
Ethiopia's Foreign Policy: Regional Integration and International Priorities

Summary of Question and Answer Session

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23 October 2015

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Question

Why is Kenya more prone than Ethiopia to attacks by al-Shabaab?

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Ethiopia has previously been the target of attacks from al-Shabaab, with hotel bombings in Addis Ababa and major regional capitals. In response to this, a new strategy was developed to ensure the security apparatus functioned in tandem with local communities, addressing their needs and concerns. This engagement with local constituencies, including citizens in Somalia and refugees in Ethiopia, has led to the relatively stable security situation in Ethiopia.

Question

Is there a schedule for reviewing foreign and defence policies?

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

These policies were first published in 2002, and although they were revised six years ago, there has yet to be a major review of them. Ethiopia's foreign policy is currently centred on the understanding that the country's survival depends on ensuring democracy, development and alleviation of poverty within Ethiopia. However, the foreign context and challenges change frequently, and this necessitates a review of foreign policy on a more regular basis.

Question

How can the Ethiopian government contribute towards resolving the Eritrea–Ethiopia conflict?

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Ethiopia and Eritrea are two countries, but they are one people. The current border conflict can be resolved if concerted effort is put into facilitating dialogue. It is imperative that any demarcation of the boundaries must address the concerns of local communities through consistent discussions. Efforts towards resolution must go further than ending the current border dispute and work towards building strong, peaceful relations between the two states. Ethiopia previously strongly supported Eritrea, as the first country to recognize its independence. Ethiopia remains open to the prospect of dialogue, and both the late Meles Zenawi and the current prime minister proposed visits to Asmara, which were ignored by the Eritrean government. There is reason to remain optimistic that the issue will be resolved, as the entire region has strong historical and ethnic ties. Ethiopia and its neighbours share a common challenge of overcoming poverty, and rivalries between states should not undermine attempts to address this.

Questions

Does Ethiopia recognize Somalia's sovereignty and integrity? What is Ethiopia's policy on the Balkanization of Somalia through clan federations?

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Somalia's future should be decided by its citizens, and Ethiopia refrains from designing specific policies on the matter. Local ownership is essential to ensure commitment to change, and the Ethiopian government has specified the need for Somali leaders to control the direction of their country throughout meetings. For example, Ethiopia has not released a position on whether Somalia should have a federal state; the decision to deploy troops under AMISOM was done at the request of the president of Somalia; and Ethiopia only intervened in the Jubbaland negotiations after an invitation from Somali partners. In the Jubbaland negotiations, Ethiopia acted as a limited facilitator and ensured that the parties directed the agenda themselves and the agreement was not enforced on them. This model for negotiations has proved successful, and could be used for future discussions. Whatever direction Somalia takes, Ethiopia will fully support this as long as it represents the will of the Somali people. Ethiopia recognizes the integrity and sovereignty of Somalia, and that a peaceful and prosperous Somalia is an essential factor in Ethiopia's own development and security. In the long term, economic integration towards political unity would be the best way forward for relations between the two states.

Question

Why has Ethiopia's conduct in the South Sudan Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) negotiations been so anti-democratic and exclusive?

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

The IGAD negotiations have not been exclusive. Opposition parties, civil society, former detainees, religious leaders, the government and the SPLM-IO [Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition] have all participated. The two warring parties are essential to progress in some areas, such as the cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access, and the rest of the parties can achieve little without them in these matters. However, stakeholders have otherwise been included as much as possible.

Question

How will China's slowing growth and introverted economic policy impact on Ethiopia?

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

The Chinese economy is slowing, but there remains reason for optimism, given the large amount of exports and numerous industries in some provinces. In addition, the 'Going Out' policy aims to relocate Chinese industries to regions with cheap labour, of which Ethiopia is a priority. The recent dip in foreign direct investment from China is likely to be temporary; and investment will increase, particularly in the areas of infrastructure and industry, and it is crucial that industrial parks are developed in Ethiopia to ensure investment continues. Recent trade deals and discussions with Chinese government and business, alongside the large number of Chinese immigrants in Ethiopia, indicate that recent events in China are unlikely to impact future investment in the country.

Comment: HE Mr Lazarus Amayo, High Commissioner of the Republic of Kenya to the United Kingdom

[*From the floor*] Although there have been incidents of terrorist attacks in Kenya, no country is immune from this threat. Kenya has a holistic approach in combating this, through security strategy and an attempt to win the hearts and minds of the people, with significant efforts made to involve community leaders. As a member of IGAD, Kenya is working to create a stable and secure environment across the whole region. The solution to Somalia lies with its citizens, and any intervention supports this. The success of such action, however, depends on commitment by the international community towards post-conflict reconstruction, especially regarding the repatriation and reintegration of refugees. The Kenyan government also understands that many Somali have settled in Kenya and no longer wish to return home. There are concerted regional and national efforts to combat terrorism, but it is a pervasive global challenge that requires wider international engagement.

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

It is true that no country is immune from terrorist threats. The capacity for terrorists to infiltrate anywhere results in the need for a comprehensive strategy that engages the local community.

Question

Why does food security remain a challenge for Ethiopia's population, given the country's economic growth?

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Drought has been a perennial problem in Ethiopia, yet as soon as this crisis began a response system was triggered, which included the distribution of food and supplies. Nevertheless, the drought went on for an extended period and necessitated a call for international assistance. Of course, as outlined here, Ethiopia has made progress, yet this does not mean that all the challenges have been overcome. The fact that some sectors of the population require food assistance is a cause for concern, but it should be noted that the decisive response ensured that damage to citizens' livelihoods was minimized. The only way to fully resolve this challenge is to push forward with wider plans for transformation towards becoming a middle-income country with an economy that can respond to these problems. At the moment we are building the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) using \$5 billion of Ethiopia's own funds, but of course, if development partners were not offering humanitarian assistance, these funds would have been redeployed to address the immediate concerns of our citizens. The donors are content with the fact the thriving economy has provided new funds for development projects, which complements their humanitarian assistance. In fact, this availability of funds is representative of the good health of the Ethiopian economy. Previously, attempts to solicit donor funding to construct a dam from the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and other partners failed despite the modest projection of a capacity of just 150–200 megawatts, on account of diplomatic and political controversy around the dam. This is in stark contrast to the current state of affairs, where Ethiopia's own funds will allow the construction of a dam of 6,000 megawatts. Despite this progress, Ethiopia has not attained self-sufficiency, and like many countries with a higher GDP per capita still benefits from humanitarian and development aid, which should not be an issue. For the moment, funding must continue for the GERD and it should also be noted that Ethiopia is only calling for \$250 million in humanitarian assistance.

Question

What is the government's policy towards Somaliland?

HE Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Ethiopia supports a united Somalia, but resolving tensions between Somaliland and Somalia should be led by the Somalis alone. This has been made clear consistently, and will continue to guide Ethiopian policy. Unfortunately this is made difficult by the pervasive suspicion of governments since the mismanagement of Siad Barre and Mengistu Haile Mariam, and it is necessary to rebuild trust and confidence without heavy-handed interference. Barre's project for a Greater Somalia devastated the country. Progress towards integration can be done peacefully, through investment in infrastructure and laying the base for political union through regional economic integration.