

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The question of the situation in the Tigray region

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Introduction

Ethiopia, the largest and most populated country located in the Horn of Africa, has been experiencing a conflict between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Ethiopia is composed of around 80 different tribes and 9 different national states, and the Oromos, Amhara, and Tigray are the tribes with the most power. For the past 27 years, the TPLF was in office, and they were the ones with the most power, but due to their oppression of state governments, the other tribes were not satisfied with their governance. Meanwhile, in 2018, Abiy Ahmed was elected with the support of Oromos. Since then, Tigray has been arguing that they've been excluded from the office and waited for the general election that was supposed to take place in 2020. However, the general election was delayed, and the Tigray started to express grievance in office through radical methods; the government led by Ahmed has sent forces to the Tigray region to suppress the radical expression. Meanwhile, thousands of people living in the Tigray region were killed due to the conflict and civilian massacre, women were exposed to sexual abuse, and Tigray civilians' human rights were abused due to prolonged events of massacre and genocide.

This issue is now spotlighted because Ethiopia is one of Africa's largest and most powerful countries. Thus, if this conflict lasts longer and brings a more significant conflict, chaos across the entirety of Africa may be inevitable. Bordering 6 countries, the refugee crisis caused by this conflict can further exacerbate the political situation in these countries. Moreover, Ethiopia is already facing a war with Eritrea regarding the border, and some experts even hypothesize that other African countries might enter the conflict. Finally, Ethiopian forces are now dispatched to the Tigray region to suppress and mediate the Tigrays' expression of grievance, as well as to Somalia alongside the African Union troops and the UN forces. Experts are worried about the chances for the Ethiopian government to withdraw the Ethiopian forces currently dispatched in Somalia, which could lead to difficulties while accomplishing peacekeeping missions in Somalia.

While there have been multiple attempts to mediate the conflict between the Tigray and Ethiopia, most have unfortunately failed. Currently, the United States and the European Union have declared a sanction towards the Ethiopian products, but the conflict between the Tigray and Ethiopian governments has not seen cessation. During this conflict, thousands of innocent civilians were killed, injured, and lost their livelihood. Tibor Nagy, the former US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa and US Ambassador to Ethiopia, asserted that aid for the

Ethiopian civilians is needed and a negotiation talk would be needed with the help of related countries such as the United States, Turkey, and China.

Definition of Key Terms

Addis Ababa

The capital city of Ethiopia, located around 570km away from Tigray

Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF)

The official military force of Ethiopia, performing over a scope of ground forces, air force, and the Defense Industry Sector

Mekelle

The capital city of the Tigray region

Oromo

An ethnic group of Ethiopia which is most predominant in the country: with a proportion of 34.4% of the population. The current Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed originates from this ethnic group.

Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

A left-wing ethnic nationalist group which was previously a parliamentary party, but is now recognized as a terrorist organization by the Ethiopian government. In older publications, this group is referred to as Woyane.

Background

The Tigray region

The Tigray region spans across the northernmost regions of Ethiopia, and for this reason, it shares a border with the neighbouring African countries of Sudan and Eritrea. In Ethiopia, the Tigray Region is recognized as one of the 10 semi-autonomous federal ‘National Regional States’ organized along ethnic lines, and is home to more than 110 million Tigrayans, who comprise around 6% of the national population. Geologically, its terrain is relatively mountainous; likewise, the agricultural sectors of society are most prominent.

Ethiopian Civil War 1974-1991

For long in history, Tigrayans – notably the TPLF – have been regarded to have wielded one of the strongest and most dominant powers within Ethiopia. An event that clearly demonstrated this trend and fact

was the Ethiopian Civil War. In 1975, the TPLF instigated a protracted conflict against the Derg militarist junta in Addis Ababa, which did not cease until 1991. Emerging victorious from this war, the TPLF joined an alliance-coalition alongside three other ethno-regional parties which constituted the country's government as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), in which they enjoyed political dominance and relative power for around 3 decades.

The EPRDF and likewise the TPLF remained successful in consolidating their legitimacy until 2015, when the central government faced popular uprisings from the Oromos causing the resignation of former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

In succession and consequence of the gradual rise of discontent against the EPRDF, Abiy Ahmed rose to power and eventually took office as the Prime Minister of Ethiopia on April 2nd, 2018. Upon his appointment, many hoped for the quelling of tensions, and as Prime Minister – in response to this public opinion – the first measures Abiy took was to rearrange the ruling coalition of the EPRDF into a new Prosperity Party. By doing so, the TPLF was virtually ostracized in the process, and Abiy's drive for a pan-Ethiopian political framework sparked fears and doubts against the country's federal system which increasingly negated the autonomy of ethnically-defined states such as Tigray. Subsequently, leaders in Tigray were forced to withdraw to their heartland in northern Ethiopia, where a regional government of their own was reinforced.

Apart from these political reforms, Abiy's rule also introduced a comparatively regressive regime in Ethiopia. Among them, the most controversial included the shutting down of internet and telephone services, as well as the suppression or arrestment of journalists and critics.

On a more positive note, in 2019, Abiy was lauded as a regional peacemaker when he received the Nobel Peace Prize in response to his successful truce with neighbouring Eritrea, with who they were engaged with what was to become a war of territorial sovereignty. Under Abiy's rule, an international commission on boundaries between the two states was finalized and agreed upon. Nevertheless, Abiy earning himself a Peace Prize does not seem to vindicate his involvement in the Tigray conflict and the war crimes borne through the military offensives, as will be discussed later in this section.

Collectively, it is important and relevant to analyse and evaluate the role, accomplishments, and shortcomings of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, as he is a central figure in power – who has and is currently wielding the influence to dictate policies and government order within Ethiopia. Even so; recently, as of January 14th 2022, a rare statement had been issued and publicized by the Nobel Committee criticizing how Ahmed has yet to step up to his “special responsibility to end the conflict and contribute to peace”.

Causes of conflict

In addition to the lasting political tensions created through the aforementioned outbreak of a civil war and the controversy surrounding the country's Prime Minister, there exist other overarching and catalyzing factors that contributed to the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia.

Long term: Ethnic Divisions

The country of Ethiopia is divided into 10 regions and 2 cities, inclusive of more than 80 different ethnic groups, that each enjoy a substantial amount of autonomy, with access to regional police and militia. As a result, regional and federal governments are largely and visibly divided along entrenched ethnic lines.

Because of correspondent issues revolving around a fragile and scattered social system, problems of resource distribution and access to goods/services/information are particularly difficult to resolve, as the interests of all groups and parties can never be equally addressed simultaneously.

Furthermore, given that certain ethnic groups exist more plentifully and thus overpower others in terms of population, the negligence of ethnic minorities also acts as a hindrance towards establishing a unified Ethiopia as suggested through Abiy Ahmed's pan-Ethiopian theory, and such clash of ideology can also be deemed a long-term cause of the Tigray conflict. For instance, and more relevantly, the Tigrayans as previously mentioned succinctly make up only 6% of the country's population which is around 1/10th the size of the Oromo and Amhara combined, and the political and regional marginalization that they have been thereby subjected and restricted to has inevitably contributed to the hostility between them and the central government.

Short term: parliamentary elections of September 2020

Even after the political mayhem of an overthrown government and a change in political order throughout the late 1990s to the 2010s, political tensions in Ethiopia on a national level saw no cessation. Although the Tigrayans had, in effect, retreated to their territory in immediate effect of the dissolution of the EPRDF, an ambiance of political competition between the TPLF – who had once been a cardinal non-state actor – and Abiy's new government persisted.

In September 2020, these tensions escalated and burst out when the TPLF defied Abiy Ahmed's decision to postpone nationwide parliamentary elections across Ethiopia due to rising cases of COVID-19, and held regional elections of their own. This act was condemned by the central government and Abiy himself who called this certain set of elections 'illegal'. Within weeks, civil lawmakers cut funding to TPLF leadership, and a brink of disparity between the regional and federal government began to emerge, altogether pulling an instantaneous trigger causing a national conflict.

Consequences of conflict

War crimes

In times of such chaos and military mayhem, atrocities have been committed by both sides of the conflict. An approximate count exceeding 50,000 have died in the fighting alone, while other victims emerge from assaults performed in refugee camps, acts of looting, sexual violence, and extrajudicial killings. Evidence of massacres committed on behalf of Ethiopian soldiers, Tigrayan troops, as well as certain Eritrean forces that have become involved in this crisis is being constantly uncovered by foreign news platforms, as well as Non-Governmental Organizations such as Amnesty International, who have relied on hundreds of confidential interviews to derive such information of witnesses of alleged abuse.

In terms of military strategies, albeit countless denials being made on this topic, blatant operations involving air raids and air strikes targeting enemies' communications and weapons facilities have been conducted, which have resulted in unprotected civilian deaths.

Humanitarian crises

According to a report issued by Sky News, humanitarian agencies currently in service in Ethiopia have access only to 30% of Tigray. Médecins Sans Frontières (otherwise known as Doctors Without Borders) has reported too that 70% of its acting facilities in Ethiopia had been looted, of which half were irreversibly damaged. By early 2021, only around 13% of the initial number of facilities were maintained in functionality.

Overall, media coverage on precise details of the conditions in Tigray has been prevented from proliferation due to strict restrictions on journalism, following consecutive declarations of a ‘state of emergency’ made by the government. Consequently, there has been a helpless delay in international response to the domestic crisis, as well as with the provision of humanitarian aid.

In addition, rates of malnutrition have been also reported to have exceeded unprecedeted levels, with around 79% of all pregnant or lactating women diagnosed with acute malnutrition. The UN Humanitarian Coordination Office also reported in September that the “level of moderate malnutrition among children under 5 is exceeding the global emergency threshold of 15%”, which is beginning to pose concerns beyond the violence of soldiers on fronts of fighting.

Migrant crises

As claimed by the United Nations, Ethiopia is currently experiencing its worst exodus of refugees from their homeland to neighbouring African countries such as Sudan. In fact, between November 2020 to April 2021 where fights in Tigray were arguably at their peak, it had been predicted that 200,000 Ethiopians fled their country in search for safety, whilst 1.7 million became internally displaced within the region. New living conditions for these asylum seekers are nevertheless challenging, ranging from concerns over access to basic necessities, communications, electricity, water and health supplies etc.

Border crises

With respect to the aforementioned migrant crises as well as the national sentiment of catastrophe within Ethiopia, border crises with neighbouring African countries have also intensified. Most prevalently, a drastic dispute occurred between Sudan and Ethiopia – the two largest countries in the Horn of Africa, incited by the Sudanese who took control of the fertile al-Fashaga borderland in mid-December 2020 when Ethiopia was distracted by suppressing the Tigray conflict. This unexpected intrusion further pushed Ethiopia into coordinating the deployment of federal forces and militiamen to the Sudan-Ethiopia border, resulting in increased fatal casualties as well as instability in their bilateral relations.

Major Parties Involved

Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

Tigray People's Liberation Front is a left-wing ethnic nationalist party of Ethiopia, and they are the party dominating in the Tigray region. This party has been dominating power in the parliament of Ethiopia for the past 27 years. However, recently, following the Oromo Democratic Party's domination of power in the parliament, the TPLF and its supporters started to argue that they were excluded in the parliament on purpose. The general elections of September 2020 were thus an event that they were looking forward to in aspiration for an increase in parliamentary influence, but the postponement of the elections has only led to the escalation of their grievance.

Oromo Democratic Party (ODP)

The Oromo Democratic Party is a party of Oromos, which constitutes 35% of Ethiopia's population, and the current Prime Minister of Ethiopia is from this party. Abiy Ahmed Ali, acting as the chairman of the ODP and as well as Prime Minister of Ethiopia has been trying to repress the expression of TPLF's grievance, but during the process of repression, there were several cases of human rights abuse and genocide towards the Tigray people.

Somalia

Somalia has been in a civil war since 1991. The Al-Shabaab army has declared a military coup to attack the Barre regime; since then, different parties and armies of Somalia started to fight against each other to hold the leadership position of the Somalian government. During the civil war, more than 300,000 Somalian soldiers and civilians were killed. Likewise, to protect the civilians and to cease the civil war in Somalia, the United Nations started a peacekeeping activity in Somalia. Among the peacekeeping team, Ethiopia contributed a lot of troops to Somalia, so the conflict in the Tigray region could therefore risk and affect the current missions in Somalia.

United States

Ethiopia is one of the United States' allies, and the stable relationship with the United States was crucial to the establishment of a stable government as the United States has been aiding Ethiopia. From 2016 to 2020, the United States has aided 4.2 billion US dollars to Ethiopia. However, as the Ethiopian government became unstable,

food stability was undermined, and war crimes occurred in Ethiopia, which has led to decisions made in the United States pressuring Ethiopia to cease the conflict in the Tigray region.

Timeline of Events

While reading this section, please bear in mind that the situation in Tigray remains an ongoing conflict. Likewise, it is suggested that you conduct further personal research on recent updates regarding this issue.

Date	Description of event
February 18th, 1975	The TPLF is founded and initiates a rebellion against the military government
May, 1991	The 4-party coalition of the EPRDF dominated by the TPLF takes legitimate office
April 2nd, 2018	Abiy Ahmed takes office as Prime Minister of Ethiopia
October 2019	Abiy is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts towards appeasing relations with Eritrea
November 3rd, 2020	Regional security forces in Tigray launch a surprise attack on the Northern Command of the ENDF in Mekelle
November 4th, 2020	Abiy declares and launches a military offensive against the Tigray forces
November 6th, 2020	Abiy and his administration launch an airstrike in the heavily fortified Tigray region. In response, the UN calls for immediate de-escalation of tensions and a peaceful resolution.
November 14th, 2020	TPLF forces launch rocket attacks at Asmara – the capital of Eritrea – causing an influx of refugees into neighbouring Sudan
November 28th, 2020	Eritrean troops commit atrocities in Ethiopian cities such as Axum. Their actions are condemned by Amnesty International as ‘potential crimes against humanity’.
December, 2020	Sudan troops move into al-Fashaga, sparking a border dispute
March 23rd, 2021	Abiy confirms that Eritrean troops have entered Tigray, after months of mutual denial from the two nations
April 22nd, 2021	The United Nations Security Council issues its first joint press statement on the continuing crisis
May 26th, 2021	US President Joe Biden calls for a ceasefire in Tigray

June 2nd, 2021	UK officials call for a ceasefire in Tigray
June 3rd, 2021	Eritrean troops begin withdrawal of troops from Tigray following an official request made by the Ethiopian government
June 28th, 2021	The Ethiopian government unilaterally declares a ceasefire
November 2nd, 2021	The Ethiopian government declares a nationwide state of emergency

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Despite the setbacks, certain mentionable efforts have been introduced in recent times as an attempt to address the current situation in the Tigray region.

- Firstly, on behalf of the **African Union**, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo was appointed as a special envoy for the Horn of Africa, tasked with meetings and discussions with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the leader of the TPLF – Debretson Gebremichael, and leaders of other ethnic groups within Ethiopia, such as the Amhara. Although these meetings failed to reach practical solutions, they nonetheless raised a cautious tone on the crisis regionally, signaling an initial proposal for potential peace resolutions.
- In terms of settling a halt to the physical fighting, in June 2021, the Ethiopian government made an attempt at a **ceasefire**; however, its essence of unilaterality damaged its viability, as fighting continued across the Tigray region within weeks after the declaration. If anything, the Ethiopian government became more determined and radical in joining military troops for their drive, calling upon all those eligible to join the Defense Forces, Special Forces and militias, as per a delineation of their patriotism.
- Beyond the continent of Africa, many dominant **Western powers** have orchestrated efforts mainly dedicated towards pressuring the federal government in response to their acts of violence and violation of international human rights. The European Union was one of the first entities to acknowledge this conflict and crisis, urging states and organizations to join in on the drive for the provision of humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile, on behalf of the USA, senior Biden administration officials threatened Ethiopia's access to a lucrative US trade program under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Likewise, Ethiopia has faced a balance of responses from foreign nations, mixed with charitable support from some, alongside strains from others in the wish to pressure them into international compliance. Even so, much of these efforts – particularly those requesting access and intervention towards the conflict – have been rejected by the Ethiopian government, potentially exacerbating the situation in the Tigray region.

The **United Nations** itself has also initiated several attempts in resolving the Tigray conflict. In December 2021, the Human Rights Council raised efforts to establish an international commission of human rights experts on Ethiopia in collaboration with the UN Joint Investigative Team, targeted towards resolving alleged violations of humanitarian and refugee law committed by all parties in the Tigray conflict.

Alternatively, several **resolutions** have also been devised directly under the United Nations. These include but are not limited to:

- [A/HRC/RES/47/13](#), 13 Jul 2021, ‘Situation of human rights in Tigray region of Ethiopia’
- [A/HRC/S-33/L.1](#), 14 Dec 2021, ‘Situation of human rights in Ethiopia’

As can be seen, not many resolutions have been properly passed by the United Nations, let alone none of which were practically binding. Similarly, this topic is yet to have been examined for resolution in the Security Council, as discussions have mostly been stopped short at the issuance of a press statement made by the council.

Possible Solutions

- ***Derive a way to rebuild the foundation of civilians' lives*** – In the Tigray region is that innocent civilians in the Tigray region were sacrificed, injured, and lost their livelihood. This could be done with the cooperation and help of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) – such as private companies willing to help while giving them some incentives such as decreasing the tax rate when exporting products to Ethiopia. This would help Ethiopia picture the future of their country and provide a chance for the civilians to rebuild and re-picture their future.
- ***Derive a way to cease war crimes*** – Many war crimes occur in the Tigray region. One way to protect the civilians from war crime is to educate the members, partners, and the leaders of both sides – the Tigray and the Ethiopian government. With the cooperation of Peacekeepers, an educational workshop or a program to educate such forces about the magnitude of the war crimes to the civilians of Ethiopia could be a way to decrease the war crime rates that are happening in the Tigray region. Also, dispatching more peacekeeping forces to monitor the war crime and the crimes that happen during the disorder would help to reduce the damage done by the war crimes and crimes that happen during the disorder.
- ***Derive a way to minimize the impacts on neighboring countries*** – An important related issue to keep in mind is Somalia's ongoing civil war. Somalia has been facing a civil war due to the military coups and conflicts, and the Security Council has dispatched its peacekeeping forces, whilst Ethiopia remained one of the countries that had sent a large troop into Somalia. Having said that, the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in Somalia could bring even more conflicts and tragedies. Thus, keeping the Ethiopian troops as a part of the peacekeeping force is vital.
- ***Derive a way to cease the military conflict in the Tigray region*** – The general election could cease the conflict of the Tigray region. The general election scheduled for 2020 was postponed, which

triggered the conflict in the Tigray region. By hosting a fair and legitimate round of general elections, the grievance of the Tigray region and the party could be addressed. However, if the same result – not having a lot of TPLF's seats in the congress – occurs, further conflicts could occur. Thus, it would be crucial to have minimum guaranteed seats for the Tigray region. The talk to guarantee the minimum seats in the congress should be monitored by the Security Council and other regions of Ethiopia.

- **Derive a way to monitor further conflicts in future** – Monitoring the possible conflicts after the cessation of conflict will also be crucial. However, while monitoring any possible conflicts in the Tigray region, it is crucial to keep in mind not to violate the national sovereignty of Ethiopia. In order to monitor any possible conflicts in the Tigray region without violation of national sovereignty, monitoring could proceed through dispatching external peacekeepers to the Tigray region.
- **Things to keep in mind** – While deriving the solutions for the conflict in Tigray, delegates need to keep in mind the war crimes and crimes happening during the crisis, dispatch of troops in Somalia, the Tigray region's grievance, and the importance of monitoring the Tigray region for any further conflicts. The solutions should be feasible, detailed, sustainable, and preserve national sovereignty.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/conflict-ethiopias-tigray-region-what-know> (Council on Foreign Relations report on the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region)

This website acts as a short and sweet political summary on the main aspects of the Tigray crisis. In general, the CFR website is a great source for insights on current affairs and political issues.

- II. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54964378> (Ethiopia's Tigray war: The short, medium and long story)

This BBC news article beautifully summarizes the Tigray conflict in 100, 300, and 500 words.

- III. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/12/ethiopia-peace-blueprint-tigray-conflict-resolution/> (A Blueprint for Peace in Ethiopia)

This article comprehensively explains and evaluates the previous attempts made in resolving the Tigray conflict, whilst also suggesting and walking through prospects and strategies of resolution in Ethiopia.

- IV. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14501.doc.htm> (Security Council Press Statement on Ethiopia)

This website is self-explanatory, presenting a digital copy of the first press statement published by the Security Council on this issue.