

# Ethiopian Military Rule: Impact On International Engagements

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## Abstract

This study explores the governance of Ethiopia from 1974 onwards, when the country's Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by a military junta referred to as the Derg, ending years of monarchical rule and leaving Ethiopia with a military dictatorship. This research paper analyses Ethiopia's international engagements under the Derg's military rule via an examination of four specific issues- the Ogaden War with Somalia, the rise of Eritrea as an independent nation, the role of international organisations, and the impact of the Derg's rule on Ethiopia's economy.

By delving into the complexities of military governance and the several major issues that plagued Ethiopia during this time politically, economically, and internationally, this research project finds that Ethiopia's period of military rule was a key point in the country's allegiance transition from the Western Bloc to the Eastern, with the reasons for the same being primarily ideological in nature in order to validate the Derg's Marxist-Leninist approach to its regime structure, its ideology and the economic structure that it sought to establish for Ethiopia. Moreover, Ethiopia's international engagements during the Derg rule bore no fruit for the country in the long run, showcasing only some short-run benefits such as momentary periods of positive economic growth and territorial retention through the Ogaden War. This study demonstrates

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the challenges of implementing Marxist-Leninism, particularly after the reduction of ideological and material support from a major power, like the Soviet Union. The understanding obtained would be instrumental in comprehending the evolution of modern Ethiopia's international engagements.

*Keywords:* Ethiopia, military rule, international engagements, Ogaden War, Eritrea, African Union

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## **Introduction**

On September 12, 1974, the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a coup d'état by the Derg, a military junta known officially as the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC). This happened in the wake of increasing public outrage against Emperor Selassie for a variety of issues ranging from a lack of action taken during the 1973 Wollo famine that killed thousands to the military protesting against shortages of food and water. In addition, the military demanded higher pay, and educational institutions demanded educational reform as well as higher pay for teachers and professors (Meredith, 2011).

The Derg was created particularly in reaction to the March 1973 protests against the government calling for a separation of Church and State, wherein Selassie ordered a military crackdown on protestors and refused to cede to any demands. As they grew in numbers and power, the Derg gradually dismantled the entire imperial government structure. This involved attacking Selassie on various platforms, such as the local radio for negligence and corruption, and threatening government officials with asset confiscation if they did not give themselves up voluntarily. All of this led to Selassie being informed of his dethronement on September 12, 1974, and his imprisonment in the Grand Palace (Meredith, 2011).

After a long period of political instability due to infighting within the Derg for the seat of power, Mengistu Haile Mariam emerged as the leader of the Derg and hence became the President of Ethiopia in 1977. He advocated for a Marxist-Leninist ideology, wherein land redistribution would be key to the country's prosperity. Under Mengistu, Ethiopia was ruled by the Derg from 1977 to 1987, post which it was ruled by a reformed version of the Derg, called the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, retaining the same Marxist-Leninist ideology. This was dissolved in 1991, which can be marked as the end of military rule in Ethiopia (Crummey et al., 2023).

The Derg's rule plays an important part in the history of Ethiopia as well as the entire Horn of Africa, affecting the geopolitical dynamics of the region. Its dissolution in 1991 led to the installation of a transitional government in Ethiopia led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and, perhaps most prominently, the independence of Eritrea and the establishment of their government under the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). This overall period of military rule is referred to as the Ethiopian Civil War, which was a major turning point in Ethiopia's history. It involved the demise of the monarchy, long periods of economic volatility, geographical changes in the country's territory, and changes in how Ethiopia was perceived internationally, eventually leading to the existence of Ethiopia and Eritrea as they are known today.

In light of the sheer importance of the Horn of Africa to international trade, it is crucial to understand the countries in the region and their history. Furthermore, studying Derg rule in Ethiopia specifically allows for a specific, case-based understanding of how military rule can potentially impact foreign policy, making it relevant to the analysis of other military regimes as well. This research project seeks to delve deeper into the Derg's rule in Ethiopia, analysing its impact on various facets of the country's international engagements.

#### **Aim of Research / Research Question:**

*To analyse and discuss Ethiopia's international engagements as a result of the Provisional Military Administrative Council's (Derg's) military rule.*

#### **Research Design and Literature Review**

The main objective of the research paper is to present the effect of Derg's military rule on Ethiopia's international engagements. The paper seeks to do so by focusing on a diverse range of specific issues pertaining to military rule during the Ethiopian Civil War. The issues that will be focused on are the Ogaden War, the rise of Eritrea, the role of international organisations in terms of a Derg-ruled Ethiopia, and the economic aspects of Derg rule. The Ogaden War and Eritrea's independence will be used as case studies in order to understand Ethiopia's international engagements during these crucial time periods in its history involving the Derg while also exploring the approach that international organisations opted for in terms of Ethiopia and providing an economic overview of the country under the Derg so as to supply further information necessary to draw a comprehensive conclusion, achieving the aim of this research paper.

Much has been written concerning the Ogaden War and its effects on Ethiopia and Somalia, with a helpful piece of literature contributing to this particular research paper being "Ethiopian foreign policy and the Ogaden War: the shift from "containment" to "destabilisation,"

1977–1991” by Belete Belachew Yihun for the Journal of Eastern African Studies. The article focuses on the Derg’s efforts to prevent Somalia from claiming Ogaden, the immediate post-war period and its effects on both nations, the destabilisation of Somalia, and the involvement of other countries, particularly great powers at the time, such as the Soviet Union and the USA (Yihun, 2014).

Similarly, Eritrea’s independence has always been a major topic of discussion, with the literature being used in the preliminary research for this particular paper being “The Ethiopia–Eritrea Conflict and the Search for Peace in the Horn of Africa” by Terrence Lyons for the publication “Review of African Political Economy.” The article serves as excellent background into the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea involving independence and also provides insights post the independence of Eritrea regarding difficulties in political transition, overall instability in the Horn of Africa caused by Eritrean Independence, and the involvement of the international community (Lyons, 2009).

However, when understanding Ethiopia’s reputation with the international community during the Derg rule, it is also important to address its engagements with international organisations, most notably the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which later evolved into the African Union (AU). In a US Army War College Strategic Report, Brigadier Joseph K. Nkaisserry wrote about the ties between Derg-ruled Ethiopia and the OAU/AU, as well as its role in the Ogaden War. This report provides important insight into the OAU’s mission as an international organisation, its leaning towards Ethiopia, and how this inclination effectively undermined its role in Africa as a whole (Nkaisserry, 1997).

Regarding the economic effects of the Derg’s rule, Alemaheyu Geda wrote a chapter entitled “The Political Economy of Growth in Ethiopia” for the book *“The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960-2000: Country Case Studies.”* This chapter provides immense detail on the evolution of Ethiopia’s economy, particularly highlighting the instability and changes that took place during the Derg regime. These insights provide crucial background and analytical insights into the relationship between the economic changes that took place under the Derg’s rule and its impact on the country’s international engagements (Ndulu et al., 2015).

The literature review dealt with select literature available on the Derg’s rule in Ethiopia, focusing specifically on the Ogaden War, the independence of Eritrea, the approach of international organisations towards Ethiopia, and the general impact of Derg rule from an economic perspective and its connection to the country’s international engagements. This research paper aims to focus on achieving a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectivity of the aforementioned issues by analysing the Ogaden War and the independence of Eritrea as case studies, while also studying the manner in which international organisations approached African issues involving Ethiopia and provided an economic overview of the Derg’s rule.

## **Analysis of Issues**

### **1. The Ogaden War (1977-1978)**

Ogaden is an arid region in eastern Ethiopia, primarily consisting of barren plains and a major river called the Shebeli, as well as the origins of the Genale River. Home to pastoralists, what makes the Ogaden region important is the presence of oil and gas fields, which have not been utilised or developed as a result of territorial conflict concerning the region between Ethiopia and its eastern neighbour, present-day Somalia (McKenna et al., 2018). In the 19th Century, Ethiopia and Somaliland, as an Italian protectorate, both claimed the Ogaden region, with Ethiopia's Emperor Menilek II using his victory against the Italians in the 1896 Battle of Adwa to occupy the region (Meredith, 2011).

Although several minor battles took place between the two, the Ogaden War refers specifically to the large-scale military conflict between Derg-ruled Ethiopia and Somalia over Ogaden, which began with Somalia's invasion of the region. The deposition of the Emperor and Somalia's military support from the Soviet Union at the time gave them a reason to believe that it would be an opportune moment for them to claim Ogaden, despite the condemnation of their aggression by the Organisation for African Unity and their attempts at diplomatic resolution (Nkaiisery, 1997). The battle ended with Ethiopian victory as the Somali force was forced to retreat, causing increased social unrest in Somalia, which led to the start of the Somali Rebellion and, hence, the Somali Civil War (Yihun, 2014).

A notable aspect of the battle would be the alliances that were broken and formed in its process. Prior to the Derg's reign, Emperor Selassie was known for his inclination towards the USA, particularly under President John F. Kennedy. This was due to the USA's economic assistance towards Ethiopia and the American Peace Corps program that worked with Ethiopia to develop agriculture, infrastructure, educational facilities, and more. Several books and journals were published to celebrate the countries' relationship, such as Point Four, a quarterly newsletter on USA and Ethiopia relations (Derillo, 2015).

When the Derg took over Ethiopia, relations between the USA and Ethiopia weakened, in part due to the Derg's Marxist-Leninist approach to establishing a socialist state, which contradicted the USA's anti-communist ideology and created a point of contention. However, the ideological differences do not equate to the USA completely abandoning Ethiopia; in the summer of 1977, when the Somali invasion of the Ogaden region was just beginning, Ethiopia received F5-Es from the USA, the best fighter bomber jets available at the time. This demonstrates that although the Derg takeover did impact the strength of the country's relations with the USA, there was still some semblance of a working relationship (Petterson, 1986).

However, this is not to say that the Ogaden War did no damage to Ethiopia-US relations. Before the conflict, it was revealed that the Soviet Union would be assisting Ethiopia with arms supplies and sending them around 30 tanks, which can be attributed to the ideological similarities of their respective governments at the time. This paved the way for an increase in overall cooperation between the two nations, resulting in a turbulent relationship between the Soviet Union and Somalia which further led to Somalia seeking aid from the USA instead. The USA agreed to send Somalia arms but doubled back on this promise upon greater awareness of the Ogaden situation, with President Carter sharing concerns about the Soviet Union's involvement in the region, as well as that of Middle Eastern countries and India (Yihun, 2014). This move by the U.S. was seen as antagonistic towards Ethiopia's socialist revolution and was detrimental to U.S.-Ethiopia relations in the Derg Era (Pettersen, 1986).

As a result of perceived betrayal by the USA, it can be argued that the Derg continued to pivot towards governments that shared ideological similarities, such as the Soviet Union. In the context of the Ogaden War, another major ally of Derg-ruled Ethiopia was Cuba under the reign of Fidel Castro, who also espoused a similar Marxist-Leninist approach to a socialist state. Cuba had already attempted to mediate diplomatic negotiations between Ethiopia and Somalia in March 1977 to prevent a full-scale war, to no avail (Kaufman, 1977). Cuba chose to support Ethiopia in the conflict, a decision that can be largely attributed to ideological similarities and Fidel Castro's perception that Somalia was shying away from socialism. To support Ethiopia in reclaiming Ogaden, Cuba sent approximately 15,000 of their own troops led by General Arnold Ochoa, later also sending tanks and playing a decisive role in the final Ethiopian counterattack that forced Somalia to retreat from the region (Lockyer, 2006).

Other communist nations at the time also offered Ethiopia assistance during the war, namely South Yemen, North Korea and East Germany, who were focused on military assistance and training resources (Yihun, 2014). It is also worth noting that India, a country that, at the time, followed closely in the ideological footsteps of the Soviet Union in the shaping of its economic policy, did not extend special support to Ethiopia during the Ogaden War, but they also did not break off their diplomatic relations, demonstrating consistency in their relationship wherein their working relationship remained essentially unaffected by the war (The Embassy of India in Addis Ababa, 2022).

This is not to say that all communist states banded together on the basis of ideology to support Ethiopia, considering that China at the time chose to support Somalia. This can also be considered a result of the Sino-Soviet rivalry of the time, although this primarily consisted of economic support rather than direct military intervention (Yihun, 2014). Nevertheless, the Ogaden War played a large part in shaping the geopolitics of the Horn; it can be understood solely on the basis of this conflict that ideology was significant in developing stronger

relationships with other communist states of the time considering Derg rule, particularly the Soviet Union and Cuba. However, it also had an adverse effect on the country's relationship with the USA, hence marking a notable shift in the country's big power allegiance. In addition, this was not the case with China, as its rivalry with the Soviet Union at the time outweighed any ideological similarities with Ethiopia, hence presenting an important exception to the argument that ideology played a major role in the alliances made and broken during this conflict.

## **2. Rise of Eritrea**

After colonisation by Italy, Eritrea was made a British protectorate from the end of World War 2 till 1951, post which it was unclear what was to be done with Eritrea, with the British suggesting that the region be divided on the basis of religion, with the Christian areas going to Ethiopia and the Muslim areas going to Sudan (Kendie, 2005). Ethiopia, on the other hand, had always claimed sovereignty over Eritrea. The region was important to Ethiopia as it provided them with a coastline and the Port of Massawa, hence playing a crucial role in the country's economic growth and development by providing them with a point for sea-borne trade as well as headquarters for their now-defunct Ethiopian Navy. Eritreans themselves were greatly divided on being independent or unifying with Ethiopia, with opinions showcasing patterns amongst social groups. Christians tended to support unification, whilst the Muslim population favoured independence. This can be associated with the lack of separation of the Church and the state in Ethiopia during Emperor Selassie's rule, which angered non-Christians in the country (Meredith, 2011).

In an effort to resolve the issue, the United Nations decided in a General Assembly meeting that Eritrea would join Ethiopia to form the Federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1952, which would last ten years. However, Eritrea's independence was never granted as per the directions of the UN, leading to Ethiopia gradually increasing its control over Eritrea and several attempts for Eritrean liberation led by the ELF or the Eritrean Liberation Front (Lyons, 2009). In 1959, the Ethiopian law code was completely imposed on Eritrea, banning political parties and encouraging censorship while also replacing Tigrinya and Arabic with Amharic as the official language. Finally, in 1962, the Eritrean assembly succumbed to pressure and voted in favor of the dissolution of the federation (Meredith, 2011).

Guerrilla attacks by Eritreans continued to take place, which kept being brutally suppressed by Ethiopia, leading to increased Eritrean anger. The same took place during the Derg's reign, however, in 1977, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) established itself as the main liberation group for the country, expelling the ELF and eventually defeating Ethiopian forces in Eritrea in May 1991, right as the Workers' Party of Ethiopia or the reformed Derg disbanded. Fighting continued to take place between Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, with the United Nations adopting Resolution 1177 condemning the use of force on both sides, and the organisation, along

with the USA attempting to mediate peace talks between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Finally, in 1993, Eritrea was recognized as an independent country, leaving Ethiopia landlocked (Lyons, 2009).

The fight for Eritrea, combined with the Ogaden War, resulted in a high degree of geopolitical instability in the Horn. Derg-ruled Ethiopia continued to receive military support from the Soviet Union and Cuba to suppress Eritrean protests. However, the Eritrean independence movement received international diplomatic and military support as well, most notably from China, for a short period of time. Nevertheless, the Ogaden War and the Eritrean uprisings gradually wore down Ethiopian military capabilities even with significant support, resulting in a war of attrition between the Derg and Eritrean independence activists (Kilfe, 2014).

The Soviet Union withdrew their support at the end of the 1980s, informing Ethiopia that they would not be renewing their defence and cooperation agreement. This can be attributed to Mengistu's decision to ban the Ethiopian media from using the terms 'glasnost' and 'perestroika', which pertained to the Soviet policy of 'transparency and reconstruction' during the reign of Mikhail Gorbachev (Kilfe, 2014). This was a result of heavy censorship during the Derg's reign, as the government did not want to arouse rebellious sentiments amongst the general public. Furthermore, the Soviet policy of 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' indicated a significant step away from communist ideology as they challenged the concepts of control over public expression, collectivism and the centrally planned economic model which were associated with communist states, hence weakening the Derg's ideological big power support. This greatly impacted the Derg's military capabilities, and showed that they were never strong enough on their own to handle a myriad of territorial issues alongside internal turmoil concerning who held the seat of power until the rise of Mengistu Haile Mariam (Kilfe, 2014). It also appears that although the USA did periodically pay attention to the instability in the Horn and attempt to mediate peace talks, it did not provide sustained attention to those issues or make a larger effort to intervene unlike the Soviet Union or China (Lyons, 2009).

Overall, Eritrea's independence movement and hard-won but eventual victory, demonstrate that the Derg was never capable of maintaining their territorial control without Soviet help, exposing a major weakness in their government. This weakness was further exacerbated when Mengistu converted the Derg to the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in order to appease the general public. They were highly discontented with the military rule but the change still failed to allow Mengistu to maintain power, providing the Eritrean independence movement with a greater advantage. This reshaped the geopolitical dynamics of the Horn, drawing international attention and landlocking Ethiopia, forcing it to resort to using Djibouti's port access for trade and greatly limiting the country's economic potential to this day.

### **3. International Organisations**

Apart from being a member of the United Nations since 1945, Ethiopia was also one of the founding members of the African Union (AU) in 1963 under Emperor Selassie's monarchical rule, which was originally named the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Since then Ethiopia has remained one of the organisation's most important members, with its headquarters being situated in Addis Ababa.

When the Derg overthrew the monarchy, the OAU/AU was unable to take any action against the military takeover, instead continuing to attend summits held in Addis Ababa and praising the Derg's hospitality (Reynolds, 2002). However, the organisation eventually pointed out the violence and gross human rights violations that took place in Ethiopia under military rule, particularly the murder of thousands who opposed the government, labelling it as the 'Ethiopian Red Terror' and setting it as a focus area for the organisation (African Union, 2016). However, the absence of volunteer armed forces like the United Nations, as well as Ethiopia's importance to the OAU/AU as one of the founding members, left the organisation with little to no means to actually expose the human rights issues taking place under the Derg rule.

Furthermore, the organisation greatly emphasised the sovereignty and territorial integrity of African states to the point where they had adopted a strict policy of non-interference in the affairs of member states, greatly limiting its effectiveness in tackling human rights issues in member countries. One of the main goals of the OAU/AU has always been to prevent its members from being controlled by or overly reliant on world powers, particularly former colonial powers. However, it can be argued that it failed in this aspect, considering the case of the Ogaden War and the involvement of multiple countries, particularly the Soviet Union, as it supplied both Ethiopia as well as Somalia with arms for certain periods of time with the OAU/AU being unable to take any action. The organisation's incompetence in major issues prompted several criticisms worldwide, with some dubbing it the "dictators' club" (Reynolds, 2002).

With regard to the Ogaden War, Mengistu had made statements to both the OAU/AU and the United Nations when Somalia invaded Ogaden to take action against Somali aggression. He warned both organisations that if they failed to do so, they would suffer the same fate as the now-defunct League of Nations, which dissolved as a result of its incompetence during several invasions and conflicts (Ottaway, 1977). While both organisations condemned Somalia's actions and attempted to advocate for a diplomatic resolution, the OAU/AU eventually supported Ethiopia in receiving foreign military support to regain Ogaden. This technically contradicted the goal of the OAU/AU to reduce reliance on non-African countries, particularly major powers at the time (Nkaissery, 1997).

As observed, Ethiopia under the Derg's rule did little to further engage itself with the international community; it did not join any new international organisations during this time and

focused on allying itself with countries that either supported or did not actively speak against the Derg's communist ideology. As seen thus far, this includes countries such as the Soviet Union, Cuba, and India, with several high-level diplomatic visits and interactions taking place. It can be argued that overall, the main international organisations that were concerned with Ethiopia during this time, namely OAU/AU and the United Nations, did little to intervene in the issues of Ogaden and Eritrea, hence largely leaving the Derg to their own devices. There also appears to have been little to no effort to tackle the human rights violations that took place during these conflicts, which can be associated with the United Nations not adequately prioritising the Horn of Africa during this time and the OAU/AU being majorly controlled by Ethiopia and hence, being ineffective in these scenarios. It can also be argued that the international community had little to no incentive during this time period to put forward significant efforts to resolve African issues unless there were opportunities presented to exert political influence or gain economically via means such as resource exploitation (Fayayo & Mngomezulu, 2019).

Therefore, it can be argued that Ethiopia took advantage of the international community's general lack of interest during this time in the Horn of Africa, along with taking advantage of its status as a founding member of the OAU/AU and the home of its headquarters in order to preserve Derg rule, thus playing into these organisations' general ineffectiveness in intervening and resolving issues.

#### **4. The Impact of Derg Rule: An Economic Perspective**

When the Derg assumed control of the Ethiopian government, one of their major priorities was economic restructuring involving the nationalisation of all means of production and creating economic policies guided by Marxism-Leninism, essentially making Ethiopia a communist state with the goal of redistribution of land to peasants. A key aspect of the Derg's domestic economic reform was the "Land to the Tiller" program, nationalising all rural land, abolishing tenancy, and giving more power to peasants. Although the government faced a lot of opposition, this program, in particular, received significant support (Geda, 2015).

In 1975, the Derg nationalised most key industries producing basic goods and services such as essentials, goods serving other industries, pharmaceuticals, and much more, which is argued to have scared off foreign investment in the country, with the National Bank of Ethiopia stating that private direct investment declined from 65 million birrs in 1974 to 12 million birrs in 1977 (Geda, 2015). It can hence be gauged that despite the land redistribution initiative, the Derg's reign is characterised by unstable economic growth. This is partly due to the initial political upheaval, as well as other factors such as the Ogaden War, counterattacks against Eritrean independence protesters, and a period of severe drought and the massive famine of 1983-1985, which affected 7.75 million people resulting in an increasing reliance on foreign aid and imports (Fassil, 2017). The famine led to the creation of charitable drives in Western nations, particularly

the United Kingdom, where concerts were held to raise money that was to be distributed amongst NGOs operating in Ethiopia (Rieff, 2005). However, it was revealed that some of the NGOs in question were under the Derg's control, and the money was being used to fund their resettlement programs, which were heavily emphasised as part of their land reform initiatives. This sparked international outrage due to the harsh conditions that resettled villagers were forced to face, such as the lack of medical attention in resettlement centres and familial separation (Rieff, 2005).

The Derg responded to its declining economy by announcing the National Revolutionary Development Campaign in 1978, wherein a ten-year plan was created to revitalize the economy by expanding agricultural and industrial output, which turned out to be a failure. In addition, other countries appeared to have become reluctant to provide aid to Ethiopia, such as the USA, particularly due to the aforementioned reasons pertaining to ideological differences (Geda, 2015). The economic situation in Ethiopia continued to grow in complexity and issues, particularly with the 1980s proving to be a difficult time not just for Ethiopia but for most communist governments around the world, most notably Ethiopia's key ally, the Soviet Union, which began to slowly move away from communism.

This resulted in a gradual reduction in aid from the Soviet Union as well, which presented itself in cutbacks of weapon deliveries and a lack of enthusiasm from the Soviet Union's end to continue any preexisting arms agreements, dealing a massive blow to Ethiopia economically as well as ideologically (Webber, 1992). To make matters worse, Ethiopia had already been facing difficulties on an international level, with the Ethiopian national currency (Birr) devaluing sharply during Derg rule by 142% from its pegged rate of 2.07 per US Dollar in October 1992 and falling trade ratios due to a high reliance on imports and lack of exports to make up for the same, performing far worse than the former monarchical government (Fassil, 2017)

In March 1990, Mengistu Haile Mariam made a shocking speech to the country acknowledging the failure of his socialist policies, proposing that Ethiopia move forward with a mixed economy, and advocating for increased private sector participation (L.A. Times Archives, 1990). It can, therefore, be understood that the Derg's reign posed severe economic difficulties for Ethiopia which were further aggravated by the unstable political climate both domestically as well as internationally, with agriculture and manufacturing being the worst affected sectors.

Although there were periods when the political and economic climate stabilised and Ethiopia witnessed increases in GDP, these increases were undercut by the aforementioned major issues that plagued the country during the Derg rule. In terms of the country's international engagements, this unstable economic climate that can be attributed to Derg's rule showcases the country's significant reliance on partners such as the Soviet Union for economic and ideological support, both of which dwindled over time, contributing to economic instability.

## **Interconnectivity of Issues**

The four issues explored, namely the Ogaden War, the rise of Eritrea, the role of international organisations in terms of a Derg-ruled Ethiopia, and the economic aspects of Derg rule, all provide specific perspectives towards military rule in Ethiopia and its impact on the country's international engagements during that particular time period.

Detailing the activities of Derg-ruled Ethiopia during the Ogaden War has allowed for an understanding of the country's past, particularly its difficult relationship with Somalia as a result of the territorial conflict. It showcases how Ethiopia's authoritarian, Marxist-Leninist form of government played a crucial role in its ability to concentrate on retaining control over the Ogaden region, assisted by the aid of other players in the international community. It is worth noting that the Derg's rule did considerable damage to US-Ethiopian relations due to ideological differences, as well as the fact that the USA later attempted to shift their aid focus towards Somalia.

This leads to the notable involvement of the Soviet Union and, to some extent, Cuba, whose military as well as economic aid was pertinent for Ethiopia's stability, considering domestic economic issues. However, not all nations with ideological similarities supported Ethiopia as a result of other rivalries also playing a role, such as the Sino-Soviet rivalry that led to China supporting Somalia instead of Ethiopia. Therefore, it can be argued that Derg-ruled Ethiopia's international alliances were largely based on ideological similarities in an effort to showcase a consolidated force in the Cold War era as well as to facilitate the Derg's implementation of its ideology, although this was not necessarily an approach that other communist nations sought.

Furthermore, the case of the Ogaden War also serves as an important case in terms of examining the approach of international organisations towards the conflict that had resulted in significant casualties, as well as their perspective towards Ethiopia as an authoritarian nation engaging in several human rights violations. The OAU/AU, a prime organisation associated with this issue, initially did very little to stop Somali aggression into Ogaden and eventually supported Ethiopia in receiving foreign aid to fund its battle despite the organisation's supposed goal to reduce foreign interference in Africa. This also showcases the privilege that Ethiopia had and exploited as a founding member and as the nation with the headquarters of the organisation since, as a result, the OAU/AU turned a blind eye towards human rights issues in Ethiopia, which were being exacerbated by unstable economic growth, further fuelled by the Ogaden conflict.

Derg rule also played a major role in the independence of Eritrea, leading to Ethiopia becoming a landlocked country and forcing it to rely economically on Eritrean roads and the port of Djibouti for trade, which can be argued to have reduced Ethiopia's capabilities as well as their autonomy to trade without being overly dependent on its neighbours not just in the Derg era, but also in the

modern day. Although Ethiopia did receive support from the Soviet Union and Cuba to suppress Eritrean independence protests, the constant conflict wore down the Ethiopian forces. Furthermore, the Soviet Union had been evolving away from its previous communist ideology, weakening the Derg's support base regarding ideological similarity and leading to differences between the two nations, which paved the way for the end of the military aid agreement between them.

This dwindling international support and the exhaustion of its military might, particularly due to the major Ogaden War, showcased the weaknesses of the Derg government, which were exacerbated by public discontent towards the Derg's rule. This was furthered by the nationalisation of major industries, driving away foreign investment, and the famine of 1983-1985, which witnessed a lack of medical attention, brutal living conditions, and familial separation. One could argue, based on the information collected thus far, that the lack of initiative on Derg-ruled Ethiopia's part to join any new international organisations and their insistence on allying with nations sharing ideological similarities played a role in Ethiopia's economic downturn.

Overall, however, it becomes evident that Mengistu's 1990 speech served as a massive turning point for Ethiopia, wherein he essentially admitted to the Derg's failures, stating that the country was on the verge of collapse politically and economically. It can be understood that the Derg were stretched extremely thin throughout their reign; although Mengistu presented a sense of stability after a gruelling battle within the Derg for the seat of power, this was clearly not a guarantee for political or economic stability for the country, as can be observed from the study of the economic effects of Derg's rule and the instability that was created, leaving the country's civilians in a lurch. Furthermore, their government was considerably weakened after the loss of the Soviet Union as an ally, exposing the Derg's heavy reliance on the communist world power to affirm its own political and economic ideology as well as to obtain material support. It also revealed the extent to which Ethiopia was desperately operating on foreign aid, particularly since it also hardly had the USA to rely on. The country's resources were majorly exhausted in fighting Eritrean independence protesters and in fighting the Ogaden War, despite the large amounts of foreign aid received in the latter conflict. Based on later events, it becomes evident that the Ogaden victory came at a massive cost for Ethiopia, hence not benefiting the country in the long run.

## **Conclusion**

In this research project, international engagements under the Derg's rule have been discussed at length by analysing the issues of the Ogaden War, the birth of Eritrea, the approach that international organisations took towards Ethiopia, and the economic effects of the Derg rule,

examining domestic policies as well as aspects of international economics such as foreign investment, trade, and currency devaluation.

On the basis of the analysis done wherein two major events were used as case studies and Ethiopia's relationships with international organisations as well as the general impact of Derg rule from an economic perspective were explored, this project has delved into the complexities of Derg rule and the several major issues that plagued Ethiopia during this time on an international level, showcasing that the Derg did more harm than good for Ethiopia on three bases:

1. Politically: by subjecting the country to unstable leadership, heavy censorship, and human rights violations
2. Economically: as a result of poor economic planning and heavy reliance on foreign aid
3. Internationally: by failing to retain a major part of its territory, Ethiopia became landlocked, as well as gradually losing allyship with world powers.

To conclude, this research project finds that Ethiopia's international engagements during the Derg rule bore little to no fruit for the country in the long run, showcasing only some short-run benefits, such as momentary periods of positive economic growth and territorial retention through the Ogaden War. This study has demonstrated the challenges of running a Marxist-Leninist authoritarian government particularly after the reduction of ideological and material support from a major power, and the understandings obtained can be instrumental in comprehending the evolution of modern Ethiopia's international engagements. Overall, the Derg's reign can be characterised by gross human rights violations, continuous territorial conflict, an unstable government, economic downfall, lack of concrete allies, and thus a poor image internationally, bringing Ethiopia to the verge of collapse and creating massive instability in the Horn of Africa.

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