and Liberia challenged unsuccessfully in the International Court of Justice South Africa's control of Namibia (then known as South West Africa); at the same time, Ethiopia provided a passport to African National Congress' leader Nelson Mandela to travel abroad and gain support for his movement, which sought the end of white-rule and apartheid. During the 1970s, Ethiopia's Marxist Derg government, which overthrew Haile Selassie, provided support to South African, Zimbabwean and Namibian fighters seeking the end of minority rule in those three countries. Since the end of apartheid in South Africa, that country and Ethiopia have cooperated in matters involving the African Union; while trade and South African investment have been on the increase those still are fairly limited. This article will examine the political, economic and cultural relations of Ethiopia and South Africa. These ties were strengthened in early 2024, as Ethiopia signed a strategic partnership with South Africa and joined BRICS (named for its founding members Brazil, Russia, India and China as well as South Africa) along with Egypt.

From the Second World War through the 1950s

In October 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia from its colonies of Eritrea and Somalia occupying Addis Ababa in May

Italian troops use the Italian guns in Edaga Hamus, south-east of Adigrat, near Makale, Ethiopia on November 11, 1935 (Photo Credits: AP Photo/Joe Caneva)

1936 and completing military operations by February 1937. Emperor Haile Selassie went into exile in Britain and was not able to return to Ethiopia's capital until May 1941. Meanwhile, Ethiopia was liberated in a military operation from June 1940, when Italy declared war against Britain and France, until November 1941. The forces of the British Commonwealth included those from South Africa and Britain's African colonies. The First South African Division, which consisted of one East African and two South African brigades, participated in ground operations. They liberated Addis Ababa in April 1941 and then proceeded northward along the road to Asmara with the intention to link up with other allied forces. They were assisted by the South African Air Force, which included two bomber squadrons, one fighter squadron and one aerial reconnaissance squadron (Stapleton, 2010, pp. 139-140). Writing under just his initials in 1946, in Chatham House's monthly journal, *The World Today*, one observer of Ethiopian-British relations commented:

It would appear ungracious to suggest that it was a pity that South African troops performed a high percentage of those who liberated Ethiopia. Without their timely assistance its liberation would have been postponed for a considerable time. Nevertheless, the fact must be faced that the South African approach to the colour question is not one easily understood by those the wrong side of the colour bar (Kirk, 1952, p. 56).

Indeed, Haile Selassie was incensed by the South Africans' attempting to apply the color bar in Ethiopia and later became a strong opponent of the apartheid system in South Africa. Until the 1950s, Haile Selassie "had officially located Ethiopia as being part of the Middle East rather than Africa" (Adebajo, Adedeji and Landsberg, 2007, p. 275).

Before then, as the Second World War came to an end and the Cold War subsequently set in, Britain was in a weak economic position and subordinate to the U.S. in world politics. In 1947, the British withdrew their military forces from Jijiga, capital of the Somali-populated Ogaden region of Ethiopia, but not before considering incorporating that territory into Somalia (Marcus, 1994, p. 157). However, Ethiopia fearing such a development grew closer to the U.S., which it regarded as a prime source of military, financial and technical assistance, an important factor in Ethiopia's participation in the Korean War along with the Emperor's commitment to collective

security against external aggression under the United Nations given the failure of the League of Nations to protect Ethiopia from Italian invasion (Findlay, 2011, p. 100). The Americans favored incorporating then British military-administered Eritrea, a territory Haile Selassie coveted as his country would regain direct access to the Red Sea, into a federation with Ethiopia, an arrangement supported by the U.N., which lasted from 1952-1962 when Ethiopia annexed Eritrea. Meanwhile, in 1961, the three-decade military struggle for Eritrean independence began. As for the U.S., it wanted to retain control over a base in Asmara, Eritrea's capital, which it used since 1942 for gathering intelligence in the Red Sea region; that facility known as Radio Marino by the Italians was later renamed the Kagnew Station, for the Ethiopian battalion that served in Korea (Marcus, 1994, pp. 158-159).

Ethiopia's Kagnew Infantry Battalion, named for the warhorse of Haile Selassie's father, Ras Makonnen, the eighth largest of 16 in the U.N.'s combat forces, arrived in Korea in May 1951 and was attached to the U.S. Seventh Infantry Division. It suffered 121 killed and 526 wounded in action, but no soldiers were taken prisoners-of-war, distinguishing itself through its movement and fighting during nighttime in combat operations especially around the Pork Chop Hill area.

During the war, Ethiopian women were dispatched to serve as nurses. Ethiopia continued to send troops to the United Nations Command until January 1965 (United Nations Command, n.d. and Africa Defense Forum Staff, 2024). As for South Africa, the No. 2 Squadron of its Air Force, known as the "Flying Cheetahs," arrived in Korea in September 1950 and left in October 1953. It was attached to the U.S. Air Force's 18th Fighter Bomber Group and was composed of 243 Air Force officers who flew over 12,000 sorties in F-51D Mustang and F-86F Sabre Jet aircraft as well as 545 ground personnel; in addition, 38 Army officers and non-commissioned personnel were attached to the First Commonwealth Division. Thirty-four pilots and two ground crew were killed in action (United Nations Command, n.d.). While the Nationalist government in South Africa, which came to power in 1948 and instituted apartheid, and many Afrikaners, who supported the policy, no longer wanted to participate in external conflicts that they regarded as "Britain's wars," just like the Ethiopians, the South Africans wanted to curry favor with the United States as a "anti-communist, pro-West" state and to receive military supplies (Van der Waag-Cowling, 2016, pp. 224, 226 and 229).

From the 1960s until the Overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie

In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom,* South African President Nelson Mandela (1994-1999) relates his feelings about Ethiopia as part of a tour of Africa which began in January 1962 that was facilitated by Ethiopian government by providing a passport in the name of David Motsamayi, and during which he met other continental leaders:

> Ethiopia was the birthplace of African nationalism. Unlike other African states, it had fought colonialism at every turn…. Ethiopia has always held a special place in my own imagination and the prospect of visiting Ethiopia attracted me more strongly than a trip to France, England and America combined. I felt like I would be visiting my own genesis, unearthing the roots of what made me an African. Meeting the Emperor himself would be like shaking hands with history (Mandela, 1994, p. 255).

And yet he noted: "Contemporary Ethiopia was not a model when it came to democracy…. There were no political parties, no popular organs of government, no separation of powers, only the emperor, who was supreme" (Mandela, 1994, p. 255). Mandela's purpose in being in Ethiopia was not only to confer with the Emperor, but to address as a representative from the African National Congress (ANC) the delegates at the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East, Central and Southern Africa, an organization established in Tanzania (then-Tanganyika) in 1958 to mobilize groups and coordinate efforts to promote independence of the countries in Africa.

As part of his speech, besides discussing the struggle for freedom in South Africa, Mandela thanked Ghana, Nigeria and Tanganyika for being at the forefront in the move to oust the apartheid government in South Africa

> " Contemporary Ethiopia was not a model when it came to democracy…. There were no political parties, no popular organs of government, no separation of powers, only the emperor, who was suprem

Ethiopia and Liberia were former members of the League of Nations, the organization that awarded South Africa a mandate over South West Africa, a former German colony, in 1920 to administer that territory and assist in its political and economic development

from the British Commonwealth (Mandela, 1994, pp. 256-257). Mandela subsequently received two months of military training in Ethiopia (Mandela, 1994, p. 266) and was arrested upon returning to South Africa on charges of inciting African workers and leaving the country without travel documents, and following a trial sentenced to five years. Later, during the so-called Rivonia trial of 1963-1964, Mandela was charged along with other ANC members with "recruiting persons for training in sabotage and guerrilla warfare for the purpose of violent revolution; conspiring to aid foreign military units when they invaded the Republic, thus fostering the aims of communism; [and] soliciting funds for these purposes from Algeria, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Tunisia and elsewhere" (Benson, 1986, p. 138). He was given a life sentence and sent to Robben Island off the coast of Cape Town.

During his internment on Robben Island, Mandela and fellow ANC member Walter Sisulu interacted with political activist Neville Alexander, who was imprisoned there from 1964-1974 for conspiracy to commit sabotage, and were fascinated with his Ethiopian origins. Alexander's maternal grandmother, Bisho Jarja, was part of a group of slaves, most of them children, of the Oromo ethnic group who were freed by a British warship in 1888 while in route to be sold in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Bisho was subsequently transported to South Africa where she was trained at a Protestant missionary school in the eastern Cape province to be a teacher and later married a minister. Alexander became an educator and an important proponent of multilingualism (Shell, 2011).

Two years before Mandela's trip to Ethiopia, in June 1960, at the second Conference of Independent African States in Addis Ababa, a resolution was adopted calling on all continental countries to: 1) sever diplomatic relations with South Africa or refrain from establishing them; 2) close their ports to its vessels and prohibit their ships from entering its ports; 3) refuse landing and overflight privileges to its aircraft; and 4) boycott all its goods. Ethiopia abided by these prohibitions. It also

spoke out strongly at regional forums against continued colonial rule in southern Africa as well as in opposition to South Africa's policy of apartheid. The Conference of Independent States meeting also discussed how to deal the situation of South Africa's moves to control Namibia (then known as South West Africa).

As Ethiopia and Liberia were former members of the League of Nations, the organization that awarded South Africa a mandate over South West Africa, a former German colony, in 1920 to administer that territory and assist in its political and economic development, those two independent African countries brought the issue of South Africa's continued administration of South West Africa to the International Court of Justice in 1960 following the Conference of Independent States meeting. Ethiopia and Liberia were especially concerned with South Africa's introduction of apartheid there and its perceived attempt to annex the territory (Kaela, 1996, p. 40). However, in July 1966, the International Court of Justice dismissed the case brought by Ethiopia and Liberia on a "technical point of law." South Africa was "not responsible to individual members of the League," but rather to the League and its related administrative bodies (Kaela, 1996, p. 49). The League ceased to exist in 1940!

Therefore, the following month, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) launched guerrilla warfare against the South Africans in that territory and in September 1966, Ghana introduced Resolution 2145 sponsored by 52 states in Africa and Asia to the U.N. General Assembly, which passed the following month. It stated that the people of South West Africa "have the inalienable right to self-determination, freedom and independence in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations," because of South Africa's actions in that territory the mandate was terminated and henceforth would be "under the direct responsibility of the United Nations" (World Legal Information Institute, 1966). In addition, it established an Ad Hoc Committee of 14 U.N. members to deal with issues related to the

implementation of the resolution. Those appointed included four countries in Africa: Ethiopia, Egypt, Nigeria and Senegal; The U.S., Canada and the Soviet Union also served on the Committee, but Britain and France refused to do so (Kaele, 1996, p. 194). In January 1970, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 276 declaring South Africa's mandate in South West Africa "illegal" and sought the opinion of the International Court of Justice, which in June 1971 agreed with that organization's decision (Kaele, 1996, pp. 73-75). While South Africa continued its occupation of South West Africa, the U.S. Britain and France continued to oppose sanctions against Pretoria, while favoring conducting ongoing negotiations together with Canada and West Germany (which joined the U.N. in 1973). Those five countries were known as the Contact Group. Cuba's subsequent involvement in the Angolan civil war from 1975-1991 – in support of the Marxist MPLA government in Luanda – as well as South Africa's from 1975-1976 and again from 1980-1987 – in support of U.S.-backed UNITA forces fighting the MPLA and against SWAPO, which used that country as a base for military operations in South West Africa, would complicate matters.

Meanwhile, Emperor Haile Selassie made his position very clear that all African countries were entitled to independence and that South Africa's apartheid must be eradicated. Speaking at the opening of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in May 1963, he stated the following:

> Today, we name as our first great task the final liberating of those Africans still dominated by foreign exploitation and control…. Our liberty is meaningless unless all African are free. Our brothers in the Rhodesias, in Mozambique, in Angola, in South Africa cry out in anguish for our support and assistance. We must align and identify ourselves in all aspects of their struggle. It would be a betrayal were we to pay only lip service to the cause of their liberation and fail to back our words with actions (African Union, n.d., p. 8).

And as for South Africa specifically, he said this:

> Our political and economic liberty will be devoid of meaning for so long as the degrading spectacle of South Africa's apartheid continues to haunt our

Some of the founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity founded by 32 countries and established in Addis Adaba, Ethiopia on May 25, 1963 (Photo Credit: African Union Lib)

waking hours and to trouble our sleep. We must redouble our efforts to banish this evil from our land, If we use the means available to us, South Africa's apartheid, just as colonialism, will shortly remain only as a memory. If we pool our resources and use them well, this specter will be banished forever (African Union, n.d., pp. 11-12).

In Addis Ababa in January 1972, speaking to members of United Nations Security Council, in their first meeting in Africa to discuss the situation in the southern part of the continent, Haile Selassie again made known his views, while expressing frustration that southern Africa was still under colonialism and that the racist policy of apartheid continued in South Africa:

> [T]he entire world has joined Africa in condemning and rejecting the inhuman practices of colonialism and racism in southern Africa. What is called for at this critical time is for the international community to move from mere rejection and condemnation to taking action. The international community has many options, but has been lacking so far is political will (United Nations, 1972, p. 2).

Indeed, it took a revolution in Portugal in 1974 to bring an end to colonialism in Angola and Mozambique the following year. However, while also in 1974 South Africa's membership in the U.N. General Assembly was suspended, it was not until the mid-1980s that the U.S., the European Community and the Commonwealth imposed economic sanctions on South Africa (Levy, 1999, p. 6).

From the Establishment of the Derg in Ethiopia to the Present

In September 1974, Haile Selassie was overthrown by the military, whose leadership was known as the Derg, which subsequently adopted a Marxist ideology as by 1977 Mengistu Haile Mariam became its undisputed leader. Meanwhile, South Africa continued to obstruct the efforts of the U.N. regarding South West Africa. Ethiopia along with its allies in the Soviet bloc accused the Contact Group of "assisting South Africa in its defiance against the UN out of their concern to safeguard their investments and to exploit the natural resources of Namibia" (Kaele, 1996, p. 98). By 1984, South Africa was reportedly spending US$1 billion a year on fighting SWAPO with more than 100,000 of its troops stationed in South West Africa as South Africa did not want that group to come to power

there (Kaela, 1996, p. 114); that was something the South Africans eventually had to concede when elections for Namibia's parliament was conducted in November 1989, three months before that country finally achieved its independence.

During Mengistu's regime, which lasted until May 1991 when the Marxist leader fled into exile in Zimbabwe, a commander of a division in the Ethiopian army, General Kassaye Chemeda, claims to have trained thousands South African, Zimbabwean and Namibian fighters in mechanized warfare (Tessema, 2017). In March 1990, Mandela made a 24-hour surprise visit to Ethiopia just one month after he was released from prison, where he addressed the Organization of African Unity and met with Ethiopian President Mengistu. It was speculated that he also met with 700 fighters of the ANC's military wing ("Mandela Makes Surprise Trip to Ethiopia," 1990). At the time, Mengistu was making promises about backing away from Marxist policies and facing a losing war against the forces of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – whose leader Meles Zenawi would become president of Ethiopia upon victory and later prime minister in 1995 when a parliamentary system was adopted – and the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front – which would achieve independence for Eritrea in 1993.

Meanwhile, in 1984, President Siad Barre of Somalia, who had launched a war against Ethiopia from July 1977-March 1978 to wrest control of the Somali-populated Ogaden province, according to a Somali-American journalist, reportedly made secret pact with apartheid South Africa for economic and military assistance signed by the latter country's Foreign Minister Pik Botha in Mogadishu. In return for South African Airways being granted overflights of Somalia's territory and landing rights at its airports as well as allowing South Africa's armed forces use of port facilities at Mogadishu and Kismayu, Somalia received US$20 million in economic aid and military equipment captured in Angola (Essa, n.d.). Siad Barre fled first to Kenya and shortly after to Nigeria in May 1991, while Somaliland, following a ten-year war against the central government, declared its independence.

Ethiopia and South Africa established diplomatic relations in August 1994, three months after Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as president of South Africa, and the first South African ambassador presented his credentials in February of the following year (South African Embassy in Addis Ababa, 2024). Ethiopia did not open its embassy in

South Africa until June 1996. Iqbal Jhazbhay, who would later become South Africa's ambassador to Eritrea from 2012-2016, noted in 2007 that

> Nowhere else in Africa is South Africa's determination to 'walk the talk' on its vision for an African Renaissance more evident than in Ethiopia…. Hotel records in Ethiopia reveal that South Africa sends more delegations to African Union than any other member state…. Under increasing international and domestic pressure, Meles [who continued in office as prime minister until his death in 2012] has been driven closer to South Africa as the pivotal continental power and the country most willing to provide capacity-building assistance at the public sector level (Adebajo, Adedeji and Landsberg, 2007, p. 289).

In January 2007, the University of South Africa (UNISA) established the Ethiopia Regional Learning Center in Addis Ababa "to assist the Ethiopian government in human capacity development in the sphere of education." It focuses on online post-graduate education through workshops, seminars and consultations and as of June 2021 graduated 862 students, 43% with doctorates and 41% with Master's degrees (UNISA, 2024).

In 2008, Ethiopia and South Africa established a Joint Ministerial Commission to oversee the implementation of bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding in such fields as trade and investment, science and innovation, health, education, culture and tourism. It has met four times over the years with the last meeting in July 2023. Yet like many other countries in Africa much of their trade is with countries outside the continent or with neighboring states. In 2022, Ethiopia's five top export markets were: 1) the United Arab Emirates

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(17.1%); 2) the U.S. (13.2%); 3) Germany (6.47%); 4) Saudi Arabia (6.33%); and 5) Somalia (6.25%), while South Africa was a mere 0.51%. As for Ethiopia's top five import markets, China was first (24%), followed by the United States (9.11%), India (8.17%), the United Arab Emirates (6.27%) and Britain (4.4%) (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2022a). In 2022, South Africa's top five export markets were: 1) China (15.9%); 2) the U.S. (7.4%); 3) Germany (6.77%); 4) India (6.22%); and 5) Japan (6.02%). As for South Africa's top five import markets, China was first (20.8%), followed by Germany (8.57%), India (7.38%), the U.S. (5.42%) and Saudi Arabia (3.99%) (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2022b). Perhaps Ethiopia's recent membership in BRICS will assist in increasing trade with South Africa. As for banking, Ethiopia has held a "strong grip on its financial sector which is dominated by the state-owned Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. In October 2015, South Africa's Standard Bank, joined the European Union's European Investment Bank, Germany's Commerzbank, Ecobank (based in Togo), Export-Import Bank of India, the National Bank of Egypt and Morocco's Bank of Africa with an office in Addis Ababa ("South Africa's Standard Bank Opens Office in Ethiopia," 2015).

Ethiopian Airlines, which has an extensive route network not only in Africa but also worldwide, flies to both Johannesburg and Cape Town. South African Airways codeshares with Ethiopian Airlines as both are Star Alliance members. Aside from tourism and business travel between the two countries, since the end of apartheid in South Africa, Ethiopians have been migrating overland to South Africa, 95% through irregular channels primarily through smuggling networks, seeking to avoid conflict and/or a better economic life. It was estimated in 2017 that there were 120,000 Ethiopian migrants in South Africa (Adugna, 2021). Most work in the informal economy as they have not sought asylum or been granted legal status, while some have developed successful businesses. Members of the community have faced violence from either smugglers, criminal elements and other people who regard them as a threat to their economic situations as well as fines from local councils (Netshikulwe, Nyomnjoh and Garba, 2022, pp. 80-81).

In November 2022, Pretoria, South Africa was the site of a signing of a peace agreement mediated by the African Union that ended the two-year war between the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front that began after Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed suspended the Tigray region's federal funding. Eritrea

A general view showing the headquarters of the African Union (AU) building in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa in January 2017 (Photo Credits: Tiksa Negeri/Reuters)

did not sign this agreement even though they had fought in support of the Ethiopian government against the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) (Harter, 2022). There was a border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1998-2000 when the EPRDF government in Addis Ababa was led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who was also chairman of the TPLF, and part of the disputed territory involved Tigray. South Africa and other countries, including Kenya and Tanzania, contributed military personnel to the U.N.'s Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea to monitor the border between the two African states until 2008, when Eritrea discontinued its cooperation with that group (UNMEE, 2009). Just three months after taking office as prime minister in July 2018, Abiy Ahmed signed a peace agreement in Asmara with Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerki accepting the boundary established by the independent Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission in 2002 (Underwood, 2018).

In March 2024, Ethiopia reached an agreement to recognize the breakaway state of Somaliland in return for port facilities on the Red Sea, having been denied direct access to that body of water with the independence of Eritrea. While many South Africans are sympathetic to Somaliland's argument that it is a special case for independence just like Eritrea and South Sudan, the government of South Africa will not recognize that state

unless the African Union decides to do so as well as was the case with the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in 1984 (Adebajo, Adedeji and Landsberg, 2007, p. 291). Meanwhile, while Somalia is not as important to South Africa as is Ethiopia, it does not want to see a conflict develop between those two countries that might bring in the participation of other states with interests in the Horn.

Conclusion

Ethiopia and South Africa are two very important African countries in terms of political and economic power that only established formal diplomatic relations in 1994, yet their history of interactions both in a direct and indirect manner between political agents and/or citizens of the two countries took place well before then. Minority-ruled South Africa and Ethiopia were founding members of the League of Nations, an organization that was unable and/or unwilling to protect Ethiopia from Italian invasion in 1935. A politically divided South Africa joined the British war effort in 1939 and two years later participated in the liberation of Ethiopia attempting to introduce the color bar there and gaining the disgust of Emperor Haile Selassie. Following the Second World War, both Ethiopia and South Africa became founding members of the United Nations, while the latter continued to rule over South West Africa (Namibia). Racial relations only got

worse in South Africa with the introduction of apartheid in 1948, yet both that country and Ethiopia participated in the Korean War to ingratiate themselves with the U.S. by demonstrating their loyalty to the West. Ethiopia sought security commitments, while South Africa attempted to fend off criticism of its racial policies.

During the 1950s, Ethiopia began a process of shifting its major attention from the Middle East to the rest of the continent of Africa. In 1963, Haile Selassie headquartered the Organization of African Unity in his capital and continued to give both moral and material support to the struggle for independence in southern Africa and for the end of apartheid in South Africa, a process that took longer than Haile Selassie expected in part due to

the reluctance of Western countries to impose economic sanctions on South Africa. The end of the Cold War facilitated the demise of minority-rule in South Africa and Nelson Mandela launched South Africa on a path of exercising important political and economic influence on the African continent. By then, Ethiopia had previously rid itself of a Marxist dictatorship and was eager to cooperate with South Africa on issues involving the continent and in projects that benefit itself such as the establishment of the University of South Africa campus in Addis Ababa. More recently, South Africa's support providing Ethiopia with membership in BRICS enables Abiy Ahmed to deal with issues that affect the Global South in a different forum and to insulate himself from previous criticism from the West of military actions taken in the war in Tigray.

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