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**U.S. and Soviet foreign aid during the Cold War:  
A case study of Ethiopia**  
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# U.S. and Soviet Foreign Aid during the Cold War – A Case Study of Ethiopia

TOBIAS BROICH<sup>a,\*</sup>

## Abstract

This study provides a historical perspective of Ethiopia's position in the international aid game at the Horn of Africa during the Cold War era (1945-1991). The main conclusions of this study are threefold. First, the countries of Ethiopia and Somalia became classic examples of pawns in Cold War politics. The two superpowers, the United States of America (USA) and the Soviet Union, switched sides to support countries to which they had been previously furnishing assistance at the apex of the Cold War. Second, recipient governments are able to use international development assistance as a tool to implement as much of their policy agenda as possible. Both the Imperial Government of Ethiopia (1941-1974) and the Ethiopian communist government (1974-1990) aimed at maximising external financial resources while minimising the amount of loss of sovereignty over the policy agenda. Third, the 1984-86 famine in the Horn of Africa region convincingly highlights the moral dilemma that the international donor community faced when assisting non-democratic recipient states. Ethiopia's history has provided two valuable lessons for the successive Ethiopian Government during the post-Cold War era: (i) the extent to which a lack of economic development and widespread death caused by famine contributed to the demise of both Ethiopian governments during the Cold War era; (ii) the extent to which large financial and military dependence of both the imperial government and the communist government on one major ally (USA and Soviet Union, respectively) during the Cold War played a decisive part in the overthrow of both governments.

**Key words:** Ethiopia • Foreign Aid • United States • Soviet Union • Cold War

**Discipline:** Political Science • Political and Economic History • International Relations

**JEL Classification Numbers:** F35 • F50 • N47 • O55

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*Ethiopia is our closest friend in Africa.*

Henry Kissinger, United States National Security Advisor, 1969

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a historical perspective of Ethiopia's position in the international aid game<sup>1</sup> during the Cold War era. Using Ethiopia as an in-depth case study, this paper discusses the historical interrelationships between the international donor community and the two successive Ethiopian recipient governments led by Haile Selassie (1941-1974) and Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974-1991).

The country of Ethiopia is used as a case study since a rigorous analysis of the evolution of the foreign aid game can probably nowhere be better applied than in Ethiopia for the following reasons. Foreign aid has played a major role in Ethiopia's development efforts since the end of the Second World War (WWII) (McVety, 2012; Metaferia, 2009; Zewde, 1991). With regard to its foreign policy, both the Imperial Government of Ethiopia under Haile Selassie and the Marxist government under Mengistu Haile Mariam have been considered classic examples of Metternichean realpolitik, "resolutely identifying their state interests and pursuing them" (De Waal, 2004, p. 182). In historical terms, Ethiopia's foreign policy was primarily rooted in "Westphalian principles with its emphasis on the security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ethiopian state" (Tadesse, 2015, p. 334) which has often been exemplified in the Ethiopian government's aid negotiation process with the international donor community.

Ethiopia is ranked as one of the most aid dependent countries in the world during the Cold War period and is still one of the poorest nations in the world. As this case study will show, the Ethiopian government under Haile Selassie became completely dependent on the goodwill of the USA, while the Marxist government under Mengistu Haile Mariam became completely dependent on the fortunes of the Soviet Union. Between 1954 and 1974, the United States of America (USA) became Ethiopia's most important source of foreign finance, and Ethiopia, in turn, was considered the major strategic partner for the USA in the Horn of Africa (McVety, 2012). In the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union joined the foreign aid game in a global contest for power and influence at the Horn of Africa (Lefebvre, 1991;

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<sup>1</sup> Unless specified otherwise, I will use the terms foreign aid and development assistance interchangeably.

Patman, 1990). Somalia became the first Sub-Saharan African country to sign a friendship and cooperation treaty with the Soviet Union. In 1978, the two superpowers suddenly switched sides. After the overthrow of the imperial government under Selassie, the Derg regime under Mengistu Haile Mariam was to rule the country until 1991. Ethiopia, a traditional American ally, turned Marxist and the Soviet Union became Ethiopia's main source of foreign finance. Ethiopia's neighbouring country, Somalia, a traditional Soviet ally, turned to the USA and U.S.-Somali relationships strengthened during the 1980s (Lefebvre, 1991; Patman, 1990; Westad, 2005; Yordanov, 2016).

There are three major conclusions that we can draw from this historical case study of Ethiopia in the Cold War era. First, the fact that the two superpowers switched sides at the apex of the Cold War in the Horn of Africa clearly demonstrates how the countries of Ethiopia and Somalia became classic examples of pawns in Cold War politics. The Horn of Africa has been considered one of the most strategic locations for the international donor community. Foreign aid did not primarily serve humanitarian and developmental ends, but to a very large extent strategic ends.

Second, this case study demonstrates how recipient governments can use international development assistance as a tool to implement as much of their policy agenda as possible. The notion that governments receiving foreign aid are passive subjects is flawed. In fact, both successive Ethiopian regimes have been just as active as players in the aid game as the donor countries during the Cold War. Both the imperial and the Marxist government aimed at maximising external financial resources while minimising the amount of loss of sovereignty over their policy agenda.

Third, the 1984-86 famine of biblical proportions in the Horn of Africa, one of the most food-insecure regions in the world, convincingly highlights the moral dilemma that the international donor community faced when assisting non-democratic recipient states. Attributing the 1984 famine mainly to the long drought between July and September 1983, crop failure and the slow response by the international donor community omits the crucial social and political context in which the famine took place (De Waal, 1991; Gill, 1986; Kaplan, 2003; Kissi, 2000, 2005). The massive mobilisation of humanitarian intervention and relief assistance during and in the immediate aftermath of the 1984-86 famine also

contributed, though unintentionally, to the prolonged life of the communist government under Mengistu.

Ethiopia's history provided valuable lessons for the transitional government of Ethiopia that assumed office in 1991.<sup>2</sup> The lack of economic development as well as widespread death caused by famine contributed to the demise of the two previous Ethiopian governments during the Cold War era. Additionally, the large financial and military dependence of both the imperial government and the Marxist government on one major ally (USA and Soviet Union, respectively) also played an important role in the overthrow of both Haile Selassie and Mengistu Haile Mariam. In both periods, the demise of the Ethiopian government can partly be attributed to the instability of aid flows and aid fatigue. As a result, economic growth and poverty reduction would have to become a major pillar of the transitional government's domestic policy agenda. Securing multiple sources of foreign finance through taking a much more pragmatic stance towards the international donor and investor community would have to become a major pillar of the transitional government's foreign policy agenda.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 briefly provides background information on Ethiopia. Section 3 examines the evolution of the aid game under Selassie's imperial government and Mengistu's Marxist government. Section 4 provides a discussion on the findings. Section 5 concludes.

## **2. COUNTRY BACKGROUND**

Ethiopia is a landlocked country located in the Horn of Africa, one of the most food-insecure and conflict ridden regions in the world. The country is bordered by Eritrea to the north, Djibouti and Somalia to the east, Sudan and South Sudan to the west, and Kenya to the south (Map 1). Home to a population of more than 100 million, Ethiopia is not only the second-most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria, but also the most populous landlocked country in the world. The Ethiopian territory covers a total area of 1,100,000 square kilometres (420,000 square miles). Its capital and largest city is Addis Ababa.

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<sup>2</sup> After the overthrow of the Mengistu regime in 1991, a transitional government ruled the country until 1995. Meles Zenawi was the president of the transitional government and Tamrat Layne acted as the prime minister. Between May and June 1995, Ethiopia held a general election and a new constitution became effective on 21 August 1995, thereby ending the transition period.

Today, Ethiopia is divided into nine administrative regions called *kililoch* (singular – *kilil*) and two special city administrations. The two city administrations are Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. The division of the nine administrative zones is ethnicity based. The nine administrative regional states are (i) Afar, (ii) Amhara, (iii) Benishangul-Gumuz, (iv) Gambela, (v) Harari, (vi) Oromia, (vii) Somali, (viii) Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNP) and (ix) Tigray. The *kililoch* are subdivided in 68 zones. The zones, considered the second-level administrative division of Ethiopia, are subdivided in more than 600 *woredas*, the third-level administrative division. The *woredas*, in turn, are composed of a number of *kebele*, the fourth-level administrative division and smallest unit of local government. A *kebele* is a neighbourhood or a localised and delimited group of people. The Ethiopian third level districts are governed by a *woreda* council.

**Map 1: Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa**



Originally called Abyssinia, Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent country and one of the most ancient states in the world (together with Egypt, Persia or China). The country is often considered as the cradle of mankind and civilisation (Marcus, 2002; Milkias, 2011). Ethiopia has a long history of centralised rule and can therefore be considered a prime example of high political centralisation in precolonial times.<sup>3</sup> Located in the Tigray region in northern

<sup>3</sup> The importance of precolonial centralization for contemporary bureaucratic quality and economic development has been empirically documented by several scholars (Broich, Szirmai, & Thomsson, 2015;

Ethiopia, the Kingdom of Axum (or Aksum) became the first Ethiopian empire. Under King Ezana, around the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Axum became the first state in Africa to adopt (Orthodox) Christianity as its official faith. The Semitic language Geez (Ge'ez) – or Ethiopic – served as first official language in the kingdom of Axum.<sup>4</sup> The kingdom of Axum thrived from approximately AD 100-940. During that time, Axum was regarded as one of the most powerful civilisations in the world, comparable to the Persian and Roman Empires (Munro-Hay, 1991).

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the first Muslims arrived in Ethiopia as immigrants from Mecca. The faster spreading of Islam in the eastern part of the Horn of Africa, particularly among the Somali and Harari, can be attributed to the strong anti-Muslim sentiment by the northern, mostly Christian, people of Abyssinia, including Amhara, Tigray and north western Oromia (Braukämper, 2003). Just before the collapse of the Axumite Empire, both Muslim Ethiopian and Arab merchants monopolised trade in the Horn of Africa region, with trade activities spanning from Suez and Cairo in Egypt to Aden and Jeddah on the Arabian Peninsula and from Damascus to Baghdad and even Persia (Abir, 1980).

With the decline of Axum, the country witnessed a large population migration. The part of the population that stayed in the North developed Tigre and Tigrigna (or Tigrinya) languages from Geez.<sup>5</sup> Those who moved to the south developed Amharic and Guragigna languages from Geez. The Aksumite imperial tradition of conquest, however, remained and Christian expansion continued under the Zagwe dynasty (1137-1270). The most well-known ruler of the Zagwe dynasty was King Gebre Meskel Lalibela who ruled the country from the early 1180s onwards and was declared a saint by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church after his death.<sup>6</sup> Between 750 and 1270, the Axumite Empire gradually transformed into Abyssinia, a Christian empire covering most of the Ethiopian highlands. Yekumlo Amlak, a descendant of the Axum rulers, put an end to the Zagwe dynasty and reigned between 1270 and 1285.

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Gennaioli & Rainer, 2007; Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2013, 2014, 2015; Osafo-Kwaako & Robinson, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> The contemporary literature and liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church are still written in Geez.

<sup>5</sup> The language of Tigre should not be confused with the Ethiopian province of Tigre (Tigray), where Tigrinya is spoken. Ethiopia's neighbouring country Eritrea, in turn, is home to Tigrinya-speaking, predominantly Christian (Coptic Orthodox) highlanders and Tigre-speaking, predominantly Muslim, lowlanders.

<sup>6</sup> During his reign, Lalibela ruled from the town of Roha (now known as Lalibela in his honour). Lalibela is located in the Wollo (Welo) region of northern Ethiopia. It was King Lalibela who is credited with the excavation of the eleven medieval rock-hewn churches, a high place of Ethiopian Christianity and a place of pilgrimage and devotion until the present day.



Yekumlo Amlak restored the Solomonic dynasty by declaring to be a lineal descent of Menelik I. The Zagwe dynasty was therefore succeeded by the establishment of the Solomonic dynasty. Ecclesiastical writings and religious practices flourished – especially under the Abyssinian King Zara Yaqob (1434-68) – and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church gained more wealth and political power (Milkias, 2011).

In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese gained a strong economic and military foothold in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese, led by Afonso de Paiva and Pedro da Covilhão, had arrived in the mainly Christian country of Ethiopia during the 1480s. Around the same time, the Ethiopian empire was threatened by two outside parties. The first major threat was the Ottoman Turks which rivalled the Portuguese empire for control of the Red Sea (Shinn & Ofcansky, 2013; Taddesse, 1972). The second group that threatened the existence of the Ethiopian empire was the Muslim sultanate of Adal to the east of Ethiopia.

The Adal Sultanate was ruled by Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (also known as Ahmad Grāñ) since 1527. In 1529, Gran's 'Conquest of Ethiopia' (Futuh al-Habasha) heralded the start of the Abyssinian-Adal war (Abir, 1980). Together with the help of the Ottoman troops, the Somali and Afari armies led by Ahmad Grāñ invaded Ethiopia. Then Ethiopian ruler Lebna Dengel (or Dawit II) turned to the Portuguese Empire to ask for military support. A small expeditionary force led by the son of Vasco da Gama, Cristóvão da Gama, came to help the Ethiopian emperor. Dawit II was killed in a battle near Debre Damo in 1540 and Galawdewos (or Asnaf Sagad I) became Dawit II's successor.

After Dawit II's death, most of the Ottoman military forces were withdrawn by Ahmad Grāñ. Meanwhile, the Portuguese forces rearmed themselves and rallied a significant amount of Ethiopian troops. Two years later, the Portuguese and Ethiopian troops defeated the remaining Ottoman troops. Ahmad Grāñ was killed in the battle of Wayne Data near Lake Tana in 1543 (Abir, 1980). After the death of Ahmad Grāñ, the Ottoman army fled from the Ethiopian highlands and north-central Ethiopia therefore remained Christian.<sup>7</sup> The Portuguese Jesuit missionaries aimed at establishing a local Catholic culture in Ethiopia continued their involvement until the early 1630s (Shinn & Ofcansky, 2013; Taddesse, 1972).

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<sup>7</sup> Several historians and political scientists attribute the origins of hostility between contemporary Ethiopia and Somalia to the Abyssinian-Adal war (see, among others, Laitin & Samatar, 1987).

The Oromo emerged as the main beneficiaries of the war. The war resulted in the weakening of the Abyssinian and Adalite regions: their original territory in the Rift Valley expanded to land areas laid waste by the war. Islam grew during the north-eastern expansion of the Oromo people (Hassen, 1990). During the large Oromo migrations in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, several Oromo communities underwent political centralisation and adopted Islam as their main religion (Braukämper, 2003). After the reigns of Menas (or Admas Sagad I, 1559-1563), Sarsa Dengel (or Malak Sagad I, 1563-1597), Yaqob I (or Malak Sagad II, 1597-1606), and Susenyos I (or Malak Sagad III, 1606-1632), Susenyos' son Fasilides (or Alam Sagad) came to rule the empire. His reign heralded the start of the Gondarine period (1635-1855).

Fasilides restored the union of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and founded the city of Gondar, north of Lake Tana, in an attempt to reunite the Church and state. In 1634, all Jesuits priests and Europeans were expelled from Ethiopia by Fasilides (Zwartjes, 2011). After Axum and Lalibela, Gondar became the third permanent capital of Ethiopia in 1636 and remained so until 1855. By 1855, Ethiopia's state regressed into feudal, regional compartments. Between the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and 1855, political power became largely decentralised and Ethiopia was de facto no longer a unified state (Keller, 1995).

The foundations of the modern Ethiopian state can be traced back to the Emperors Tewodros II (1855-1868), Yohannes IV (1872-1889), Menelik II (1889-1913) and Haile Selassie (1941-1974). Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the main inhabitants of the Abyssinian heartland were Orthodox Christians who would speak either Amharic or Tigrinya languages (Milkias, 2011). Fearing that the territorial expansion of Islam could undermine Christian control of Ethiopia, Tewodros took a strong anti-Islam stance. By emphasising Christian identity and suppressing regional autonomy, Tewodros set out to restore and to reunify the Ethiopian kingdom but he was frequently undermined by disloyal leaders. The capital was moved from Gondar to Debre Tabor, and later to Magdala under his rule.

Tewodros' successors Yohannes of Tigray and Menelik of Shewa continued Tewodros' reunification policy. Yohannes was mostly engaged during his rule in military struggles in northern Ethiopia against Ottoman Egypt and Sudan. Menelik expanded the Abyssinian heartland at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by conquering western, southern and eastern provinces of contemporary Ethiopia. Those areas were inhabited mainly by the Oromo,

Sidama, Gurage and Wolayta (Marcus, 1975). At the same time, the empire absorbed Muslim minorities in Arsi, Bale, Eritrea, Harar and Sidamo under his rule. Menelik, himself Amharic, promoted the Amharic language and idealised Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity while other languages, cultures and religions were suppressed. Founded in 1887 at the site of a hot springs, the town of Addis Ababa became Ethiopia's capital under Menelik's rule in 1889. Menelik II died in 1913.

Since Menelik had no surviving sons, Menelik's grand-son Lil Iyasu became the designated Emperor of Ethiopia. Lil Iyasu's father was Ras Mikael who was the Governor of Wollo at that time and a close friend and advisor of Menelik. Ras Mikael was a Muslim and was forced to convert to Christianity in 1875 under Yohannes IV (Marcus, 1975; Metaferia, 2009). Since the Council of State and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church were suspicious of Lil Iyasu's alleged Muslim sympathies, Lil Iyasu was never crowned Emperor of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church deposed Iyasu and made Menelik's oldest daughter Zewditu (baptised as Askala Maryam) the head of state in 1916. Empress Zewditu became the first female head of state of a modern African country and the last monarch directly descended in the line from the Solomonic dynasty.

After Zewditu's death in 1930, Haile Selassie became Emperor of Ethiopia on 2 November 1930. Born in 1892 and a member of the Amhara ethnic group, Ras Tafari – as he was known before his coronation as Emperor – was crowned *Negusa Nagast*, literally King of Kings. Upon his accession, he took as his regnal name Haile Selassie I (Asserate, 2014, 2015; Murrell, Spencer, & McFarlane, 1998; Zewde, 1991).<sup>8</sup> Seven years earlier, the regent Ras Tafari had already signed up Ethiopia to be the first African country to join the League of Nations, the forefather of the United Nations, promoting and defending African interest in the global political arena.

Besides Liberia, Ethiopia was the only African country to resist colonisation. Italy's first attempt to colonise Ethiopia happened in 1896 but the Italians were defeated by Menelik

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<sup>8</sup> Haile means "Power of" in Ge'ez and Selassie means "trinity". Therefore, Haile Selassie roughly translates to "Power of the Trinity". Haile Selassie's full title in office was "By the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, King of Kings of Ethiopia, Elect of God". Selassie claimed to be the 225th direct line descendant of Menelik I (first Solomonic Emperor of Ethiopia ruling around 950 BC), who was credited with being the child of King Solomon of ancient Israel and the Queen of Sheba. For more information see Murrell, Spencer & McFarlane (1998) and Asserate (2014, 2015).

and his 100,000-man army at the Battle of Adwa in northern Ethiopia on 1 March, 1896. Thanks to Menelik's strategic skills on the battlefield, an African army had defeated a European army and it became "the founding event in the history of modern Ethiopia" (Jonas, 2011, p. 1).

Under Haile Selassie's rule Ethiopia, for a second time, resisted Italian colonisation when most of Africa was conquered by European powers. During the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in October 1935, the Italian army under Mussolini invaded the northern part of Ethiopia and, by early 1936, had overrun large areas of Ethiopia (Mockler, 2003; Pearce, 2014). Italian forces captured Addis Ababa on 5 May 1936. Despite Selassie's appeal to the League of Nations in June 1936 to stop Italy's aggression, the Ethiopian government had little support from Western democracies, especially Great Britain and France, in its fight against the Italian occupation until the outbreak of WWII (Mockler, 2003; Pearce, 2014). Together with the royal family, Selassie went into exile to Fairfield House in Newbridge, Bath, Great Britain between 1936 and 1941. Meanwhile, the Italian King Victor Emmanuel III was declared Emperor of Ethiopia. When Mussolini entered WWII by joining Adolf Hitler as his Axis ally on 10 June 1940, Haile Selassie eventually secured British support.

In January 1941, the Patriots Movement, an indigenous resistance movement, coupled with British military assistance defeated Mussolini's army and eventually liberated Ethiopia (Berhe, 2003; Zewde, 1991). On 5 May 1941, Haile Selassie, alongside an army of Ethiopian Free Forces, returned to Addis Ababa, exactly five years to the day when the Italian occupation started. In January 1942, the British government officially reinstated Haile Selassie as Emperor of Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup> Ethiopia's resistance to European colonisation has become a symbol of African independence throughout the colonial period.

The end of the Italian occupation in 1941 heralded the start of a British decade in Ethiopia:

"The tripartite competition among Britain, France and Italy for control of Ethiopia in the pre-1935 period was replaced by unilateral British domination. (...) The British came to assume extensive control over Ethiopia's finance, administration and territorial integrity (...). [The British Military Mission to Ethiopia (BMME) was]

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony Mockler's (2003) book "Haile Selassie's War" describes in compelling detail the Second Italo-Ethiopian War between October 1935 and May 1936. In his meticulously researched work "Prevail: The Inspiring Story of Ethiopia's Victory over Mussolini's Invasion, 1935-1941", Jeff Pearce (2014) shows how Ethiopia successfully resisted Italy's invasion between 1935-1941, eventually prevailing against Mussolini's forces against all odds.

entrusted with the task of assisting the Ethiopian government in the ‘organization, training and administration of the Ethiopian army.’ (Zewde, 1991, p. 179-180)

In the early period of his reign, Haile Selassie launched a first wave of modernisation efforts, such as the abolition of slavery, the launch of the printing press, the establishment of modern hospitals, electrical grids and foreign language schools in major cities, the initiation of the National Bank of Ethiopia, the introduction of telephone and wireless services throughout the country, the introduction of cars, motorcycles, trucks, bicycles and airplanes, the creation of a sophisticated road network linking major cities, the introduction of Ethiopian embassies and consulates abroad, the formation of cabinet ministries based on the European example and the inauguration of Ethiopia's first modern Constitution (Zewde, 1991).

The fact that contemporary Ethiopian society can be considered one of the most ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse African societies is a direct result of the territorial expansion under Emperor Menelik II (Milkias, 2011). According to the Ethiopian national 2007 census, the country contains over 80 different ethnic groups. The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia representing 34.4 percent of the total population, followed by the Amhara (Amara) with 27 percent, the Somali (Somalie) with 6.2 percent and the Tigray (Tigrinya) with 6.1 percent. Approximately 90 languages are spoken in Ethiopia. The majority speaks Afro-asiatic languages of the Cushitic or Semitic branches. Both the Oromo language and the Somali language can be grouped into the Cushitic branch. The Amharic and Tigrinya languages can be classified as Semitic languages. Those four languages are spoken by almost three quarters of Ethiopia’s population.

Religion plays an important role in Ethiopian society. Christianity and Islam are the most widely practiced religions in Ethiopia. According to the 2007 national census, Ethiopia is home to over 60 million Christian adherents (around 60 percent) and 25 million Muslim adherents (around 34 percent). According to estimates by the U.S. Department of State (US-DOS), however, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Muslims are thought to make up 40-45 percent and 45 percent of the Ethiopian population, respectively (US-DOS, 2009).

“Ethiopia is located on a religious fault line. This diversity can be a source of stability or instability. Over the past 100 years Ethiopia’s complex mélange of religious communities has generally lived side by side in harmony. (...) No one

knows with certainty the percentage of Christians and Muslims living in Ethiopia. It is likely, however, that power and stability. Ethiopia (tied with Morocco) now has the eleventh-highest number of Muslims in the world; it has more Muslims than Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Iraq, or Afghanistan. Ethiopia is no longer a 'Christian nation' (..) Although the leadership continues to be largely Christian, Ethiopia now officially recognizes both Christian and Muslim holy days." (Shinn, 2005, p. 96-97)

Ethiopia consistently ranks among the poorest countries on the planet. The country's history is filled with terrible famines, most notably the ones in 1973-74 and 1984-86. Many scholars consistently refer to Ethiopia as one of the most aid dependent nations not only in Africa but in the world. Visiting Mekelle in northern Ethiopia in the year 2006, Australian journalist Peter Greste noted that "like a patient addicted to pain killers, Ethiopia seems hooked on aid. For most of the past three decades, it has survived on millions of tons of donated food and millions of dollars in cash. It has received more emergency support than any other African nation in that time."<sup>10</sup>

### **3. FOREIGN AID GAME IN ETHIOPIA DURING THE COLD WAR**

Development aid can be regarded as a phenomenon of the post-WWII era. After the end of WWII, the USA became increasingly aware of the strategic importance of the Middle East in geopolitics (McVety, 2012). With the increasingly hostile rivalry between the USA and the Soviet Union during the Cold War period, the two superpowers considered foreign aid and military assistance as valuable tools to prevent recipient countries from switching political ideology.

#### **3.1. Foreign Aid under Haile Selassie**

During the post-WWII era, some of the ways in which Haile Selassie sought to promote the modernisation of his country was through the opening of Ethiopia's first university; a new Ethiopian Constitution that extended the power of the parliament; increased public goods provision such as new hospitals and physical infrastructure expansion and strengthened diplomatic ties with the rest of the world, particularly with the USA (Asserate, 2014, 2015; Clapham, 1969; Metaferia, 2009).

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<sup>10</sup> The entire news article can be found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4671690.stm>

The British influence in Ethiopia significantly declined during the immediate aftermath of WWII and gave rise to Ethiopia's close partnership with the USA. Concomitant with the increasing U.S. predominance in global politics during the post-WWII period, U.S. political, economic, military and humanitarian involvement in Africa steadily increased from the early 1950s onwards. Three major factors led to America's increasing strategic interests in Ethiopia: (i) the withdrawal of the BMME in Ethiopia in the late 1950s forced the Ethiopian government to look for a new partner in terms of military assistance; (ii) the Egyptian revolution in 1952 forced the U.S. to establish new political relationships in the Middle East and the Red Sea; (iii) the start of the Cold War era forced the USA to search for allies against the spread of communism. According to Connell (2005), "Ethiopia provided an entry point for influence over emergent African states and a base for pursuing strategic interests in the region. It was the first African state to which the United States turned" (p. 66). Consequently, the British decade in the 1940s was replaced by the American era in the 1950s and 1960s.

The U.S.-Ethiopian diplomatic relationships intensified under the Eisenhower administration (1953-1961). Haile Selassie made his first royal state visit to the USA on 26 May 1954 (Metaferia, 2009).<sup>11</sup> Zewde (1991) notes that "the initiative for closer contacts came from the Ethiopian side, (...) the emperor sought the Americans as counterweight [against the British]" (p. 184). U.S. political and economic involvement in Africa by that time was almost non-existent:

"In 1954, most Americans knew little about the dark continent. (...) The dominant colors of maps of Africa were the colonial-designating pinks for Great Britain and blues for France. Even the U.S. State Department deferred responsibility and blame for events in Africa, and especially in sub-Saharan Africa, to the colonial empires that had scrambled to claim lands there in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and still tenaciously held on to their possessions in the face of increasingly strengthening independence movements." (Vestal, 2011, p. 6)

Following the onset of the Cold War, Haile Selassie became a key ally in the U.S. fight against communism, as exemplified by (i) Ethiopian voting alignment with the U.S. in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) against Eastern bloc policy interests and (ii) the

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<sup>11</sup> The last visit of an African head of state to the United States dated back to 1944 when Theodore Roosevelt welcomed then Liberian President Edwin Barclay (Asserate, 2014, 2015).

provision of thousands of troops – known as Kagnew<sup>12</sup> Battalions – as part of the American-led United Nations force in the Korean War between June 1951 and April 1954 (Vestal, 2011). Fearing that Ethiopia could become a major target for Soviet influence, the USA started to provide foreign aid to Ethiopia from the early 1950s onwards.

“As early as 1955, American officials perceived famine in Ethiopia as providing the seedbed for a communist revolution and a compelling reason for Ethiopia to take peasant agriculture seriously. For its part, the United States promoted agricultural development rather than military security as the dominant goal of its relations with Ethiopia.” (Kissi, 2000, p. 114)

On 15 May 1992, Ethiopia signed a Four Point Technical aid agreement under Selassie’s imperial regime. Ethiopia became one of the first developing nations to receive foreign aid from the USA (McVety, 2012; Metaferia, 2009).<sup>13</sup> The Point IV agreement mainly consisted of agricultural and public health education, scholarships, public administration and locust control. The Point IV programme became

“one of the most conspicuous manifestations of the American presence in Ethiopia in the 1950s and 1960s (...) [F]or the Ethiopian government, [however,] the value of the United States was not so much in such issues of development as in the diplomatic leverage that the USA could exercise on the British, and in the military assistance likely to be offered.” (Zewde, 1991, p. 184)

The late 1950s marked both the end of the colonial period in Africa and the rise of national independence movements. In 1957, nationalist (and communist-leaning) Kwame Nkrumah became Ghana’s first prime minister and president. One year later, on its independence, the outspoken Marxist Sekou Touré became Guinea’s first president. Both the Soviet Union and China started to offer foreign aid, technical aid in particular, to several African countries such as Ghana and Guinea (Erich & Sonne, 1963). Haile Selassie recognised that he could increase his leverage by playing off the USA against the Soviet Union. In 1959, Selassie visited the Eastern bloc coming back with \$100 million in credits. The emperor made clear that he would not use the credits if Western aid would increase. In 1960, with Somalia’s independence approaching– a country that would be a prime target for Communist

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<sup>12</sup> The name "Kagnew" derives from the name of the warhorse of Ras Makonnen, Menelik II's General and the father of Haile Selassie, at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 during the First Italo-Ethiopian War.

<sup>13</sup> The Point IV Program became the first U.S. plan for international economic development.



infiltration – the U.S. government responded immediately by providing more development assistance to Ethiopia (Marcus, 2002).

The creation of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Kennedy administration in November 1961 heralded the start of the “decade of development”. USAID brought together several existing foreign assistance organisations and programmes. While the African continent received “the highest per capita assistance of any region – around \$6 per person throughout the 1960s, USAID funding for the continent amounted to less than 10 percent of total grants and loans of the global aid budget. Loans were limited to those nations who showed the most promise for development, with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, which were ‘in a ‘special relationship’ category” (McVety, 2012, p. 182-183).

The USAID programme carried out in Ethiopia during the 1950s and 1960s had its largest impact in three particular spheres: (i) connection and communication, (ii) education, and (iii) military assistance. The USAID programme promoted, among others, Ethio-American connection and communication. One major programme was the restoration of the road network.<sup>14</sup> In January 1951, the U.S. government founded the Imperial Highway Authority (IHA). The American-dominated International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) provided the loans and oversaw the activities of the IHA. The U.S. government also launched a contractual agreement between the Ethiopian government and the U.S. multinational International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) organisation to repair telephone lines destroyed during the Ethiopian Liberation movement against Italy. In 1952, the Imperial Board of Telecommunications was established under the recommendation of the ITT and IBRD. The board was run by Swedish authorities until the first Ethiopian general manager was appointed in 1966 (Zewde, 1991).

The establishment of an educational system along American lines<sup>15</sup> and the provision of U.S. scholarships for Ethiopian students by U.S. agencies such as USAID, Point IV, the African-American Institute and the African Graduate Fellowship Program (AFGRAD) were a

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<sup>14</sup> The formerly sophisticated road network built by the Italians was severely damaged – almost completely destroyed – during the Ethiopian Liberation struggle against Italy.

<sup>15</sup> The exception were the few elite schools that still resembled the British and French educational environment (see Zewde, 1991).

second pillar of U.S. development assistance to the Ethiopian government (Asserate, 2014, 2015; Metaferia, 2009; Vestal, 2011; Zewde, 1991).<sup>16</sup> The USA became a major destination for Ethiopian students striving for higher education. While 71 Ethiopian students were recorded at U.S. universities in 1950, the number rose to more than 10,000 by 1973 (Zewde, 1991).

USAID assistance for Ethiopia during the 1960s was not only driven by economic development concerns but also increasingly by military concerns, partly due to Haile Selassie's frequent neglect of food shortages in his country and his focus on military and security issues in U.S.-Ethiopian relations.

“U.S.-Ethiopian relations in the area of famine relief from 1950 to early 1970 resembled the epic drama of two nations debating the basis of a relationship and focusing on two alternative issues: agricultural development to produce food for the Ethiopian people and weapons to provide military security for the Ethiopian government. American policy-makers saw agricultural development to prevent famine in a peasant society as providing the only legitimate outcome of this debate.” (Kissi, 2000, p. 131)

The 1958 famine in Tigray that left more than 100,000 people dead and the 1966 famine in the Amhara region forced the U.S. administration to strengthen its pressure on the Selassie regime for agrarian reform.<sup>17</sup> Haile Selassie, however, frequently denied the existence of extreme food shortages and strongly resisted U.S. relief aid. Due to Haile Selassie's skilful manoeuvring in diplomatic talks with the U.S. administration where he frequently highlighted military assistance as a main priority for Ethiopian state security, military assistance became the third major sector of U.S. foreign finance to Ethiopia.

Already in 1953, Addis Ababa and Washington signed two important military agreements: (i) the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement under which the U.S. administration promised to provide military equipment and training for the Selassie regime, and (ii) an agreement that formally granted the U.S. administration the exclusive right to the Kagnew Communication station near Asmara in Eritrea (Lefebvre, 1991; Metaferia, 2009). Kagnew Station originally

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<sup>16</sup> Ethiopian schools and universities like the Business School and Law School at Haile Selassie I University [now Addis Ababa University (AAU)], Alemaya Agricultural College in Harar, College of Public Health in Gondar, as well as Jimma and Ambo agricultural high schools hired American professors, and were equipped with textbook and other school material that was used at U.S. universities and colleges (see Metaferia, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the 1958 and 1966 famines in Ethiopia, see Zewde (1991) and Kissi (2000).

served as an Italian naval radio station, Radio Marina, during WWII. In 1942, the U.S. took over the radio station. After the Italian defeat in Eritrea in 1941 by the British army, Eritrea was under British administration until 1950. Between the WWII period and 1950, there was little agreement amongst the Western powers whether Eritrea should become independent or become part of Ethiopia's federalisation (Welde Giorgis, 2014; Wrong, 2005).<sup>18</sup> The U.S. government showed little interest for Eritrea's quest to become independent. U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, argued in a Security Council debate:

“From the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country has to be linked with our ally, Ethiopia.” (cited in Kaplan, 2003, p. 56)

Based on the UN General Assembly Resolution 390 A(V) in 1950, the UN chose the golden rule: it federated Eritrea with Ethiopia as “an autonomous unit (...) under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown” from September 1951 onwards. Haile Selassie, however, never respected the UN autonomy agreement as he viewed Eritrea as an integral part of Ethiopian territory. Selassie's stance towards Eritrea triggered the start of a thirty-year long war between the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Ethiopian government from 1961 onwards. In 1962, Eritrea was forcibly annexed by the Ethiopian government, becoming the fourteenth province of Ethiopia (Welde Giorgis, 2014; Wrong, 2005; Zewde, 1991).<sup>19</sup>

During the 1950s, the U.S. government developed the radio station in Asmara into a crucial military communication and intelligence-gathering complex<sup>20</sup> through a deal with Haile Selassie that was viewed as mutually beneficial:

“In return for continued use of the communications base in Asmara, (...) the United States undertook to launch a military aid programme. A unit called the

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<sup>18</sup> Michaela Wrong's (2005) book “I Didn't Do It for You: How the World Betrayed a Small African Nation” and Andebrhan Welde Giorgis' (2014) publication “Eritrea at a Crossroads: A Narrative of Triumph, Betrayal and Hope” are convincing accounts on how the fate of the Eritrean people has frequently been determined by external players, such as the Ethiopian governments under Selassie and Mengistu, Western powers (in particular Italy, Great Britain and the USA) as well as the United Nations.

<sup>19</sup> Ethiopia's annexation and the imposition of direct rule over Eritrea took place with the acquiescence of the international community and the United Nations, thereby abrogating the 1950 United Nations Resolution 390 that granted Eritrea a semi-autonomous status.

<sup>20</sup> The U.S. base was named “Kagnew” station in 1953 to pay tribute to the first Ethiopian Kagnew Battalion that aided the United States in the Korean War. Kagnew Station was primarily supplied by ships from the Eritrean port of Massawa at the Red Sea and by planes from the U.S. Airbase in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia (Connell, 2005; Kaplan, 2003; Welde Giorgis, 2014; Wrong, 2005; Zewde, 1991).

Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was set up to train three divisions, each of 60,000 men, at a cost of 5 million US dollars.” (Zewde, 1991, p. 185-186)

“Between 1953 and 1960, U.S. military advisors built black Africa’s first modern army, with three divisions of 6,000 men each, equipped largely with surplus weapons and equipment from World War II and the Korean War.” (Connell, 2005, p. 67)

Meanwhile, in 1960, Ethiopia’s neighbouring country Somalia became independent. Somalia’s national flag posed a challenge to the Ethiopian national state. One of the five pointed stars on the Somali flag represented the Somali-inhabited Ogaden region in Ethiopia. All efforts by the Ethiopian government to calm down Somali nationalism in the Ogaden region were unsuccessful. As the Cold War heated up, the Soviet Union joined the USA in the struggle for power and influence in the Horn of Africa. In late 1963, the Soviet Union signed a military assistance pact with Somalia and delivered weapons and other technical equipment worth \$30 million to the Somali army (Lefebvre, 1991; Marcus, 2002).<sup>21</sup> The USA offered \$18 million worth of aid plus a letter indicating that Somalia would benefit from being loyal to the West. Somalia, however, declined the offer.

In early 1964, the First Ogaden War between Ethiopia and Somalia broke out. The Ethiopian government was backed by the USA and the Somalis were defeated very quickly with Mogadishu negotiating a cease-fire effective on 6 March 1964 (Lefebvre, 1998). By 1970, almost two-thirds of U.S. total military aid to Africa was allocated to the Selassie regime. Between 1946 and 1972, Washington’s military assistance to Ethiopia amounted to more than \$180 million. More than 2,500 Ethiopians received different forms of military training in the USA between 1953 and 1968 (Connell, 2005; Zewde, 1991).

Under Selassie, formal economic and political diplomatic relationships between Ethiopia and *China* were not established until 24 November 1970. Emperor Haile Selassie made his first visit to China in October 1971 after China’s Prime Minister Zhou Enlai had visited Ethiopia seven years earlier. Despite the fact that the two countries signed two economic and trade cooperation agreements in the early 1970s (Sino-Ethiopian Agreement for Economic and Technological Cooperation in 1971 and Sino-Ethiopian Trade Agreement in 1973), Sino-Ethiopian relations were still in a stagnant state around that time (Adem, 2012; AFRODAD, 2011).

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<sup>21</sup> The two major aims of the Soviet Union were the expansion of the Somali Army from 4,000 to 200,00 soldiers and the development of a Somali air force (Lefebvre, 1991).

While Ethiopia's interest in Asia beyond the Middle East strengthened from the 1920s onwards, it was not China but Japan that captured Selassie's attention during his imperial rule. The reasons were historical and economic. First, similar to Ethiopia in 1896, Japan was victorious against a major European power in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Like Ethiopia, Japan had a long-reigning dynastic monarchy and was considered the oldest imperial dynasty in the world. Second, Selassie viewed Japan as an example for Ethiopia's economic modernisation. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan's economy was rapidly transformed from a feudal society into a global industrial powerhouse. In 1956, Emperor Selassie became the first African head of state to visit post-war Japan (Adem, 2013).

Between 1950 and 1958, Selassie supported Taiwan in the United Nations, partly because of historical reasons. During the Italian fascist occupation (1936-1941), Selassie's regime received public support from Taiwan. Even though Ethiopia supported China in the United Nations from 1960 onwards, Beijing struggled to overcome Ethiopia's close ties with Taiwan and the USA as well as Selassie's strong anti-communist stance (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). Sino-Ethiopian relationships only improved from the early 1970s onwards, when U.S.-Chinese relations entered an era of rapprochement.<sup>22</sup>

The American era in the 1950s and 1960s goes hand in hand with Haile Selassie's consolidation of absolutism:

“The power of the state reached a limit unprecedented in Ethiopian history. This was clearly manifested in such spheres as provincial administration, military organization and fiscal control. A ruling class based on landed property, but with interests in industry and trade as well, exercised this power. The architect and physical embodiment of the absolutist order was the Emperor (...) As years progressed, the emperor tended to detach himself from domestic issues altogether, and to devote his attention to foreign affairs. He was possibly the most widely travelled head of state in the world. His globe-trotting knew no ideological or geographical boundaries (...) As he pursued international fame and prestige, the emperor became oblivious to the signs of trouble at home.” (Zewde, 1991, p. 201-203)

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<sup>22</sup> The era of rapprochement (1970-1979) between the U.S. government and the Chinese government was initiated by then U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's visit to China in mid-1971, followed by U.S. President Nixon's visit to China in February 1972.

Despite an accelerated reform process in the 1960s, the privileges of landlords largely remained and public dissent grew as exemplified by the tax rebellions in Bale in 1964 and in Gojjam in 1968 (Brietzke, 1976; Chege, 1979; Mengisteab, 1990).<sup>23</sup>

Several factors initiated the decline of Haile Selassie's regime. One major factor was the rise of a political opposition due to Ethiopia's economic backwardness, in which the agrarian question played a fundamental role (Chege, 1979; Gilkes, 1975). Despite Selassie's modernisation attempts, the country remained one of the poorest countries in the world. Development failures such as the inability to provide more schools, classrooms and teachers but also to improve education opportunities in the countryside and in non-Amhara regions demoralised both the urban elites and peasants in rural areas (Levine, 1961; Marcus, 2002). The increasing opposition against the Emperor, however, mainly stemmed from urban movements as the rural population was largely disengaged from the political process (Chege, 1979; Clapham, 1988).

The coup d'état staged on 13 December 1960 by the Neway brothers seriously jeopardised Selassie's power (Clapham, 1969).<sup>24</sup> The coup was crushed, however, and the Selassie's government regained control of the capital four days later. At the same time, the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) that emerged primarily from the urban areas, particularly in Addis Ababa, drove the revolution forward. Ethiopian students demanded a free press, labour unions, a land reform and, later, a socialist societal change along Marxist-Leninist principles. Western principles and influence became increasingly associated with "imperialism" and "neo-colonisation" (Asserate, 2014, 2015).

"The preponderance of Americans in almost all aspects of Ethiopian life bred resentment, especially among the students, who viewed the whole situation as being

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<sup>23</sup> The accelerated reform process under the Selassie regime included fiscal and administrative reforms such as the Tax Proclamation of 1961, the establishment of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU) in 1962, the establishment of the Investment Decree in 1963, the Investment Proclamation in 1966, as well as the Agricultural Income Tax Proclamation of 1967 (Mascagni, 2016; Zewde, 1991, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> During the coup, Selassie was on a state visit to Brazil but immediately returned to Ethiopia after he heard the news of the staged coup. The two main conspirators in this coup were two brothers, Mangestu and Germane Neway. Mangestu Neway was a member of the patriotic Black Lion Organization while his brother Germane was an intellectual who received both his BA and MA at U.S. universities (Wisconsin University and Columbia University, respectively). The conspirators launched the coup mainly due to their frustration over Ethiopia's economic backwardness while many newly independent African states witnessed rapid economic growth (Clapham, 1969; Zewde, 1991).

within the global framework of American imperialism. Anti-Americanism grew particularly strong in the late 1960s and early 1970s.” (Zewde, 1991, p. 189)

Ironically, many of the members of the ESM enjoyed their education through U.S. teachers in Ethiopia, Peace Corps Volunteers in Ethiopia or U.S. universities. One part of the ESM was even organised by Ethiopian student activity abroad through the Ethiopian Students Union in North America, the successor of the Ethiopian Students Association in North America, and the Ethiopian Students Union in Europe. Their distance from the Imperial Government of Ethiopia and better access to uncensored revolutionary literature gave them a comparative advantage vis-à-vis local Ethiopian students in their efforts to overthrow the government (Asserate, 2014, 2015; Zewde, 1991). Peasant rebellions were also part of a nationwide resentment against Haile Selassie’s rule but the rural protest took place at a lower scale and received less attention compared to the urban protest movement.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia’s economy seriously deteriorated. One major feature of Haile Selassie’s misguided economic policies was the rapid privatisation of land ownership without instituting a meaningful land reform. Land privatisation mainly benefitted political supporters at the expense of the general farming population. Selassie’s land policy created a feudal landholding regime that (i) put a heavy fiscal burden on the rural population, (ii) sharply divided rural society into landlords and tenants and (iii) ultimately hindered agricultural development (Gilkes, 1975; Keller, 1989).

By the early 1970s, between 50 and 60 percent of all private rural holdings fell under the category of land tenancy. Out of 5 million hectares of land allocated after 1941, landless and unemployed people only received a few thousand (Zewde, 1991). The strong political support from the landlord class for Haile Selassie’s imperial government successfully thwarted a land reform that would relieve pressure on the peasants. The negative consequences of Selassie’s land privatisation combined with natural disasters such as droughts made the rural population vulnerable to famine.

A related factor that led to the demise of Haile Selassie’s rule was the deterioration of Ethiopia’s economy concomitant with the Ethiopian Famine of 1973-4. With the sudden and unexpected closure of the Suez Canal at the beginning of the Six Day War in 1967 prices of both imported goods from abroad and Ethiopian exports rose. Government revenues

from tariffs and import duties shrank. The economy managed to rebound in 1972 thanks to high international commodity prices and a successful harvest (Marcus, 2002). Ethiopian government statistics demonstrate that Ethiopia's food production in 1972 was about normal (Table 1 and 2). The Wollo region was the only exception.

**Table 1:** Crop production in 1972 by region, relative to previous average production

Province	Provincial sub-districts (%) reporting production			
	Above average	Average	Below average	Poor
Arsi	5	70	15	10
Bale	82	9	9	0
Begemder/Gonder	6	84	2	8
Eritrea	4	78	9	9
Gamo Gofa	6	82	12	0
Gojam	14	82	4	0
Hararghe	22	39	30	9
Ilubador	22	64	14	0
Kaffa	33	45	22	0
Shoa	17	54	21	8
Sidamo	22	78	0	0
Tigray	6	84	2	8
Welega	0	86	14	0
Wollo	0	10	38	52
<b>All provinces</b>	14	65	14	7

*Note:* Until 1995, the Hararghe region was a large province in Eastern Ethiopia, with its capital in Harar. After the adoption of the new constitution in 1995, the region was divided between the Afar, Harari, Oromia, and Somali Regions.

*Source:* Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture (1973).

**Table 2:** Total production of various crops in 1972, relative to previous average production

Crop	Provincial sub-districts (%) reporting production		
	Above average	Average	Below average
Sorghum	16	51	33
Teff	18	57	25
Barley	21	64	15
Wheat	18	60	22
Maize	17	55	28
<b>All crops</b>	14	65	21

*Source:* Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture (1973).

The oil crisis in 1973, spurred by the Yom Kippur War, once again put serious strains on the Ethiopian economy. The oil crisis pushed food prices to unaffordable levels for many people. Estimates by Gilkes (1975) suggest that prices increased by 20 percent in 1973, and during the first quarter of 1974 alone, the price rise was equivalent to an annual rate of 80



percent. Rising food prices and a severe drought in 1973-74 in the overpopulated and overfarmed northern regions of Shewa, Wollo and Tigray led to the death of more than 200,000 Ethiopians by 1974. At the same time, around 2.5 million people, 8 percent of Ethiopia's population, experienced starvation (Gebre-Medhin & Vahlquist, 1976; Koehn, 1979; Shepherd, 1975). The two northern provinces most seriously afflicted by the famine, Tigray and Wollo, had supplied almost 40 percent of Ethiopia's total food crops before the drought (Holt & Seaman, 1976; Shepherd, 1975).

While the traditional analysis of famines concentrates on food supply, some scholars believe that supply-side factors such as long-term climatic changes or unusual failure of rains were not the main causes for the 1973 famine (Kaplan, 2003; Miller & Holt, 1974; Sen, 1981). Sen (1981) believes that the famine occurred not primarily due to a lack of food, but due to inequalities built into mechanisms for distributing food, namely the inability of peasants in rural areas to cushion financially the worst effects of natural disasters.<sup>25</sup> In the same vein, Miller and Holt (1974) argue that "people died in Ethiopia not because of an extreme shortage of food, i.e. famine, but because of an extreme shortage of money, i.e. poverty" (p. 170). Those scholars suggest that the 1973 famine must therefore be considered a political and social rather than a natural phenomenon.

As mentioned earlier, the 1973-74 famine mainly took place in the north, namely in the Tigray and Wollo regions.<sup>26</sup> Northern Ethiopia was a region that

"the Amhara emperor had a strategic interest in keeping underdeveloped, on account of Amhara historical conflicts with the Eritreans and Tigreans. A feudal landowning system, an absence of investment, crippling taxation, and drought were the causes of the famine." (Kaplan, 2003, p. 20)

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<sup>25</sup> Amartya Sen is famous for his assertion that famines do not appear in modern democracies. According to his 'Democracy prevents famine' hypothesis, political processes and institutions play a substantial role in the prevention of famine (Sen, 1999). Sen argues that 'no famine has ever taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy'. Since political leaders in democracies feel accountable to their citizenry, they cannot ignore the plight of their population.

<sup>26</sup> The Tigray province was also affected by the drought but the famine was less severe there compared to the Wollo province largely due to different modes of land tenure: While most farmers were tenants in the Wollo region, most farmers in the Tigray province were owners of their land (Lundström, 1976). In the middle-altitude areas of northern and central Wollo, "the enforcement of crippling tenancy contracts in time of shortage had the effect of taking food from the hungry. Thus, during 1973, the famine area exported grain to the provincial capital, Dessie, and to Addis Ababa" (De Waal, 1991, p. 60).

During 1972 and 1973, between 40,000 and 80,000 Ethiopians died in the Wollo region alone (Seaman & Holt, 1975). Meanwhile, at the height of the famine in 1973, the Ethiopian government exported more than 200,000 tons of grain – the highest export surplus since 1967. Until mid-1973, Haile Selassie denied the existence of a famine in his country.

“Evidence indicates that the Government was aware of the severity of the drought by mid-1973; yet, it would only accept outside assistance that was discreetly provided. Prospective donors such as the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef), and the United States Agency for International Development (U.S.A.I.D.) were approached privately and successfully convinced to begin shipping limited food aid quietly without publicly commenting about the seriousness of the problem.” (Keller, 1992, p. 611)

In November 1973, Haile Selassie visited the Tigray and Wollo regions but “his attitude was that peasants always starve and nothing can be done, and that in any case it was not the Shewan Amhara who were dying” (De Waal, 1991, p. 61).

The 1973 famine was one of the first famines that attracted significant media attention throughout the world despite numerous attempts by the Ethiopian government to suppress the news of a famine (Koehn, 1979).<sup>27</sup> The media reports and pictures from the famine-stricken northern regions triggered a huge international relief operation. By late 1974, more than 40 Ethiopian and foreign aid agencies were operating in Ethiopia to give food and shelter to the Wollo and Tigray rural population (Gebre-Medhin & Vahlquist, 1976). Much of the overseas aid, however, was not effective in saving people’s life as it arrived too late. 20 percent of the human population and 90 percent of the animal population in the Wollo province died as a result of the 1973 famine, while 80 percent of the crop was lost (Keller, 1989). The famine and the inappropriate government response to it were the precipitating factors in the deposition of Haile Selassie and the termination of monarchical rule (Kapuściński, 1978; Koehn, 1979).

Another factor for the demise of the imperial government was the declining support from the USA. Under President Richard Nixon (1969-1974), the USA followed a policy of disengagement from Ethiopia for three main reasons. First, following Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat’s pro-Western shift in Egyptian foreign policy, the U.S. government

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<sup>27</sup> On 18 October 1973, a presentation on British TV by Jonathan Dimpleby called “The Unknown Famine” documented the local circumstances surrounding the famine, exposing to the world the seriousness of the famine.

increasingly viewed Ethiopia as a less strategically valuable partner – vis-à-vis Egypt – in the Middle East (Zewde, 1991). Second, advances in technology and satellite communication made the Kagnew Station obsolete. U.S. operations at the Kagnew Station were significantly reduced in August 1973 and the Kagnew Station was eventually closed down by April 1977. Third, the U.S. government became increasingly aware of Haile Selassie’s misguided economic and social policies and, as a result, it started to question the sustainability of the generous U.S. welfare programme for the Ethiopian government.

“Between 1950 and 1970, the United States used its famine aid as a lever to induce social and economic reforms it believed were desirable for political stability in Ethiopia. The IEG [Imperial Ethiopian Government] viewed those reforms as inimical to its political survival. Instead it placed the demands of state security above those of peasant survival.” (Kissi, 2000, p. 131)

By the early 1970s, U.S.-Ethiopian relationships deteriorated gradually and Haile Selassie’s regime began to lose its most important ally: “the emperor no longer held the trump card, and a new era of U.S.-Ethiopian relations would begin” (Vestal, 2011, p. 183).

Members of the Crown Council of Ethiopia – the constitutional body which advised the reigning Emperor of Ethiopia – were well aware that Selassie plunged the country into political and economic chaos. However, most of the members of the Crown Council of Ethiopia, as well as the Ethiopian Prime Minister Tsehafi Taezaz Aklilu Habte-Wold and army commander Leul Ras Aserate Kassa, were unwilling to challenge Haile Selassie. The fact that their solidarity with the emperor stood above everything else must be considered a true testimony to unwavering loyalty.

On 12 September 1974, a Marxist group known as the Derg<sup>28</sup>, led by Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, staged a coup d’état against Emperor Haile Selassie. Haile Selassie was taken away in a baby blue Volkswagen beetle from the Jubilee Palace and imprisoned, together with the rest of the imperial family.<sup>29</sup> On 23 December 1974, what came to be known as “Bloody Saturday”, Mengistu orchestrated the massacre of 60 former high officials of the imperial government without trial. Haile Selassie spent the last few months of his life imprisoned in

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<sup>28</sup> The word “Derg” means ‘committee’ in Amharic.

<sup>29</sup> Sudanese President Gaffar al-Nimeiry offered asylum to the Emperor since he considered Haile Selassie not only as the legitimate Ethiopian leader but also the leader of the whole of Africa (Metaferia, 2009). Anecdotal evidence suggests that al-Nimeiry had Ethiopian friends and that his mother was originally from northwestern Ethiopia (Wagaw, 1993).

the Grand Palace. It is believed that the 82-year-old Emperor was suffocated with an ether-doused pillow and was buried under a bathroom floor in one of his palaces (Asserate, 2014, 2015).<sup>30</sup> The military-led regime under Mengistu was to rule the country from 1974 onwards putting an end to the Solomonic dynasty.

While the period under Haile Selassie's rule can be regarded as a period of peace and national unity, the inherent flaws of Selassie's project of centralised imperial state formation became increasingly obvious in the 1960s.

“There is no doubt that Haile Selassie wants to go down in history as the builder of modern Ethiopia. Indeed, some of the most radical Ethiopians assert that he does not lack good intentions. The tragedy is that he has been kept from realizing his progressive ideals by characteristics traditionally connected with the Ethiopian monarchy. Consistent with the traditional attitude that delegation of authority deprives the ruler of some measure of dignity, he has insisted on retaining the powers of an absolute despot.” (Levine, 1961, p. 11)

“His appeal to divine right with an intense personal grasp of power, in much the same way as symbols and controls are combined in the emperorship itself. Highly personalised control is the essence of his style. He stands at the head of a hierarchically ordered government, with comparatively weak horizontal communications, and acts so as to hold its diverse threads as closely as possible in his own hands.” (Clapham, 1969, p. 115)

Almost fifty years later, Haile Selassie's rule can be described as a period of

“repressive feudalism, built on injustice and inequality, when government was dedicated to the service of a single man, and opportunities to secure peaceful reform were spurned. [Selassie's] project of imperial centralization destroyed any mechanisms through which political power could be linked to changing social forces in a highly diverse country” (Clapham, 2015, p. 206).

In terms of economic development, Selassie's economic results were mixed at best. In his attempt to modernise his country, Selassie heavily emphasised the development of the industrial sector and commercialised agriculture mostly for purposes of import substitution.

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<sup>30</sup> For a detailed account of Haile Selassie's life, consult Asfa-Wossen Asserate's (2014, 2015) “King of Kings: The Triumph and Tragedy of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia”. Asserate, a German-Ethiopian historian and great nephew of Haile Selassie, provides a fair-minded, insightful, and nuanced portrayal of Haile Selassie using his own experiences and arduous research in family and public archives. His account is a riposte to Ryszard Kapuściński's (1978) “The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat”, a grotesque and schizophrenic portrayal of Haile Selassie.

While Selassie was eager to attract foreign capital for the promotion of Ethiopia’s manufacturing industry, manufacturing only accounted for a meagre 5 percent of GDP in 1975 (Keller, 1989). Table 3 shows the evolution of economic development in Ethiopia from 1950 until the end of the Selassie regime, using data from the Penn World Tables version 8.1 (PWT8.1) and the Maddison Historical Statistics from the Groningen Growth and Development Centre (GGDC).

**Table 3:** Evolution of GDP (per capita) in Ethiopia, 1950-1974

PWT8.1	1950	1960	1970	1974
<b>Real GDP</b> (in mil. 2005 US\$)	8316.8	13990.5	20219.6	22555.4
<b>Real GDP per capita</b> (in mil. 2005 US\$)	419.5	589.0	698.2	698.5
	1950s	1960s	Early 1970s	1974
PWT8.1				
<b>GDP Growth Rate</b>	4.9	5.0	1.8	0.0
<b>GDP per capita Growth Rate</b>	3.0	3.0	-0.3	-2.4
GGDC				
<b>GDP Growth Rate</b>	3.0	5.2	3.5	1.2
<b>GDP per capita Growth Rate</b>	1.2	3.1	1.2	-1.1

*Note:* The average GDP (per capita) growth rate is shown for the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s (1970-1974).

*Source:* Penn World Tables (PWT) version 8.1 (Feenstra, Inklaar, & Timmer, 2015); Maddison Historical Statistics from the Groningen Growth and Development Centre (GGDC) (Bolt & van Zanden, 2014).

Even though the PWT8.1 and GGDC data on Ethiopia’s economic growth slightly deviate, a few major patterns emerge. Between 1950 and the late 1960s, real GDP and real GDP per capita grew fast. On average, the Ethiopian economy grew by 5 percent in both the 1950s and 1960s. But the figures also show a deterioration of the Ethiopian economy in the early 1970s. Real GDP per capita in 1974 was almost identical to real GDP per capita in 1970. In contrast to the rapid economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, economic growth slowed down in the early 1970s and came to a halt in 1974 according to the PWT data. Both data sources suggest that the GDP per capita growth rate was in fact negative in 1974, the last year of Haile Selassie’s reign.

Table 4 provides the main stylised facts and trends in output and employment at the sectoral level for the both the Ethiopian economy and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) between 1960 and 1975. The manufacturing sector in Ethiopia expanded during that period, albeit less if compared to the Sub-Saharan African manufacturing sector as a whole. The manufacturing

value added share rose from 2 percent in 1960 to 4 percent in 1975. The manufacturing employment share only slightly increased from 1.3 percent to 1.7 percent. At the same time, the agriculture value added in the Ethiopian economy dropped from 81.1 percent in 1960 to 69.5 percent in 1975. The relative employment share in the Ethiopian agricultural sector was reduced by 5.3 percentage points within the same period.

**Table 4:** Sectoral Data on Value Added and Employment in Ethiopia, 1960-1975

	Value added (% of GDP)				Employment (% of population)			
	1961	1965	1970	1975	1961	1965	1970	1975
<b>ETHIOPIA</b>								
<b>Agriculture</b>	81.1	78.6	76.1	69.5	96.2	94.8	92.5	90.9
<b>Industry</b>	7.9	8.1	8.6	10.2	1.5	1.8	2.2	2.1
<b>Manufacturing</b>	2.0	2.3	3.0	4.0	1.3	1.6	1.9	1.7
<b>Services</b>	11.1	13.2	15.3	20.3	2.3	3.4	5.3	7.1
<b>Total economy</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>SSA</b>								
	<b>1960</b>	<b>1965</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1975</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1965</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1975</b>
<b>Agriculture</b>	37.6	34.0	31.7	29.2	72.7	71.2	69.3	66.0
<b>Industry</b>	24.3	25.1	28.3	30.0	14.3	9.8	10.3	13.1
<b>Manufacturing</b>	9.2	10.9	12.6	14.7	4.7	5.2	5.8	8.9
<b>Services</b>	38.1	40.8	39.9	40.7	18.0	19.0	20.4	40.7
<b>Total economy</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Note:* For some countries time series do not start in the 1960s. For these countries the share is taken from the most nearby year (Botswana: 1964; Ethiopia: 1961; Kenya: 1969; Malawi: 1966; Mauritius: 1970; Senegal: 1970; Tanzania: 1961; Zambia: 1965). Figures are unweighted averages across 11 African countries. Numbers may not sum due to rounding.

*Source:* Authors' own calculations using the Africa Sector Database (De Vries, Timmer, & De Vries, 2015).

Despite Washington's provision of economic assistance to Ethiopia worth over \$350 million between 1946 and 1975, the "backwardness and underdevelopment were the hallmarks of the socio-economic order" (Zewde, 1991, p. 200). The little expansion of the industrial sector can mainly be attributed to Ethiopia's infant stage of industrialisation. At the same time, industrialisation was (i) confined to the cities of Addis Ababa, Asmara and Dire Dawa and (ii) mainly dominated by foreign capital.

Even though there exists some weak evidence for a mild structural transformation under the Selassie regime, economic policies did

"little to reform peasant agriculture or to integrate small farmers more fully into the market economy (...) Capitalist classes emerged side-by-side with feudal classes and in some cases overlapped. Inequalities abounded. Traditional relationships were

fractured and Ethiopian society became increasingly exploitative and insecure for the impoverished majority.” (Keller, 1989, p. 127-128)

Haile Selassie’s regime became totally dependent on the goodwill of the USA, both in economic and political spheres (Metaferia, 2009). The USA was Ethiopia’s main trading partner. 40 percent of Ethiopia’s exports went to the USA (predominantly coffee). Between 1966 and 1969, the indebtedness of the Ethiopian government rose from \$Eth. 30,310,000 to \$Eth. 445,189,000 as expenditures diverged considerably from revenues. The Selassie regime had to take on loans from international creditors. According to estimations by Zewde (1991), “some 75 percent of this loan directly or indirectly originated from the USA and underlined Ethiopia’s dependence on that country, a dependence duplicated in military and educational spheres” (p. 201).

Haile Selassie’s rule can be linked with some historical successes. His government resisted Italian fascism, and contributed to the unity and independence of the Ethiopian state. Selassie was a well-respected politician in the international political arena and an important figure in Africa’s decolonisation process. However, Haile Selassie was not capable of mastering the economic and technological challenges that arose in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Zewde (1994), Haile Selassie’s “greatest crime was to rule far too long” (p. 43) and thus losing touch with Ethiopian society (see also Kapuściński, 1978). Mockler’s (2003) conclusion is very similar:

“Haile Selassie ruled too long. In his old age he was challenged, discredited, deposed, calumniated, scorned and – probably – smothered to death. For years it looked as if his reputation had died with him. But thankfully this has proved not to be the case. His reputation now stands higher among Ethiopians than it ever did before.” (p. xi)

The reason why Haile Selassie’s reputation now stands very high among the Ethiopian population is mainly due to the reign that was going to follow from 1974 until 1991.

### **3.2. Foreign Aid under Mengistu Haile Mariam**

Mengistu Haile Mariam’s rule heralded the start of Ethiopia’s socialist era. Mengistu was the most prominent officer of the Derg which was undergoing an intra-party struggle whilst also competing with the communist Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) for full

control. Mengistu's control was thereby limited until he gained full control on 3 February 1977.

The Amhara-dominated Derg regime proclaimed "Yaleminim Dem Ityopia Tikdem" ("Without shedding blood, Ethiopia First") as revolutionary slogan emphasising the move away from an ethnic hegemony of the Shewan Amhara towards a nationalist approach (Chege, 1979; Clapham, 1988). At the regional level, however, the revolutionary slogan never bore fruit due to the lack of a national identity among the rural population (Clapham, 1988; Keller, 1981).

Mengistu's government vision was a self-reliant future based on transforming the country into a Marxist-Leninist state (Pankhurst, 1992). The fact that the country could not avoid the 1974 famine with foreign aid, particularly Western foreign aid, was unacceptable in the eyes of the new regime. The Derg regime believed that the country should not be dependent on aid from foreign countries, particularly capitalist ones. To examine the causes of the 1973 famine and to prevent the occurrence of future famines, the government set up the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC).

"Before the RRC was established, there was no effective mechanism for bringing assistance to bear at times of famine, let alone for raising international alarms. The establishment of the RRC was intended to change this. The centrepiece of its operation would be an early-warning system so that fears about future famines could be given concrete and scientific shape. This would enable donors to respond in time to future emergencies. In the early years of the revolutionary government, the United States and Britain joined UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, in financing the new system." (Gill, 1986, p. 35)

Mengistu established an agrarian socialist regime nationalising most of the country's industry and agriculture between 1974 and 1975 (Brietzke, 1976; Marcus, 2002; Prunier, 2015; Wolde Giorgis, 1989). The Land Reform Proclamation of March 1975 gave all agricultural land to the Ethiopian people, redistributing it to the peasants and prohibiting the sale of land plots (Mengisteab, 1990; Ottaway, 1977).

One of the Derg's major policies was a resettlement programme: the enforced population transfer from the more populated and exhausted lands of the northern regions to the



lowlands of the south and west.<sup>31</sup> Another main trait of Ethiopian socialism was the villagisation of at least seven million people, where the collectivisation of farming under the *Ujamaa* policy in Tanzania served as role model.<sup>32</sup> In July 1975, the Derg regime established *kebeles* in Addis Ababa and several other urban centres. Each *kebele* included, on average, 500 families or between 3500 and 4000 people. While the main purpose of the *kebeles* was the provision of basic health, education and other social services in their neighbourhoods, the Derg also used the *kebele* (together with peasant associations) to control the urban regions and to implement land reform (Ottaway, 1977; Shinn & Ofcansky, 2013; Vaughan, 2015; Wolde Giorgis, 1989). The restructuring of the regional and local government structures was aimed at dismantling feudal privileges enjoyed under Haile Selassie.

Mengistu believed that the “USSR’s [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] revolutionary history of national reconstruction was more in keeping with Ethiopia’s political goals than were the traditions of American capitalism and bourgeois liberalism” (Marcus, 2002, p. 196). While Mengistu’s commitment to scientific socialism alienated the U.S. government, the latter still provided economic development aid and military assistance to prevent Mengistu from switching sides and moving towards the Soviet Union. The outgoing secretary of state during Gerald Ford's presidency (1974-1977), Henry Kissinger,

“tried to keep an iron in the fire by continuing military assistance to Ethiopia, even after the overthrow of Haile Selassie. [...] Kissinger, [...], seemed to realize that if the United States completely forfeited its presence in Ethiopia, rather than hold its nose for the time being at the awful violations of human rights, the eventual result would be not only a strategic gain for the Soviets, but a more drawn out suffering for the people of the region.” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 166)

In the early 1970s, the Soviet Union also gained an even stronger foothold in the Horn of Africa by strengthening further its diplomatic relationships with Somalia. In July 1974,

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<sup>31</sup> The solution was not feasible for several reasons. First, the transporting of people was implemented in a brutal way killing more than 50,000 settlers. Second, northern peasants moved from a malaria-free ecosystem in the north to the malaria-prone lowlands killing them in large numbers. Third, the local people in the lowlands were not willing to accommodate the peasants from the North. Fourth, the amount of money budgeted by the government for the transportation of people was insufficient (Prunier, 2015)

<sup>32</sup> Similarly to the *Ujamaa* village policy in Tanzania (see Ergas, 1980), villagization in Ethiopia failed. Those villages were often considered a dead end for peasants who had been forced to live in them: “they were too far from the outer ring of fields, some markets had become too distant; crop theft became frequent; too many small livestock around the villages themselves led to overgrazing on too small an area, leading in turn to massive killing of animals and later to a dearth of animal production, both milk and meat” (Prunier, 2015, p. 225).

Somalia became the first Sub-Saharan African country to sign a friendship and cooperation treaty with the Soviet Union.

“The Soviet Union was also Somalia’s main source of military assistance, including highly sophisticated weapons, tanks, fighter planes, and bombers. Between 1971 and 1974, the value of Soviet military aid increased tenfold and the number of Soviet military advisors reached 1,400. (...) Over the following three years, Moscow supplied Mogadishu with weapons and military equipment valued at some \$300 million. By 1976, Somalia boasted a 22,000-man army and was the fourth most heavily armed nation in sub-Saharan Africa, surpassed only by Nigeria, Zaire, and Ethiopia. While Cuban technicians trained Somali troops in the use of Soviet armaments, the Soviet Union and East Germany helped bolster Somalia’s National Security Service, which was notorious for arresting and torturing opponents of the Siad Barre regime.” (Schmidt, 2013, p. 149)

With the election of Jimmy Carter as U.S. president in November 1976, Washington became increasingly disenchanted with the Derg regime. On 24 February 1977, the Carter administration upset the Mengistu government by withholding military-aid grants worth \$6 million due to the Derg’s poor human rights record. Carter’s human rights agenda provided the Soviet Union with an entry point (Patman, 1990; Westad, 2005; Yordanov, 2016). In contrast to inherently weak Somalia, Ethiopia was the most powerful state in the region and “probably the most valuable piece of real estate in Africa” (Maren, 1997, p. 35). While Moscow continued to provide military assistance to the Somali government, it also promised Mengistu military assistance based on the condition that he would sever Ethiopia’s ties with the USA (Marcus, 2002). In December 1976, Mengistu signed a military agreement with the Soviet administration in Moscow.

“The real turning point in Moscow’s approach to the region was Mengistu’s coup on 3 February 1977, during which he assassinated most of his remaining rivals within the Derg. Although not informed in advance, the Soviets viewed the coup as a giant step forward in its relations with Ethiopia.” (Westad, 2005, p. 271)

Forthcoming Soviet military assistance also further pushed the Derg to embrace fully a Marxist-Leninist political philosophy (Chege, 1979; Clapham, 1988; Keller, 1981; Markakis & Ayele, 1977). At the same time, the Kremlin supported Mengistu’s Red Terror of 1977-78, a violent political campaign that targeted political opponents such as the Derg faction that allied against him and anyone suspected of being an EPRP member. It is estimated that up

to 500,000 people were killed during Mengistu's "Red Terror" purge including many innocent civilians and children (Andrew & Mitrokhin, 2005; De Waal, 1991).

In April 1977, the military relationship between the USA and Ethiopia came to an end under the era of U.S. President Jimmy Carter. On 30 April 1977, Mengistu abrogated the 1953 Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with the U.S. administration (Yordanov, 2016). Consequently, Washington also stopped providing economic development assistance to Ethiopia. The Carter administration was no longer willing to continue supporting a repressive government perpetrating serious human right abuses with U.S. arms. Similarly, the British Overseas Development Administration stopped its development programmes in Ethiopia by 1979. Consequently, the RRC lost two major providers of funding, even though the "early-warning system has continued to function with considerable efficiency with the assistance of UNICEF" (Gill, 1986, p. 35).

In early May 1977, Mengistu arrived in Moscow for a nine-day official visit where he held talks with Leonid Brezhnev, then General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

"The main result from the visit, (...) was the signing of a joint political document, showing each side's commitment to developing bilateral relations. Both parties also concluded economic, cultural and scientific, and consular agreements, which set the stage for an eventual Soviet-Ethiopian friendship treaty. It appears, the Soviet military had also played a key part in the negotiations, as, reportedly, Mengistu managed to sign a US\$ 504 million arms agreement that was the largest Soviet accord with an African country at that time. This increased the total amount of military aid pledged over the course of six months by the Soviet Union to Ethiopia to US\$ 640 million, more than double the military aid provided to Mogadishu over the past decade." (Yordanov, 2016, p. 168-169)

The Somali Ethiopia Ogaden War (or Second Ogaden War) between July 1977 and March 1978 forced the Soviet Union to choose sides between Ethiopia and Somalia. The war started with a Somali military offensive over the disputed Ogaden region in Ethiopia. Moscow condemned the invasion and broke off ties with Somalia and its President Siad Barre (Schmidt, 2013). As a result of the Soviet build-up in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian army grew from 65,000 to nearly 300,000 troops by the late 1970s therefore becoming the largest army in sub-Saharan Africa. The Mengistu government, formerly equipped with 62 tanks

and 27 jet fighters, received an additional 350 tanks and 70 jet fighters from Moscow (Kaplan, 2003). At the same time, the USSR ceased its support to the Somali government:

“Fuel shipments were cut off; and arms deliveries were squeezed another notch. By mid-September 1977, Mogadishu was only receiving spare parts and some light arms. Delivery of heavy weapons ceased altogether. Nevertheless, Mengistu remained uneasy about what remained of the Soviet-Somali connection. At a press conference on 18 September, the Ethiopian leader floated the idea of fresh American arms supplies and warned Moscow that ‘if socialist countries are still supplying arms to Somalia, then this is not only violating one’s principles, but also tantamount to complicity with the reactionary Mogadishu regime’. This public rebuke had the desired effect. On 18 October 1977, Anatoly Ratanov, the Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia, announced that the USSR had completely stopped supplying arms to Somalia and was now providing Ethiopia with ‘defensive weapons to protect her revolution.’” (Patman, 1990, p. 219)

In November 1977, Moscow provided 18,000 Cuban troops and \$2 billion worth of arms to the Ethiopian government which was eight times larger than the value of all U.S. arms delivered to the country between 1953 and the start of the Second Ogaden War in 1977 (Maren, 1997).<sup>33</sup>

As a result, Somalia broke diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Siad Barre turned to the U.S. administration after the USA ceased its support to Ethiopia. U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance indicated in July 1977 that the U.S. considered delivering military assistance to Somalia (Lefebvre, 1991). The U.S. government, however, reversed itself refusing to provide military and economic assistance for Somalia. The U.S. reversal was partly due to President Carter’s human rights agenda and his critical stance towards Somalia’s violation of Ethiopia’s territorial integrity. It was two years after the Somali National Army (SNA) evacuated the Ogaden and President Siad Biarre promised to respect the boundaries of Somalia’s neighbouring state Ethiopia that the USA started to provide military assistance to the Somali government (Lefebvre, 1991; Westad, 2005).<sup>34</sup> Despite Carter’s human rights agenda, the

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<sup>33</sup> Both Kaplan (2003) and Hanhimäki (2012) estimate the monetary value of Soviet arms delivered to the Ethiopian government to be around \$1 billion ‘only’. Even this lower benchmark estimate is still four times larger than the value of all U.S. arms delivered to Ethiopia between 1953 and the beginning of the Second Ogaden War.

<sup>34</sup> The strategy of both recipient countries to gain significant leverage by convincing both the United States and Soviet Union that they could swing either way has been identified as ‘negotiated extraversion’ (Thomson, 2000). The term ‘negotiated extraversion’ is derived from the concept of ‘state extraversion’ (Bayart, 2000; Clapham, 1996). It describes the tendency of Third World governments to constantly address an external audience rather than mobilising support of domestic constituencies for their political agendas.

U.S. government “ultimately allowed Cold War concerns to govern its policy in Somalia” (Schmidt, 2013, p. 155).

The Soviet support for the Mengistu government during the Second Ogaden War contributed to the “consolidation of Mengistu’s power and that of the Kremlin’s in Ethiopia – an incredible display of Soviet military strength and determination in support of an ally” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 172).

“By 1979, Ethiopia was firmly in the Soviet camp – and the beneficiary of the largest Soviet foreign assistance program since Moscow’s massive transfer of aid, technology, and know-how to China in the 1950s. More than 7,000 technicians and other personnel arrived from Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Bloc countries to help Ethiopia build a revolutionary socialist society.” (Schmidt, 2013, p. 153-154)

China, however, remained politically neutral due to its principal of non-interference in domestic political affairs. Since the Derg regime was a strong ally of the Soviet Union between 1977 and its overthrow in 1991, China’s popularity gradually increased among leftist movements in Ethiopia (Adem, 2012). While China was willing to strengthen its diplomatic relationship with the Mengistu regime, it was not prepared to compete with the Soviet Union in providing military assistance for Ethiopia’s fight against Somalia. Beijing was officially accused by the Derg regime of cooperating with the West and the Somalian government. After this unfounded accusation, Sino-Ethiopian relations deteriorated (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). Beijing’s foreign aid to Ethiopia during the 1970s and 1980s was minimal and came mainly in the form of emergency relief (food aid). The majority of China’s aid was channelled through multilateral donor organisations such as UN agencies (AFRODAD, 2011).

Besides the external war that the Derg regime fought against Somalia, it also faced several domestic challenges such as the fight against Eritrea’s independence movement, and other ethnic minorities that became increasingly hostile towards the Amhara-dominated Derg regime (Chege, 1979; Clapham, 1988; Keller, 1981; Tareke, 2009). In 1977, former groups of the ELF joined forces and established the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The EPLF became the dominant opposition group for the Derg regime. The Secretary-General of the EPLF was Ramadan Mohammed Nour, Isaias Afewerki was the Assistant Secretary-General. Two years before the establishment of the EPLF, another opposition party

emerged. On 18 February 1975, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was established. By 1980, the TPLF claimed to control 80 percent of the Tigray region (De Waal, 1997). The TPLF was largely provided with arms and other supplies by the EPLF. The TPLF and EPLF fought side by side against the Derg Regime throughout the Ethiopian Civil War. The Mengistu government attempted to crush the guerrilla movement in the north of the country between 1978 and 1986 but had little success.

“The EPLF and TPLF were highly motivated and ruthlessly committed organizations. In contrast to the army, with its debilitating factionalism and rigidity, the fronts were remarkably cohesive and adaptable. Masterful at using the terrain to their advantage, they fought with will, purpose, patience, stealth, and speed, skilfully exploiting the army's weaknesses and mistakes while nullifying its strengths.” (Tareke, 2009, p. 316-317)

When Ronald Reagan assumed office in Washington in January 1981, Ethiopia was “well on its way to becoming Moscow's first African satellite” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 175). In order to counterbalance Soviet military assistance to Ethiopia and to seek replacements for lost strategic facilities in Ethiopia, the Reagan administration obtained Siad Barre's permission to use naval, port and air facilities in Mogadishu and Berbera. The Somali government, in turn, received “\$500 million worth of military and economic assistance between 1981 and 1986, making Mogadishu one of the largest recipients of U.S. military aid in sub-Saharan Africa” (Schmidt, 2013, p. 155).

In its attempt to institutionalise a communist regime, the Mengistu government made similar errors committed by the Soviet Union in the 1930s, especially with regard to agricultural policy and collectivisation in particular. Collective farms made up only 5 percent of cultivated land during 1980 and 1985. But collective farms received 43 percent of the investment in the agricultural sector and their returns were lower than what had been invested in their development (Chole, 2004). This policy inhibited the investment in fertilisation, high-yield seeds, labour, technical expertise and tractors to raise the production among the peasants. The net effect was lower incentives by peasants to produce food, a higher government dependence on relatively high cost grain from state farms and little food surplus as a cushion against an emergency crisis. In May 1981, the RRC of Ethiopia held a presentation to the United Nations on Least Developed Countries documenting deteriorating weather conditions in Ethiopia (Kumar, 1990). The call by the RRC was largely

ignored by the international community and only little food aid was given by donor organisations.

The harvest in 1982 was the largest ever recorded in Ethiopian history and the harvest in the subsequent year was the third largest, even though production remained far below the country's potential (McVety, 2012). A long drought between July and September 1983 was a warning sign for a famine in 1984. In the mid-1980s, the four northern Ethiopian provinces – Gojam, Eritrea, Tigray and Wollo – and the eastern Ethiopian province Hararghe witnessed low rainfalls. According to RRC estimates, the number of people "at risk" of famine rose to 3.9 million in 1983 from 2.8 million in 1982, which was less than the 1981 estimate of 4.5 million (De Waal, 1997, p. 112).

On 30 March 1984, the RRC calculated that it needed another 900,000 tons of grain for the remaining months in 1984. The RRC, however, thought that it did not possess the capacity to distribute 900,000 tons. As a result, the RRC only appealed for half of the initial figure, 450,000 tons (Gill, 1986).

“It was, according to some, a fateful error, and started that process by which big donors could wriggle from whatever sense of obligation they may have felt. Tony Vaux [Oxfam relief manager in Ethiopia] described the process: ‘It appears that the constant repetition of appeals had produced a sense of scepticism which was not based on any past failure of the RRC’s predictions but more a feeling that they were constantly asking for more. Agencies were tired of helping a government that seemed to do so little to help itself.’” (Gill, 1986, p. 31)

In its aim to launch its own appeal, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its partner agency, the World Food Programme (WFP), sent a mission to Ethiopia in February 1984 to work closely together with the RRC for a month. The FAO mission reduced the latest RRC appeal of 450,000 tons by almost three-quarters to 125,000 tons as it believed that Ethiopia's distribution capacity was even more limited than previously estimated by the RRC. The UN-backed appeal is considered “one of the more fateful conclusions made by any set of experts in the build-up to the Ethiopian famine” (Gill, 1986, p. 44).

“In the field, the voluntary agencies had tended to rely upon their big brothers in the UN system for judgements and expertise in such technical areas as crop assessment. (...) The UN mission's key error – more abundantly plain in retrospect

than it may have been at that time – was to underestimate the capacity of the creaky Ethiopian port and distribution system to get food moving in a crisis.” (Gill, 1986, p. 47)

The long draught, crop failure and the initially slow response by the international donor community were, however, not the only major determinants for the 1983-85 famine. As the next few paragraphs will show Mengistu’s initial denial of the famine, his war against secessionist movements in Eritrea and Tigray and the deliberate withholding of food aid by the Derg regime to guerrilla-controlled regions significantly contributed to the vast scale of the famine in (northern) Ethiopia.<sup>35</sup>

Similar to the Selassie government during the 1973-74 famine, the Mengistu government did not fully acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, even after the absence of short rains in early 1984 (Clay & Holcomb, 1986; De Waal, 1991; Kaplan, 2003). Around one-sixth of Ethiopia’s population was directly threatened with starvation and death at the peak of the crisis (Marcus, 2002). By March 1984,

“it was apparent to Ethiopian relief officials that a major famine, with its accompanying death, distress and dislocation, could only be averted through massive Government and international intervention (...) In the middle months of 1984, official attention was simply directed away from the likelihood of severe famine to the political priority in hand, the establishment of the new party [Workers' Party of Ethiopia]<sup>36</sup> and the [Derg’s tenth] anniversary celebrations.” (Gill, 1986, p. 9)

In late 1984, hundreds of thousands of people in the northern provinces began to die. More than 300,000 people died in the year 1984, more than twice the number during the 1973-74 famine (Keller, 1992).

“While Eritreans, Tigreans, and others in the northern provinces died by the hundreds of thousands, the markets of the Amhara fortress of Addis Ababa were brimming with grain.” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 38)

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Gill’s (1986) “A Year in the Death of Africa: Politics, Bureaucracy and the Famine”, Alex De Waal’s (1997) “Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa” and Robert D. Kaplan’s (2003) “Surrender or Starve. Travels in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea” are very insightful accounts on the role of domestic political factors and external agents (such as the disaster relief industry) behind the famine that ravaged Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region more generally.

<sup>36</sup> The Workers’ Party of Ethiopia was established in 1984, with Mengistu appointing himself as chief of the party. The party was modeled on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and became the only legal political party in Ethiopia.



At the height of the famine, the Derg regime announced that it would allocate 46 percent of Ethiopia's gross national product (GNP) to military spending in its war against the Tigrayan and Eritrean rebels in northern Ethiopia. Mengistu created a 3-million-man standing army, the largest and most sophisticated one in sub-Saharan Africa (Gill, 1986; McVety, 2012; Webb & Von Braun, 1994). Mengistu fed his army and Ethiopia's main cities by forcing the peasants' association to deliver grain at prices below the average market price alienating the peasantry and stifling their productivity (Tareke, 2009). The Derg's repeated military offensives (including bombings) and discriminatory food policies against the guerrilla-controlled territories in Tigray and Eritrea, mass displacement, and disruption of agricultural production and trade in the guerrilla-controlled areas played an important role in creating the breeding ground for a famine in northern Ethiopia (Davey, 2015; De Waal, 1997; Marcus, 2002; Tareke, 2009; Wolde Giorgis, 1989).

The RRC undertook several efforts to get the Derg regime to respond to the famine but all its attempts failed. The Derg regime faced a dilemma: its main ally, the Soviet Union, was facing food shortages at home and the other Warsaw Pact countries had little financial resources to assist the Ethiopian government. At the same time, both the USA and the European Economic Community held grain surpluses (Marcus, 2002). Throughout the early 1980s, however, Mengistu was largely reluctant to receive humanitarian assistance – including food aid – from the Western donor community thereby prolonging the famine.

At the same time, RRC commissioner, Dawit Wolde Girogis, questioned the morality of rich Western governments and their little humanitarian assistance for the poor in his country: “It was a formula that seemed at times to exclude his own government from further obligation” (Gill, 1986, p. 33). In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration used food aid as an instrument of foreign policy against the Ethiopian government. Despite several appeals to USAID by international humanitarian agencies working in the Wollo and Tigray regions, the U.S. response was slow.

After the U.S. humanitarian agency Catholic Relief Services made an appeal for 16,000 metric tons of grain on 13 October 1983, for example, only 8,000 tons of food aid were promised by USAID in May 1984 (Gill, 1986). The other 8,000 tons were only approved and delivered ten months after the initial request. Between 1982 and 1984, the Reagan

administration cut food aid from 8,172 metric tons in 1982 to zero in 1984 (Keller, 1992; Shepherd, 1985).

“The reluctance of the rich countries to respond to the appeals of Ethiopia’s Relief Commission is the less easy to understand because the Commission enjoys a remarkably high reputation among the aid agencies. The United States Government, for instance, has gone out of its way to publicize its criticisms of the Ethiopian regime for failing to give a high enough priority to the famine, but the RRC won a grudging commendation. Through clenched teeth, the State Department acknowledged that aid donors considered the RRC to be a ‘relatively well-organized and well-run organization.’” (Gill, 1986, p. 37)

The Reagan administration was initially very reluctant to supply food aid to Ethiopia for two reasons. First, the U.S. government viewed food aid as one sector ripe for budget cuts. Second, it was not willing to support an oppressive communist government, “subsidizing a regime that was burning crops and dropping cluster bombs in the drought zone with one hand and using its relief agency to beg with the other” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 29).<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, the Derg was largely preoccupied with its war against separatist forces and the upcoming tenth anniversary celebration of Derg rule. On 10 September 1984, the Mengistu government spent around \$200 million celebrating the tenth anniversary of the rule of the Derg (Clay & Holcomb, 1986; Griffin, 1987).

“Ten years before, an imperial regime had been toppled for its failure to cope with drought and attendant famine. As that event [Tenth anniversary of the Derg regime] was commemorated in the middle of a far worse famine, the heavens had spoken. Addis Ababa that day betrayed nothing of the tragedy that was building up in the countryside. Roads had been freshly asphalted. Every department of state, including the Government’s own Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, had been instructed to devote part of its budget to sprucing up its office buildings. It was even said that beggars had been rounded up and carted out of town for the duration, so as not to offend the Revolution’s visiting friends.” (Gill, 1986, p. 7)

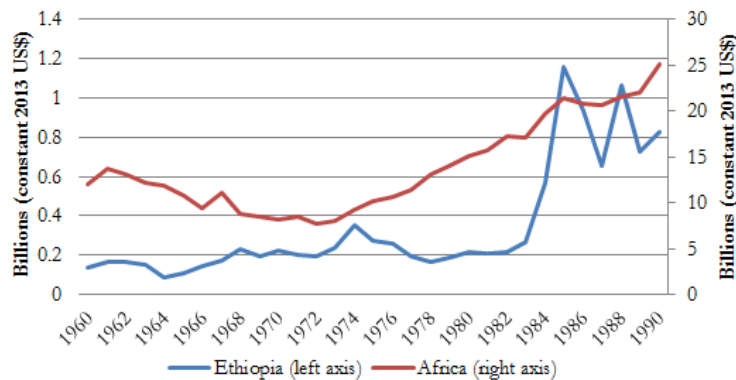
A few weeks after the tenth anniversary celebrations, on 3 October 1984, Mengistu and his regime belatedly acknowledged the famine in the north and granted international media

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<sup>37</sup> British government officials expressed similar concerns towards the Ethiopian Marxist government. As a result, the British government under Margaret Thatcher initially refused to deliver development assistance to Ethiopia. In November 1984, Rev. Charles Elliott, former director of Christian Aid in Great Britain, accused the U.S. and British governments to deliberately withhold development assistance “in the hope that famine would bring down the communist regime” (Clay & Holcomb, 1986, p. 216).

access to the famine-stricken areas.<sup>38</sup> The media coverage had an unprecedented impact. Even though Western bilateral and multilateral donors largely condemned Mengistu’s socialist experiment and Stalinist policies, a large international relief effort took off and made available vast amounts of surplus grain. The famine set a new wave of aid enthusiasm in motion. Between 1982 and 1985, Western bilateral development assistance to Ethiopia rose by a factor of more than five, while foreign aid to Africa as a whole followed its normal general trend (Figure 1). In 1984, less than 20 nongovernmental development organisations were based in Ethiopia, while there were 60 in 1986 (McVety, 2012). Kaplan (2003) reports that in late 1984 “the Hilton Hotel [in Addis Ababa], whose occupancy rate normally hovered around 50 percent, was filled to capacity for the next nine months” (p. 32).

**Figure 1:** Western Bilateral Development Assistance to Ethiopia, 1960-1990



Source: Author’s own calculations based on OECD/DAC statistics.

Due to increasing publicity of the famine and increasing pressure from congressmen returning from famine- and poverty-stricken camps, the Reagan administration provided emergency food aid at an unprecedented scale from early October 1984 onwards. By late October 1984, the USA delivered approximately 500,000 metric tons of food and other assistance worth around one billion dollars to Ethiopia (Kissi, 2005). The USA became the major provider of food aid from late 1984 onwards. U.S. food aid represented almost a third of total food aid delivered to Ethiopia by the international donor community (Gill, 1986):

<sup>38</sup> The probably best known media footage of the 1984 famine was the broadcast of a “biblical famine” by BBC journalist Michael Buerk filmed in the Korem refugee camp, a remote part of northern Ethiopia. The first of Buerk’s reports was shown on BBC Six O’Clock News on 23 October 1984. According to the BBC, the footage was “subsequently shown by 425 of the world’s broadcasting organizations with a potential audience of 470 million people” (Gill, 1986, p. 91).

the U.S. food aid programme to Ethiopia between October 1984 and late 1985 became the largest one ever recorded in history (Shepherd, 1985).

Domestic political factors, however, prevented the international donor community from addressing the famine in northern Ethiopia effectively and efficiently. One major problem in the efficient and effective distribution of food aid to those in need was that the access to the poverty-stricken areas in the north was restricted (Clay & Holcomb, 1986). The Derg regime denied U.S. officials the right to monitor grain deliveries in rebel-controlled territories like Eritrea and Tigray culminating into the systematic purloining of grain by Derg officials. Moreover, millions of dollars of Western aid money were siphoned off by both the Derg regime and opposition groups such as rebel leaders to buy weapons and military equipment. It is estimated that

“some \$100m went through the hands of the TPLF and affiliated groups. Some 95% of it was allocated to buying weapons and building up a hard-line Marxist political party within the rebel movement.” (Plaut, 2010)

The famine became a lucrative business for the Derg regime as well. Import fees for international food aid became Ethiopia’s biggest hard currency earner replacing coffee (Kaplan, 2003).

“The Derg felt the need to levy changes on all the food and other relief supplies being brought into the country, mainly in order to help finance its war machine. As much as \$30 million was raised in 1985 by imposing an import fee that was initially set as high as \$50.50 per metric ton for all donors (except the United Nations, which had to pay \$49). However, this levy was reduced to \$20 following an outcry from all the affected agencies. To make matters worse, some truck-loads of food intended for civilian centres were diverted by military officials in order to meet the needs of their own soldiers and armed supporters.” (Keller, 1992, p. 621)

The Derg regime had an interest to keep the guerrilla-controlled regions malnourished. The government used the international food aid as a weapon against its enemies by (i) feeding the army and (ii) denying relief supplies to enter non-government controlled regions (McVety, 2012; Wolde Giorgis, 1989). Out of 1.25 million tons of food relief that Ethiopia received in 1984, only 90,000 tons were distributed in the rebel-held territories of Tigray and Eritrea (Marcus, 2002). Similarly, in the first half of 1985, Ethiopia received more or less the 75,000 tons that it required for that period through foreign assistance, but the RRC was very

selective in its distribution: the Wollo region, for example, only received a quarter of the grain allocated to that area. The empirical evidence suggests that most victims came from the Northern provinces (Eritrea, Tigray and Wollo) where the majority of the population resisted the Derg's brutal regime (Table 5). By mid-1985, almost 50 to 60 percent of the areas affected by the famine were guerrilla-controlled territories (Kaplan, 2003).

“At the center of the famine – Tigray and north Wollo – the counter-insurgency strategy of the Ethiopian army was the single most important reason why the drought of 1983-4 became not a ‘normal’ period of hardship but a famine of a severity and extent unparalleled for a century.” (De Waal, 1991, p. 133)

**Table 5:** People affected by Serious Food Shortages by Region, 1984-1986

	1984	1985	1986	1985		
	(in thousands)			% of Total Affected	% of Population (Region)	% of Population (Total)
<b>Arsi</b>	21	82	20	1.00	4.9	0.19
<b>Bale</b>	53	193	99	2.40	19.2	0.46
<b>Begemder/Gonder</b>	325	363	341	4.50	12.5	0.86
<b>Eritrea</b>	877	827	650	10.30	30.6	1.97
<b>Gamo Gofa</b>	80	106	152	1.30	8.5	0.25
<b>Gojam</b>	35	76	0	1.00	2.3	0.18
<b>Hararghe</b>	279	875	1520	11.00	21.1	2.08
<b>Ilubabor</b>	-	20	102	0.30	2.1	0.05
<b>Kaffa</b>	-	58	90	0.70	2.4	0.14
<b>Shoa</b>	204	852	709	11.00	8.9	2.03
<b>Sidamo</b>	355	533	442	6.70	14.1	1.27
<b>Tigray</b>	1300	1400	1000	17.50	58.1	3.33
<b>Welega</b>	-	23	116	0.30	1.0	0.05
<b>Wollo</b>	1821	2587	1547	32.40	71.7	6.16
<b>TOTAL</b>	5350	7995	6788	-	-	19.03

*Source:* Varnis (1990) based on data from USAID Ethiopia and the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC).

The RRC commissioner Dawit Wolde Giorgis was no longer willing to support the withholding of food aid by the Derg regime and defected to the USA in late 1985. In a New York Times interview in 1988, he argued that the vast amount of international humanitarian assistance contributed to Mengistu's stay in power (Wolde Giorgis, 1989). It was only in late 1985 that Eritrea and Tigray started to receive large-scale humanitarian assistance. Relief

food aid to Eritrea and Tigray mainly came through Sudan which was also severely affected by the famine (De Waal, 1991; Kaplan, 2003; Varnis, 1990).<sup>39</sup>

“By the end of 1985, relief efforts had become considerably stabilized. Food aid continued to be required in order to forestall famine conditions, but famine deaths had slowed significantly as the capacity for distributing aid had become firmly established. PVO [private voluntary organizations] operations continued to support the RRC system for distributing food; tertiary and secondary distribution mechanisms were coordinated with the assistance of UN organizations.” (Varnis, 1990, p. 139)

Due to lack of data, the death toll related to the 1984-86 famine in Ethiopia varies between 200,000 and 1 million people (De Waal, 1991; Shepherd, 1985; Varnis, 1990). Apart from the international aid effort for the famine, the international donor community was also implicated in the disastrous consequences of the resettlement programme (De Waal, 1991; Pankhurst, 1992; Woldemeskel, 1989). Only a few weeks after the international media became widely informed of the famine, the Derg regime implemented a resettlement programme that had been a major pillar of Mengistu’s collectivisation programme.

“The plan was to move a large section of the population from the north to the south. The target was 1.5 million people. In fact, about 600,000 people were moved in three phases: November 1984-May 1985, October 1985-January 1986, and November 1987-March 1988. The justification presented to the west and to the people of Ethiopia was that it was a famine relief measure – the north of the country was stricken by drought and environmental collapse, and the only alternative was to move most of the people elsewhere.” (De Waal, 1991)

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<sup>39</sup> Sudanese politics played an important role in the significant delay of humanitarian assistance to the northern provinces of Ethiopia. First, the logistical problems at the Sudanese border were severe: “Tens of thousands of tons of wheat and dried milk powder were piling up in Port Sudan warehouses in the early weeks of spring 1985, because there were insufficient trucks to bring the food over the border” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 76). A second major reason was of political nature. Sudanese President Gafaar Al-Nimeiry was afraid that his approval for allowing Western humanitarian assistance for the famine-stricken areas in northern Ethiopia to enter over the Sudanese border could upset Mengistu. Mengistu was reducing his military support for the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) led by John Garang, an African Christian rebel group in southern Sudan that was fighting a secessionist war against the Muslim government in Khartoum. Mengistu initially supported the SPLA/M because the Muslim government in Khartoum supported Eritrea’s separatist movement (Holt & Daly, 2011; Kaplan, 2003). Third, there was a growing anti U.S.-sentiment among the Sudanese Arabs in the capital of Khartoum when the rescuing of 8,000 black Ethiopian Jews, known as Falasha/Bete Israel, to Israel via Sudan through the CIA and the Israeli intelligence agency ‘Mossad’ became public. The rescue became known as Operation Moses. It is believed that al-Nimeiry was bribed by the United States and Israeli officials to allow the airlifting of the 8,000 Jews (De Waal, 1991; Metaferia, 2009). Al-Nimeiry had to resign in 1985 and the Transitional Military Council took over. The Transitional Military Council eventually gave its approval for the humanitarian assistance project aimed at helping the peasants in northern Ethiopia “provided that publicity about it be kept to an absolute minimum and that the U.S. role in the actual transport of the grain over the border be as indirect as possible” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 76).

During the resettlement campaign, hundreds of thousands of people were “hastily, forcibly, and pitilessly uprooted from the cool, dry highlands of Shewa, Tigray, and Wello to the hot, wet lowlands of Gojjam, Illubabor, Kafa and Wellega” (Tareke, 2009, p. 149). The Derg regime often chose the resettlement camps randomly without the consultation of agronomists, anthropologists, ecologists or economists.

The effects of the resettlement campaign proved to be disastrous for the local – often indigenous – population and the environment (Pankhurst, 1992; Woldemeskel, 1989). The Derg regime paid little attention to the concerns of the local people. Indigenous people were forcibly driven off their land often causing separations of families. The humanitarian and medical conditions in resettlement centers were inadequate leading to the death of thousands due to tropical diseases like malaria and sleeping sickness (Pankhurst, 1992; Tareke, 2009).

The net effect of the resettlement policies was that the Derg could control areas of civil unrest and advance its socialist policies (Keller, 1992). Dawit Wolde Giorgis compared the resettlement programme with concentration camps:

“From the very beginning, resettlement for Mengistu was not a development program but a solution to his social and national security problems. Any dissidents, anyone who created problems or was seen as a security risk, was packed off to a resettlement site. Resettlement programs became our Siberia. As a result, in the minds of the people they were equated with concentration camps.” (Wolde Giorgis, 1989, p. 285)

The resettlement programme was supported by a large part of the Western donor community. The international organisations and humanitarian agencies that supported the resettlement programme believed that it was an effective famine relief measure. The disastrous effects of Mengistu’s resettlement policies, however, became obvious over time and there is evidence that the international donor community was not totally unaware of it (Gill, 1986). USAID, for example, was cautious not to channel U.S. aid to relief operations that were connected with the resettlement programme. Then U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz wanted to launch a UN resolution condemning the resettlement policies by the Derg regime but backed down as he received no support from Western allies. Great Britain, West Germany, Italy, Sweden and Finland did not support the programme either, while Australia, Norway and Canada did (Gill, 1986). Besides several Western governments, the WFP of the

United Nations, UNICEF and many private Western donor organisations supported the programme as those groups did not want their projects in Addis Ababa, as well as other urban centres and rural areas, questioned (Davey, 2015; Kaplan, 2003).

“The resettlement programme was heavily reliant on equipment and logistics provided by Western donors; military raids upon aid distribution centres were used to gather people for transfer to the south; and local officials were coerced into participation in the programme by threats of a withdrawal of aid from their region.” (Davey, 2015, p. 227)

In mid-1985, the U.S. nonprofit group Cultural Survival<sup>40</sup> published the first independent and statistically highly representative investigation into the conditions of resettlement (Clay & Holcomb, 1986). The report was based on 277 interviews by the authors and was conducted at six sites in eastern Sudan with Ethiopian refugees from Tigray and other famine-stricken regions.

“The death rates reported by the refugees ranged from 33 deaths per 10,000 people per day to 270 deaths per 10,000. These rates are extremely high given that the camp populations were comprised almost entirely of adults. Such figures were consistently reported from a number of different refugees from different areas. Furthermore, they were relayed by people who did not know each other. Some of the resettled people were undoubtedly malnourished as a result of declining agricultural production in their homelands, but many had not experienced famine until they were captured for resettlement. (...) These figures raise, among other issues, the question of how many of the 400,000 people who were resettled by June of 1985 are still alive. If even the most conservative estimates of the death rate (33 per 10,000 per day) are halved and then halved again (i.e., reduced by 75 percent), then 50,000 to 100,000 of those resettled in this massive program may already have been dead by July 1985.” (Clay & Holcomb, 1986, p. 102)

In December 1985, a few months after the Cultural Survival’s report, the French medical agency and non-governmental organisation (NGO) Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) denounced the disastrous consequences of Mengistu’s resettlement policy through a study that triggered a flood of international media reactions (Pankhurst, 1992). The study estimated that around 300,000 people were most likely to die in the process of resettling 1,500,000 famine victims. The report described the resettlement programme as “one of the most massive violations of human rights we have seen (...) carried out with the equipment and funds supplied by international aid” (Médecins Sans Frontières, 1985, p. 4).

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<sup>40</sup> Cultural Survival was founded in 1972 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The aim of the organization is to defend human rights and cultural heritage of indigenous people and oppressed ethnic minorities.



“Humanitarian organizations and the western governments must know that they are in the process of supporting, through weakness, an operation that will be described with hindsight in a few years’ time as one of the great slaughters in the history of the twentieth century.” (Médecins Sans Frontières, 1985, p. 65)

The claims brought forward by MSF were rejected by, among others, Michael Priestly, UN Aid Co-Coordinator for Ethiopia, and Canadian diplomat Maurice Strong, executive coordinator of the UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa. At the same time, MSF was expelled from Ethiopia by the Mengistu government (Pankhurst, 1992). It was only in mid-1986 that the Derg regime stopped the resettlement programme in order to appease the rising criticism put forward by the international community.

The resettlement programme became the most controversial part of Mengistu’s famine policy and was responsible for at least as many deaths as the famine itself (Davey, 2015; De Waal, 1991). The largest component of Mengistu’s collectivisation policy was the forceful uprooting of almost five million people through villagisation between 1984 and 1986. In contrast to the resettlement programme, however, villagisation was to a very large extent not supported by the Western donor community (De Waal, 1991; Kaplan, 2003; Tareke, 2009).

The U.S. administration used international human right principles as a lever for the pursuit of a foreign policy aimed at relieving famine in Ethiopia’s famine-stricken regions.

“The famine emergency gave the United States what it thought was an opportunity to weaken Moscow’s hold over Ethiopia using peaceful means. While the Soviet Union provided less than 1 percent (10,000 tons out of 12.5 million) of the emergency food aid, the noncommunist world provided 99 percent” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 175).<sup>41</sup>

The large-scale humanitarian assistance and food aid delivery brought little political change in Ethiopia. American policymakers overestimated the impact of their large-scale humanitarian assistance and food aid to bring political change in Ethiopia (Kissi, 2005). While the large – albeit late – wave of international development assistance reduced the suffering and mitigated the disastrous effects of the famine (Gill, 2010), it also prolonged the lifespan of the Derg regime and the Ethiopian Civil War (Wolde Giorgis, 1989). The

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<sup>41</sup> It is believed that the Soviet Union donated food aid to Ethiopia 1984 and 1985 due to the large international pressure. The exact amount delivered by the Soviet Union, however, remains unclear (Uvin, 1985).

unprecedented relief aid to the politically powerless rural sector in Ethiopia could not compete with the Soviet military assistance to the political elite. Throughout the 1980s, U.S. influence in Ethiopia gradually decreased while Soviet influence in Ethiopia gradually strengthened.

In early 1989, the TPLF and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) formed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) aimed at ousting Mengistu from power (Tareke, 2009). By the late 1980s, the survival of the Derg regime was increasingly tied to the fortunes and policies of the Soviet Union. Ethiopia's diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union, however, gradually deteriorated, partly due to the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 (Yordanov, 2016). Gorbachev's policies of glasnost ("openness"), perestroika ("restructuring"), demokratizatsiya ("democratisation"), and uskoreniye ("acceleration" of economic development) contributed to the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union.

When the guerrilla movement in northern Ethiopia started to launch a major offensive in April 1988 against the Derg regime, Mengistu visited Moscow asking for increased military assistance (Tareke, 2009; Westad, 2005). Gorbachev, however, was only ready to deliver military aid and economic support conditional upon a change in Ethiopia's agricultural policies and a liberalisation of the political system. Since Mengistu largely refused any type of Ethiopian-style glasnost and perestroika policies, the Soviet government only provided a tiny fraction of the aid requested by Mengistu. Moscow's declining military assistance to the Derg regime can mainly be attributed to two factors: (i) the Soviet Union was mainly preoccupied with its military involvement in the Afghanistan War (1979-1989); (ii) Gorbachev held a "personal distaste for Mengistu, having been briefed by the KGB [Soviet security agency] on the human rights record of his regime" (Westad, 2005, p. 383). In 1990, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Soviet-Ethiopian alliance came to an end.

With the loss of the Soviet Union as Ethiopia's major ally, China became a serious alternative as a development partner. Strong Sino-Ethiopian relationships, however, did not materialise since a revolution led by the TPLF-EPRDF alliance under Meles Zenawi and the EPLF under Isaias Afewerki overthrew the Derg regime in May 1991.

“They won not only because enough people supported them but also because they were willing to make extraordinary sacrifices and would not consider anything less than total victory. (...) In the end, the fronts beat a quantitatively and technically superior foe because, despite divergent goals, they supported each other tactically at critical moments. They wore down the army through guerrilla tactics and then annihilated it in conventional wars that were efficiently coordinated.” (Tareke, 2009, p. 317)

The interplay between the Mengistu’s internal war against the rebel groups, the Derg government’s disastrous agricultural collectivisation programme, the famine and the demise of the Soviet Union brought the Ethiopian economy to the brink of collapse and ultimately contributed to the fall of the Derg regime in 1991. Mengistu was forced to go into exile in Zimbabwe (Marcus, 2002; Prunier, 2015). In 1991, Meles Zenawi became the president of the transitional government of Ethiopia and was to become Ethiopia’s Prime Minister between 1995 and 2011. The Eritrean War for Independence that lasted for 30 years ended on 29 May 1991. Similar to Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia, EPLF leader Isaias Afewerki became the head of the Provisional Government of Eritrea. Between 23 and 25 April 1993, the overwhelming majority of Eritreans (99.83 percent) voted for Eritrea’s independence in a UN-monitored referendum (Wrong, 2005). Two days later, Eritrea was declared independent by Eritrean authorities and Isaias Afewerki became the president of Eritrea.<sup>42</sup>

Mengistu’s legacy was an Ethiopian economy in a poor state of affairs. Table 6 shows the evolution of Ethiopia’s economic development under the Derg regime. Looking at real GDP first, we observe a positive trend over the time period 1975-1990. During the 1980s, the economy witnessed positive economic growth. If we turn to GDP per capita, however, the picture looks less promising. Between 1975 and 1990, real GDP per capita declined significantly. While real GDP per capita stood at \$652.3 in 1975, it dropped to \$578.5 in 1990. In a similar vein, the average growth rate of GDP per capita was predominantly negative or close to zero through 1975-1990.

These figures demonstrate that Ethiopia’s economic growth under the Derg regime has been more than offset by an exploding population. Or put differently, economic growth has been eaten up entirely by rapid population growth. In 1990, Mengistu’s last year in power, GDP

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<sup>42</sup> Meles Zenawi accepted Eritrea’s independence. Article 39 in Ethiopia’s 1994 constitution gave Eritrea and other Ethiopian regions the right to secede as part of the Ethiopian government’s commitment to self-determination.

growth and GDP per capita growth contracted significantly. Compared to 1975, Ethiopian society was a lot poorer in 1990.

**Table 6:** Evolution of GDP (per capita) in Ethiopia, 1975-1990

PWT8.1	1975	1980	1985	1990
<b>Real GDP</b> (in mil. 2005US\$)	21498.1	23220.4	24825.5	27961.5
<b>Real GDP per capita</b> (in mil. 2005US\$)	652.3	655.5	604.4	578.5
	<b>Late 1970s</b>	<b>Early 1980s</b>	<b>Late 1980s</b>	<b>1990</b>
PWT8.1				
<b>GDP Growth Rate</b>	-0.2	2.6	2.6	0.3
<b>GDP per capita Growth Rate</b>	-1.7	-0.1	-0.6	-3.0
GGDC				
<b>GDP Growth Rate</b>	2.1	1.6	2.4	-1.6
<b>GDP per capita Growth Rate</b>	0.1	-1.5	0.0	-4.3

*Note:* The table shows the average GDP (per capita) growth rate for the late 1970s (1975-1979), early 1980s (1980-1984) and late 1980s (1985-1989), and the GDP (per capita) growth rate for 1990.

*Source:* Penn World Tables (PWT) version 8.1 (Feenstra et al., 2015); Maddison Historical Statistics from the Groningen Growth and Development Centre (GGDC) (Bolt & van Zanden, 2014).

**Table 7:** Sectoral Data on Value Added and Employment in Ethiopia, 1975-1990

	Value added (% of GDP)				Employment (% of population)			
	1975	1980	1985	1990	1975	1980	1985	1990
<b>ETHIOPIA</b>								
<b>Agriculture</b>	69.5	59.7	65.7	64.1	90.9	89.3	88.9	89.4
<b>Industry</b>	10.2	11.5	10.4	10.8	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.2
<b>Manufacturing</b>	4.0	1.5	4.2	4.3	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.8
<b>Services</b>	20.3	28.8	23.9	25.1	7.1	8.7	9.0	8.3
<b>Total economy</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>SSA</b>								
<b>Agriculture</b>	29.2	25.5	26.4	24.9	66.0	63.1	62.3	61.6
<b>Industry</b>	30.0	33.2	32.8	27.8	13.1	12.7	12.8	14.3
<b>Manufacturing</b>	14.7	13.6	14.8	10.1	7.8	7.2	7.8	8.9
<b>Services</b>	40.7	41.3	40.8	49.8	20.9	24.2	24.9	24.1
<b>Total economy</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Note:* Figures are unweighted averages across 11 African countries. Numbers may not sum due to rounding. Relative productivity level is the ratio of the sector and total economy levels.

*Source:* Authors' own calculations using the Africa Sector Database (De Vries et al., 2015).

Table 7 shows the trends in output and employment at the sectoral level for both the Ethiopian economy and sub-Saharan Africa between 1975 and 1990. For both Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, the industry value added share rose between 1975 and 1980,

while the agriculture value added share declined within the same period. Between 1980 and 1990, Ethiopia's agriculture value added increased from 59.7 percent to 64.1 percent. At the same time, Ethiopia's industry value added dropped from 11.5 percent to 10.8 percent. Between 1980 and 1990, Ethiopia witnessed a phase of deindustrialisation since very few workers were moving out of subsistence agriculture and being absorbed in modern manufacturing. Industry value added also declined for Africa as a whole but it was not compensated by a rise in agriculture value added but service value added.

Since the beginning of the revolution by the Derg regime, agricultural production declined at an average annual rate of 0.4 percent while population grew at approximately 3 percent every year. Trade and industry stagnated from 1974. In 1988, the government spent \$1.5 billion on armament alone, 54 percent of government revenue in that year. Between 1974 and 1988, Ethiopia's international debt rose from a modest \$51.4 million to \$530 million (Marcus, 2002, pp. 212-213). The country stood on the edge of bankruptcy. According to Mockler (2003), Haile Selassie's reign, "compared to the bloodthirsty tyranny that the Revolution of 1974 ushered in, appears almost as a golden age" (p. xi).

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. The Ethiopian Famine and the Foreign Aid Dilemma(s)**

While international development co-operation surged in the 1960s in the midst of post-war optimism and euphoria, a period of donor fatigue set in with the end of the Cold War during the 1990s. While a bulk of foreign aid provided by donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private voluntary organisations (PVOs) and international financial institutions (IFIs) alike was aimed at helping the poor and contribute to economic development, foreign aid such as humanitarian assistance often became, unintentionally, an instrument of conflict and for political survival of authoritarian elites as well.

As this case study has shown, unconditional foreign aid flows to the Ethiopian government contributed to prolonged military efforts through the purchase of weapons and to human rights abuses (in the resettlement programmes, for example) and to the prolonged life of the Derg regime. Ethiopia's catastrophic famine of 1984-86, one of the worst humanitarian crises in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also the famine of 1973-74 to a lesser extent, vividly portray

three major problems that the international donor community faced (and often still faces) vis-à-vis the Ethiopian government and recipient countries more generally.

In the context at hand, the first problem of foreign aid is that the prospects for aid effectiveness are often the lowest in those countries that need financial, technical and administrative help the most. The most commonly cited objective of foreign aid is the reduction and eventual elimination of poverty. How to allocate foreign aid efficiently to maximise the number of people lifted out of poverty, however, remains a significant challenge. Collier and Dollar (2002) developed an optimal allocation rule:

“To maximize the reduction in poverty, aid should be allocated to countries that have large amounts of poverty and good policy. The presence of large-scale poverty is obviously necessary if aid is to have a large effect on poverty reduction. The good policy ensures that aid has a positive impact.” (Collier & Dollar, 2002, p. 1482)

According to Riddell (2007), however,

“[t]he overarching dilemma of aid is that it is needed most in those countries in which the prospects for its being most effective are the poorest” (Riddell, 2007, p. 377)

This dilemma was certainly visible in the context of Ethiopia’s repeated famines. Both the policy environment under Haile Selassie and under Mengistu Haile Mariam made it very difficult for development assistance to be effective for the following reasons: (i) both regimes were not fully committed to solve the humanitarian crisis manifested by both Mengistu’s and Selassie’s late acknowledgement of the famine and lack of adequate policy responses; (ii) both regimes had not developed a coherent policy framework geared towards poverty reduction, citizen participation and inclusive governance as illustrated by the authoritarian style of government with an emphasis on building military defence capabilities rather than promoting substantial agricultural and industrial reform; (iii) both regimes lacked accountable and transparent institutions for the efficient and effective distribution of foreign aid: the ill-favoured and unequal delivery of foreign aid among the Ethiopian population was not allocated on needs-based considerations but primarily on political favouritism and nepotism.

A second problem of foreign aid during the Ethiopian famine was the importance of ideological considerations among the international donor community, especially among bilateral donors. Ideology heavily shaped the foreign aid policies by the USA and the Soviet Union. Not only the USA, but also other major Western donor countries like Great Britain, cut off systematic development assistance to the communist Derg regime and were even initially reluctant to provide humanitarian aid during the Ethiopian food crisis. This example once again highlights that foreign aid delivery during the Cold War was not exclusively motivated by considerations of poverty reduction, economic development, or humanitarian relief, but also by geostrategic motives. During the Cold War, both the USA and the Soviet Union, and also the majority of other bilateral donors divided the world into enemies and friends. Ken Hackey, regional director for Sub-Saharan Africa for the U.S. based humanitarian aid organisation “Catholic Relief Services” during the 1980s, argued:

“To isolate countries because a specific Government espouses an ideal that clashes with our own is short-sighted. Punishing the starving because an oligarchy, under the pseudonym of ‘People’s Democratic Republic’ or whatever, in no way serves our long-term interests...We are closing ourselves out of many of the political processes of Africa because we are delineating friends and foes.” (Cited in Gill, 1986, p. 178)

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union, the international donor community lost strategic interest in Africa. That did not mean, however, that this problem no longer existed in the post-Cold War era. Some scholars argue that the allocation of donor aid money during the post-Cold War era has still been influenced by an explicit distinction between regime autocratic and democratic types, alongside needs-based considerations (Bader, Grävingholt, & Kästner, 2010; Bermeo, 2011). However, democratic donor countries that use foreign aid as a tool to promote democracy in recipient countries, for example, face the risk of becoming detached from several of the economic and political processes in the developing world.

A third major problem exemplified by the Ethiopian 1984-86 famine is the presence of political and economic vested interests on both the donor and recipient side in the international aid game. The Ethiopian case is not an exception as entrenched interests existed both on the donor and recipient side. On the recipient side, both Selassie and Mengistu were largely dependent on foreign aid for their political survival as it provided them with a stable source of income. The systematic and mostly unconditional aid flows,

however were often used for unproductive rent-seeking activities, or sectors with very little developmental prospects, such as the military sector. On the donor side, workers in the aid industry depended for their livelihood on the ongoing aid flows. During Mengistu's resettlement programme, for example, several international organisations did not question the resettlement policies as they had an interest to stay in the country and support the programme to keep their aid projects going.

In the immediate aftermath of the Ethiopian Famine 1984-86, scholars, policymakers and international organisations began to seriously question the effectiveness of aid. The mismanagement of a significant part of international development assistance by the Ethiopian government, the RRC and rebel groups during the famine led to the erosion in the noble objectives of foreign aid. It also ultimately changed the way in which governments, IFIs, PVOs and NGOs were to deliver development assistance in general and how to respond to international emergencies in the developing world.

“What was urgently needed was fresh examination of the entire ‘aid’ relationship, leading perhaps to its termination. Over a period, Africa without aid could scarcely be in a worse state than Africa with aid. A cessation of aid might even embolden those who had never benefited to start imposing their wishes on those who ruled them.” (Gill, 1986, p. 179)

#### **4.2. A New Aid Agenda**

One major objective for delivering aid to the developing world vanished with the fall of the Iron Curtain: strategic advantage. As the geostrategic considerations for delivering foreign aid dwindled, a period of donor fatigue set in during the 1990s (Moyo, 2009; Riddell, 2007). Since “a vacuum in Western strategic interest in Africa emerged” (De Waal, 1997, p. 133), foreign aid was

“facing its most severe crisis and the pressures for changes were greater than ever before. Aid agencies were beginning to experiment with new approaches.” (van de Walle, 2001, p. 233)

As a result, numerous interest groups within the international donor community used the end of the Cold War as a golden opportunity to reform the international aid architecture (Lancaster, 2007; Riddell, 2007). In fact, the end of the Cold War heralded the emergence of



a new development paradigm among policymakers and international donor communities. In 1996, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD developed a strategy aimed at reversing the trend of declining aid flows to the developing world by

“justifying the aid its members donated in terms of its impact on (an expanded notion of) development, ‘human development’. The DAC proposed recasting the aid relationship as a partnership between donors and recipient governments. Donors would provide more resources, improve the coordination of assistance in support of domestically owned development strategies, and achieve coherence between their aid policies and other policies which affect developing countries (trade, debt, arms sales, etc.). In return, recipient governments were expected to commit to poverty reduction objectives and accountable governance.” (Fraser & Whitfield, 2009, p. 77)

The emergence of the good governance agenda, in particular, became “the latest philosopher’s stone of official aid agencies” (Riddell, 2007) after the end of the Cold War. At the macro level, the increasing use of political conditionality and aid selectivity attached to foreign aid was regarded as a necessary condition for enhanced aid effectiveness and as a useful tool for promoting democratic governance in the least developed countries (Burnside & Dollar, 1997; World Bank, 1998). The majority of foreign aid offered by Western aid agencies and international organisations shifted away from unconditional aid flows towards conditionality-based foreign aid. The donor agencies’ belief that democratisation and constitutional change is a sine qua non condition for enhanced aid effectiveness was especially relevant for aid-dependent Sub-Saharan African countries like Ethiopia.

“[While the new Western approach] involved moral condemnation of the past behaviour of African states, the moral rehabilitation of the Western aid industry also required a contrast with old donor behaviours. Rejecting the self-interested motives inherent in the commercial tying of aid and the strategic focus of Cold War era aid helped ward off scepticism of new, purer motives: the promotion of human rights, democracy, and an end to world poverty. A key aspect of the new discourse was the idea that aid would now be increasingly, or exclusively, ‘poverty-focused.’” (Fraser & Whitfield, 2009, p. 77-78)

At the micro level, numerous contributions gave policy recommendations (i) how to design more efficient impact evaluations to improve development outcomes; (ii) how to improve on-the-ground-experience and expertise of staff and personnel from aid agencies and (iii) how to strengthen the ownership of the recipient countries and their local stakeholders in the design, resource mobilisation, learning, and evaluation processes of development

assistance programmes (see, among others, Gibson, Andersson, Ostrom, & Shivakumar, 2005).

### **4.3. Policy Lessons for the Ethiopian Government**

After the TPLF-led EPRDF seized Addis Ababa on 28 May 1991, it set up a conference to develop a plan for the country's future. Since the EPRDF had strong ideological foundations, it was "suspicious and careful not to admit those organizations it considered detrimental to the creation of an ethno-regionally structured state" (Tadesse, 2015b, p. 273). The transitional government of Ethiopia was installed after the end of the conference and TPLF Chairman Meles Zenawi became the president of the transitional government.

"The complete victory of the TPLF over all its opponents over the preceding years and the Derg in 1991, the Front's administrative competence, a measure of pragmatism, the invaluable experience of developing a close understanding of the country's peasants, and a belated appreciation of the changed international context had produced (...) a generally smooth transition. Outright military victory also meant that the TPLF could gain the approval of its constitution and predetermined political processes and pursue largely unhindered its programme of political and economic reform." (Tadesse, 2015b, p. 274)

While the simultaneous implementation of political and economic reforms in developing countries was both desired by the international donor community and the transitional government, Meles Zenawi soon gave a preferential treatment to economics over politics. In July 1992, the Ethiopian transitional government launched an extensive economic reform programme that included macroeconomic stabilisation and initial structural reform measures to address the internal and external structural imbalances within the Ethiopian economy, a strategy of enhanced resource mobilisation and allocation as well as the promotion of private sector development. As this historical case study has shown, economic backwardness and widespread death caused by famine and starvation led to the eventual demise of both the imperial government and the Derg regime. This historical repetition provided a major domestic policy lesson for the Ethiopia's transitional government, namely that poverty reduction is fundamental not only for economic development but also for political stability.

"From the outset, what needed to be done was to conquer poverty. From his early days in the field through to his last years as an international statesman, Meles was

absolutely consistent in this aim. Ethiopia's overriding national challenge was to end poverty." (De Waal, 2012, p. 150)

Ethiopia's transitional government was also fully aware of the changing international context. With the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union was no longer a source of foreign finance. Moreover, the Western donor community entered a period of aid fatigue and aid flows to Africa were significantly reduced and became increasingly conditionality based. While the new Ethiopian regime was determined to refuse "to bow to the whims and wishes of the donors" (Borchgrevink, 2008, p. 200), Meles Zenawi presented himself as part of

"a new breed of African leader": genuinely pro-poor and committed to modernising and bringing development to his country." (Borchgrevink, 2008, p. 200)

Zenawi's determination to adopt a skilful manoeuvring of the diplomatic field from the early 1990s onwards stemmed from a second major policy lesson for the transitional government: both Haile Selassie and Mengistu Haile Mariam became increasingly dependent on the fortunes of USA and the Soviet Union, respectively, which significantly contributed to the overthrow of both regimes. Consequently, securing multiple sources of foreign finance through taking a much more pragmatic stance towards the international donor and investor community had to become a crucial objective in Ethiopia's foreign policy.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the evolution of the international foreign aid game during the Cold War era using Ethiopia as an in-depth case study. The paper discussed the historical interrelationships between the international donor community and the two successive Ethiopian recipient governments, the imperial government under Haile Selassie and the Derg regime under Mengistu Haile Mariam, between the end of WWII and the fall of the Iron Curtain.

We can draw three major conclusions from the historical case study of Ethiopia. First, Ethiopia and Somalia can be considered classic examples of pawns in Cold War politics. At the height of the Cold War, both the USA and the Soviet Union switched sides supporting countries which they had been furnishing assistance previously. In a global contest for power

and influence in the Horn of Africa, both superpowers used foreign aid not only for humanitarian and developmental ends, but also for strategic ends.

Second, the recipient governments have not been passive players in the international aid game. Both the Selassie and the Mengistu regime tried to maximise external financial resources while minimising the amount of loss of sovereignty over the policy agenda. Both recipient governments used international foreign aid (including military assistance) to pursue their own political objectives.

Third, the 1984-86 famine in the Horn of Africa region has clearly demonstrated the moral dilemma that the international community faces when it wants to provide humanitarian/relief assistance in a non-democratic state. By trying to save lives and mitigate the disastrous consequences of the famine on the one hand, development assistance also contributed to a prolonged life of the Mengistu government. The Ethiopian famine therefore provided valuable lessons for the international donor community. For development assistance to be effective, the international donors had to pay attention increasingly to the complex interaction of political, economic, social, historical and environmental factors that shape government policies.

The transitional government had to acknowledge two major lessons in Ethiopia's Cold War history: (i) economic backwardness and widespread death caused by famine and starvation led to the eventual demise of both the imperial government under Selassie and the Derg regime under Mengistu. As a result, the EPRDF-led government had to build its domestic legitimacy on developing strategies and programmes for economic growth and poverty reduction; (ii) both Haile Selassie and Mengistu Haile Mariam became increasingly dependent on the fortunes of USA and the Soviet Union, respectively, which ultimately led to the demise of both governments. Therefore, securing multiple sources of foreign finance through taking a much more pragmatic stance towards the international donor and investor community had to become a major pillar of the transitional government's foreign policy agenda.

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