

The Power of Geography

Reading Guide for Chapter 8, Ethiopia

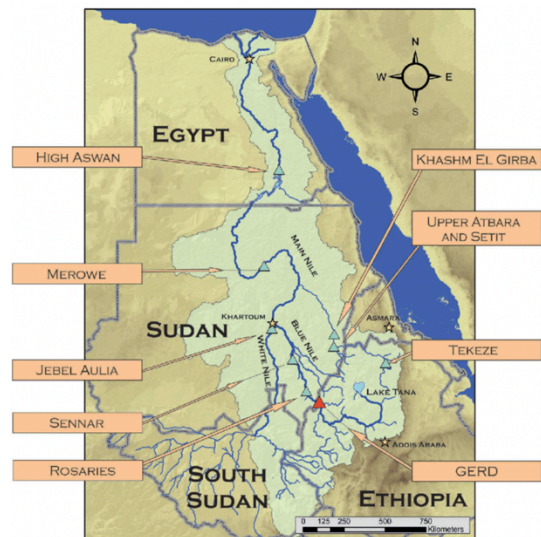
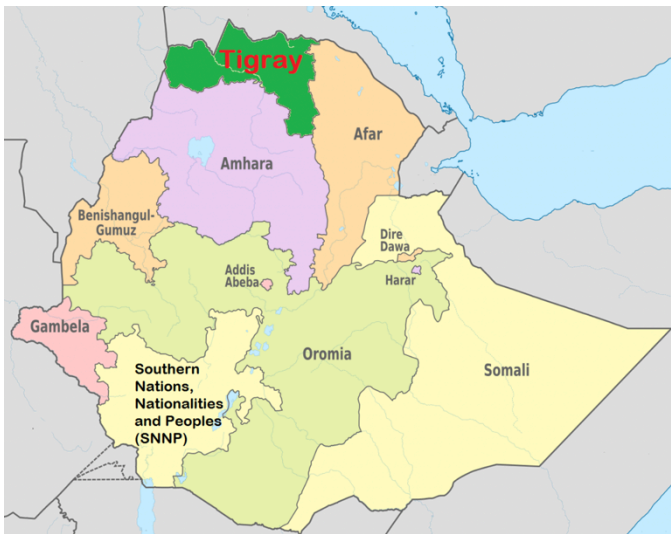
The country sits at the center of one of the most troubled regions in the world.

–Tim Marshall

Water defines Ethiopia's geopolitical position and importance. Freshwater is its main strength, and salt water one of its weaknesses....It has twelve large lakes & nine major rivers, most of which supply its neighbors, giving Ethiopia enormous political leverage over them. What it lacks, though, is a coast and direct access to the sea.

–Tim Marshall

–Tim Marshall



Map of Eastern Nile region, with reservoir locations

The geography of Ethiopia -- East African Rift system, mountainous highlands, the Horn of Africa, a population of 110 million people, weak borders and internal dissension (with 9 ethnic groups).

Ethiopia is **“the water tower of Africa.”**

Ethiopia was never colonized.

Amharic is the working language of the national government.

The story of the Queen of Sheba (Makeda) & King Solomon and the Ark of the Covenant.

The Aksum Empire (100-940 CE)

Christianity arrived in the 300s....One-third of Ethiopians are now Muslim.

A summary of modern Ethiopian history

Defeat of Egypt (1874-76) & Italy (1896)

Emperor **Haile Selassie I** modernized the economy, slavery (2 million slaves) was still prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s.

Mussolini's Italy occupied Ethiopia in 1935

Ethiopia in the Cold War – using and being used by the Americans and the Soviet Union

A coup d'état in 1974, Haile Selassie I murdered in 1975, a Marxist-Leninist regime under **the Derg**, famine in the 1980s killed 1 million.

1993 **Eritrea** was recognized as a separate country, followed by a full-scale war between Eritrea & Ethiopia which ended in a stalemate.

Elected **Abiy Ahmed Prime Minister** in 2018– political prisoners freed, ended the ethnically based national collation government and created a single national party, honored the 2000 peace treaty with Eritrea. Ahmed awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Ethiopia's challenge: many internal enemies

“Ethiopiawinet” (“Ethiopianness”) is at odds with the powerful ethno-nationalist forces that threaten the disintegration of the country.



Hachalu Hundessa

Case study: the assassination of Oromo pop singer Hachalu Hundessa & resulting violence between the Oromo and the Amhara.

Ethiopia's major challenge: lack of access to the sea. Landlocked, it needs reliable trade routes.

China is a major player in the Horn of Africa, and Saudi Arabia/United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Qatar/Turkey are vying for strategic advantages there.

Explained: Why Is China Stepping Up Its Diplomatic Efforts In The Horn Of Africa

5 min read



Zoya Hussain

Updated on Jul 06, 2022, 14:00 IST



The capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, recently hosted the inaugural two-day "China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance and Development Conference."

The special envoy for Beijing, Xue Bing, has stated that China wishes to play a "more significant role" in fostering security and stability in the Horn of Africa, but he also noted that the meeting did not discuss any particular conflict in the area.

According to Xue Bing, Beijing is prepared to assist the states in the area in finding peace and eradicating what he called outside interference.



Turkey's Open to Africa policy makes it the #2 investor in Ethiopia after China. Ethiopia and Turkey have tense relationships with Egypt.

Source of tension with Egypt: The **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** on the **Blue Nile**, Africa's largest hydroelectric power plant. Control of Nile water, upstream of Egypt, makes the dam an existential matter for Egypt. ("Egypt is the gift of the Nile.") Ethiopia has its hands on the tap for Egypt's water. There is a chance for a "**water war**."



Attacking Ethiopia would be very difficult for Egypt for geographic and diplomatic reasons. Water is a matter of national security all the countries that rely on the Nile River system, and Egypt is no longer the preeminent Nile power.

The electricity the GERD will provide “can break the centuries-long cycle of poverty and ethnic violence.” As the “Water Tower” of Africa, Ethiopia is clearly a regional power. [“Cheap and abundant electricity can transform the lives of tens of millions of people”](#) if good governance brings stability to Ethiopia. But there are numerous challenges Ethiopia faces – climate change, droughts, deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, waves of refugees, extremist groups, piracy.

[“When the spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.”](#) But the binds have to hold.