

# Neocolonialism Haunts Horn of Africa

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*Chinese foreign ministers have traditionally marked the new year by visiting the African continent. [Wang Yi’s 2022 African tour](#) begins with Eritrea against the backdrop of the US strategy in the Horn of Africa to gain control of the strategically vital Red Sea that connects Indian Ocean with the Suez Canal.*

Eritrea and China are close friends. China was a supporter of the Eritrean liberation movement since the 1970s. Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki, the veteran revolutionary who led the independence movement, had received military training in China. More recently, Eritrea was one of the 54 countries backing China’s Hong Kong policy (against 39 voicing concern in a rival Western bloc) at the UN General Assembly in October 2020.

Last November, Eritrea [signed an MoU](#) with China to join the Belt And Road Initiative. Neighbouring Djibouti is already a [major participant](#) in the BRI. So is Sudan along the Red Sea coastline.

Central to regional cohesion in the Horn of Africa is the relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea. It has been a conflict-ridden troubled relationship but China, which also has close ties with Ethiopia, is well-placed to mediate reconciliation.

One [common view](#) is that Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed pulled off a stunning victory in the conflict with US-backed Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) with the help of armed drones supplied by the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Iran. But civil wars are won on the ground. And the politico-military axis between Ethiopia and Eritrea to take on the TPLF proved to be the decisive factor. China encouraged the rapprochement between Addis Ababa and Asmara.

Effectively, the two leaderships understood that they have a congruence of interests in thwarting the TPLF which is an American proxy to destabilise their countries and trigger regime changes. (Read the analysis in CounterPunch titled [Ethiopia Conflict by US Design](#).)

Washington is mighty displeased that China’s influence in Djibouti is on the rise and resents that the Marxist regime of Isaias Afewerki keeps the US at arm’s length.

The Horn of Africa is of great strategic importance, and Ethiopia sits at its heart. Destabilise Ethiopia and impact the whole region; install a dictatorial expansionist ethnocentric regime (TPLF); sow division and poison the atmosphere of mutual understanding and cooperation that is being built within the region — this is the neocolonial agenda.



President Uhuru of Kenya, speaking at Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's inauguration had said, "Ethiopia is the Mother of African independence.....for all of us on the continent, Ethiopia is our Mother... As we know, if the Mother is not at peace, the family cannot be at peace."

The US is going for the jugular veins of the Mother of post-colonial Africa. An analogy would be destabilising India to gain control of the South Asian region, the difference being that Ethiopia is the only African country never to have been colonised.

The widespread revulsion among Africans all over the continent is palpable over the US using its TPLF proxy to destabilise Ethiopia. Their collective cry is "No more" — no more colonialism, no more sanctions, no more disinformation, no more lies by the CNN, BBC, etc. The cry resonates widely amongst the Ethiopians, Eritreans, Sudanese, Somali, Kenyan, and friends of Ethiopia.

The paradox is, Ethiopia today has a democratically elected government after decades of thuggery under the TPLF that ruled with an iron fist for over 30 years with US backing. The Tigray people actually add up to only 5% of Ethiopia's population but such details were irrelevant to Washington so long as the government in Addis Ababa obeyed its diktat.

There is also a religious sub-text. The Tigray people are Christians whereas the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia is the Oromo, native to the region of Ethiopia and Kenya. They are a Cushitic people who have inhabited the East and Northeast Africa since at least the early 1st millennium. The Oromo people have a glorious history of forced resistance to religious conversion, primarily by European explorers, Catholic Christians missionaries.

Broadly, the resistance ideology is embedded in the Oromo collective memory. Abiy Ahmed is the first ethnic Oromo to become prime minister. Nobel laureate Abiy Ahmed is an [extraordinary politician, far-sighted](#) and deeply committed to his country's plural identity national sovereignty.

In geopolitical terms, Washington would see many advantages in the destabilisation of Ethiopia as it would trigger a multi-vector regional conflagration, as happens when multi-ethnic nations unravel — such as the former Yugoslavia or today's India or Russia. And neighbouring countries would be inevitably sucked into ethnic wars such as Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya — and even Egypt and Persian Gulf states.

The fact that the UAE, Turkey and Iran — improbable allies — are supporting Abiy's desperate effort to preserve Ethiopia's sovereignty and national cohesion and helped boost his military campaign to ward off another attempt by the US-backed TPLF to capture power speaks volumes.

In this matrix, while the US aims to dominate the hugely strategic Horn of Africa, "Plan B" will be to be the spoiler by throwing the region into turmoil so that China is also a loser. The point is, the Western world has no answer to China's BRI.

China and Ethiopia have a strong political affinity and deep economic bonds, and Ethiopia is one of China's top five investment destinations on the African continent. Beyond investment, relations extend to trade, infrastructure finance and other areas. Economic engagement with China has provided Ethiopia with many opportunities.

Curiously, even prior to the advent of the BRI, China was already a major financier of Ethiopia's infrastructure. Chinese investment in the manufacturing sector — incidentally, one of the Abiy government's focus areas currently — has contributed to the country's economic transformation and diversification and to job creation.

A recent report by the well-known London-based global think-tank ODI titled [The Belt and Road and Chinese Enterprises in Ethiopia](#) estimates that China's BRI "has the potential to open up new development pathways through infrastructure development, stimulating investment and job creation and promoting economic transformation... BRI can be an engine for growth and development. However, this is not a given..."

The ODI report, dated August 2021, concludes, "Chinese investors are concerned regarding economic and political uncertainty in Ethiopia. Political uncertainty has to do with domestic conflict and political instability, which may affect not only investors' profitability, but also their personal safety and the safety of their assets. The economic challenges relate to high production and transport costs and the difficulties of accessing foreign exchange, which is a problem for virtually all Chinese businesses in the country. The challenges identified by Chinese investors could pose a threat to the sustained development of China-Ethiopia economic cooperation."

Simply put, if there is mayhem in Ethiopia, the locomotive of China's BRI in the vast regions of the Horn of Africa and East Africa can be potentially slowed down if not derailed. That is the least the US can do faced with the grim prospect that it has no alternative offer to make to the African nations to counter the BRI.

If the BRI locomotive chugs along unimpeded, the entire Western neocolonial project in Africa in the 21st century is threatened with extinction. The existential angst shows in the Biden Administration's announcement on New Year's Eve [terminating Ethiopia's access](#) to the US duty-free trade program under the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA "amid the widening conflict in northern Ethiopia."

President Biden had threatened in November already that Ethiopia would be cut off from the AGOA because of alleged human rights violations in the Tigray region. Biden spoke up in sheer despair in anticipation of Wang Yi's [working visit](#) to Ethiopia on December 1!

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*Featured image: Ethiopian troops vanquish US-backed Tigray rebels (File photo)*

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