



**FOREIGN POLICY APPROACHES OF CHINA AND U.S.A. TOWARDS  
ETHIOPIA SINCE 2018: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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2018: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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## DECLARATION

This research paper titled “*The Foreign Policy Approaches of China and USA towards Ethiopia since 2018: A comparative Analysis*” conducted under the supervision of Dr. Yacob Arsano has been submitted towards the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of MA Degree in Political Science (Comparative Politics) at Addis Ababa University. I affirm that the content of this thesis is original and that all sources of materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged. I further solemnly declare that this thesis has not been submitted to any other institution anywhere for the award of any academic degree, diploma, or certificate.

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To all of you: ‘I can no other answer make but thanks, thanks, and ever thanks!’ Shakespeare ÷ *Twelfth Night*.

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGOA	The African Growth and Opportunity Act
AU	African Union
BRI /OBOR	Belt and Road Initiative/One Belt and one Road
EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
ICHREE	International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia
ICS	US Integrated Country Strategy for Ethiopia
n.d.	No date
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
PRC	People’s Republic of China
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
TPLF	Tigray People Liberation Front
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

### **Abstract**

*The foreign policy interests of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia have been anchored on geo-strategic interests. Despite having similar strategic interests in Ethiopia, China and the U.S. pursued different foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia. What accounts for the divergence of the approaches was not explored very well. Therefore, this study aimed at explaining the divergence in foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018. A qualitative methodology, a comparative method of research, thematic and content analysis are utilized as part of the research design in this study. Primary sources including personal interviews, policy documents, official reports, speeches of leaders, and secondary sources of data are analyzed using the tools of foreign policy and international relations theories. The analysis revealed that China pursues an approach of detachment to deal with internal conflict, non-interference in domestic affairs, state centric approach in its engagement, developmentalist approach in the administration of foreign development assistance and high regard for Westphalian conception of state sovereignty. In contrast, the US pursued a policy of humanitarian intervention in its response to domestic conflicts, unilateral realism in its response to emergency, safety-net approach in the administration of humanitarian aid, the state-in-society approach in its engagement, and coercive power in enforcing its desire. The result indicated that the divergence of the foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. mainly resulted from differences in political culture, foreign policy priorities, role conception in the international system, historical experiences, self-image, strategic rivalry, differences in foreign policy decision making mechanisms and Ethiopia's behavior.*

**Keywords:** foreign policy approach/behavior, U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia, Chinese foreign policy towards Ethiopia, comparative foreign policy approach

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The research employed qualitative design, a comparative case study method and explanatory research approach to analyze the foreign policy behaviors and approaches of China and the USA towards Ethiopia since 2018. This introduction chapter consists of background of the study, statement of the problems, central argument, objectives, and significance of the study, research questions, research methodology, limitations, scope, ethical considerations, and organization of the study.

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Ethiopia has been perceived as strategic pivot for both China and U.S.A. It is considered to serve as a gateway to Africa for the two powers. Its geo-strategic location, it being the headquarters of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), its sheer demographic and geographic size, and its long-standing diplomatic history, its relative capability provide strategic weight to Ethiopia.

As a result, Shinn (2018: 62) argued that U.S. foreign policy “rarely considers Ethiopia in isolation” but in relation to the role that Ethiopia can play in the region. US foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia come as a regional package. In affirmation, Magu (2019: 173) concludes that American interests in Ethiopia have historically been guided by **geopolitical strategic concerns**.

In relation to Chinese foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia, President Hu Jintao (2003-2013) reported to have stated in 2004 that ‘Ethiopia could play a pivotal role in **enabling China to consolidate its cooperation with other African countries**’ (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023:110; Kibsgaard, 2020:2; Seifudein, 2012:148). In the articulation of Cabestan (2012:53) economic and trade cooperation of Beijing with Addis Ababa **is a means rather than an end in itself**; China was as motivated by diplomatic, strategic, and even ideological considerations as economic ones. Thus, one can argue that the foreign policy goals of both China and the U.S.A. have been anchored on **geo-strategic interests**.

With the advent of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to power in 2018, their foreign policy strategic interests remain the same. Ethiopia has continued to be as important to China as it has been to the USA. They continued to exert similar levels of influence, neither of them securing a hegemonic presence. Ward et al. (2021), using Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2017 and 2020 placed China and the United States in roughly equivalent positions as external influencers towards Ethiopia. In corroboration, the Rand Corporation (2022) identified Ethiopia as hedger and non-aligned in its relationship with China and USA (Mazzar, 2022:53).

Against that backdrop, both countries have tried to cajole, induce and/or pressure Ethiopia's foreign policy makers to their respective umbrella of influence since 2018 with different approaches and foreign policy behavior. The question to address, thus, is why the US and China pursue different approaches of foreign policy towards Ethiopia since 2018 despite similar strategic interest? What causes the difference in foreign policy behaviors and approaches? Addressing this question is at the heart of this paper.

## **1.2. Statements of the Problem**

Despite similar strategic interests, and similar level of foreign policy influence, both China and the U.S.A. pursued different at times diametrically opposing foreign policy approaches and display dissimilar foreign policy behavior towards Ethiopia. While China preferred an approach of detachment (Sany & Sheehy, 2022), non-interference and respect for sovereignty; the US pursued a policy of humanitarian intervention, unilateral realism (Lund & Turner, 2022: para.3; Magu, 2019:179), applied the carrot and stick approach at the same time (Lund & Turner, 2022: para.7).

What explains the difference in approaches is an area not explored very well. Systematized comparative analysis of foreign policy of China and the USA towards Ethiopia since 2018 is hardly available. Those available are either only anecdotal accounts of news reportage and commentaries or sketchy analysis or only focused on the general foreign policy of these two countries towards Africa and the Horn of Africa failing to cover recent developments and specific cases of comparative foreign policy of China and the US towards Ethiopia.

For instance, “*How Ethiopia's Civil War Exacerbates Strategic Competition Between the U.S. and China*” by Abyssinia Kasu (October 03, 2022) is a simple commentary of anecdotal accounts.

It simply indicates the increasing competition between China and the USA and failed to demonstrate the difference in foreign policy approaches. Another article with sketchy analysis is “*In Ethiopia, China, and the US map rival roads to lasting peace*” by Jevans Nyabiage (27 March 2023). He articulated that both China and the USA have a similar agenda but a starkly different approach. The scope of his analysis was limited to the two countries approach to the implementation of the Pretoria Peace Agreement that ended the War in Northern Ethiopia. Furthermore, Nyabiage was not able to outline the general approaches that the two countries are pursuing except for merely mentioning the difference in approach that they have. This analysis is sketchy, anecdotal, and non-systematized.

The other aspect of the literature is a general nature which only focused on general foreign policy of these two countries towards Africa and the Horn of Africa. The outstanding ones include “*The United States and China: Strategic Rivalry in Africa*” by Earl Conteh-Morgan (2018), “*The Greater Rift of China and USA in Africa*” by Ryan Cimmino (2019), “*China and the United States in Africa: Competition or Cooperation?*” by Wang Lei (2020), “*The Eagle and the Dragon in Africa: Comparing Data on Chinese and American Influence*” by Ward et al. (2021), and “*Counterbalancing Chinese Influence in the Horn of Africa: A Strategy for Security and Stability*” by Maj Ryan CK Hess (2021). These are some of the articles which simply focused towards either the Horn of Africa or Africa. It is imperative to understand the general approaches of the two countries towards Africa and the Horn of Africa. This may inform discussions regarding the foreign policy approaches of China and USA towards Ethiopia by providing a general perspective. However, those articles failed to provide specific analysis of the foreign policy approaches and behaviors of the two countries towards Ethiopia. Thus, on account of the above literature review, one could argue that there is yawning academic gap necessitating further inquiry; hence the topic: “***Foreign Policy Approaches of China and US towards Ethiopia since 2018***”.

### **1.3. Core Argument of the Study**

The foreign policies of both China and the U.S.A. towards Ethiopia have been anchored on the geo-political and geo-strategic significance of Ethiopia. Their premise is the same but the way/the approach through which they want to achieve their specific foreign policy objectives are different, competitive and at times opposing towards each other. This has resulted from their different world

views of the international system, historical experiences, international identity, role conceptions, strategic rivalries, political culture within which their respective national interests are defined, and approaches of foreign policy are selected.

#### **1.4. Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to explain the underlying reasons for the divergence of foreign policy approaches of China and the U.S. towards Ethiopia since 2018 through a comparative analysis. The specific objectives of this study are:

- 1.4.1.** To explore the historical evolution of the foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since the commencement of their respective diplomatic relations.
- 1.4.2.** To compare the foreign policy approaches of China and the U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018.
- 1.4.3.** To explain the reasons that accounts for the divergence of foreign policy approaches of the two powers towards Ethiopia.
- 1.4.4.** To identify implications of the foreign policy approaches of the two powers towards Ethiopia.

#### **1.5. Research Question(s)**

The study aimed at addressing the following cardinal research questions:

- 1.5.1.** How has the foreign policies of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia evolved since the commencement of their official diplomatic relations with Ethiopia?
- 1.5.2.** How different are the foreign policy approaches of the two powers towards Ethiopia since 2018?
- 1.5.3.** What causes the difference in the foreign policy behaviors and approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018? Why China and the U.S.A. pursue dissimilar and different foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia despite similar strategic interests?
- 1.5.4.** What are the implications of the divergence in foreign policy approaches of the two powers towards Ethiopia?

## **1.6. Scope of the Study**

This study is about the foreign policy approaches of China and the U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018. Its temporal scope is between 2018-2024, while its spatial scope extends to foreign policy issues of the three countries: China, U.S.A., and Ethiopia. The directional scope is prominently China's and U.S.A.'s policy behaviors and approaches towards Ethiopia and not the other way round, as such it is unidirectional. This does not mean Ethiopia remains to be a passive recipient of the foreign policy of the two powers. In fact, some of China's and U.S.A.'s foreign policy behavior might be triggered by the foreign policy behavior of Ethiopia. In that case, Ethiopia's foreign policy behavior will not be exempt from investigation as well.

## **1.7. Research Methodology and Research Design**

The study employs qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Qualitative design is selected because it is important to understand foreign policy approach and behavior that usually exhibits discrepancies between stated policies and its implementation, theories and realities, rhetoric, and praxis. Interpretive and explanatory epistemological approaches are employed.

Interpretive approach aims at understanding events by discovering the meanings human beings attribute to their behavior and the external world and it aims at understanding the motivations that lie behind human behavior within specified socio-political contexts (Kothari, 2004; Neuman, 2007; Porta & Keating, 2008). Thus, interpretive explanatory epistemological approach better helps understand meanings attached to a particular foreign policy motivation and behavior which is the unit of analysis in this study.

As “explanatory research identifies the sources of social behaviors, belief, conditions, and events; it documents causes, tests theories, and provides reasons” to an event that is well recognized but needs an explanation as to why things are the way they are, this study employs explanatory research design (Neuman, 2007:16). The research design is, thus, qualitative-interpretive-explanatory.

### **1.7.1. Research Approach**

Interpretivist and realist epistemological and ontological approaches were combined with international and foreign policy theoretical tools to better understand the foreign policy behavior and approaches of China and the U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018. Constructivism, liberalism, realism, and their variants will be used as theoretical tools of qualitative analysis.

### **1.7.2. Research Methods**

The method of research in this study is a comparative case study. “Comparison involves explanation, in that one of the principal reasons that we invoke comparisons is to explain how ostensibly different factors have led to similar outcomes, or how ostensibly similar situations have led to different outcomes” (Porta & Keating, 2008: 177). This study will explain the divergence of foreign policy behaviors of China and the U.S.A. towards Ethiopia. This is better explained through comparative-explanatory method of research.

### **1.7.3. Data Collection Techniques**

Multi-method data collection techniques were employed. Personal interview, digital observation, policy document review and analysis, literature reviews were important techniques of data collection employed in this study. The data was collected through interviews with foreign service officials of the two countries, Ethiopian officials, and scholars. Extensive text analysis was also used to collect and analyze data. Media and government reports, political statements and some other relevant documents were used.

### **1.7.4. Sampling Approach, Method, and Techniques**

This study utilized a non-probability sampling approach as it offers the researcher greater freedom and flexibility of selecting the individual population units as it fits to the research topic. As the issue of foreign policy is known to only few high government agencies of the respective countries within which only few individuals do have the opportunity to the floor of foreign policy decision making, this paper employed judgment sampling (purposive sampling) design and snowball sampling (chain referral sampling) technique. This paper used snowball sampling as it can be best used to find and recruit “hidden populations” that is, groups not easily accessible to the researcher.

### **1.7.5. Sampling Frame and Sampling Units**

The sampling units were government agencies of the two countries (China and the U.S.A.), former ambassadors that used to help formulate foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs/the State Department, Embassies, think tanks, Foreign Relation Councils, foreign affairs committees, legislatures, foreign policy commentators etc were sampling units and frames. Press statements on Ethiopian conflict, and human rights situation, policy documents including their African Foreign Policy strategies were also important units of sampling and analysis. Individuals from the Ethiopian Foreign, finance, defense Ministries, research institutes were also part of the sampling units for interview.

### **1.7.6. Sources of Data**

Sources of data for this research are primary and secondary sources. Personal interviews, policy documents, political statements, official reports, press releases and statements are among the primary sources of data for this study. Secondary sources of data include articles, journals, books, abstracts, commentaries, published and unpublished theses.

### **1.7.7. Operationalization**

Interview questions were prepared, and a detailed interview schedule was held with 17 individuals. Interviewees include Tibor P. Nagy Jr. a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (2018-2021) and U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia (1999-2002), David Shinn, former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia (1996-1999) and one other senior U.S. diplomat from the U.S.A. From China, key informants include 3 senior foreign service officers and a university professor who want to remain anonymous. From Ethiopia key informants include a senior policy advisor, two director generals, and a director from Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a director from Ministry of Finance, two director generals from the Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs, senior researcher from Center for Cooperation, Dialogue and Research, and a Brigadier General and a Colonel from FDRE War College participated in the personal interview for this study.

Notes were taken while the interview took place. With reference to document sources, data was collected from the internet, books, journals, policy documents based on their relevance to the topic.

### **1.7.8. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Content and thematic analysis were combined to treat the data and analyze it. Thematic analysis is found to be useful for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification, process of coding and identifying themes of foreign policy positions, policy statements, convergences, and divergences of policy positions. The data has been analyzed through an approach of empirical, methodological, controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules of description, classification, and contextualizing, understanding intentions, making connection, and looking process all together.

### **1.7.9. Data Presentation**

The data were narrated and coded in line with the research objectives so that they would be organized into meaningful themes. Then, the data were related to theoretical frameworks of foreign policy behavior to build logical chain of evidence to the issue under consideration. Confirmation was done through the triangulation of sources of data. Presentation emphasizes important and relevant data.

## **1.8. Case Selection Justification**

China and the U.S.A. have similar strategic interests and levels of influence in Ethiopia. Their foreign policies are driven by the geostrategic interests that these countries have towards Ethiopia. They are both great powers and heavy weights in relation to the international system. Despite those similarities in interest, and equivalent degree of influence in Ethiopia, they pursue different foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia. The case allows for, in the parlance of Sartori (1991: 246), sensible comparison that engages “entities whose attributes are in part shared (similar) and in part non-shared (and thus, we say, incomparable)”.

As to why they pursue different foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia despite the similar interests is at the center of this study. This is better achieved through what Przeworski and Teune (1970) called Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) in comparative qualitative analysis. Because “with the MSSD differences in the outcome are explained for generally similar cases” (Porta, 2014: 44). But also, part of the reason for selecting these countries is related to the arguably high foreign policy impact that these countries would have on Ethiopia. They are the two great powers

who compete for greater influence. Thus, there are no better candidate than the USA and China to comparatively analyze in relation to their foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia.

### **1.9. Significance of the Study**

Empirical literature on the subject under consideration is scant, those available are either anecdotal accounts, sketchy, or outdated or have not covered comparative analysis or are simply general. Thus, this study may fill that gap. In that sense it will help systematize idiographic and separate accounts of the two powers' foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia. Thus, it will contribute to theoretical interpretation of the empirical data regarding foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia. As a result, the study will become a useful source of reference for academics, policy makers, and government advisors.

### **1.10. Limitations of the Study**

In this study methodological limitations related to the shortcoming of the research method and operational limitations attributed to the operation of the design were observed.

#### **1.10.1. Operational Limitations**

Some of the questions expected to be answered by the research were political and diplomatically sensitive in nature which means attempts at answering them using interview was a challenge as the key informants tended to give diplomatically correct answers which may not be academically correct. This can be compensated by including individuals from the research community who may have wider academic autonomy. Furthermore, different sources were utilized for triangulation.

Access to high profile documents and officials was important to dissect the very intentions of foreign policy behaviors, but it was not easy to realize that. To reduce the limitation in that connection, this paper engaged retired foreign policy insiders who know the *modus operandi* of the foreign policy of the two countries.

Prior research and literature on the subject at hand are hardly available. This may possibly compromise the quality of the thesis as it may potentially limit triangulation and validation. Inference from other similar works was used to mitigate such limitations.

### **1.10.2. Methodological Limitations**

Methodologically, a snapshot (one time) interview was not enough to understand the very behavior of foreign policy of China and the U.S. towards Ethiopia, non-response error, which occurred when potential respondents refused to reply, was also limitation to the study. Both of which would compromise the construct validity of the research.

The study to reduce nonresponse error increases the number of interviewees and to reduce the problem of construct validity it used data triangulation with secondary sources. Ecological fallacy has been reduced by balancing sampling between the state actor and non-state actors, diplomats, and researchers of foreign policy. Individuals from independent institutions were interviewed to avoid caucus sophistication and biases.

### **1.11. Ethical Considerations**

The research design and practices were guided by ethical principles. Ethical principles that include voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality. The name, position and address of some key informants is not mentioned in the research due to the sensitivity of their position. Thus, informants are identified as Key Informants (KI) in the research report and only those who agreed to be mentioned are referred in their name and position.

### **1.12. Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction which consists of all the elements of the research design, the second chapter delves into theoretical literature and conceptual frameworks. This chapter deals with theories of foreign policy and international politics. The third chapter explores historical evolution of foreign policies of the U.S. and China towards Ethiopia. The fourth chapter analyze, compare, and discuss the foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018 and the last chapter is about implications of the foreign policy approaches of China and the U.S., Conclusions, and recommendations.

## **Conclusion**

Despite similar strategic interests, China and the U.S. pursue different foreign policy approaches and behaviors towards Ethiopia. They use different means to achieve their foreign policy ends. To

explain the difference of the behavior of the two powers is at the heart of this study. Qualitative research design was combined with comparative explanatory approach. In terms of theoretical frameworks, burgeoning foreign policy theories are combined with meta-theories of international relations. Such research design is found to be helpful to give both positivist and hermeneutic epistemological and ontological insights.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### Introduction

This chapter introduces the conceptualization of foreign policy approaches, and reviews relevant theoretical frameworks that are related to the topic under discussion. This chapter, by engaging the theories tried real world situation demonstrate the relevance of the frameworks to the title understudy. Thus, after providing lexical definition of foreign policy approach, the chapter justifies the relevance of innenpolitik approach, systemic theories, and neo-classical realism as theoretical tools to explain the foreign policy behaviors of Chian and U.S.A.

#### 2.1. Conceptualization: Foreign Policy Approaches Versus Foreign Policy Behavior

This study cannot find a precise definition of foreign policy approach and the forms that it takes from the literature that it has consulted. Thus, the study relies on lexical definition of the term ‘approach’. According to Merriam Webster, the term approach can be defined as an act or instance of approaching or the taking of preliminary steps toward a particular purpose or a particular manner of taking such steps. Thus, in this paper, the term approach is defined as a way of doing things, as a particular manner of taking steps to achieve foreign policy objectives. Manner implies the way behavior is displayed. That means in this research foreign policy approach and foreign policy behavior, *mutatis mutandis*, are employed interchangeably.

According to the Council on foreign relations three main questions inform a government’s approach to foreign policy: engagement vs isolationism, realism vs idealism and unilateralism vs multilateralism (How Do Governments Approach Foreign Policy? n.d.). This, however, cannot not be an exhaustive framework to analyze foreign policy approaches. That necessitates further exploration of theoretical frameworks to help capture the intricacies of foreign policy behavior and approach as “nothing is so practical as a good theory”(Lewin, 1944:27). Hence, that brings in the need for reviewing related theoretical frameworks in the following.

#### 2.2. Theoretical Frameworks: Theories of Foreign Policy and International Politics

Foreign policy behaviors and approaches are the results of the complex action and interaction of systemic, state, non-state, and individual factors, actors, and interests. “The core concept of foreign policy theory is **state interests**, and the main logic is that **state interests determine foreign policy behaviors**”(Song, 2023:22) [Emphasis Added]. However, it is difficult to determine a state’s real interest because “foreign policy goals may not be those that are explicitly stated” at the respective foreign policy documents of states (Brown & Ainsley, 2005:71). Stated interests may be affected by domestic and external environments, the capability and willingness of actors; so is foreign policy behavior.

Complicating the case is the lack of well-developed theories of foreign policy. Some take theories of international relations and theories of foreign policy interchangeably. Some others even go on to challenge whether there are theories of foreign policy at all. In this regard, Kenneth Waltz (1996: 54-57), argued that given the complexity of the foreign policy-making process, and the fact that foreign policy is shaped by domestic, individual, and international factors, it is impossible to construct a theory of foreign policy. According to Waltz, “the best that we can hope to achieve is a theory of international politics; that is, one that ‘describes the range of likely outcomes of the actions and interactions of states within a given system and shows how the range of expectations varies as systems change’” (1979: 71). However, international politics is not enough to explain foreign policy of states, even to the admission of Waltz (1996: 54-55) who argued that:

*Indeed, any theory of international politics can at best limp along, able to explain some matters of foreign policy while having to leave much of foreign policy aside. A theory has to take the performance of governments as its object of explanation in order to be called a theory of foreign policy.*

In corroboration with the above, Song (2023:12) affirms that “the difference and diversity of the foreign policies of various states are questions that cannot be answered by the theories of international relations”. Theories of international relations can only address part of foreign policy behavior.

*States’ behaviors are restricted by the international regime, so international relations theory can explain part of foreign policies. However, because the formulation of foreign policy is simultaneously restricted by domestic politics and many factors at the individual level, the explanatory power of the theory of international relations is very limited. (Song, 2023:12)*

Nevertheless, neither Waltz (1996) nor Song (2023) were able to formulate theories of foreign policy. Waltz only recommended “Students of international politics ...to concentrate on, and make use of, separate theories of internal and external politics until someone figures out a way to unite them” (1996:57). Similarly, all that Song can propose is the “need to synthesize the elements and logic of different theories and analyze how they can be organically combined to ultimately shape the states’ (rational or irrational) foreign policy choices”(2023:12).

Many scholars, however, want more than this—they also want to be able to explain the specific foreign policies of countries (Schmidt, 2012). These scholars have ventured to create a theory of foreign policy, one that seeks “to explain what states try to achieve in the external realm and when they try to achieve it” (Rose, 1998:145) and “dedicated to answering the question of what causes a state to adopt a specific type of foreign policy” (Schmidt, 2008:10). For Brian Schmidt (2008:10):

*compared to a theory of international politics, which is interested in explaining general patterns of behavior such as the causes of war, a theory of foreign policy seeks to explain why a particular state pursued a specific policy at a certain point in time.*

Notwithstanding the above theoretical debates, Rose (1998) distinguished four kinds of foreign policy theories that can help explain foreign policy approaches. They are Innenpolitik theories, offensive realism, defensive realism, and neo-classical realism. However, as several of their tenets are derivatives of theories of international relations in a reductionist way, these foreign policy theories as specified by Rose (1998) may not be sufficient to explain the subject at hand.

This calls for combining what Waltz (1979) referred to as analytic theories and systemic approaches of international politics. Therefore, this study will blend the burgeoning foreign policy theories as distinguished by Rose (1998) with meta-theories of international relations (i.e., Realism, liberalism, and constructivism) to comparatively explain the foreign policy approaches of China and the USA towards Ethiopia since 2018.

To that effect, this study employs the systemic approach, domestic accentuating foreign policy approach, and the neo-classical realist approach (Schmidt, 2008), this classification has wisely combined burgeoning foreign policy theories and international relation theories in analytic and systemic manner as suggested by Waltz (1979). The basis of classification is whether the foreign

policy is primarily influenced or shaped by internal (domestic situations), external (systemic or international) situations or by both factors. Here, Systemic Approach deals with mainstream theories of international relations. Liberalism, realism, constructivism, and their variants will be employed as important theoretical tools that can help in the process of understanding of the world views of China and the USA in their approaches towards Ethiopia since 2018. With that in mind, the section that follows deals with three categories of foreign policy approaches: innenpolitik theories, systemic theories, and neo-classical realism.

### **2.2.1. Domestic Accentuating/Innenpolitik Theories**

These theories emphasize internal and domestic factors in shaping the foreign policy behavior of states. “Internal factors such as economic and political ideology, national character, partisan politics, or socio-economic structure determine how countries behave towards the world beyond their border. Foreign policy is best understood as a product of country’s domestic dynamics.” (Rose, 1998:148). This model focuses on the impact of the nature of the state on foreign policy behavior. According to Ripsman (2017:10) “Innenpolitik theories are unit-level approaches, which explain foreign policy primarily in terms of the internal characteristics of states, their domestic political processes and the individuals, parties, and coalitions that lead them”. The characteristics of the state can be liberal or authoritarian/illiberal. This theory seems to adhere to the foreign policy decision making model to explain foreign policy approaches and behaviors.

*Although foreign policy is a policy of how to interact with other states, its formation is still a domestic political process in essence. In this process, the domestic power structure, political leaders, bureaucrats, interest groups, and decision-making process of state will have an inevitable impact on the final content and form of its foreign policy. (Song, 2023:11)*

This definition reduced foreign policy to a mere process, and overlooked the content, and motivation of foreign policy. According to Waltz (1979: 61), “this approach explains international outcomes through elements and combination of elements located at national or subnational levels. It is about the behavior of parts”.

However, foreign policy choices irrespective of how they are chosen, who participates to choose them, the internal mechanism of foreign policy decision making cannot escape the effect of the international system as “the behavior of the units that make up the system is assumed to be

determined by the system” (Brown & Ainsley, 2005:75). In affirmation, Waltz (1979:39) articulated that “If the international organization of units affects their behavior and their interactions, then one cannot predict the outcomes or understand them merely knowing the characteristics, purposes, and the interaction of the system’s units”. That means the mode of organization, interaction and the ‘rules-based order’ has its fair share of influence in determining the foreign policy behavior of states. “It will be insufficient, and a system approach will be needed if outcomes are affected not only by the properties and interconnection of variables but also by the way in which they are organized”(Waltz, 1979:39) in the system. This necessitates the utilization of systemic theories of foreign policy as an additional tool to explain foreign policy behavior and approaches to the case under investigation.

### **2.2.2. Systemic Theories of Foreign Policy**

These groups of theories argue that it is the international regimes that determine foreign policy approaches and behaviors of state. How the state views the international system and its reaction to the system is manifested through its foreign policy behavior. The best theories that explain the international system in relation to foreign policy are realism, liberalism, constructivism, and their variants. These theories are engaged in more detail here.

#### **2.2.2.1. Realism and its Variants**

The realist approach to foreign policy views international engagement in terms of power relations between and among states. “This means that the language of ‘power politics’ helps explain state action. All else (regional and international organizations, or of economics or law) is ultimately of secondary importance”(Sutch & Elias, 2007: 43). The foreign policy behavior of states is a reaction to the distribution of global and regional power. The calculus of national interests is how much power can a state gain and preserve from international engagement. In the articulation of Sutch and Elias (2007), the calculus of foreign policy zeroes in on gaining power, reducing threats from power, and configuring the balance of power.

The characters of international law, and international institutions like the UN, UNSC, and AU are understood within the context of global distribution of power and in terms of the power relations of member states to those international sociological institutions. The state is a unitary actor in

foreign policy according to realism. The realist school of thought, as united as it may be on the state as unitary actor is so divided **as to what causes the state to act the way it does**. This brings up the classical realist/traditional and neo-realist/structural debates to realist school of thought. Classical realism attribute state behavior to human nature whereas the neo-realist/structuralist attributes it to the international structure of distribution of power. “... classical realists argue that human nature causes states to act in certain ways and the structural realists argue that the system of international politics is the causal motor of world politics” (Sutch & Elias, 2007: 46).

The foreign policy response of the state to the international structure includes maximizing security/minimizing threat, maximizing and maintaining power. In the articulation of Hans J. Morgenthau (1948: 21):

*A political policy seeks either to keep power, to increase power or to demonstrate power and the corresponding foreign policies are either a policy of maintaining the status quo (maximizing security), a policy of imperialism (Maximizing power) or a policy of prestige/power demonstration for the purpose of either to maintain or to maximize it.*

To Brown and Ainsley (2005: 65) topics of ‘the state, foreign policy, power, security, conflict and war’ are agendas of realism. As, on the one hand, the foreign policy of the U.S. and China towards Ethiopia for much of its existence since 2018 was predominated by the Ethiopia conflict, on the other hand as the two states are accused of using Ethiopia a battle ground for power domination and competition, it is difficult to avoid realism as tool of analysis in relation to the topic under consideration.

Realism, however, cannot not be exhaustive enough to include all actors of international engagement and is reductionist in its definition of national interests, by implication state approach and behavior. It limits national interests to mere power amassing and foreign policy to power relations (Morgenthau 1948). However, goals of national interests in the contemporary world go far beyond hard power, and it includes now economic interests, human rights, democracy, and international norms and values. This requires this paper to extend theoretical discussions to liberalism to cover foreign policy issues and interests that might not be covered by realism and its variants.

### 2.2.2.2.Liberalism and its Variants

Liberalism is an alternative to realism. “Individual freedoms and rights, global poverty and economic justice, **humanitarian intervention, international law, and human rights** are among normative elements of liberalism”(Sutch & Elias, 2007: 65) [Emphasis Added]. Liberal foreign policy is founded on international sociological institutions like the UN, UNSC, and international normative values like democracy, human rights, and freedoms. States promote values like democracy and human rights for instrumental and/or normative reasons. Liberal school of thought is predominated by the democratic peace thesis and neo-liberal institutionalism. Democratic peace thesis stipulates that:

*liberal states are less warlike as liberal character of a state means that there is an in-built respect for individual rights and freedoms and due to the requirement of the consent of the citizens for declaring war as they fight and foot the bill for war, they are likely to be reluctant. (Sutch & Elias, 2007: 71).*

In view of that underlying assumption, liberal states use their foreign policy to promote democracy as this would in the long term be the right thing to do for both materialist and normative reasons.

Neo-institutionalism is another variant of liberalism. It acknowledges the importance of multichannel interaction of various actors of international affairs. Institutions and organizations are instruments and tools of international engagement. Instead of the realist’s military capability, liberal institutionalists have “organizationally dependent capabilities, such as voting power, ability to form coalitions, and control of elite networks: that is, by capabilities that are affected by the norms, networks and institutions associated with international organization” (Keohane & Nye, 2011:47).

In general terms, liberal foreign policy behaviors as illustrated above are manifested in China’s and the U.S.A. foreign policy approaches towards third countries. Criticizing each other’s foreign policy behavior towards another state is one feature of their interactions at international institutions. This is the case in their foreign policy at international institutions like the UNSC. Their positions have a deep ideological orientation and roots. “To the U.S., China is actively subverting the U.S.-led liberal international order. Also, since China presents itself as an

alternative development model to the liberal democratic one, the U.S. suspects it of popularizing authoritarianism in the developing world and beyond.” (Almén *et al.*, 2021: 5).

China offers an alternative to what it characterized as interfering democracy peace model. Its developmental and governance model opposes to open market democracy advocated by the USA “Seen this way, the U.S.-China strategic competition clearly assumes an ideological dimension. China has a hands-off approach against other countries affairs including human right issues” (Tran, 2021:1), while U.S.A. pursue humanitarian intervention and unilateral realism.

More specifically, both China and the U.S.A. have been using international organizations like the UNSC to project their foreign policy towards Ethiopia. The U.S.A. in response to what it says Ethiopia’s violation of international human rights and humanitarian law tried to use the UNSC to influence Ethiopia’s behavior. To do so, it was trying to create coalition with UNSC permanent member states, African states and UNSC penholders to articulate and effectuate its foreign policy towards Ethiopia. It has red flagged the Ethiopian issue during northern conflict 14 times at the UNSC.

In a similar manner, China arguing that Ethiopia as sovereign states should not be subject to outside interference in what China and Ethiopia itself referred to as internal affairs as defined by article 2 of the United Nations charter, opposes U.S. pressure at the UNSC on Ethiopia. China uses its growing structural power; its ability to influence rules, norms, and the ‘structure’ of the relationship patterns within the international system to help shape the discussion at the UNSC in relations to Ethiopia. China has vetoed, water down those issues that were tabled under U.S. coordination at the UNSC against Ethiopia.

The above two theories: realism and liberalism with their variants are positivist /foundationalist in terms of epistemological and ontological approach. However, this paper would argue that foreign policy behaviors are not always observable independent of interpretive theoretical tools, nor can they be found objectively out there to the extent the above theories would like to demonstrate. That means this research should look for an additional alternative theoretical explanation like constructivism to capture the whole picture in relation to the topic under discussion. That leads this paper to review constructivism as interpretive theoretical of foreign policy behavior.

### 2.2.2.3. Constructivism

Constructivism will help us to see how states construct meanings to their policy direction both at bilateral and multi-lateral platforms.

*Constructivism emphasizes the significance of norms and ideas, which is in the nation's collective consciousness, associated with conceptions of national identity, and in the foreign policy context, norms and ideas are best thought of national identity. Activities, relations, and interactions are very important between agents and structures; as a result, through these activities, states can understand each other, and they can build and shape their identities. (Erbas, 2021: 5087)*

For McCourt (2022) constructivism is not simply about norms, identity, and culture, and their role in international politics, nor about 'ideas', 'meaning', 'consciousness'; it is also about how they are constructed, the relational manifestations of states during the construction and how they live within that construction.

Considering the above theoretical assertions, the collective consciousness and national identity of China and U.S.A. is not only very distinct in several ways but also the way they have been participating in the construction of those norms, identity and values has been different. While China because of its history enviously protect sovereignty and respect the principle of non-interference in its foreign policy, the U.S. who claimed to champion fundamental values of human rights and democracy argues that there should always be a limit to sovereignty. For the U.S. democracy and human rights are not only important on their own rights superseding archaic principles of sovereignty but are in the collective consciousness of the American foreign policy decision makers and the U.S. public. In terms of what McCourt (2022) referred to as relational constructivism, while China's foreign policy approach predisposed to a win-win formulation with no stringent, the US approach is reportedly dominated by donor-recipient relations attached with stringent. The collective consciousness of the two countries determines their view of the world, their management of international relation including their engagement with Ethiopia.

For example, China's and the U.S.A.'s view of Ethiopia's conflict (2020-2022) and the resultant positions taken at the UNSC was different. While China views it in the lens of the sacrosanct respect for sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Ethiopia, the

U.S.A. preferred to see it in terms of the international norms of human rights, humanitarian law that should be protected through even the principle of responsibility to protect (R2P).

China's foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia basis on low politics that is on economic development, infrastructure building, support at international *fora* including at the UNSC and to use Ethiopia as show case of success of its foreign policy and as launching pad to the rest of Africa. This approach has a lot of constructivism into it, it is about building confidence; to show case that China investing a lot in a relatively resource (extractive) poor Ethiopia is not there in Africa for an exploitative relation. In line with the theory of constructivism, China's foreign policy approach aimed at increasing understanding, expanding consensus, strengthening friendship and promoting cooperation.

U.S. foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia has been very sensitive towards Chinese and Russian presence in the country. McCourt (2022: 20), “drawing on ongoing research into U.S. foreign policymaking towards great power challengers like Russia and China, showed the sensitivity to **international norms** and the US political culture, especially America's **role as a hegemon**, being crucial to the understanding of the formation of U.S. strategy” [Emphasis Added).

There are several other empirical illustrations that showcase differences in foreign policy approaches of U.S.A. and China towards Ethiopia as would be further elaborated in chapter four of this paper. Such empirical knowledge is better interpreted through theoretical prism(s) like constructivism. That is why constructivism is an integral part of the theoretical framework of this research.

### **2.2.3. Neo-Classical Realism**

This theory of foreign policy tries to combine domestic and systemic factors into a comprehensive theory of foreign policy called Neo-classical realism. Neo-classical realists argue that domestic factors are needed to explain how systemic factors are translated into foreign policy decisions (Schmidt, 2008; Rose, 1998). Domestic factors are not however independent variables in neo-classical realism as innenpolitik theories would like to assert, they simply are dependent on the international system.

Neo-classical realism asserts that “if there is any single dominant factor shaping the broad patterns of nations’ foreign policy over time, it is their relative material power *vis-à-vis* the international system and so this is where analysis of foreign policy should begin” (Rose, 1998: 150). For neo-classical realists, relative capabilities are the independent determinants of foreign policy behavior of states. The relative position and capabilities of nations in the international system determines its foreign policy. That means a country’s foreign policy behavior and approach cannot simply be determined by its national interests but also by power consideration in relation to the system.

In the articulation of Colin Elman “states rationally decide foreign policies depending on a combination of power and interests”(2007:16). Foreign policy is the skillful consideration of domestic capabilities and international distribution of power. “Neoclassical realists agree that material capabilities and the distribution of power are the starting points for an analysis of international outcomes”(Schmidt, 2008: 16).

In a somewhat similar tone to neo-classical realism, Song (2023) introduced what he terms *positional realism* which centers its argument on the relative capability of states in relation to the international system, and its society. Song (2023:11) argued that it is “unlikely to draw a universal conclusion about foreign policy behavior because the diplomatic strategies of different states are the result of the joint actions of three levels of factors, i.e., international regime, domestic politics, and state leaders”. These three levels of factors resonate well with the three levels of analysis of Kenneth Waltz (2001): individual, state and system level of analysis.

This argument of Song (2023) is in line with the neoclassical realists’ assumption that as foreign policy choices are made by actual leaders and elites with their limitations, perceptions and misperceptions within state and societal constraint, their analysis of relative capabilities in relation to the international system cannot not be objectively evaluated. This affects their behavior and the way they display their behavior and approach foreign policy issues. Hence, “power analysis must therefore also examine the strength and structure of states relative power to their societies” (Song, 2023:19), in addition to analyzing capabilities relative to the international system.

Therefore, neo-classical realism concluded that “to understand the way states interpret and respond to their external environment, one must analyze how systemic pressures are translated through unit level intervening variables such as decision makers’ perception and domestic state

structure’’ (Rose, 1998:152). That means, neo-classical realism could better explain the foreign policy approaches and behavior of both China and the U.S.A. towards Ethiopia.

The problem with neo-classical realism, however, is that it takes the international system as an independent variable while it takes domestic state structure and leaders’ perception as intervening variables dependent on the international system. This may not always be true particularly with regards to superpowers like the U.S.A. and China who themselves are capable of either directly affecting the international system to their favor or override it to achieve their national interests through unilateral measures. Taking that into account, Lobell et al. (2009: 2-3) contend that:

*Neither a purely systemic theory of international outcomes, such as neorealist balance of power theory, nor a purely Innenpolitik theory of foreign policy, such as liberal or democratic peace theory, can explain US foreign policy decision makers behavior. Instead, a combination of international opportunities, relatively low external threat levels, and domestic political constraints appear to account for US foreign policy behavior. Complex relationships between systemic and unit-level variables in shaping foreign policy are not unique to the United States. Unit-level variables constrain or facilitate the ability of all types of states – great powers as well as lesser states – to respond to systemic imperatives.*

Hence, in view of that, this paper combined the above theories: innenpolitik approach, systemic theories, and neo-classical realism to explain the foreign policy behaviors and approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018. In short, this research adopted an eclectic approach to foreign policy analysis.

## **Conclusion**

To sum it up, foreign policy behaviors and approaches are the results of the joint action and interaction of systemic, state, and individual factors. Thus, it is only the combined application of what Waltz (1979) referred to as analytic and systemic approaches that can help to capture the foreign policy approaches of states. Foreign policy theories as a simple derivative of some of the international relations theories are not well developed to sufficiently explain foreign policy behavior. Therefore, this study combines the burgeoning foreign policy theories with mainstream international relation theories to comparatively explain the foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE U.S. AND CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICIES TOWARDS ETHIOPIA: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter provides with the historical background and evolution of U.S. and China's foreign policies and approaches towards Ethiopia since the official commencement of their relationship with Ethiopia. The official diplomatic relations of the U.S. with Ethiopia commenced in 1903, while China's official diplomatic relations with Ethiopia began in 1970.

Since the commencement of official diplomatic relations, the foreign policy approaches of U.S.A. and China evolve from one form to another. However, one key factor remains constant the international distribution of power as assumed by the realists has been shaping their respective foreign policy approaches and behaviors.

The U.S. foreign policy approach has evolved from isolationism (1903 -1935) to non-entanglement in the war and politics of Europe (1935-1941) then to the cold war realism (1941- 1991) and to the realist humanitarian intervention and global war on terrorism (1991-2018). These approaches were the driving instruments of the U.S. foreign policy behavior towards Ethiopia.

China's foreign policy approach on its part evolved from the cold war ideological entanglement (1970-1991) to a pragmatic realist strategy of keeping low profile (1991-2013) and then to the defensive realist foreign policy strategy of "Striving for Achievement" (2013-2018). Those approaches shape China's foreign policy behavior towards Ethiopia. The sections that follow illustrated the evolution of U.S. and China's foreign policy approaches and factors that led to the changes through historical empiricism.

#### 3.1.The U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Ethiopia: Historical Empiricism

Ethiopians are said to have traded with the Americans as far back as the 1800s. The inference by Getachew (2009:16) of racial segregation in the first Baptist church in the United States against "Ethiopians merchants" resulting in their walking away from the hall of the church which led to the establishment of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in 1808 is a corroboration of the

longstanding contacts between the two. In view of that one could argue that Ethiopia's relations with the United States spans over 200 years. However, official diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and the U.S.A. began with the signing of treaty of commerce in 1903.

### **3.1.1. The U.S. Foreign Policy Approach towards Ethiopia during the Earlier Period of the Relationship (1903-1935)**

In 1903, U.S.A. and Ethiopia agreed to receive representatives "in order to perpetuate and strengthen the friendly relations which exist between Ethiopia and the United States of America" (U.S. State Department of the Office of the Historians, n.d.; the Treaty of Commerce between U.S.A. and Ethiopia, 1903, Art. V.). The words **perpetuate and strengthen** taken from the text of the treaty of commerce acknowledges pre-existing relations between the two countries. The U.S. interest in Ethiopia was commercial, and engagement was moderated by isolationism and the principle of non-involvement in European politics.

Contrasting the foreign policy objective of U.S.A. with other powers who established diplomatic relations with Ethiopia, Skinner (1906: 91) argued that "America was the first country to establish diplomatic relations for the avowed purpose of only protecting and extending **commerce**, and without a political issue of any character to discuss". It means that geopolitical balance of power was not part of U.S. foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia at least at the beginning of the relationship as the U.S. foreign Policy was generally guided by the principle of "non-entanglement in European politics and War" (U.S. State Department of the Office of the Historian, n.d). This foreign policy approach of U.S.A. contrasted with those of the Great Britain, France, and Italy who vied for not only geographical influence but also colonial control.

In fact, the very first US official mission to Ethiopia led by Robert P. Skinner in 1903 was driven by commercial interests. In this regard, Skinner (1906: 93) recalled that "to investigate and report upon the trade possibilities of Ethiopia, to safeguard our existing interest by the negotiation of a commercial treaty these were the motives which had prompted the organization of the American mission". Paul Henze (2000:176) reiterated that the U.S. had no other interests than **trade and commerce**. This partly indicates the manner and approaches of U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia in early period of the diplomatic relations.

However, the justification given to send a mission to and establish diplomatic relations with Ethiopia was implicitly pushed by external factors like the influence of European powers on international trade and the need to protect potential and actual American commercial interests. In this regard, Skinner (1906:93) himself justified that the partition of Africa by European powers, the creation of custom house by the Europeans and all related administrative measures whereby trade was made to follow flag were among the reasons for the US to establish diplomatic relations with Ethiopia. In that vein, geopolitics and international political economy factored in the U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia.

From there, the relationship eventually gained momentum in response to both the global political condition and the increasing U.S. interest towards Ethiopia. The U.S. legation was established in Addis Ababa in 1906 (Getachew, 2009:19; Nymeyer, 2003:3) and on July 6, 1909, the legation was promoted to be represented by a Minister Resident and Consul General (*US State Department of Office of the Historian*, n.d.), and in 1910, the US President proclaimed that Ethiopia's government was friendly (Getachew, 2009:20).

*In general, Ethiopia had a great allure for U.S. businessmen, and newspapers reported the country to be an “El Dorado<sup>1</sup>” possessing “wealth beyond power of calculation of human beings.” However, the U.S. still **clung to its isolationist foreign policy which sought to avoid any “entanglement” in international politics.** That policy was beginning to unwind, however. (Getachew, 2009:19)*

In consonance with the structural realists' analysis of international relations, U.S.A. foreign policy behavior towards Ethiopia was affected by the distribution of power in the international system. The neo-realist/structuralist attributes state behavior to the international structure of distribution of power as “... the system of international politics is the causal motor of world politics”(Sutch & Elias, 2007: 46).

Having had long-standing geopolitical and economic interests in Ethiopia, Britain and Italy tried to derail the agreement that was signed in 1903 (Getachew, 2009:29). Italy had colonial desire on Ethiopia despite its defeat at Adwa in 1896. The British, on their part, endeavored to obtain

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<sup>1</sup> The Spaniards called the city ruled by this flamboyant monarch "El Dorado," Spanish for “gilded one,” and the story of the gold-covered king eventually grew into a legend of a whole country paved with gold. These days, “El Dorado” can also be used generically for any place of vast riches, abundance, or opportunity, see, El Dorado. (2024). In Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

concessions from the Ethiopian government to gain control of the entire Blue Nile from its source in Ethiopia to its mouth in Egypt (Getachew, 2009:29). Generally, there was strong opposition to Ethiopia's foreign policy approach towards U.S.A. from these powers. That has influenced U.S. foreign policy behavior and approach towards Ethiopia.

This is well illustrated in the U.S. response to Regent Teferi's request for U.S. made weapon purchase. The U.S. was inconsistent in its response to Ethiopia's request for arms purchase. On 5 November 1928, the U.S. Consular General in Ethiopia Addison E. Southard (1927-1934), citing the legal requirement of only selling surpluses to foreign governments, and as the war department had no surplus airplanes and tanks to sell to Ethiopia, responded negatively to the Ethiopian request. But later, on 14 November 1928, Secretary of State J. Reuben Clark, Jr., assured Ethiopia through Southard himself that "while the Department does not encourage the exportation of arms and ammunition to any country, there are no legal restrictions on the exportation of those commodities to Ethiopia" (Getachew, 2009: 31). The U.S. policy was arguably influenced by the fear for not entangling with European international politics as arms deal was fervently opposed by Italy and Britain. "Like the proposal to build a dam on the Blue Nile, the idea of arms importation to Ethiopia from the U.S. resulted in rancor and antagonism from the European powers" (Getachew, 2009:31). Thus, U.S. foreign policy approach was influenced by the international distribution of power.

The relationship between Ethiopia and U.S.A. collapsed when fascist Italy occupied Ethiopia and the U.S. closed its legation in Ethiopia in 1937. The U.S. offered no political or military support to Ethiopia as result of its claimed neutrality and isolationist foreign policy.

### **3.1.2. The U.S. Foreign Policy Approach During the Italian Occupation of Ethiopia (1935-1941)**

Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935. During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, the foreign policy approaches of U.S.A. towards Ethiopia was claimed to be a policy of neutrality and non-involvement. The U.S. pursued a policy of isolationism and neutrality (Dixon, 1960:52; Henze, 2000:221). For Dixon (1960:28) the statements, responses to Ethiopia's request for support and solidarity reaffirmed the U.S. policy of avoiding being drawn into European war.

*Nevertheless, U.S. policy was conceived to favour Italy, allowing for the acquisition of raw materials and industrial products. Although, the U.S. was one of the few countries which refused to recognize Italian Occupation of Ethiopia as U.S. foreign policy was set against the acquisition of territory through the use of force. Furthermore, President Roosevelt was unwilling to renew the Italo-American trade agreement because Italy insisted that King Victor Emanuel ought to be recognized as 'Emperor of Ethiopia'. (Sbacchi, 1998:96)*

After Italy's occupation of Ethiopia, "a new Italian ambassador to the U.S., who was to present his accreditation from 'The king of Italy and the Emperor of Ethiopia', was denied the presentation of his credentials" as there was a reference 'From the Emperor of Ethiopia' in the letter of credence (Getachew, 2009: 36). In contrast, Dixon (1960:53) accounted that after several exchanges between Rome and Washington, they agreed that Rome would receive U.S. Ambassador to Italy without any reference to "The king of Italy and the Emperor of Ethiopia" but simply to 'The king of Italy', while Washington agreed to receive the Ambassador of Italy to the U.S. with the title bearing 'the king of Italy and the Emperor of Ethiopia'. U.S. despite such arrangement did not recognize the Italy's power over Ethiopia (Dixon, 1960:53; Getachew, 2009:37; Henze, 2000:53).

The U.S. distanced itself from Ethiopia and terminated diplomatic relations with Ethiopia. "On July 26, 1935, President Roosevelt remarked that the dispute between Ethiopia and Italy was of no concern to the United States claiming to act under the Neutrality Law" (Getachew, 2009: 37).

*In spite of his interventionist leanings, Roosevelt maintained a consistent isolationist position in his public statements. He announced that "despite what happens in continents overseas, the United States of America shall and must remain...untrammeled and free." This public position implied that the United States would rely on its existing policies, such as the Good Neighbor Policy and the Doctrine of Nonrecognition, as well as the Neutrality Acts. (Nymeyer, 2003: 94)*

In view of that, one may conclude that U.S. foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia during the Italian occupation was guided by the principle of what the office of the Historian of the State Department referred to as "non-involvement in European wars and politics".

### **3.1.3. The U.S. Foreign Policy Approach Towards Ethiopia in the Post-War Years (1941-1947)**

Internationally, the post-Italian occupation period in history coincided with the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. Domestically, once the Anglo-Ethiopian joint force expelled Italy from Ethiopia, Britain did not hand over policy instruments of internal and foreign affairs of Ethiopia. Hence, the relation between Britain and Ethiopia after the war had a significant impact on the relation between Ethiopia and the United States.

In the Anglo–Ethiopian Agreement of 1942 the British gained diplomatic precedence, extra-territorial military privileges<sup>2</sup>, and controlled over the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, and monopolized over aviation. The British went as far as “even contemplating establishing trusteeship over all of Ethiopia” which was opposed by the White House and the State Department (Getachew, 2009: 38).

*President Roosevelt was opposed to the British idea as it is inconsistent with the Declaration of the United Nations and the Atlantic Charter signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill on 12 August 1941. That charter stipulated that no territorial gains were to be sought by the US and the United Kingdom (UK) and that all peoples had a right to self-determination.* (Getachew, 2009: 39)

This approach of the U.S. resonates well with liberal institutionalism upon which the UN was founded. But it is important to note that U.S.A. had also been influenced by cold war realism. “It was a period when the U.S. committed to counter Soviet expansionism diplomatically, economically, and militarily in far-off places” (Getachew, 2009: 40). Therefore, motivated by the need to contain the eminent confrontation from Soviet Socialist expansion and its post-war liberal internationalism, U.S.A. actively engaged with Ethiopia. “Washington consequently intervened, as much because of its anticolonialism as with an eye to Ethiopia's potential postwar strategic importance” in containing socialism (Marcus, 1994: 83).

President Franklin Roosevelt secretly met with Emperor Haile Selassie I at Great Bitter Lake in the Suez Canal on his way back from the Yalta conference in 1945; US diplomatic representation

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<sup>2</sup> As provided under the different Articles of the Agreement and Military Convention between Ethiopia and UK, Journal of the Royal African Society, Apr. 1942, Vol. 41, No. 163 (Apr. 1942), pp. 111-113.

in Ethiopia that had been terminated during the Italian occupation (1936–41) resumed in 1943; U.S. government later facilitated Ethiopia's entry into the United Nations (Marcus 1994); various Ethio-U.S. treaties including agreements to establish and manage the Ethiopian airlines were signed (Getachew, 2009; Shinn, 2018). This active engagement indicated a definite shift in foreign policy approach from isolationism. “President Franklin Roosevelt informed Haile Selassie in 1942 that the defense of Ethiopia was vital to the United States, adding that Ethiopia had become eligible for American military assistance under the Lend-Lease Act<sup>3</sup>” (Shinn, 2018: 62). The interventionist/ realist personal disposition of President Franklin Roosevelt (1933-1945) (Nymeyer, 2003:88), the change in the post-war world condition motivated the U.S. to push for realist and active approach towards Ethiopia.

#### **3.1.4. U.S.A. Foreign Policy Towards Ethiopia During 1947-1974 Cold War Realism**

With the beginning of the Cold War in 1947, U.S. interest in Ethiopia centered on its potential strategic contributions to contain socialism. Thus, the U.S. expanded its partnership with Ethiopia from the treaty of commerce in 1903 to increased level of engagement. Both sides agreed to raise their diplomatic representation from legation to embassy in 1949, signed a treaty of amity and economic relations in 1951, Ethiopia joined the U.S. led UN force in the Korean War in 1951, the Point Four economic assistance for Ethiopia was announced in 1952, signed Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement in 1953 (Getachew, 2009:41; Lemmu,1989:51; Shinn, 2018:62).

In 1959, dissatisfied with the fulfillment of expectations from U.S.A., Ethiopia visited U.S.S.R., and mended relations with the anti-west Egypt. Ethiopia appeared moving close to U.S.S.R. that resulted in the U.S. to swiftly review the relationship and decide to accommodate Ethiopia's interest (Lemmu, 1989:56; Shinn, 2018:63). That means the U.S. foreign policy approach was influenced by cold war distribution of power and alliance and counter alliance which is in consonance with the very tenet of structural realism.

In the 1960s, “U.S. policy towards Ethiopia focused increasingly on the need for political reform and modernization of the imperial regime after the failed coup. At the same time, Washington

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<sup>3</sup> Passed on March 11, 1941, this act set up a system that would allow the United States to lend or lease war supplies to any nation deemed "vital to the defense of the United States, Lend-Lease Act (1941), National Archives.

continued to place a high priority on its use of Kagnew’’ (Shinn, 2018: 63). The U.S. effort to maintain good relations with Somalia and to keep it away from aligning with the Soviet Union conflicted with Ethiopia’s interests. That continues to erode the trust Ethiopia used to have on U.S.A.

Furthermore, the Nixon administration (1969-1974) preoccupied by its own Watergate political debacle; the Vietnam quagmire tends to return to isolationist foreign policy. Ethiopia, therefore, was unable to count on the United States. At the time of Nixon/Kissinger initiatives of *détente* in 1972 and in 1973, the U.S. was redefining its foreign policy in Africa. The Nixon administration stated that “the U.S. wants no military allies, no sphere of influence, no big power competition in Africa. The U.S. was starting to ease tensions with the U.S.S.R.” (Getachew, 2009: 69). This resulted in gradual “withdrawal of military and economic support for Haileselassie” from the Nixon Administration (Lemmu, 1989: 64). All in all:

*The foreign policy approach of the U.S. during Emperor Haileselassie was evolutionary, status-quo oriented, and incremental. The U.S. backed a policy of stabilizing the area and maintaining the status quo by providing financial aid and military assistance to Ethiopia in the early 1970s.* (Getachew, 2009: 52)

The U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia during this period was influenced by Cold War geostrategic calculations and competition for influence which could better be explained through structural realism. The incremental and *status quo* orientation is better understood through rational and bureaucratic models of foreign policy decision making.

### **3.1.5. Wait-and-See and Interventionist Foreign Policy Approach of the U.S. during the Dergue Regime (1974-1991)**

In the early period of the *Dergue*<sup>4</sup>, the U.S. foreign policy approach was a sort of *wait-and-see approach*, while it was changed into active interventionism in the later period of the regime. The Ford Administration (1974–77) being informed that the change in Ethiopia would not affect the U.S. interests, adopted ‘*a wait-and-see posture*’ (Cohen, 2020:109). Furthermore, U.S.A. adopted

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<sup>4</sup> The Derg (or Dergue; Amharic: ደርግ, lit. 'committee' or 'council'), officially the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), was the Marxist–Leninist military dictatorship that ruled Ethiopia, then including present-day Eritrea, from 1974 to 1987, when the military leadership or junta formally "civilianized" the administration but stayed in power until 1991. (Wikipedia contributors, 2024a)

neutrality in relation to the Ethio-Somalia War (1977-1978) during the Ford administration. “As further evidence of its neutrality, the United States decided not to accede to Ethiopia’s request to send a new ambassador” (Cohen, 2020:115).

*The Carter administration (1977–81) changed course, announcing that it would link foreign aid to human rights and reduce military support to Ethiopia. In response, Ethiopia closed the communications station in Asmara along with four other US facilities and expelled three hundred US personnel, including all military advisers. Washington in turn announced that it would sell arms to Ethiopia’s regional rivals, Somalia, and Sudan. (Schmidt, 2023, Para. 14)*

The *Dergue* angrily responded to the U.S. intention of closing *Kagnew Station* by instructing American personnels to leave the station hurriedly and shutting down U.S. Installations. “The United States then suspended all military assistance in the pipeline” (Shinn, 2018: 65). That resulted in shift in alliance from U.S.A. to U.S.S.R. Thus, in 1977, the Soviet Union and Ethiopia established a formal alliance (Washington Post 1977, 6 May).

The Reagan Administration (1981-1989) was vehemently against socialism. It had fought U.S.S.R. and its proxies, tooth and nail. Its foreign policy reflected this international position. Empirically speaking, the Reagan administration was the most interventionist of all the U.S. administrations in relations to Ethiopia. “It was committed to toppling the military regime in Ethiopia by supporting conservative groups, such as the EDU (Ethiopian Democratic Union), and even providing tactical support to Eritrean secessionist groups. This is realpolitik from the US point of view”(Getachew, 2009: 64). Generally, U.S.A. foreign policy during the cold war and the *Dergue* regime was influenced by superpower competitions which falls within structural realism under the rubric of systemic theories of foreign policy approach.

### **3.1.6. Globalization and Neo-liberal Economic Policy Towards Ethiopia (1991-2000)**

After the end of the Cold War in 1989, the Western World declares the victory of neo-liberalism as preferred ideological guidance of development over socialism and other alternative routes of development. Since then, the policy prescriptions of the Washington Consensus were unprecedentedly intensified across the developing world. Ethiopia was not an exception; it was among the countries that adopted Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) and policies of stabilization.

The U.S. foreign policy was derived by the forces of economic liberalization and globalization. In fact, the whole exercise of policy of globalization and liberalization had been spearheaded by the U.S.A. The Ethiopian government, wittingly or unwittingly, also claims to subscribe to this policy. However, in general terms “U.S. post-Cold War involvement in Africa take the form of **humanitarian interventions** that deal with famine and HIV/AIDS which are said to have security implication for the United States” and Ethiopia was not exception to this generalization (Getachew, 2009:102).

### **3.1.7. The U.S. Foreign Policy From 2000 to 2018: Global War on Terror**

On his first visit to Africa as U.S. President in 1998, President Bill Clinton (1993-2001) spoke of a “new generation of leaders” devoted to democracy and, market economy. Among the leaders apprised was the late Prime Minister Melse Zenawi (1995-2012). The speech focusing on the importance of market economy and democracy depicted liberal institutional approach of the U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia. This approach, however, was soon changed into the realist global war on terrorism following attacks against the U.S. interest in the world and in Africa.

Terrorist attacks on the U.S. Embassy and its properties in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 influenced U.S. foreign policy mightily towards Ethiopia. Since 9/11, the U.S. proclaimed Ethiopia a “frontline state” in the fight against Islamic fundamentalism in the region, and a “key strategic partner” on the war on terror (Seife, 2018:66).

As result, despite official declarations in the initial period of the post-1991 of conditioning foreign assistance upon the state of human rights, and democracy, “as will eventually be witnessed, foreign assistance increased despite the sorry state of democracy in Ethiopia” (Getachew, 2009: 80). This reflects the supremacy of security interests over human right and democracy issues in the U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia. This resonates well with realist assertion of security overriding all other interests.

Within that broader context, the U.S. foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia in relation to democracy and human rights has been guided by cautious approach and low-key diplomacy, the balance of forces between the GOE and the opposition. “Human rights are not an end in and of

itself in U.S. foreign policy, the use of foreign policy machinery to advance the cause is calculated in terms of overall strategic foreign policy objectives” (Seife, 2018: 91).

A very illustrative case in this regard is the position of the U.S. during the post-2005 national elections. In this regard, Getachew (2009:120) quoted Birhanu Negga being forewarned by the then U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, Aurelia Brazeal who is an African American, in a private conversation that “it took African Americans hundreds of years to get their rights by working through the system peacefully”.

Therefore, the U.S. approach was mightily influenced by security issues. Even during of the domestic protests between 2015 and 2018. The U.S. preferred to strike a balance between normative human rights and democracy promotions interests and security interests. From this, one could conclude that since 2000, the U.S. foreign policy approach was dominated global war on terrorism which is a security interest.

### **3.2. Historical Background of the Relations between Ethiopia and China**

Ethiopia and China have long-standing contacts. In this reference, despite a lot of contestations, the sinologist A. Hermann arguably believed that a live rhinoceros that arrived at the court of the Chinese Emperor Ping from the country of the "Agazi" or "Agazin", which probably is the current area of Axum, between AD 1 and 6 came from the Horn of Africa is a hint shedding light on the relations (Pankhurst, 1961:362). Richard Pankhurst (1961:362) is certain that by the Tang dynasty (618–907) the Chinese were acquainted with at least part of the Horn of Africa where Ethiopia is located.

#### **3.2.1. The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between China and Ethiopia**

Though Ethiopia and China have a long history of contacts, it was only on 24 November 1970 that they agreed to establish ‘formal Diplomatic Relations’ (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023:347; Fantahun 2013: 91; MFA of PRC, 2002). The establishment of the diplomatic relationship was derived by both external and internal factors. Internally, the need for isolating Taiwan from the international community and gathering support for the one China policy was an important factor. At the international stage China was looking for vote to take the UNSC seat from Taiwan and to deal with the Soviet threat.

Ethiopia on its part was interested in diversifying its ally for support as the United States was gradually beginning to distance itself from Emperor Haile Selassie I (Mantzikos, 2010:5). Hence, the move towards China can be a hedging strategy against the U.S. policy.

In 1971, Emperor Haile Selassie I visited China. During the visit “the two countries agreed to struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, and racial discrimination. In addition to that, Haile Selassie’s visit brought economic and technical cooperation with China” (Mesafint, 2024:9). More concrete result of the visit was the announcement of a \$144 million interest free loan for the next 10 to 12 years to Ethiopia. Of which \$84 million was signed for agricultural development during the visit (The New York Times, 11 October 1971; Shinn, 2014:151). China despite its level of poverty provide Ethiopia with the much-needed interest free development assistance in return for Ethiopia’s support at the UN and Ethiopia’s support for one-China policy.

### **3.2.2. China’s Ideologically Entangled Foreign Policy Approach towards Ethiopia (1974-1991)**

In 1974, the *Dergue* came to power overthrowing the Monarch via revolution. The Sino–Ethiopian relations were amicable during the early years of the military regime. However, because of China’s support for Somalia which invaded Ethiopia in 1977, the alleged China’s support for Western Somali Liberation Front in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and Ethiopia’s alliance with the Soviet Union, which was the ideological nemesis of China, Sino-Ethiopia relations began to erode (Aaron, 2020:24; Gashaw, 2018:15; Shinn, 2014:151).

Ethiopia’s closer relations to U.S.S.R. was unacceptable to China as U.S.S.R. was considered by China as social imperialist. The two had intractable ideological differences on the interpretation of Orthodox Marxism-Leninism. That had its ramification on China’s foreign policy approach towards third countries like Ethiopia. As both China and U.S.S.R. were exporting their version of socialism and vanguardism, they were inherently in competition. Thus, the 1974 revolution, which led to the emergence of a regime close to the Soviet Union, provoked a distancing of Beijing from Addis Ababa until at least the late 1980s.

Improvements in the relations between China and U.S.S.R. gave way for the rapprochement of China’s foreign policy towards Ethiopia. Thus, “with the beginning of new Sino-Soviet relations,

Chinese–Ethiopian relations began to improve, China provided food assistance in Ethiopia’s 1980 famine and dispatched medical teams to affected areas. In 1987 Mengistu visited China and met with Deng Xiaoping’’ (Aaron, 2020:25).

### **3.2.3. The Chinese Foreign Policy Approach Towards Ethiopia (1991-2000): An Assessment of Mutual Learning**

It was not until the rise to power of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991 that bilateral relations between China and Ethiopia began to experience real growth (Aaron, 2020:27; Cabestan, 2012:54; Gedion & Mathews, 2010:94). However, EPRDF’s (1991-2018) ascendance to power did not immediately provide the solid ground for China’s diplomatic entrenchment. It must take its time.

EPRDF, which took power with U.S. backing, did not initially give priority to strengthening ties with China. The regime favored market economy (except in such matters as land ownership) and declared its willingness to establish a federal and democratic polity (Cabestan, 2012:54).

Thus, in the early years of the EPRDF period, the relationship with China grew modestly and only began to surge in the mid-1990s when the government of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (1995-2012) encouraged closer ties with China to tap into its financial resources and to balance against Western countries, particularly the United States.

China’s foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia was seen within the context of its international position and interest. “The Chinese leaders in this decade adopted a pragmatic and realistic approach for foreign relations. They wanted to maintain a peaceful international environment to concentrate on China’s modernization’’ (Cheng, 1997:67). Thus, China did not abandon its open-door policy despite the frustrating criticism from the West following the Tiananmen incident in 1989. It consistently pursued efforts to improve relations with the West in the effort to benefit from the Western support for Chinese modernization. However, recognizing that China needs a shield of some kind from Western pressures, it looked for a partner at the international stage. In that line, acknowledging that China had neglected the third world and the old friends in Africa, China planned to strive to resume and develop relations with these old friends (Cheng, 1997:65).

Within that historical context, in October 1995, Prime Minister Meles visited China, and this was reciprocated with Jiang Zemin, former President of China (1993 to 2003) visiting Ethiopia six months later in 1996. An ambitious Agreement on Trade, Economic and Technical Cooperation (ATEC) was signed. The agreement led to the creation in 1998 of a Joint Economic Commission which confers “most favored nation” status on Ethiopia and covers the whole bilateral economic cooperation (Aaron, 2020:26; Cabestan, 2012:54; Shinn, 2014:152). Since then, Sino-Ethiopian links have continued to strengthen and diversify.

#### **3.2.4. Pragmatic Realism in China’s Foreign Policy Approach and the Ethio-Chinese Bilateral Relations (2000-2013)**

During the meeting in Beijing of the first Ministerial Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, Addis Ababa was chosen to host the second Ministerial forum in December 2003. Ethiopia co-chaired FOCAC from 2000 to 2006. At the Addis Ababa FOCAC Ministerial Forum attended by Premier Wen Jiabao (2003-2013), several supplementary agreements were signed between China and Ethiopia further cementing the partnership (Aaron, 2020:29; Benjamin, 2020:77; Cabestan, 2012:54). In 2003, China and Ethiopia elevated their partnership to ‘*All-round Cooperative Partnership*’ (MFA of PRC, 2013).

In 2005, Sino-Ethiopian relations entered a new phase of close diplomatic, political, and economic partnership. This evolution has arguably a direct link to the Meles regime’s hardening as well as the strengthening of his powers following the 2005 national elections. Electoral irregularities, post-election violence and human rights violation led to a rapid deterioration of relations between Ethiopia and its traditional donors (the United States and European Union), who began to attach conditions to their assistance. Meles then looked for an alternative source of finance and development path and China was ready to provide the alternative Meles was looking for (Cabestan, 2012:54).

Furthermore, on the China’s side, “under the leadership of Hu Jintao (2003-2013), China began the process of improving its national security by emphasizing its responsible role in the international system and expanding its soft power globally. China became pragmatic, separating foreign policy from ideology” (Aaron, 2020:26). Thus, one may argue that China’s foreign policy approach during this period had been pragmatic realism that encourages establishing partnership

based on pragmatic evaluation of national interests under the prevailing international system. Those developments and orientation took Ethiopia close to China and brought China close to Ethiopia.

In general terms, one may conclude that China's foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia until 1991 was clouded with the cold war ideological realism, while its foreign policy approach from 1991 to 2013 was largely guided by the pragmatic realist strategy of Keeping Low Profile (KLP).

### **3.2.5. The Foreign Policy Strategy of “Striving for Achievement” (2013-2018)**

China's foreign policy had been guided by pragmatic realist strategy of Keeping Low Profile (KLP) in the 1990s and 2000s. It is with the coming into power of Xi Jinping in 2013 that Chinese foreign policy strategy of “Keeping Low Profile-KLP” changed. It was changed into the foreign policy strategy of “Striving for Achievement-SFA” (Yan, 2014:153). Following China's economic success by becoming the second largest economy, after USA, surpassing Japan in 2010 (New York Times, 2010, 15 August), China aspires for higher ends like political support for its “great power diplomacy”. “Chinese scholars have long defined “major power diplomacy” (*daguo waijiao*) as “diplomacy with major powers,” referring to the U.S., Russia, and in some cases, Japan” (Yoshikazu, 2019: para.3). Hence, China announced the foreign policy strategy of Striving for Achievement. “The key difference between the KLP and the SFA is that the former focuses on economic gains and the latter seeks to strengthen political support” (Yan, 2014:153).

Furthermore, with the coming into power of President Xi Jinping in 2013, China called for “a new type of great-power relationship” with the United States (Kejin, 2013: para.9). China begins to pursue an assertive foreign policy that promotes its desire to be a sort of great power. In consonance with the realists' understanding of international relations, such foreign policy moves of China corresponds to Morgenthau's (1948:21), “political policy of seeking to increase power or to demonstrate power”.

Countries like Ethiopia in the global south are instrumental in providing international support to China to that end. Hence, China aggressively recruits larger states, called “hub states”. “Ethiopia is one of the countries that are considered as ‘hub’ states in Africa to help serve as “hard balancing” against the United States and its allies” (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023:5). Hence, Ethiopia was seen

from geostrategic context as an ally in the international system in the creation of what China referred to as a more “democratic” and “multipolar” world order (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023:6).

Thus, one can conclude that Ethiopia is seen by China in terms of its geostrategic importance in China’s competition with the West/U.S.A. In the phraseology of Cabestan (2012:53), “The establishment of partnership was motivated as much by diplomatic, strategic, and even ideological considerations as economic ones”. Aaron (2020:33) affirms that China is interested in Ethiopia for diplomatic, security, and economic reasons as the latter is a key player not only in the Horn of Africa but in the African Union (AU) as well. Stretching his argument further, Cabestan (2012:53) concluded that, for Beijing, “economic and trade cooperation with Addis Ababa is a means rather than an end in itself”.

China’s foreign policy approach during the EPRDF was determined by a mix of the desire to get international support for its peaceful rise in the international system, the desire to get international support and shield against international criticism on human rights issues (Gashew, 2018:17) and the role that Ethiopia can play in Chinese competition against the West/USA, huge economic potential. According to Gamora and Mathews (2010:96), “Ethiopia has become a reflection of China’s wider ambitions in Africa and the changes it portends for the region”. Ethiopia may lack the vast natural resources that have drawn China’s interest in other countries, but it has something else that Beijing craves for: geopolitical clout in the region, a potentially large market, and an important investment destination (Aaron, 2020:6; Gashew, 2018:16; Ziso, 2018:109). Thus, such strategic importance of Ethiopia has influenced Chinese foreign policy behavior.

In May 2017, the relationship between Ethiopia and China elevated to a higher level of “*Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership (CSCP)*” (Ethiopian Embassy Beijing, 2020) from what was “*All-round Cooperative Partnership*” since 2003 (MFA of PRC, 2013). According to Li and Ye (2019:66), there are about 24 titles of partnership that are used by China in its relationship with countries. Drawing from former Premier Wen Jiabao’s (2003-2013) explanation in 2004 of what Comprehensive strategic Partnership means for China<sup>5</sup>, Li and Ye (2019:69)

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<sup>5</sup>The explanation of ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’ was given during the Speech by H.E. Wen Jiabao, Premier (2003-2013) of the State Council of the People's Republic of China at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum in Brussels on 6 May 2004, for more please refer to his speech which is available at [http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/Topics/200405/t20040512\\_8303627.htm](http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/Topics/200405/t20040512_8303627.htm)

subsumed those 24 types of partnerships into three broader categories: *comprehensive strategic partnership*, *strategic partnership*, and *regular partnership*.

By this classification, it was only in 2017 that China decided to elevate the partnership from *regular partnership* to *Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership* with Ethiopia. Comparatively, in 2016, while China had *comprehensive strategic partnerships* with South Africa, Republic of Congo, Egypt, Algeria and strategic partnerships with the Sudan, Angola, Nigeria. Its relations with Ethiopia were “*All-round Cooperative Partnership*” which by the above definition was “*regular partnership*”. The year 2017 is important as the U.S. rhetoric against China grew to the level that China is strategic competitor, and that “a greater number of comprehensive strategic partnerships can certainly help alleviate pressure from the U.S.A.” (Li &Ye, 2019:79). That hints on that the core interests of China towards Ethiopia have been mightily influenced by geo-strategic competition with the U.S.A.

## **Conclusion**

Both the U.S. and China have had a long-standing contact with Ethiopia. The official diplomatic relations that the U.S. and China have with Ethiopia commenced in 1903 and 1970 respectively. Their relations evolve through different levels of ebbs and flows. The approach that U.S. and China pursued during those years is different, but their strategic interests remain similar. Ethiopia’s geo-strategic importance in Africa was the diplomatic attraction to both powers. Ethiopia has been considered within their regional package as means to a larger strategic end.

Historically, U.S.A. foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia has been shaped by isolationism in the earlier period of the relationship, Cold War realism since the end of the World War II, the neo-liberal institutionalism in the first decade of the end of the cold war and the realist global war on terrorism in 2000s. The international distribution of power was very important factor in determining the foreign policy behavior of U.S.A. towards Ethiopia during those periods.

In a similar fashion, China’s foreign policy approach greatly evolves from ideologically entangled foreign policy during the cold war to pragmatic realism after the end of the cold war. In stark similarity to the U.S. approach, the distribution of power in the international system as advocated by structural realism was determining factor in China’s foreign policy towards Ethiopia.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FOREIGN POLICY APPROACHES OF CHINA AND U.S.A. TOWARDS ETHIOPIA SINCE 2018: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

This chapter, after a quick overview of the current state of foreign policies of China and U.S. towards Ethiopia, analyzes the difference in foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018 and explains as to why the divergence in approach occurs.

#### 4.1. The Foreign Policy of China and The U.S. towards Ethiopia (2018-2024)

Ethiopia is considered to serve as a gateway to the rest of Africa for both China and U.S.A. Both powers perceive Ethiopia as a strategic pivot in Africa. In this regard, Magu (2019: 173) affirms that “American interests in Ethiopia have historically been guided by geopolitical strategic concerns”. Thus, U.S. foreign policy “rarely considers Ethiopia in isolation” but in relation to the role that Ethiopia can play in the region (Shinn, 2018:62). US foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia come as a regional package.

Similarly, in reference to China’s interest towards Ethiopia, former Chinese President Hu Jintao (2003-2013) reported to have articulated in 2004 that “Ethiopia could play a pivotal role in enabling China to consolidate its cooperation with other African countries”(Eisenman & Shinn, 2023:110; Kibsgaard, 2020:2; Seifudein, 2012:148). Thus, China’s foreign policy considers Ethiopia within the lens of the totality of what China desires to achieve in Africa. In the articulation of Cabestan (2012:53) “economic and trade cooperation of Beijing with Addis Ababa is a means rather than an end in itself; China was as motivated by diplomatic, strategic, and even ideological considerations as economic ones”. Thus, one can argue that the foreign policy goals of both China and the U.S.A. have been anchored on geo-strategic interests.

With the advent of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to power in 2018, their foreign policy premises remain to be the same with little variation in tone. What was deemed to be a pro-democracy agenda of liberalization and political reforms in the initial period of the administration seems to provide a short-lived optimism and enthusiasm for the U.S. (Integrated Country Strategy [here after ICS] of

the U.S. towards Ethiopia, 2018). The change in administration provided a moment of adapting cautious approach for China whose relationship with Ethiopia during EPRDF was moderated by the party-to-party relations (Kibsgaard, 2020:3; Lejeune, 2015:1) as “the collapse of the EPRDF in 2019.... precipitated a temporary reduction in Beijing’s ability to understand, react to, and influence developments in Ethiopia” (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023: 87).

However, Ethiopia has continued to be as important to China as it has been to the U.S.A. They continued to exert similar levels of influence, neither of them securing hegemonic presence. Ward et al. (2021), using Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2017 and 2020 placed China and the U.S.A. in roughly equivalent positions as external influencers towards Ethiopia.

In the same fashion, the Rand Corporation (2021) identified Ethiopia as hedger and non-aligned in its relationship with China and U.S.A. (Mazzar, 2022:53). Ethiopia’s affinity to both China and the U.S.A. has been almost equal. Against that backdrop, both countries have tried to cajole, induce and/or pressure Ethiopian foreign policy makers to their respective umbrella of influence. This section of chapter four provides a quick overview of the current state of the foreign policies of China and U.S. towards Ethiopia since 2018.

#### **4.1.1. The U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Ethiopia Since 2018**

The 2018 transition in Ethiopia was considered as an opportune time for U.S.A. as it was considered as “a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance the U.S. national interests with a partner that newly and openly seeks to align its own national interests with the U.S.” (ICS, 2018: 2). The U.S. supported the Change with high optimism, hope and enthusiasm.

The U.S. supports political transitions with a view to influencing the process to their liking or at least to prevent the ascendance of anti-U.S. forces from within and without. In fact, the U.S. has an office called Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) under USAID that initiates and manages transitions in foreign countries. “OTI supports U.S. foreign policy objectives by providing fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs” (USAID, n.d). The U.S. support for political transition is not only institutional but also considered as foreign policy tool.

The U.S. support for Ethiopia in 2018 can be viewed within the framework of OTI. Hence, viewing the transition as ‘*newfound, but potentially transient, influence*’ for the U.S., they committed to assisting the transition (ICS, 2018:2). In this regard, explaining as to what the reform would mean to them and why they should support it, the U.S. policy articulated that:

*First, Ethiopia’s reform agenda, if properly executed, will greatly strengthen its capacity to be a strong partner to the United States in areas of U.S. strategic priority: promoting Horn of Africa stability, countering terrorism, countering **Chinese and Russian influence in the region**, and promoting U.S. commercial opportunity via the fastest-growing economy in Africa. Second, our role in supporting Ethiopia’s pivot toward reform, and the resulting ascendance of Prime Minister Abiy, **gives us access, influence, and good will with the Ethiopian government that is exponentially greater than it has ever been.** (ICS, 2018:2) [Emphasis Added]*

The U.S. foreign policy enthusiasm did not last long however, nor does the foreign policy optimism. The attack by TPLF against the Northern command of the national defense forces of Ethiopia on 04 November 2020 has changed that optimism. Since then, the U.S. foreign policy approach has gone from diplomatic engagement to a series of unilateral coercive measures. The U.S. has imposed wide ranging sanctions, terminated Ethiopia’s AGOA duty free access privilege, Suspended support for multilateral lending, co-sponsored, and supported the establishment of the UN Human Rights Commission of Experts on Ethiopia (for short IHRCEE), introduced different resolutions by the Senate and the House are among the measures.

However, “while the conflict... in Tigray... has inflicted significant damage on the bilateral relationship..., it has not altered the strategic logic of a healthy and vibrant U.S.-Ethiopia partnership” (ICS, 2022:1). Ethiopia’s relative strategic relevance to the U.S. remains unchanged. Hence, “the U.S. Mission’s overarching goal for 2022-2025 is to restore and revitalize the longstanding partnership between the United States and Ethiopia in a way that serves both countries’ interests” (ICS, 2022:2). Yet again, the U.S. foreign policy conditions revitalization, and normalization with Ethiopia to improvements in domestic situation. In this regard, the ICS (2022:2) outlined that:

*To restore the full economic assistance potential from the USG, the White House and U.S. Trade Representative have publicly declared a desire to witness concrete steps from the GOE on enabling humanitarian access to Tigray, negotiating an end to the conflict, engaging in inclusive dialogue that addresses ethnic tensions, and*

*holding perpetrators accountable for human rights abuses and violations. Absent sustained, good-faith efforts by the GOE in these areas, our partnership remains limited.*

The Pretoria peace agreement signed on 2 November 2022 between the Government of Ethiopia and TPLF addresses one of the foreign policy pre-conditions for normalizing relations. Thus, “the United States faces the imperative of assisting its long-standing partner to consolidate early gains in peace, reconciliation, and prosperity, while turning the page to a more productive era in bilateral relations” (ICS, 2023:2).

This, for U.S.A., is only a step towards the right direction to help improve the relationship as there are more checklists to tick to normalize the relation to its full gear. Because, while there is progress on ending the conflict in Tigray, enabling humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas of the north, and engaging in inclusive dialogue to addresses ethnic tensions, “more is needed to hold perpetrators accountable for human rights abuses and violations” (ICS, 2023:3). Therefore, as long as these U.S. policy conditions are not met with what they call ‘the sustained and good faith efforts’ of the GOE, U.S. partnership with Ethiopia remains limited to humanitarian assistance.

*Development assistance remains paused in the areas of security cooperation, some aspects of democracy and governance, economic growth, and associated support to the GOE. Policy interventions, such as suspension of African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) benefits, imposition of individual visa sanctions, and the prospect of Executive Order sanction designations, are the status quo. Although some like-minded partners would like to restart international financial institution (IFI) support for Ethiopia, the U.S. has legal restrictions against doing so under current circumstances. (ICS, 2023:2)*

U.S. policy seems to be juggling in dilemma of “how to ensure Washington does not abandon democracy and human rights values while expanding engagement with a significant regional player that continues woeful violations of democratic norms and basic human rights” (Gleixner-Hayat, 2023: para.12).

Currently, the U.S. foreign policy engagement with Ethiopia is limited to humanitarian assistance, the engagement hangs on *ad hoc* mechanisms rather than on existing structured mechanisms of engagement. Even by the U.S.’s official assessment, U.S.-Ethiopia partnership is “currently

trending in a negative direction, but it is not the worst in U.S.-Ethiopia history” (KI1<sup>6</sup>, May 13, 2024). An official from the Ethiopian Ministry of foreign affairs concur on the assessment that the relationship is at its “low” if not the lowest (KI2<sup>7</sup>, May 20, 2024), another official at the Ministry sees Ethiopia’s “relation with China grows, while the relation with the US deteriorates” (KI3<sup>8</sup>, May 6, 2024).

#### **4.1.2. China’s Foreign Policy Towards Ethiopia Since 2018**

China’s relation with Ethiopia has for long been dominated by party-to-party relations. In this reference, Lejeune (2015:1) maintained that “the ruling parties of China and Ethiopia are linked together in an international community of practice, that exchanges within this community have strengthened the perception of like-mindedness, and that Sino-Ethiopian relations therefore rest on this”. Thus, the crisis with the EPRDF led administration that culminates with the 2018 change of government would not naturally be in China’s favor.

The change in government results in “a prime minister who looked more favorably on Washington opens the door for a return of U.S. influence” (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023:25). This would not be good news for China. To top China’s concern off, the metamorphosis of EPRDF (without TPLF) into Prosperity party in 2019, has created uncertainty for China whose relations with Ethiopia has been moderated by the strong agency of the party-to-party relations (Kibsgaard, 2020:3; Lejeune, 2015:1). In the parlance of Eisenman and Shinn (2023: 87), “the collapse of the EPRDF in 2019.... precipitated a temporary reduction in Beijing’s ability to understand, react to, and influence developments in Ethiopia”. However, China cannot let Ethiopia go. Ethiopia is a central hub for China’s Belt and Road Initiative, with currently around 400 Chinese construction and manufacturing projects valued at \$ 4 billion (Gbadamosi, 2022; Sany & Sheehy, 2022) and with China accounting for 60% Ethiopia’s FDI (KI4<sup>9</sup>, May 16, 2024).

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<sup>6</sup> Key Informant one (KI1), an official from the US foreign service, interviewed on 13 May 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Key Informant Two (KI2), a high-level official from the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interviewed on 20 May 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Key Informant Three (KI3), a high-level official from the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interviewed on 6 May 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Key Informant Four (KI4), a high-level official from the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance, interviewed on 16 May 2024.

Political ties are also strong. It was Ethiopia that helped establish and, co-chaired (2000-2006) and legitimized FOCAC, indispensable platform for China's partnership with Africa (KI2<sup>10</sup>, May 20, 2024). The two countries have a “*Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership*” since 2017 until it was elevated to “*all-weather strategic Partnership*” at the end of 2023.

Thus, considering the strong economic and political partnership, and Ethiopia's significance, China should adapt so quickly to the internal change in Ethiopia and to the demands of the new administration. Thus:

*China organized several high-level exchange visits, rescheduled part of Ethiopia's debt, and quickly funded some of the prime minister's pet projects. These maneuvers had their desired effect: while attending the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing in 2019, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed hailed China as Ethiopia's most reliable friend and most cherished partner. (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023: 25)*

Following the conflict in the North and the resultant humanitarian and human rights situations, the U.S. toughen its foreign policy towards Ethiopia. That was a political market for China whose foreign policy has been founded on the principle of non-interference and the respect for sovereignty. China demonstrated that its foreign policy is to the liking of Ethiopia. Hence, the U.S. position during the conflict, provides China with wider window of opportunity to pull Ethiopia more towards itself.

In fact, when the U.S. relations with Ethiopia deteriorates, China and Ethiopia have announced further elevating the bilateral ties to an “*all-weather strategic partnership*” in 2023 (Xinhua, 2023, October 17) which according to the Chinese Ambassador to Ethiopia Zhao Zhiyuan:

*means that rain or shine, we two friendly developing countries both agree to step up mutual support on issues of each other's core interests and major concerns, and remain committed to further enhancing mutual trust, cooperation across the board and strategic consultation regardless of how the external and internal environment may evolve. (Ethiopian Herald, 2023, December 30: para.2)*

On 19 May 2024, China has “all-weather strategic partnership”, Ethiopia included, with only six countries in the world: Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Venezuela, and Hungary (Personal Communication with Chinese Diplomat, May 19, 2024).

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<sup>10</sup> See footnote 7

For Li and Ye (2019: 66), “China’s choice of building a partnership is not random. It is largely determined by three factors: the need to *counter the U.S. pressure*; the necessity of maintaining peace and stability along its borders and *achieving the long-term goal of modernization*”[Emphasis added]. Therefore, China’s decision of elevating the partnership with Ethiopia to “all-weather strategic partnership’ ’could partly be explained by the increasing pressure from the U.S. and China’s desire to counter the U.S. pressure. Because “as the power gap between the U.S.A. and China decreases, meaning as China catches up with the U.S.A., it tends to establish more comprehensive strategic partnerships. Such a policy can certainly help alleviate pressure from the U.S.A.’” (Li &Ye, 2019:79).

Be that as it may, currently Ethiopia is arguably China’s most important bilateral partner in Africa. Ethiopia’s value to China, and China’s behavior towards Ethiopia will continue to be moderated by geostrategic and geopolitical importance.

With that quick overview of the current state of the foreign policies of U.S.A. and China towards Ethiopia as background, the following sections compare and explain the difference in foreign policy approaches and behaviors of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia.

#### **4.2.Comparing the Foreign Policy Approaches of U.S.A. and China towards Ethiopia**

Despite similar strategic interests (Hanauer & Morris, 2014:86; D. Shinn<sup>11</sup>, May 4, 2024) and similar level of influence (Mazzar, 2022:53; Ward et al. 2021), both China and U.S.A. have pursued different, and at times diametrically opposing foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia.

China pursues an approach of detachment to deal with internal conflict, non-interference in domestic affairs of Ethiopia, state centric approach in its engagement with Ethiopia, *productivist* approach in the administration of development cooperation and high regard for Westphalian conception of state sovereignty.

In contrast, the U.S. pursued a policy of humanitarian intervention in its response to domestic conflicts of Ethiopia, unilateral realism in its response to emergency in Ethiopia, welfarist approach in the administration of humanitarian aid, the state-in-society approach in its engagement

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<sup>11</sup>According to email response on 4 May 2024 to questions forwarded to him as part of this study, Ambassador David Shinn affirm the similarities in strategic interests. He was U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia from 1996-1999

with the Ethiopian state, and coercive power in enforcing its desire. The following section details those approaches of China and U.S.A.

#### **4.2.1. The ‘Productivist’ Versus the Welfarist/Neo-liberal Approach to Development Assistance**

In terms of development assistance and investment, China has been driven by “*productivist*” approach<sup>12</sup> in contrast to the neo-liberal approach of the Western World. The Chinese productivist approach in the administration of development assistance and foreign aid is contrasted to current safety-net or ‘welfarist’ models of Western donors (Aaron, 2020:80)

That means the Chinese approach is state led and centralized, focus on physical development; whereas the U.S. approach to the administration of development assistant is private-led and decentralized focusing on human development and social services. Hanauer & Morris (2014:89) argue that “The United States has emphasized good governance, foreign aid focused on human development, and private sector–led investment, whereas China has stressed political independence and state-backed investment in infrastructure and natural resource extraction”.

As a result of the difference in investment that they make, the effect is different as well. The Chinese investment is visible, concrete, and immediate in effect than the less concrete, less visible and long-term effects that the U.S. investment may have.

*While U.S. messages of private investment and good governance have had little concrete impact on the lives of ordinary Africans, it appears that China’s strategy of large-scale infrastructure construction and investment in extractive industries is winning friends in Africa. Chinese aid is more visible than U.S. and Western aid, in addition to the construction of high-profile facilities, Chinese funds often enable large-scale construction and infrastructure initiatives that have the potential to benefit the public through job creation and improved services (transportation, electricity, etc.). (Hanauer & Morris, 2014:107)*

In Ethiopia as well, the Chinese investment, loan and development assistance focus on infrastructures of mega projects of high visibility. According to a report from Ministry of Finance

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<sup>12</sup> It differs from neoliberalism in that it gives governments a more expansive role to play in the economy. This approach is driven less by notions of citizenship and social rights, and more in terms of accumulation functions. Social investment is justified for broader economic development goals in contrast to current safety-net or ‘welfarist’ models of Western donors, Hanauer & Morris, 2014.

of Ethiopia (2023), the Chinese companies played pivotal roles in the construction of strategically important infrastructures and mega projects of the country: railway lines, express roads and highways, airport terminals, telecommunication lines, suspension bridges, skyline buildings, industrial parks, sugar factories, hydro power dam, wind power plants, substation and transmission line, the Addis Ababa riverside park and many other projects. These are highly visible investments that catches the eye of both domestic and international audiences, in addition to its productivist nature.

In addition to visibility, the way in which aid projects are selected is different between China and U.S.A. The U.S. is criticized for emphasizing donor interests and policy prescriptions while China preferred to follow African government self-identified needs (Hanauer & Morris, 2014:108). This resonates very well with Chinese approach towards Ethiopia. The government of Ethiopia is of a view that “Ethiopia’s development priorities have direct coherence with Chinese government development initiatives, Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)” (Minister of Finance FDRE, 2023, para.4).

The other difference in approach is China provides project based direct assistance through bilateral platforms, while the U.S. assistance is usually delivered through multilateral platforms using third parties. This affects its productivity, predictability, and efficiency. “Chinese development assistance is implemented faster and more efficiently than aid from the West because the multilateral aid platform through which it is implemented has become increasingly dysfunctional and uncoordinated, leading to wide frustration among recipient countries” (Aaron, 2020:9). When bilateral assistance cooperation from the U.S. occurred, “it has usually been insufficient to overcome the malevolent effects of U.S. hegemony” and US conditionalities (Abidde & Ayoola, 2021:71).

In a nutshell, China’s approach to development cooperation is ‘*productivist*’ which contrasted with the U.S. welfarist humanitarian aid. In fact, despite all that, the US is the biggest official development assistance provider to Ethiopia unmatched by China. U.S. approach of supporting democracy, good governance, human rights are in consonance with the liberal school of thought of the democratic peace theory. China’s approach resonates with the constructivist’s recommendation that “activities, relations, and interactions are very important between agents and

structures; as through these activities, states can understand each other, and they can build and shape their identities (Erbas, 2021:5087). Thus, driven by its historical identity of the importance of centralized state in political life, China pursues state centered approach. Furthermore, understanding the constructivist imperative of physical infrastructural development in Ethiopia as a show case of success of its foreign policy. China uses this as launching pad to the rest of Africa, China centers on infrastructure development.

#### **4.2.2. Bilateral-Multilateralist Versus Unilateralist Approach to Foreign Policy**

China tends to favor multilateral approach while the U.S. is criticized for its unilateral approach. Kane (2006:119) recalls that since the end of the cold war, the foreign policy approach of the U.S.A. has been dominantly characterized by unilateralism. For Restad (2015:9), U.S.A.'s foreign policy has always been unilateral. In fact, this has been an integral part of the U.S. foreign policy behavior advocated even by practitioners on the ground. In this regard, Richard Haass (1997), a high-level American diplomat, as cited from Magu (2019: 6) recommended that “the U.S. adopts a policy of “regulation”, forming and working with coalitions when needed, and unilaterally when it suits the U.S. interests”.

This resonates well with the U.S. foreign policy behavior towards Ethiopia since 2020. In affirmation of this, Lund, and Turner (2022, para.3) characterized that the U.S. foreign policy approaches during the war in the Northern part of Ethiopia as “hurried unilateralism and unilateral interventionism”. The U.S. has placed visa restrictions, withhold support to Ethiopia provided through multilateral development banks including the IMF, terminated Ethiopia's beneficiary status from AGOA since 2021 (Saldinger, 2021, para.12). These are clear unilateral foreign policy approaches of U.S.A.

In contrast, China traditionally followed an orthodox bilateral-multilateral approach in its conduct of foreign policy (Cheng, 2018: vii). Shih (2021: 919) strongly corroborated that “The PRC has, historically, had multilateral self-role conceptions, for example, a responsible major power, a world revolutionary, a socialist nation, etc., which are neither constituted by any consensual rules, nor constitute any bilateral interactions”.

China's multilateral foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia emanates from that multilateral self-conception. The establishment of the Forum for China and Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 first at ministerial level with China's leadership is a recent testimony of China's high place for multilateralism. Ethiopia was instrumental in the establishment of this mechanism; it co-chaired the forum from 2000-2006 with China and hosted the second FOCAC ministerial conference in Addis Ababa. In the action plan adopted after the conference, among other things the two sides, "agree to strengthen their coordination and mutual support in multilateral fields" (FOCAC, 2009, section 3, para 3). Hence, China has already been institutionalizing multilateral platforms of engagement with Africa. This is one of the commitments through which they demonstrate their approach to multilateral approach to foreign policy.

On January 9, 2024, in his statement at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations in 2023, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Foreign Minister Wang Yi affirmed that "China firmly choose multilateralism over unilateralism" (2024). Indeed, "China opposes all forms of unilateralism and the forming of blocs and exclusive groups targeted against particular countries" according to a report submitted to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on 16 Oct 2022 (Xinhua, 2022, October 16, para.1).

In specific relation to its foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia, the Chinese Premier Li Qiang in his meeting with his Ethiopian counterpart reaffirmed that "China stands ready to strengthen cooperation with Ethiopia within such multilateral frameworks as the BRICS mechanism to practice multilateralism, oppose power politics and bullying, and safeguard the common interests of China and Africa as well as international equity and justice" (Xinhua, 2023, October 16, para. 6).

In connection with the conflict in Tigray, in August 2021, Dai Bing, chargé d'affaires of China's permanent mission to the United Nations, told a Security Council briefing that China wants the African Union (AU) and regional countries to find a solution to the conflict, reflecting the multilateral foreign policy approach of China in contrast to the unilateral approach of U.S.A. to resolve conflicts. The U.S. on the other hand red flagged the Ethiopian situation 14 times in two years on its own, in coalition with other member states of the UNSC to legitimize its potential interventionist policy towards Ethiopia.

### **4.2.3. The U.S. Isolationism/Disengagement Versus China's Engagement Policies towards Ethiopia Since 2018**

Whenever there are problems, U.S.A. prefers to disengage with Ethiopia. This is what has happened after a conflict erupted in Tigray. According to Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, U.S. Special Envoy for The Horn of Africa (2021-2022):

*The United States... limited significant amounts of development assistance to Ethiopia in an effort to dissuade the government from this (conflict) harmful path. We have conveyed to Ethiopia that it is at risk of losing its trade benefits under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, AGOA, if human rights violations are not addressed.* (Department of State of United States, 2021, para.19)

This is part of the foreign policy tradition of the U.S.A. towards at least Ethiopia. Quick historical review of U.S. foreign policy during Italian occupation and the *Dergue* regime could be empirical illustrations of that isolationist behavior and disengagement or minimized engagement. Since 2020, the U.S. foreign policy approach has been a mix of isolating Ethiopia from the international community and unilaterally sanctioning it.

In contrast China prefers engagement at highest level even at trying times. High level engagement is one of the Chinese approaches. This is corroborated by Eisenman and Shinn (2023: 28-29) as follows:

*China frequently uses high-level visits for strategic purposes, such as to mitigate or reverse potential diplomatic setbacks. Ethiopia offers excellent examples in this regard. In 2016, at the height of public protests in the country when Chinese investments and personnel were threatened, Vice President Li Yuanchao spent almost a week in Ethiopia to advise on the best way to respond to the crisis. In 2018 Ethiopia elected a new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, whose public comments suggested that he wanted to reach out to Western countries. The chairperson of China's Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Li Zhanshu, quickly led a delegation to Ethiopia to shore up bilateral relations.*

Thus, China's approach to resolve a setback is not just engagement but it is characterized by high-level engagement in contrast to the U.S. approach of disengagement and lowering engagement. This high-level interaction that China offers and sometimes compared to the fewer visits conducted by senior American officials and fewer invitations received from the Whitehouse is positively received by African leaders (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023:29). Getachew and Zou (2021: 80) agreed

that “the bilateral diplomatic relations between China and Ethiopia are characterized by frequent high-level visits of ministers, ambassadors, and top officials” and this is not the case with the U.S. foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed made official visits to China in 2018, 2019, and 2023. In all those visits he was given access at the highest level, including for *tête-à-tête* with President Xi Jinping. Comparatively, when he went to the U.S. in 2018 to engage with the Ethiopian diaspora in U.S.A. This was a period considered by the US as “a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance U.S. national interests” (ICS, 2018:2), yet even then the highest official that the Ethiopian Prime Minister got access to was only the then Vice President (2017 to 2021) under President Donald Trump, Mike Pence. In 2022 while in Washington for the Africa-US summit, he only met President Biden for photo. The Prime Minister had to meet Secretary of State Antony Blinken for bilateral discussions, no higher official than the State Secretary.

Currently the U.S. partnership with Ethiopia remains limited to humanitarian assistance (ICS, 2023). There are pre-conditions that the U.S. believed should be fulfilled before full re-engagement with Ethiopia. Hence, as it stands, the U.S. engagement with Ethiopia is not based on bilateral structural mechanisms available.

China on the other hand has rather elevated its partnership with Ethiopia to ‘all-weather strategic partnership’. Up to 19 May 2024, China established this level of partnership with only 6 countries in the world (Personal Communication with Chinese Diplomat, May 19, 2024). These countries are Pakistan, Venezuela, **Ethiopia**, Uzbekistan, Belarus, and Hungary.

China’s approach towards Ethiopia resonates well with the constructivist understanding of the importance of continued social interaction and engagement to shape behaviors of actors in foreign policy, while the U.S. sticks to the force of the realist material power to induce and/or pressure Ethiopia to accept U.S. line of policy direction. From such respective behaviors emanates, China’s relational approach to foreign policy towards Ethiopia, and the US transactional-rationalist approach towards Ethiopia which is discussed below.

#### 4.2.4. Relational Approach Versus Transactional-Rational Approach to Foreign Policy

China's approach has been founded on relations-relational approach while U.S. is criticized for becoming more of transactional particularly recently. In fact, some would argue that such differences in foreign policy behavior of China and U.S.A. have more to do with the difference in their world views. In this regard, Qin (2016: 35&37) explains that:

*If rationality nurtures the metaphysical components of mainstream Western International Relations Theory, then rationality may well be its counterpart in Confucian cultural communities. The western approach bases upon individual rationality, while the Chinese approach is founded on establishing communities of relationships. A relational foreign policy approach is based on the assumptions that the world is an interrelated universe, actors should be understood not as isolated entities but within the context of the webs of relations and that relations are in dynamic motions producing and reproducing life of its own. China cares about its relationship with countries expect results later because ‘from a relational perspective to maintain a process of cooperation is often more important than to achieve immediate and tangible results.*

China conceives partnership in terms of its contribution to the totality and long-term goals of its foreign policy. Hence, in its relations with Ethiopia, China cares about its long-term interests. They care about the relation in its entirety rather than the components. Hence, they can be tolerant to challenges if it does not significantly affect the entire partnership. With that mindset, China tried to adapt to the behavior of the new government that came to power in 2018 in Ethiopia by engaging through close, and frequent engagement and consultation. China believes that as it continues to engage with the new Ethiopian administration, it would develop intimacy, acquittance, understanding and relation. That leads to relationality and “the logic of relationality is that an actor tends to make decisions according to the degree of intimacy and /or importance of its relationships to specific others, with the totality of its relational circles as the background” (Qin, 2016:37). China's approach towards Ethiopia resonates well with the logic of relationality.

China aims at building, based on the logic of relationality, long term partnership with Ethiopia for its eminent competition against the U.S. It is building international allies in its effort to build alternative international order. In this context, for China, “the logic of relationality has priority over both the logic of instrumental rationality (consequences) and the logic of normative rationality (appropriateness)” (Qin, 2016: 38). That is why they may overlook normative rationalities related

to normative values of human rights and democracy and refrain from employing instrumental rationalities in their relationship with others including Ethiopia.

The U.S. on the other hand is transactional in its relationship with Ethiopia. Generally, one could argue that the U.S. approach is based on individual rationality but when it comes to Africa, the US foreign policy is transactional. “Transactionalism is a foreign policy approach that favors..., focuses on short-term wins rather than longer-term strategic foresight, adheres to a zero-sum worldview where all gains are relative and reciprocity is absent, and does not follow a grand strategy” (Bashirov & Yilmaz, 2019:165).

Transactional approach also refers to the tendency of applying *quid pro quo* in foreign policy engagement. In this regard, Ignac (2022) observes that U.S. foreign policy during particularly the Trump Presidency “making U.S. foreign aid straightforwardly contingent upon political gains” was shifting from humanitarian principles to political transactionalism. This transactional approach represents the high proclivity among the U.S. policy makers to employ assistance and aid as a political tool. Further cementing this is Toosi (2019) who referring from a leaked presidential policy document revealed that “the U.S. links its development assistance and aid to what it calls a renewal of ‘great power competition’ with China and Russia”.

In the specific case of Ethiopia, in response to Ethiopia’s refusal to sign a draft agreement on the GERD solicited by the World Bank and U.S. Department of Treasury, the US, on what the State Department referred to as the guidance of President Trump, suspended close to \$ 130 million worth foreign assistance to Ethiopia (Gramer, 2020; New York Times, 2020). Ethiopia refuses to sign the draft agreement on the ground that the agreement favors Egypt at the expense of Ethiopia. The Trump administration attempted at getting Ethiopia’s agreement on the GERD as a *quid pro quo* for Egypt’s support for Trump’s Abraham Accord Initiative (KI5<sup>13</sup>, May 13, 2024). This is a clear demonstration of a transactional approach in foreign policy.

Furthermore, the U.S. approach focuses on isolated cases and foreign policy demands and expectations and failure to fulfill those expectations usually results in rejection, isolation, and sanction. Officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia characterized such transactional

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<sup>13</sup> Key Informant Five (KI5), High Ranking Official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, interviewed on 13 May 2024.

behavior of the U.S. towards Ethiopia as “*goal post shifting*” approach (KI2<sup>14</sup>, May 20, 2024). The U.S. foreign policy behavior in general seems to be guided by the instrumental and normative rationalism which goes along with the liberal and realist understanding of the international system.

#### **4.2.5. Humanitarian Interventionism Versus Non-Interference and Respect for Sovereignty**

During the conflict in the North (2020-2022), the U.S. pursued consistent humanitarian interventionism. This is manifested in different forms. One such manifestation is invoking humanitarian situations to isolate and pressure Ethiopia by helping to establish on 17 December 2021 external institutions like the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) to investigate alleged human right violations and another is sanctions.

In this connection, the U.S. secretary of state since 2021, Antony J. Blinken, announced that in addition to visa restriction, the U.S. has imposed wide-ranging restrictions on economic and security assistance to Ethiopia and bring defense, trade control policy in line with those measures limiting the relationship to only humanitarian assistance (US Department of State, 2021). These approaches of the U.S. are not only unilateralist, but they are interventionist.

Furthermore, U.S.A. and its ally convened the UNSC 14 times between 2020 and 2022 in different formats invoking humanitarian situations. In those meetings, U.S.A. and its partners in Europe called for humanitarian interventions including instituting an independent international investigative mechanism and sanctions (KI5<sup>15</sup>, May 13, 2024). They were finally able to establish an International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) against Ethiopia’s will.

In contrast, China regretted that those meetings should not have been called. In those UNSC engagements China emphasized on Ethiopia’s sovereignty, opposed the use of sanctions as counterproductive, and maintain that the crisis in Tigray should be understood as an internal issue (Ethiopia Publications: Security Council Report, n.d.). In fact, China voted against the establishment of ICHREE (United Nations Information Service, 2021).

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<sup>14</sup> See footnote 7

<sup>15</sup> See footnote 12

China viewed all matters pertaining to the Northern conflict (2020-2022) in Ethiopia in essence as a domestic affair. In view of that, Wang Yi, the Chinese Foreign Minister reassured that “China does not interfere in Ethiopia's internal affairs and in fact, opposes the intervention by external forces, let alone their attempt to exert pressure on Ethiopia to achieve their own political purposes” (Xinhua 2021, June 11, para. 4).

#### **4.2.6. Conditioned versus Non-Conditioned Foreign Policy Approaches towards Ethiopia**

The foreign policy approach of China towards Ethiopia is distinct not only in comparison to the U.S. foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia but also in comparison to China’s foreign policy approaches towards the rest of Africa because it is not conditioned even on resources. The foreign policy approach of China towards Africa is accused of being “infrastructure for natural resources” however, as for Ethiopia, it is seen differently. It is “infrastructure for diplomatic support” (Benjamin, 2020:81-82).

The foreign policy approach of China is guided by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Ethiopia and disregard the political conditions and policy prescriptions in its engagement with Ethiopia. China does not have Western like conditions attached to its African projects (Aaron, 2020:13; Abidde & Ayoola, 2021:71; Hackenesh, 2011:6; Ziso, 2018:198).

China’s non-conditional foreign policy approach is in fact considered by China as real foreign policy tool that goes beyond rhetoric as it places China at advantage to entice other countries towards itself. Therefore:

*When forging relationships in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world, Beijing has emphasized its role as a fellow member of the South, its willingness to provide aid, assistance, and economic opportunities based on equality—without the paternalistic prescriptions or conditions often demanded by Western donors and international financial institutions. (Abidde & Ayoola, 2021: p.71)*

In reference to the specific case of Ethiopia, Messay and Teferee (2018: 63) maintained that “China is providing Ethiopia with monetary and non-monetary forms of assistance based on the principles of mutual benefits with no conditions on governance, democracy, and human rights”.

In the words of Aaron (2020: 9, 76 & 112), while China’s development assistance to Ethiopia, ranges from infrastructure construction to development loans, it comes with no official conditions.

while the United States want political reform in Ethiopia through conditionality. Such conditions or lack of it affects the direction of diplomatic communication as a one-way direction or two-way direction which is dealt with in the section that follows.

#### **4.2.7. One way Direction versus Two-Way Direction Policy Approaches**

U.S. official development assistance dominated by development aid/humanitarian aid, whereas Chinese development assistance is more than safety-net like humanitarian assistance. Security, development, and humanitarian assistances has been the defining feature of the U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia for a long period of time; in contrast, assistance is not the main ingredient in Sino-Ethiopian relations. Chinese cooperation with Ethiopia is instead increasingly made of mutual economic partnership by combining aid with other official flows, trade, investments, and political cooperation’’ (Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020:142; Hackenesh, 2011:6).

As a result, while the U.S. considers Ethiopia within Lense of the donor-aid recipient continuum, for China Ethiopia is not primarily an aid recipient, but an important economic and political ally, an important partner in regional and international debates (Hackenesh, 2011:20; Aaron, 2020:73). Furthermore, from the very inception, Ethiopia’s relationships with U.S.A. have been based on the traditional South-North hierarchy whereas its relationship with China is founded on South-South mindset, allowing for a two-way approach; this relationship is, at least in theory, mutual. Such orientations determine the tones and manners of communication and the relationship as it does.

The development assistance orientation that China has towards Ethiopia is partnership-oriented, it is not patron-client oriented at least in principle. Mutual goals of development and policy are agreed by assistant provider and receiver and the receiving state has some level of control over the administration of the implementation of the project. ‘‘China seems to be offering a partnership-oriented relationship, one based on mutual goals and respect. It has been dubbed as a win-win situation with both parties gaining substantially from the arrangement’’(Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020:145).

Moreover, China is very careful with its usage of a language as constructivism suggests. So, ‘‘when China does pronounce on development cooperation, it avoids the language of aid and development assistance and instead prefers the language of solidarity, mutually beneficial

economic cooperation, ‘common prosperity’ and shared ‘developing country’ status’’ (Fantu & Obi, 2010: 4).

#### **4.2.8. State Centric Foreign Policy Versus the State -In- Society Foreign Policy Approach**

China’s foreign policy towards Ethiopia is state centric. Its prominent engagement is directly with the government, its development assistance is government demand driven. In that sense, China’s foreign policy approach resonates well with the realist emphasis on state actors.

*China’s noninterference policy, in general, and Africa, in particular, is associated with the inviolability of the basic pillars of statehood protected by international law whose key reference point is the UN Charter. At the center of the approach is the respect of the internal and external sovereignty, abstaining from interference in the internal affairs of other sovereign states, respect for the independence of other states, and eschewing coercive diplomacy as a means to project or protect its interests abroad. The stance serves as a guarantee that China is respectful of the diversity in ideas, views, and principles of other countries. (Abidde & Ayoola, 2021:72).*

On the other hand, the U.S. views Ethiopia’s government as one among other actors within the Ethiopian society that competes for influence. According to the state -in- society approach, the government is only one actor in foreign policy decision making which looks like the pluralistic point of view of liberal internationalism. In the view of the state-in-society approach, “states often struggled to establish authority in competition with strong social forces’’ (Wang, 2021: 5). This is how the US foreign policy understands Ethiopia. Hence, the U.S. engages with several other non-state actors to achieve its foreign policy priorities in Ethiopia. This is confirmed with the data collected from all the 17 key informants this paper was able to reach out. The U.S. believed that they have built a huge number of networks of non-state actors, in the U.S. foreign policy called host state “policy community’’, in Ethiopia (KI6<sup>16</sup>, May 8, 2024). They tend to consider the Ethiopian state as “a state-in-society’’ and their foreign policy approach towards that has been guided by the philosophy of liberal pluralism and liberal internationalism.

China’s approach in comparison to the U.S. approach in the words of Benjamin (2020:80, 84) is:

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<sup>16</sup> Key Informant Six (KI6), Senior US-Ethiopia expert at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, interviewed on 8 May 2024.

*Far different to that of the Americans, the Chinese engagement with African countries such as Ethiopia involves significant state actors such as Ministry of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Commerce and other relevant ministries, instead of a developed policy community. A deep critical Afrocentric review of the mainstream literature has revealed that China's foreign policy with Africa and Ethiopia respectively has been shaped by the Westphalian understanding of state sovereignty and principle of Non-Interference. [Emphasis Added]*

In line with realist emphasis of order and security, “China’s policy is to strengthen regime’s effective control of its sovereign territory and citizenry, emphasizing the element of order. In China’s view, giving preference to state rights rather than individual rights is likely to minimize violence in the long run” (Odgaard, 2018:83).

Thus, China’s view of the state as a dominant actor in international relations resonates well with the realist understanding of international relations, while U.S. approach of the state-in-society resembles more like the liberal foreign policy understanding of plural actors of foreign policy.

#### **4.3.The Causes for the Difference in Foreign Policy Approach of China and U.S.A.**

The previous section has elaborated the divergence in foreign policy approaches of U.S.A. and China towards Ethiopia. This section of the paper explains why China and U.S.A. pursue dissimilar foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia despite similar strategic interests. What causes the difference in foreign policy behaviors? In general terms, the reasons emanate from the “foundational discordances and the structural dynamics between the U.S. and China” in the international system (Almén et al., 2021:81). The difference might among other ways be explained, specifically, in terms of differences in political culture, historical experiences, role conception at the international system, international identity/self-image, difference in political priorities and Great power competition.

##### **4.3.1. Differing Political Cultures**

Culturally and in political culture both are extremely different. Such difference shapes policy behavior.

*The differences in political culture between China and the U.S. affect the two countries' foreign policies. Chinese political culture is characterized by a prominent moral and ethical nature, low political participation, and a more*

*centralized responsibility for policymaking while the main elements of American political culture are **isolationism, universalism, realism** based on Protestant philosophy, and high political participation. (Ye, 2024:1-2)*

Hence, Chinese state- centered and non-interfering foreign policy behavior towards Ethiopia, and U.S. isolationist, Unilateralist, universalist, sanctioning foreign policy towards Ethiopia could partly be attributable to the difference in their respective political culture.

#### **4.3.2. Different Historical Experiences**

China's foreign policy is not divorced from historical experience. In fact, history has a significant impact on its foreign policy approach. Chinese experience against colonialism and imperialism affected its policy of non-interference, its views of multilateralism, its view of U.S. interventionism.

According to Lippert and Perthes (2020: 20), “The historical experience of vulnerability and the ‘century of humiliation’ (1840–1949) shapes China’s strategic culture to this day”. China assumes that it is “only after the arrival of Western colonialism and imperialism was China plunged into a decline lasting roughly a century, during which it suffered economic exploitation, political humiliation, and military invasion” (Lippert & Perthes, 2020:12). The Chinese call this experience the “century of humiliation”.

The 2019 China’s Defense White paper recalls that “since the beginning of modern times, the Chinese people have suffered **from aggressions and wars**, and have learned the value of peace and the pressing need for development” (The State Council of the People Republic of China, 2019, Section II, para. 5). Thus, it will not be a mistake to concluded that Chinese historical experience is one of factors in determining its foreign policy behavior.

Historical experience has also been a valuable foundation for its foreign policy towards Africa as China believes that among other factors “**shared past experiences** ...have brought China and Africa close together” (The State Council of the People Republic of China, 2021, forward, para.1).

China likened its experience of humiliation with that of Africa’s colonial and slavery humiliation. A key informant from the Chinese diplomatic circle believed that “both China and Africa experiencing humiliation imposed by external forces; knows the importance of trust, solidarity,

mutual understanding at the international level and the need for dignity and sovereignty in each other's engagement'' (KI7<sup>17</sup>, May 13, 2024).

Indeed, understanding the importance of history to its foreign policy engagement, ''when forging relationships in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world, Beijing has emphasized its role as a fellow member of the South, its history free of imperialism or colonialism in foreign lands'' (Abidde & Ayoola, 2021:71).

Both China and Ethiopia have bitter experience of Western aggression and humiliation. That experience shaped their foreign policy approach to each other. In historical terms, influenced by the Japan's occupation of Manchuria (1932-1945), China was one of the few countries that did not recognize Italian occupation (1935-1941) of Ethiopia (Li, 2023:188; Shinn, 2014:150).

Further confirming the imperative of history to China's foreign policy, China in the joint communique issued on the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Ethiopia committed ''to resolutely support the Government and people ...of Ethiopia in their struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism'' (MFA of PRC, 2002, para. 4). In general, statements and foreign policy documents indicate the importance of history in shaping the idiosyncrasy of foreign policy decision makers in China, their world views.

U.S.A., seen in the prisms of historicism on the other hand, has been the dominant superpower at least since the end of World War II. Then the end of the Cold War left U.S.A. with an opportunity to be at the driving wheel of liberal internationalism. According to Kane (2006), this historical *Fortuna* has bestowed U.S.A. with unrivaled superpower status with the ability and the willingness to impose its values of human rights and democracy and philosophy of economic development on others. Despite changes in the international system and actors, ''the U.S. refused to voluntarily relinquish its position, allow its power to subside, and leave international action to other nations''(Kane, 2006:2). This is because one of the elements of American exceptionalism is the belief that ''the United States shall rise to power but never decline'' (Restad, 2015: 225). This led to the entrenchment of unilateralism and the tradition of humanitarian intervention in U.S. foreign policy psychic.

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<sup>17</sup> Key Informant Seven (KI7), senior official from the Chinese foreign service, interviewed on 13 May 2024.

History has therefore shaped the collective consciousness, identity of both China and U.S.A. which impacts their foreign policy but differently. China's policy of non-interference, respect for sovereignty and U.S. unilateral internationalism unrivaled by any power on earth developed through the years in the collective consciousness of its policy makers is founded at least partly on historical experience.

#### **4.3.3. International Self-Conception/International Self-Identity**

One can observe that China and U.S.A. have different international self-conceptions/identities. International identity is “a state's distinctiveness with respect to its interests, purposes and preferences when compared with other states”(Kowert, 1998, as cited in Chan, 2014:263).

China's international identity shaped by its historical experience evolves from a “*peaceful raising state*” in the 1990s and 2000s to a ‘*responsible state*’ in the world. Xi Jinping in speech delivered at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs on 28 December 2023 acclaimed that “China has become a responsible major country with enhanced international influence, stronger capacity to steer new endeavors, and greater moral appeal” (PRC MFA, 2023, para. 4). In this conference, China is featured as a country with historic responsibility to “building a community with a shared future for mankind” as an alternative international order and a country that “opened-up new prospects in major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” (MFA of PRC, 2023, para. 4).

Chinese leadership in foreign policy believed that they “have showcased distinct Chinese characteristics, style, and ethos in [in their] diplomacy, and established the image of a confident, self-reliant, open, and inclusive major country with a global vision” (MFA of PRC, 2023, para. 3). However, “China continues to grapple with a sense of historical victimhood that complicates its global ambitions as a great power” (Boon, 2018:176). This historical victimhood persists its policy of non-interference, strengthened its sympathy for countries under U.S. pressure as it has demonstrated to Ethiopia during the conflict in the North.

The Global-South self-conception, weather it is pursued as diplomatic tactic or for any other reason is a paramount importance influencing its foreign policy. “Despite its economic success and great power status, China still sees itself as part of the Global South. To this day the political leadership

speaks of China as the “the world’s largest developing country” (Lippert & Perthes, 2020:12). The State Council of PRC (2021) affirms that China views and projects itself as the largest developing countries in the world. This view of the Chinese-self facilitates South-South cooperation with Ethiopia allowing for a two-way direction of communication and consultation (Aaron, 2020).

On the other hand, U.S.A. international identity has been defined by American exceptionalism which consists of the “belief in America’s superiority, its historical mission, and that the United States shall rise to power but never decline” (Restad, 2015: 225). The foreign policy consequence of such America’s self is that the U.S. leads, while others follow, and that the U.S.’s way is the highway because U.S.A. considers itself as ‘God’s New Israel’ chosen to redeem the world (Restad, 2015:6; Sachs, 2018:1).

Furthermore, in relation to China “American exceptionalists see China’s rise as an unacceptable threat to U.S. dominance” (Sachs, 2018:12). They recommend every means to contain the growth of China at her home and abroad. That has highly influenced U.S. foreign policy behavior towards Ethiopia as U.S. policy of China has global implications. Indeed, one of the U.S. strategic priorities was “*countering Chinese influence in the region*” (ICS, 2018: 2) [Emphasis Added].

The element of the American exceptionalism inspires U.S. unilateral internationalism, unilateral interventionism, and coercive approach in its foreign policy. In the articulation of Restad (2015: 10 & 236) “the way in which American exceptionalism has influenced American foreign policy is to inspire *unilateral internationalism*, more recently *unilateral interventionism*. The U.S. has been constantly seeking *unilateral maneuverability*, even when engaging in so called multilateral ventures”. Given its unilateral internationalist behavior, for Restad (2015) systemic attributes of international politics as formulated by structural realist international relations scholars have provided only a limited guide to American foreign policy behavior.

#### **4.3.4. Role Conception of China and U.S.A. in the International System**

China and U.S.A. have different conception of national role at the international system and in their relationship with other states. Here, “national role conceptions are defined as foreign policy maker’s perception of their nations’ position, role, demand, expectation in the international system”(Wish, 1980:532).

China conceives its role to be more neutral or at least politically neutral. That may explain as to why China pursues a policy of “detachment” towards the conflict in Ethiopia between 2020 and 2022. According to Noesselt *et al.* (2021:16), “the global dimensions of Chinese role conceptions, as exemplified in the field of security, treat the PRC as a “neutral” actor and do not link its international engagement to regime-type patterns (or political ideologies)”. This is quite different from the U.S. role conception.

Comparing the role conception of China and U.S.A., Liao (2019:354) argues that:

*Chinese leadership construes its national role and those of the interacting parties as “mutually constituted” and hence places a premium on the adaptation to the specific contexts of the self-other interactions. In stark contrast to the American style of role playing that often leads to an imposed pattern of deference, the Chinese role-play, without an aim of reshaping the international system based on its own value system, emphasizes that the differences in national conditions should be fully respected in mutual relations. China prefers to convince the foreign “other” of its trustworthy partnership.*

In more concrete terms, O’Rourke (2021:1) in a report prepared for the U.S. Congress, described the role of the U.S. at the international stage as “consisting of four key elements: global leadership; defense and promotion of the liberal international order; defense and promotion of freedom, democracy, and human rights; and prevention of the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia”. This is how the U.S. arguably views its role in the world. The exemplary and missionary roles that emanates from the American identity of exceptionalism highly influenced the overall role conception of U.S.A. Therefore, in view of its missionary identity, the U.S. believes that it is in “a hands-on mission, actively promoting values of democracy and capitalism around the world” (Restad, 2015:7).

A review of the Integrated Country Strategies (ICS) towards Ethiopia of 2018, 2022, 2023; press statements and official comments of U.S.A. indicated that the promotion and protection of democracy and human rights in Ethiopia are constant foreign policy priorities of U.S.A. towards Ethiopia since 2018 such priorities among others are caused by U.S. role conception.

#### 4.3.5. U.S.A.-China Strategic Rivalry and Distrust

One of the factors that affects China's and U.S. foreign policy behavior is the fact that they are competitors in the international system. "Rivalry between the United States and China has become a paradigm of international relations. Since 2017 China has been treated as a "long-term strategic competitor" in official U.S. government strategy documents" (Lippert & Perthes, 2020: 5).

The view that China is a threat to U.S. led liberal world has bipartisan support. In this regard, "The Trump Administration's strategy documents describe China as an essentially revisionist power aiming for global supremacy" (Lippert & Perthes, 2020:16). The National Security, and the National Defense Strategies of the Biden-Harris Administration call China a consequential strategic competitor against which the U.S. seeks to prevent the PRC's dominance of key regions, and out-compete it (US Department of State, 2022; White House, 2022). Complicating the competition is the mistrust and distrust both have against each other.

*To the U.S., China is actively subverting the U.S.-led liberal international order. The U.S. also suspects China of popularizing authoritarianism in the developing world and beyond. From a U.S. perspective, the Communist Party's ideology is irreconcilable with U.S. values. The ideological differences become more threatening to the U.S. as China grows more powerful and active on the international stage. (Almén et al., 2021:5)*

As a result, Washington views the world, ..., through a "China lens" (Lippert & Perthes, 2020:11). The U.S. foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa is very illustrative of this approach of the China factor. The policy document argued that China "sees Sub Saharan Africa as an important arena to challenge the rules-based international order, advance its own narrow commercial and geopolitical interests, undermine transparency and openness, and **weaken U.S. relations with African peoples and governments**" (Whitehouse, 2022: 5). In view of that, the U.S. foreign policy "focuses on responding to growing foreign activity and influence in sub-Saharan Africa"(Whitehouse, 2022:6).

Rendering the realists' nightmare of "Security Dilemma", U.S. security policy is leading China to fear for its own security and vice versa. China's 2019 Defense White Paper demonstrates that. In the articulation of the White paper (2019, Section I, Para.3):

*International strategic competition is on the rise. The US has adjusted its national security and defense strategies and adopted unilateral policies. It has provoked and intensified competition among major countries, significantly increased its defense expenditure, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense, and undermined global strategic stability.*

In view of that, in addition to hard-balancing with U.S.A. through its national defense policy, China seems to be employing its foreign policy for soft-balancing with the same. In this reference, Abidde and Ayoola (2021:79), argued that:

*In nontraditional forms, counterbalancing against the United States is occurring through China's noninterference policy in African affairs. Unlike states engaged in hard balancing, China's soft balancing largely employs nonmilitary instruments of power such as noninterference to build alliances that constrain and delegitimize the actions of a hegemonic United States.*

China's counter balancing is manifested through taking the opposite policy direction *visa vis* what U.S.A. would take. According to Conteh-Morgan (2018: 47), "China has adopted exactly the opposite policy posture towards Africa (non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations) of what it perceives as U.S. behavior in the international system". The Non-interference, and detachment policy of China seems to be motivated by China's desire to counter U.S. hegemony. According to Abidde and Ayoola (2021:81), "It appears China's engagement with Africa is primarily motivated a subtle strategic calculus; one that seeks to constrain U.S. power and influence".

It is within this geostrategic context that African partners including Ethiopia are seen with in the Chinese foreign policy approach (Eisenman & Shinn, 2023:5). Ethiopia seen in terms of any strategic calculus is a relevant candidate. In view of that, "China is courting countries such as Ethiopia in a geopolitical tug-of-war, and Ethiopia's BRICS invitation increases its relevance in the great power competition calculus" (Gleixner-Hayat, 2023, para, 11). U.S. foreign policy is not different, it sees Ethiopia in terms of its potential significance to counter China's influence in the Horn of Africa (ICS, 2018:1).

This strategic rivalry was considerably visible in their foreign policy towards the Northern conflict (2020-2022) in Ethiopia. In this line, writing for Wahington based think-thank American Security project, Abysinia (2022, para.1) establishes that "China and the U.S. have interests in the

trajectory of the conflict in light of competition on the continent’’. They seem to view Ethiopia in terms of their strategic competition.

The United States Institute of Peace (2020) in its ‘‘China’s engagement in the Red Sea Region Report’’, concluded that China’s position and approach is influenced by the U.S. potential gain or failure. The report argues that instability in the region benefitted China in some ways by feeding a narrative of U.S. strategic failure. Thus, instead of supporting the U.S. approach of pressuring Ethiopia to resolve its conflict, Sany and Sheehy (2022) argued that ‘‘China take satisfaction in the perceived failure of U.S. diplomatic efforts and the growing tension between Washington and Addis Ababa’’. Furthermore:

*as relations between Ethiopia and the United States continue to fray because of U.S. policy, Ethiopia likely to turn to China for greater support, Beijing can be expected to feel that it is scoring points in its strategic rivalry with the United States. (Sany & Sheehy, 2022, para.14).*

In affirmation, Wei (2022) concluded that strategic competition between China and the U.S. influenced their respective foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia. For Wei, U.S. sanction on Ethiopia is an instrument to pressure China. So, it is part of the U.S. competition with China. Therefore, strategic competition for influence between China and U.S.A. is very important factor in influencing their respective foreign policy behaviors towards Ethiopia.

#### **4.3.6. Different Foreign Policy Priorities**

Economics is much stronger instrument of foreign policy for China, while political conditions are the preferred instruments in U.S.A. foreign policy towards Ethiopia. Wang (2020:128) comparing the foreign policy priorities of China and U.S.A. asserted that:

*Beijing does not promote any specific political or ideological agenda on the continent while Washington, though not always consistent in practice, prefers dealing with African countries deemed to possess ‘‘good’’ human rights records and regards democracy promotion as one of its political priorities in Africa.*

Almost all the 17 key informants in course of this study confirm that China’s priorities in Ethiopia revolves around economic development, China cares about Ethiopia’s capability of debt repayment, Ethiopia’s environment for investment and trade, while US priorities in Ethiopia zero

in on regional peace and security, human rights, democracy and good governance. This difference in priorities results in different foreign policy responses.

Thus, guided by its traditional principles of non-interference in domestic affairs of countries, Beijing have pursued a policy of “detachment” in relations to its foreign policy towards Ethiopia (Sany & Sheehy, 2022). The U.S. on the other hand invoking humanitarian and human rights situations in Ethiopia pursued a unilateral action of sanctions, limited engagement, humanitarian intervention, repeated call for respect for human rights, and implementing transitional justice policy and holding alleged human right perpetrators into accountability.

#### **4.3.7. Different Visions and Definition of the International System**

Guided by the democratic peace thesis of liberalism, the U.S. would like to promote liberal values of human rights and democracy and protect what it referred to as the liberal rules-based order that has been created in the spitting image of U.S. or U.S. driven institutions. “China regards the West’s advocacy of a liberal world order and universal human rights as a hegemonic discourse” to perpetuate the international dominance of the U.S. (Lippert & Perthes, 2020:13).

In view of that, China aspires to change or reform the existing order in its own image or at least in a way that enhances its core national interests. Hence, “China is seen as exercising a more assertive brand of foreign policy with the intent of renegotiating its relationship with the global order in greater favor of Chinese interests” (Boon, 2018:130). In that direction, China has adopted the Belt and Road Initiative sometimes referred to as the New Silk Road. This is a global infrastructure development strategy initiated in 2013 by China to connect Africa, Asia, and Europe. The initiative carries Chinese vision of a global community of shared future which basically is an alternative to the existing international order. Odgaard concluded that “The main objective of One Belt, one Road (OBOR) is to establish an alternative to the liberal free trade projects of Western states and institutions, or in the least, to conform to neoliberalism with ‘Chinese characteristics’” (2018:81). Ethiopia is one of the central hubs for China’s Belt and Road Initiative (Sany & Sheehy, 2022). China continued to entice Ethiopia by offering a partnership of high level-all-weather strategic partnership only offered to few countries in the world. Gleixner-Hayat (2023, para, 11) believed that “China is courting countries such as Ethiopia in a geopolitical tug-of-war”.

It is not only the future that they have a different view but also their definition of current the rules-based order is also different.

*While the U.S. promotes a rules-based order that is driven by the international norms of democratic participation, rule of law, transparency, and open markets, China puts its focus on the principle of state sovereignty and the right of each country to adopt its own development trajectory. As a result, both countries regard the other as rule-breakers in the international system. (Almén et al., 2021:8)*

Therefore, their foreign policy behavior towards Ethiopia has been dependent upon their definition of the international system. As China's understanding of the international system is based on the principle of state sovereignty, and the right of adopting own development trajectory; China does pursue a policy of non-interference and detachment towards Ethiopia. The U.S. who believes the international system should be based on the liberal values of democracy, individual freedom, and human rights; advocated a policy of humanitarian interventionism and sanction, limited its partnership to pressure Ethiopia's government in response to what it says the violation of human and humanitarian law during conflicts.

#### **4.3.8. Foreign Policy Decision Making Mechanisms of China and U.S.A.**

The foreign policy Decision making mechanisms of China and U.S.A. are structurally, and substantively different. China's foreign policy decision making mechanism is more centralized, stable, and predictable, while the U.S. foreign policy decision making mechanism is pluralistic and democratic as a result it is instable, slow, and unpredictable (KI1<sup>18</sup>, May 13, 2024; KI2<sup>19</sup>, May 20, 2024; KI3<sup>20</sup>, May 6, 2024).

Separation of power, institutional check and balance, the pluralistic nature of state and non-state actors in general terms influence the foreign policy decision making mechanisms of U.S.A. Moreover, Africa usually is at the footnote of the U.S. foreign policy or at best U.S. African Countries Policy is lumped together in its Sub-Saharan Africa Strategy. Africa is regarded as marginal and a "backwater" in official policymaking circles to U.S. interests (Schraeder, 1994; Woodward, 2006).

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<sup>18</sup> See footnote 6

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 7

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 8

That creates lack of context for U.S. African policy or left the foreign policy space with respect to African countries to individual actors, media reporting, lobbyists. Such mechanisms result in an “often “a set of people, a set of policies” situation (Ye, 2024: 4). This has been quite the case with regards to the U.S. foreign policy decision making mechanisms towards Ethiopia. Individuals close to the administration, lobbyists and media reporting were of a paramount importance to bring, and influence issues of Ethiopia to the decision-making table.

Thus, U.S. policy towards Ethiopia is affected by aberrated idiosyncratic behavior of leaders. Two cases illustrate this. One is the decision of halting close to \$130 million U.S. foreign assistance to Ethiopia. The decision was said to be made “on the guidance of Trump” in response to Ethiopia refusal to sign an agreement on the GERD which Ethiopia argues favor Egypt (New York Times, 2020). The decision was believed to have been influenced by Trump’s geostrategic calculation of appeasing Egypt in return for support for his Abraham Accord initiative (KI5<sup>21</sup>, May 13, 2024)

Another is the Samantha Power, USAID administrator, factor. It is true that, during humanitarian crisis which is a situation that the U.S. characterized Ethiopia with since 2020, the role of USAID is influential. The Administrator, officed at the Whitehouse is one of the regular attendees at the National Security Council which is the President’s principal forum for national security and foreign policy decision making. So, she is influential in the U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia.

However, the problem emanates from her attitude towards Ethiopia. The position taken by Samantha Power is believed to be politicized and charged feeding into the negative U.S. approach towards Ethiopia. Affirming such observation is, the revelation from *Politico* which citing senior USAID official revealed that “in an early brainstorming session with staffers, Power asked about ***ways to embarrass the Ethiopian government***” in relation to humanitarian situation (Toosi, 2021, ‘Do no harm’ Section, para. 2). Such requests demonstrated the negative energy towards the U.S. foreign policy towards Ethiopia.

Samantha Power is a well-known liberal internationalist who advocated for U.S. interventionism on the grounds of human rights and humanitarian violations. “Power’s past advocacy for humanitarian intervention, including with U.S. military force, has fallen out of favor in recent years

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<sup>21</sup> High Ranking Official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, interviewed on May 13, 2024.

as public confidence in Washington's ability to reshape distant lands wanes'' (Bearak & Hudson, 2021). However, one would argue that her liberal internationalist attitude is not out of the calculation of the U.S. foreign approach towards Ethiopia. In fact, according to reports by Foreign Policy Magazine, Samantha Power opposes normalization of relations between Ethiopia and U.S on the grounds of humanitarian situation (Gramer, March 9, 2023). Substantiating such reporting is, the advice to the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from ''interlocutors in the U.S Embassy who emphasizes the need to carefully handle the golden hair lady at the 6<sup>th</sup> floor in the Whitehouse referring to Samantha Power to improve relations with U.S.'' (KI6<sup>22</sup>, May 8, 2024). Thus, individuals are pivotal in U.S. foreign policy decision making towards Ethiopia.

China's Foreign policy decision making mechanism is more unified, centralized, hangs on the role of the communist party and its paramount leader Xi Jinping (Jakobson & Manuel 2016; Maull et al.,2023; Medeiros, 2000; Ye 2024; Zhao 2020). Therefore, the party's role is very important in China's policy towards Ethiopia. The visit of Li Zhanshu, the third-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (2017-2022), to Ethiopia on 12 May 2018 cannot be a coincidence but a practical illustration of the role of the party in its decision-making mechanisms towards Ethiopia. During his visit Li Zhanshu met with the Prime Minister and the President of Ethiopia both of which are ultimate foreign policy decision making units. The ultimate decision-making body on crucial foreign policy issues is the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) (Jakobson & Manuel, 2016; Ye, 2024). Furthermore, ''the formulation of China's foreign policy reflects the country's overall interests and has strong stability'' (Ye 2024:4). That means China's foreign policy decision making towards Ethiopia sees Ethiopia in terms of its contribution to its overall interests in which ''China strategically uses economic and policy tools to expand its influence – which it understands to be at the expense of American supremacy'' (Maull et al., 2023:34). Therefore, one of the factors explaining the divergence of foreign policy approaches of U.S. and China would probably be the difference in their decision-making mechanisms.

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<sup>22</sup> Senior US-Ethiopia expert at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, interviewed on May 8, 2024

#### 4.3.9. Ethiopia's Foreign Policy Behavior and Domestic Situation

Ethiopia's foreign policy and the Ethiopian political landscape has been generally in transition, in reform since 2018. Though "continuities outweigh changes in the field of foreign policy", there is a visible change in the Ethiopian foreign policy orientation (KI2<sup>23</sup>, May 20, 2024). The new administration is assertive and is trying to make an independent and proactive foreign policy and offensive diplomacy. A key Informant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs believed that such posture is not liked by particularly the U.S. (KI2<sup>24</sup>, May 20, 2024).

Another Change to Ethiopia's diplomacy is the focus to summit diplomacy, diplomacy by leaders. In the parlance of the Prime Minister, "another diplomatic option that we have not paid enough attention to because of our focus on diplomat-based communication is diplomacy at the senior leadership level. The diplomatic option of senior leaders is something we should pay attention to" (2019:267). However, the assertion that Ethiopia's lack of attention for senior level diplomacy was because of the focus on bureaucratic politics model is untenable as the two are rather complementary. Furthermore, summit diplomacy should always be supported by professional diplomats to bear fruit, to help following up and implementation. True to his position as the top diplomat of the nation, the Prime Minister should engage in extensive diplomatic activities.

However, some including from the Ministry of foreign Affairs of Ethiopia express concern that this high proclivity for summit diplomacy is marginalizing institutional foreign policy decision making. Building on such concerns, some analysts like Sarkar (2023) and former diplomats like Eliab (2024) take it to the extreme concluding that Ethiopia's foreign policy since 2018 has been personalized, transactional, de-institutionalized.

National interest is an important determinant of foreign policy behavior (Song, 2023:22). Therefore, understanding what the government says its national interest is a step to decipher foreign policy behavior. Unfortunately, in Ethiopia's case, there is neither an adopted foreign policy document to look for the definition of Ethiopia's national interest nor the government believes in "objectively out there and permanently defined national interests". In this regard, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed believed that "our national interests are not only determined by our

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<sup>23</sup> See footnote 7

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 14

understanding but are also taking shape and meaning in our dialogue with other countries’’(Abiy, 2019: 257). Furthermore, Abiy Ahmed recalling the debate between absolute gains of neo-liberal institutionalists and the relative gains of structural realists, recommends the neoliberal institutionalist view of national interest (2019). Such foreign policy orientation attuned with the liberalist, constructivist and the foreign policy decision making model of understanding of national interest. Such orientations should be guided by well-articulated foreign policy document.

Thus far, the guiding principle for policy action is pragmatism in the William James sense of the term (Abiy, 2021:346). According to William James ‘‘Pragmatist turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from a bad priori reason, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power’’ (n.d). However, as pragmatism is imperative for flexibility and merit based foreign policy decisions, it may at its worst turn into opportunism, confusion, and ideological disarray. This may create unpredictability, confusion of communication, ambiguity in foreign policy making.

Another feature of Ethiopia’s foreign policy is diplomatic charm offensive, taking proactive as opposed to reactive diplomatic posture on issues considered important for Ethiopia. This has created suspicion with international interlocutors including U.S.A. and China. A best case in point is the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopia and Somaliland on 1 January 2024. Ethiopia’s move in this direction was a surprise to the U.S. ‘‘The U.S. government was surprised that Ethiopia would make such a big decision that affects U.S interest without the slightest notification, they were raged’’ (KI5<sup>25</sup>, May 13, 2024). The U.S. perceives that Ethiopia’s move would back track years of achievement against Al-Shabab. ‘‘The US ...has invested heavily in attempts to rebuild Somalia’s state and security apparatus and to counter Islamist terrorism’’, so such an agreement was considered risk to the U.S. investment (Bakonyi 2024, para.12). Furthermore, catching international interlocutors like U.S. who consider themselves as guardian of the international system off guard is not a traditional practice.

Ethiopia joining the BRICS, the signing of all-weather strategic partnership with China, Ethiopia’s shift in alliance to the Middle East, the MOU with Somaliland created frustration among the U.S.A.

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<sup>25</sup> See footnote 12

foreign policy makers as to where Ethiopia is heading to. John James, Chairman of the U.S. Subcommittee on Africa of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs alleged that Ethiopia's is taking a political path, footstep of Russia and is aligning with China. In his phraseology, Ethiopia is "only interested in the United States to solve its increasing financial woes" (House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2023:26:36). This demonstrates the dissatisfaction of the U.S. at least at the legislature level in the paths that Ethiopia is taking. The legislature is very powerful in influencing the executive through budget allocation, open hearings, check-and-balances and exposing the executive for public and media scrutiny.

The domestic situation in Ethiopia also creating enabling environment for superpower rivalry. U.S.A. is very clear that, it is only upon improvements in the domestic situation of Ethiopia which includes the implementation of transitional justice policy, the accountability of perpetrators of alleged human rights violation that it would revitalize and normalize partnership with Ethiopia. U.S. policy is partly influenced by high media coverage, lobbyist pressure and individual officials' perception and of course China's presence.

Though takes satisfaction by the perceived or actual strategic failure of the U.S. in Ethiopia, China cannot of be out of worries about Ethiopia's stability as it is only when Ethiopia is stable that China could gain more. However, in the final analysis, one of the factors affecting U.S. and China's behavior towards Ethiopia is the foreign policy decision making mechanism and the domestic situation of Ethiopia.

## **Conclusions**

Despite similar strategic interests, China and the U.S. pursue diverging foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia since 2018. The Chinese foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia has been more of pragmatic, productivist, multilateral-bilateralist, non-interfering, an approach of detachment, state centric, non-conditional, and based on high level of engagement. In contrast, the U.S. foreign policy approach towards Ethiopia has been isolationist, welfarist, unilateral, interventionist, based on a body of policy community/the state-in-society approach and disengagement.

The divergence in approach is attributed to differences in political culture, historical experience, political priorities, vision of the international system, conception of global role, self-image, and

strategic rivalry between China and U.S.A., difference in foreign policy decision making and the behavior and domestic situation of Ethiopia. Ethiopia should consciously pursue its foreign policy based on consultation and understanding aiming at benefiting from both partnership without picking sides in their strategic rivalry.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter highlights the implications of the diverging foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia, it extracts conclusions from the discussion and analysis of the previous chapter.

#### **5.1. Implications of The Foreign Policy Approaches of China and the U.S. towards Ethiopia**

This section provides a snapshot of the implications of the foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia. Implications include whatever the approaches and the cause of China and the U.S. policies might be, Ethiopia is instrumental in shaping, and mediating their behavior at least towards itself. Ethiopia's agency matters in that regard. The skillful maneuvering of the strategic rivalry from the Ethiopian side is imperative. Moreover, enhancing Ethiopia's significance which is linked to domestic stability and tranquility is also critical to shape their behavior towards Ethiopia. Let's substantiate the implications bit more.

##### **5.1.1. Ethiopia's Agency Matters**

Ethiopia has been considered exporters and bastion of stability amid the chaotic Horn of Africa. However, since 2020 Ethiopia is criticized for being at war with itself. The government should put its house in order. That would open opportunities, it goes without saying, for revitalization of partnership and increase Ethiopia creditworthiness, dependability, and reliability for cooperation. China's investment in Ethiopia cannot thrive in a conflict environment, in an environment where investors and their investment are at risk due to internal conflict.

The U.S. is struggling between cooperating with a government implicated in alleged human rights violations given Ethiopia's strategic weight and looking for alternative regional strategic ally forgoing Ethiopia. In view of that, the U.S. emphasizes that "Ethiopia, not the United States, is in the driver's seat" to revitalize the relationship (U.S. State Department, 2021). In this line, the U.S. calls for "sustained, good faith efforts by the GOE" to implement the Pretoria Peace Agreement, transitional justice policy and national dialogue and stop the recurrence of conflict and human

rights violations (ICS, 2023). Ethiopia's domestic situation improvement will remove or at least reduced pretexts for unnecessary pressures.

Rhetorically, the U.S. is promising to “stop treating Africa as a subject of geopolitics” and to pursue a policy that is “not about China or any other third party but it's about Africa” (Asunka, 2021). If it is not about geopolitical competition, if both China and U.S. stop to use Ethiopia as a geopolitical pawn then Ethiopia stands to gain. Even if they continue to be led by geopolitical desires and calculus, what Ethiopia can gain depend on Ethiopia's skillful maneuver of the competition. Ethiopia's balance of assertive and flexible foreign policy could lure both countries to stick to Ethiopia.

Edward Knight (cited in Clynych, 2023:2), geopolitical researcher at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change in London, argued that “the U.S.-China competition is not inherently bad for Africa, nor inherently good. it really depends on how different African governments engage with both the U.S. and China”. It is dependent upon the agency of African countries. This works for Ethiopia as well and for Kibsgaard (2020) Ethiopia has historical experience and ability to balance external powers against each other for its interest. Therefore, Ethiopia should build on this experience to benefit from both China and U.S.A even if they are in strategic competition. That is why this paper believe that it is Ethiopia which is at the driving seat.

### **5.1.2. The Rhetoric and the Meaning of “with us or against us”**

The implication of the divergence of the foreign policy approaches of U.S.A. and China, the intensity of the strategic competition, priorities and the heat up in rhetoric may lead to a situation of “you are either with us or against us”. Washington is already showing signs that it is even shifting its policy of assistance from humanitarian schemes to political reciprocities or *quid pro quos* for its strategic cooption. The major request from the U.S. is to abandon China and align with U.S.A. Furthermore, both are seen engaging in courting geostrategic allies in every region.

In this reference, Brazinsky (2023, para.1) observes “as the U.S.-China rivalry intensifies — with some speculating a new Cold War is in the offing — ...countries are looking on with concern”. Since 2017, the U.S. has sought to use Washington's leverage to encourage governments to downgrade their ties with the P.R.C. and demonstrate unity against China. This policy may be

more evident in some places like Asia than say for example Africa. However, in both cases, the U.S.A is apprehensive of China's presence. Zhang and Reyes (2023) writing for IMF are also warning that Economic Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa could permanently decline if geopolitical tensions escalate. This indicates the ramification of the U.S.-China competition.

In view of that, therefore, Ethiopia should be careful not to create an impression that it disproportionately clings to either side. A balanced relations with the two powers would provide the opportunity to benefit from the complementarity of their cooperation. Furthermore, a balanced partnership would help to avoid clientelist-dependency on either side. As much as there are challenges, there are opportunities to tap for Ethiopia as well as the African countries to engage with both China and U.S.A.

*As China and the United States deliver different goods and services to Africa, the two great powers can complement each other's role in promoting African development. Besides, Beijing and Washington also share interests in improving market rules, government efficiency, and infrastructural conditions on the continent. Wang (2020:134)*

In view of the above, the Ethiopian government cannot afford to give the impression of leaning towards one of the powers. It should rather be guided by the merits of its national interests. It is very important not to fall into the traps of over dependence on either power. An understanding of the depth and level of the strategic rivalry between U.S.A. and China and the possible impacts of their respective leverage on Ethiopia's interest is very important. Ethiopia has been consistently clarifying that its international position is, as it has been, guided by the principle of neutrality, non-alignment and the merit of its national interests.

Despite this, the two powers may pressure Ethiopia to pick sides. In that case, Ethiopia's diversification of partnership as witnessed with its active engagement with emerging powers like UAE, Brazil, Turkey is recommendable.

### **5.1.3. Significance of Ethiopia's Strategic Alternative in Africa**

China's measure of elevating partnership to a "all-weather strategic partnership", comes as no surprise, though U.S.A. did not expect China committing itself to such level of partnership with

Ethiopia. That has what U.S. officials been saying to their Ethiopian interlocutors (KI3<sup>26</sup>, May 6, 2024). However, one could guess that such moves are to some extent taking Ethiopia closer to China, away from U.S.A. The U.S. is apprehensive of that. That is at least how the U.S. perceives Ethiopia's move as stated by John James, Chairman of Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House during hearing on Ethiopia in 2023 ((House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2023).

In fact, the U.S., since the breakout of conflict in Tigray has been searching for an alternative viable regional power to outsource its regional foreign policy. They have been swinging between the Sudan and Kenya. The “legions of U.S. officials—including Feltman, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee, and U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power—descended on Khartoum for endless consultations” was partly in search of a geostrategic regional ally in the Horn of Africa (Gabriel, 2022, para. 28). Unfortunately, the Sudan descended into civil war since 15 April 2023 before winning the bid.

Kenya on the other hand has for long been the darling of the West due to its policy resonance. The situation in the Sudan and Ethiopia favored Kenya to become the best option for U.S. alliance. President Joe Biden's choice of Kenya for a first African state visit to America in more than 15 years is no coincidence, but it is driven by increasing strategic interdependence with Kenya (Kell, 2024). The U.S. seems to be courting Kenya as “a model of economic partnership, key strategic regional interlocutor that can fill a leadership vacuum created by Ethiopia's internal conflicts....” (Kell, 2024). Indeed, during a joint press conference at the White House with Kenya's President William Ruto, Biden announced that his administration is working with Congress to name Kenya as “*a major non-NATO ally*” (Whitehouse, 2024) [Emphasis Added]. Tibor Nagy, former U.S. Assistant Secretary for Africa (2018-2021) lamented that “it could have been Abiy instead of William Ruto who had made the state visit, had Ethiopia resolved its internal conflict and turned to normalcy; now Kenya is succeeding Ethiopia in strategic importance for the U.S.A.” (Personal Communication<sup>27</sup>, May 30, 2024). Be that as it may, “doubts exist in Western capitals, however,

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<sup>26</sup> See footnote 8

<sup>27</sup> Video interview with Tibor Nagy, former US Assistant Secretary for Africa (2018-2021), May 30, 2024

over Kenya's bandwidth to address the full range of crises facing the region (Horn of Africa)" (Kell, 2024, para.18). That leaves rooms of maneuver for Ethiopia.

Ethiopia can get out of its internal problems strong and be a choice for U.S. as Kenya cannot by any measure fit into Ethiopia's shoes. This should be another urgent call for Ethiopia to readjust itself if it should continue to maintain its relative strategic significance in the eyes of the dominant powers including the U.S.

#### **5.1.4. From Global War on Terror to Strategic Rivalry: What Could be Ethiopia's Offer to U.S.A.?**

U.S. interest in the Horn of Africa has shifted from "global war on terror" to strategic competition against China. According to Lippert and Perthes (2020:5) "for the United States, it can be said that strategic rivalry with China has edged out the "War on Terror" paradigm that had prevailed since 2001". Such global policy shifts, the prevalence of China's presence in Ethiopia, the current domestic situation may challenge Ethiopia's relevance for the U.S. interests.

However, despite such shifts, Ethiopia will continue to be an important country with its huge population, its geographic position at the crossroad of Africa and the Middle East, it being the head quarter of the AU, UNECA and other international institutions, its huge economic potential, improving economic policy environments are difficult to resist for either of the powers.

The U.S. still believes that "While the conflict that began in Tigray in November 2020 has inflicted significant damage on the bilateral relationship, it has not altered the strategic logic of a healthy and vibrant U.S.-Ethiopia partnership" (ICS, 2022:1). China's quick strategic adjustment following the 2018 change demonstrate the significance that China attributed to Ethiopia. Therefore, Ethiopia's significance, to both China and U.S., is unlikely to fadeaway at least in the foreseeable future. Ethiopia can skillfully mine that reality to its advantage.

## **5.2.CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusions are reached upon the discussions and analysis from the data. The foreign policy approaches of China and U.S. may be divergent but are not necessarily zero sum, a multitude of factors explain the divergence in foreign policy behavior of China and U.S., Ethiopia is a means

to a larger end in the foreign policy of both China and U.S., China and U.S. may not always be rational in their foreign policy towards Ethiopia.

China and U.S. have diverging foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia, but their approaches are not zero sum. Approaches and priorities of China and U.S. can be complementary. China focuses on economic development and U.S. focus on democracy and governance. Both policy priorities are important to Ethiopia. So, Ethiopia can reap benefits from entertaining both approaches.

The second conclusion is China and U.S. need Ethiopia as means to their bigger ends. Ethiopia is considered as a gateway to Africa; it is an instrument of influence and launching pad for China and U.S. strategies towards Africa or at least the Horn of Africa.

Third conclusion arrived at is that various factors accounts for the divergence in foreign policy approaches of China and the U.S. towards Ethiopia. In general, foundational discordances and the structural dynamics between the U.S. and China in the international system influenced their behavior towards Ethiopia. In particular, the differences in political culture, historical experiences, role conception at the international system, international identity, difference in political priorities and decision-making mechanism, world views, great power competition among others account for the divergence in foreign policy approaches of the two powers.

The strategic competition between China and U.S.A. is affecting their respective foreign policy approaches towards Ethiopia. Thus, they may not be rational in their behavior towards Ethiopia as their behavior is clouded by their global strategic competition. When they arrive at a decision based on their strategic competition, they may not take Ethiopia's context into account, they may focus on scoring points against each other, and satisficing on the strategic failure of each other on Ethiopia as demonstrated on the previous chapter.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix I: General Interview Guideline**

1. What are the foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A. towards Ethiopia? What are the similarities and differences of their approach?
2. What causes the difference in foreign policy approaches of China and U.S.A towards Ethiopia since 2018?
3. How does Ethiopia's situation and behavior affect the foreign policy approaches of the two powers?
4. What is the implication of the Foreign Policy approaches of China and U.S.A towards Ethiopia on Ethiopia?

## Appendix II: List of Key Informants

No.	Code	Position	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Remark
1.	KI1	Senior Diplomat from the US foreign Service	13 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
2.	KI2	High level Official from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia	20 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
3.	KI3	High level Official from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia	6 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
4.	KI4	High-level official from the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance	16 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
5.	KI5	High Ranking Official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia	13 May 2024.	Addis Ababa	
6.	KI6	Senior US-Ethiopia expert at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia	8 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
7.	KI7	3 Senior officials from the Chinese foreign service	13 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
8.	KI8	Former US Assistant Secretary for Africa	30 May 2024	Video Call	
9.	KI9	Former US Ambassador to Ethiopia and Professor	4 May 2024		Filled questionnaire
10.	KI10	A Brigadier General, FDRE War College	17 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
11.	KI11	A Colonel, FDR War College	17 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
12.	KI12	Chinese Scholar Specialized in China-Africa; China-USA policy towards Africa	30 May 2024		Filled questionnaire
13.	KI13	Senior Researcher from Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation (CDRC)	16 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
14.	KI14	Senior Researcher from Institute of Foreign Affairs	8 May 2024	Addis Ababa	
15.	KI15	Senior Researcher from Institute of Foreign Affairs	9 May 2024	Addis Ababa	