

U.S. SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS AND THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS



Government of Ethiopia & the Ethiopian National Defense Force

A Collaboration Between Brown University, Security Assistance Monitor, & InterAction

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About the Factsheet

This factsheet is a collaboration between Brown University's Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies (CHRHS), the Security Assistance Monitor (SAM) at the Center for International Policy, and InterAction. It provides an overview of key facts, data, and analysis of issues related to U.S. security cooperation with the Government of Ethiopia in the context of ongoing civilian protection, civilian harm, and humanitarian concerns. It is the first in a series of factsheets examining protection of civilian issues in geographies where the U.S. is a significant external security partner.

The collaborators on this project have endeavored to provide data-driven and fact-based information on the nature of U.S. security cooperation with Ethiopia and current trends in civilian harm in the country. The information presented here does not necessarily represent the institutional views of the contributing organizations. The recommendations presented in this factsheet reflect the assessments of InterAction and CHRHS contributors. The SAM, as a program of the Center for International Policy, does not itself take any institutional position on these matters.

Drawing on the insights and recommendations of NGO colleagues and experts working on Ethiopia and U.S. security assistance policy and practice, this product was developed by the following contributors:

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About the Contributing Organizations

Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies: Housed within the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University, The Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies aims to promote a more just, peaceful, and secure world by furthering a deeper understanding of global human rights and humanitarian challenges, and encouraging collaboration between local communities, academics, and practitioners to develop innovative solutions to these challenges.

Security Assistance Monitor: Security Assistance Monitor is a program of the Center for International Policy, that tracks and analyzes U.S. security sector assistance and arms sales programs worldwide. By informing policymakers, media, scholars, NGOs, and the public (in the United States and abroad) about trends and issues related to U.S. foreign security assistance, we seek to enhance transparency and promote greater oversight of U.S. military and police aid, arms sales, and training.

InterAction: InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people. InterAction convenes several thematic and country-specific working groups, including the Protection of Civilians Working Group (PoC WG), a coalition of 16 international humanitarian and human rights organizations working to shape U.S. policy and practice to minimize civilian harm in U.S. military operations and security partnerships.



Key Findings

- The U.S. has provided at least \$152.7 million in security sector assistance (SSA) to Ethiopia between FY2000 and FY2020, spread across various programs and funding authorities and with fluctuations over time.
- More than 61% of known U.S. SSA to Ethiopia has been funded by two programs, the Department of Defense's Section 1206/333 train and equip authority—at 44%—and the State Department's Foreign Military Financing—at 17% (\$67 million and \$26 million, respectively).
- U.S. SSA has spanned various eras in Ethiopian governance, including the period between 1991 and 2018, when the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dominated governments, as well as during the recent period in which the Prosperity Party led by Abiy Ahmed—the current Prime Minister—has held power. Accordingly, U.S. security cooperation with Ethiopia is likely to have benefited both the contemporary iteration of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) as well as other security actors, whose elements at various times would have been considered legitimate recipients of U.S. assistance.
- Ethiopia's descent into internecine violence—including mass atrocities, gross violations of human rights, forced displacement, and severe restrictions on humanitarian assistance at the hands of ENDF, associated forces, and other forces—suggests that important objectives of the U.S. strategic framework have not been realized, notably concerning advancing regional peace and security, promoting the rule of law, and enhancing the professionalism of Ethiopian security forces. While information is limited as to the extent that U.S. capacity-building efforts have prioritized civilian protection, the systemic nature of abuses and violations by ENDF and its allies indicate a broader failure by the U.S. to promote political will and military leadership in this area. Abuses by TPLF forces, such as attacks on civilians and the use of child soldiers, also raise questions about U.S. SSA, which may have benefited former ENDF elements now part of the Tigrayan forces.
- While the U.S. has taken some measures to attempt to shape the behavior of the Ethiopian Government and other conflict parties, there is little evidence of Ethiopian decision-makers adjusting in response to U.S. pressure. Therefore, U.S. influence over Ethiopia and its allies appears limited.

Based on these findings, the U.S. could conduct a comprehensive review of U.S. security assistance to the country in order to learn lessons from this partnership—including failures at the strategic level (e.g., anticipating civil conflict and the threat of atrocities posed by political and military leaders when conflict erupts) and gaps at the operational level (e.g., strengthening the protection of civilians, compliance with international law, and accountability for civilian harm), as well as how these shortcomings have contributed to the conflict's unfolding and violence against civilians. The U.S. should revise its approach to security assistance globally and make the necessary adjustments both at the policy level and in specific theaters to take appropriate remedial measures in situations of crisis, promote leadership on civilian protection, and develop an early warning capability to assess the risk of and prevent the recurrence of mass atrocities.

Introduction

The United States is Ethiopia's [largest bilateral foreign aid provider](#), with over [\\$4.2 billion](#) in development and humanitarian assistance between FY2016 and FY2020. Though a smaller portion of its yearly aid package, the U.S. Government also provides significant amounts of security sector assistance (SSA), amounting to approximately \$152.7 million between FY2000 and FY2020.

The scale of U.S. investment reflects Ethiopia's strategic importance in the region and its centrality to U.S. engagement with the Horn of Africa. Over the past two decades, the partnership has deepened as U.S. policymakers have welcomed Ethiopia's contributions to regional peacekeeping, its regional counterterrorism operations, its role in conflict resolution, as well as its ostensible steps towards political liberalization. But the recent escalation of violence between the central government and coalition forces versus Tigrayan and aligned forces has led to a rethink in U.S. assistance by civil society, government actors and experts alike.

The purpose of this brief is to provide data points and analysis related to the U.S. security partnership with Ethiopia amid the ongoing Ethiopian conflict (November 2020-present) to help shape U.S.-focused NGO advocacy strategies and policy engagement to strengthen the protection of civilians, enhance humanitarian access, and reduce the suffering of conflict-affected civilians in the country and region. In examining political and security developments in Ethiopia, this paper focuses mainly on the policies and practices of the Ethiopian security forces given the U.S. relationship with this actor and any leverage the U.S. may exert through this relationship on the conflict. The purpose of this document is to generate awareness on U.S. policy and practice on Security Sector Assistance (SSA) and document its effectiveness in promoting civilian protection through an illustration of one of its security partners. This document is one part of a wider series on U.S. security partnerships, with other context-specific briefs scheduled for completion in 2022.

This paper was developed as part of a research partnership between Brown University CHRHS, InterAction, and Security Assistance Monitor. Information collected stems from open-source information as well as interviews with experts, including U.S. policy specialists and locally-based NGOs.

Partnership Overview¹

Objective and Purpose of Partnership

Data on U.S. security assistance to Ethiopia is limited and, in the public domain, incomplete. The following is based on analysis of publicly available information on U.S. security cooperation with Ethiopia, drawn from government reports, notifications to congress, budget justifications, and other official sources.

U.S. security assistance to Ethiopia is spread across various programs and funding authorities, with significant variations over time. It has also spanned various eras in Ethiopian governance, including both the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)-dominated governments of 1991 to 2018 and the government of Abiy Ahmed, the current Prime Minister. Accordingly, U.S. security cooperation with Ethiopia is likely to have benefited both the contemporary iteration of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) as well as other armed groups whose elements at various times would have been considered legitimate recipients of U.S. assistance. The nuance is of particular importance for the Ethiopian context, where opposition forces have been part of the central government's security sector and, therefore, potential beneficiaries U.S. arms and training— a fact that could have bearing on current hostilities. Nevertheless, the U.S. effort has consistently focused on strengthening the government in Addis Ababa. As the U.S. partnership remains with the central government and the ENDF, this brief focuses on the action of those forces.

In recent years, U.S. security assistance has reflected once-high hopes in Washington for Abiy Ahmed Ali following his 2018 selection for Prime Minister and his early steps towards political and economic liberalization. As was described in the most recent publicly available (2018) U.S. integrated country strategy (ICS) for Ethiopia, the prospects of rapid political reform enabled greater U.S. engagement with Ethiopia on several key areas of strategic priority: "promoting Horn of Africa stability, countering terrorism, countering Chinese and Russian influence in the region, and promoting U.S. commercial opportunity via the fastest-growing economy in Africa."

Vital to these potential opportunities were U.S. efforts to gain access, influence, and goodwill with Ethiopia's new administration— something the United States has often sought to do through security cooperation. Accordingly, in the [2018 Ethiopia ICS](#), the U.S. laid out several sub-objectives under the broad heading "Advance Regional Peace and Security," aiming to achieve the following:

- Ethiopia Builds Capacity to Address Regional Humanitarian Crises Mission Objective.
- Ethiopia's National Defense Force (ENDF) Respects Rule of Law and Sustains Regional Stability through Peacekeeping Mission Objective.
- Ethiopia Establishes Police and Investigative Policies, Procedures, and Practices to Meet International Standards.

Taken together, U.S. security assistance can be seen as a means to several strategic and tactical ends.

- Improving the abilities of the Ethiopian security services to 1.) address U.S. counterterrorism priorities in the Horn and 2.) participate in regional peacekeeping operations.

- Enhance the professionalism of Ethiopian security services both to improve its practical abilities and as a way of mitigating potential threats to political reform or civil-military affairs.
- Gaining greater access and influence within Ethiopia's political and military leadership.

The recent crisis in northern Ethiopia and the country's descent into internecine violence—including clear acts of abuse and civilian harm, possible violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), and obstruction of humanitarian access at the hands of Ethiopian federal troops, the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF), Amhara Special Forces and regional militias, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)/Tigray Defense Forces (TDF)—suggest that key objectives of this strategic framework have not been realized. In turn, the United States has suspended large portions of its non-humanitarian assistance to Addis, including security assistance. On May 23, 2021, the U.S. Secretary of State announced [restrictions on security assistance](#) to Ethiopia, which has resulted in a policy of denial for exports of defense articles and defense services to or for the armed forces, police, intelligence, or other internal security forces. The [amendment](#) to [ITAR § 126.1](#) was officially codified on November 1, 2021. Additionally, the U.S. imposed economic restrictions on Ethiopia in May and [plans to terminate](#) Ethiopia from the African Growth and Opportunity Act's (AGOA) trade preference program on January 1 absent "urgent action."

Type of Assistance

Across the past two decades, the primary tactical-level aims of U.S. assistance, based on programming budgets, have been 1.) building the capacity and capabilities of Ethiopian defense and security forces, with a focus on counterterrorism and border security, and 2.) assisting in Ethiopia's acquisition of arms and equipment. The primary vehicles for these aims have been the Department of Defense's section 1206/333 of Title 10 U.S.C. train and equip authority and the Department of State's Foreign Military Financing Program.

According to limited publicly available information, of the approximately \$152.7 million in security assistance provided to Ethiopia between FY2000-FY2020, more than 61% has been funded by these two programs. More specifically, more than 44% of that \$152.7 million was funded by the Department of Defense's train and equip authority, amounting to more than \$67 million. The top security assistance programs for Ethiopia can be seen in table 1.

Though full picture of Ethiopia's security security assistance relationship with the U.S. is not available due to reporting limitations, public accounting suggests SSA peaked in FY2016 at \$29 million, with a similarly high total in FY2015 of \$28.5 million. In FY2017 and FY2018, SSA was significantly reduced to less than \$1 million each year, amid unrest in the wake of anti-government protests in the country. U.S. SSA resumed to \$5.5 million in FY2019 following Abiy's selection and country-wide reforms as well as a peace deal with neighboring Eritrea.

Additionally, the U.S. Government has provided foreign military training to at least 4,000 Ethiopian trainees between FY2000 and FY2018. Specifics regarding the unit-level identity of the majority those trainees were not publicly reported or were named in very broad terms (i.e., Ethiopian Army). Among the largest named units that have received U.S. training are the 6th Motorized Contingent Battalion (76 trainees), the 6th Motorized Battalion Logistics (63 trainees), and the 11th Motorized Battalion Logistics (47 trainees). The lack of specificity in some of this reporting is especially challenging in the Ethiopian context because of the country's complex security sector architecture, which comprises federal, regional, and local troops who, in some cases, operate without clear lines of command and control to the central government in Addis. Some forms of security assistance or security cooperation may have flowed to forces under regional commands. However, given the explicit U.S. aim of strengthening the central government's national authority, it seems likely that most engagement was directly with federal forces under the auspices of the ENDF.

Foreign Military Financing (FMF): FMF is a State Department foreign aid program that provides grants and loans to help countries purchase U.S.-made defense articles and defense services on the U.S. Munitions List.

Section 1206/333: Section 333 Building Partner Capacity is a new program created under the provisions of the FY 2017 NDAA that sought to expand the scope of Global Train and Equip (Section 1206 Train and Equip Authority) for the purpose of building the capacity of foreign national security forces to conduct one or more of the following: counterterrorism operations; counter-weapons of mass destruction operations; counter-illicit drug trafficking operations; counter-transnational organized crime operations; maritime and border security operations; military intelligence operations; operations or activities that contribute to an international coalition operation.

Publicly available information suggests that security assistance remains a relatively small portion of the wider bilateral U.S. assistance relationship with Ethiopia. For example, in FY2016—the year with the highest recorded total for U.S. security assistance (\$29 million)—USAID's [foreign aid database](#) shows that Washington provided \$520 million in humanitarian assistance. In years where security aid packages were smaller, the discrepancy is even greater. In 2017, when security assistance was just \$648,000, humanitarian aid amounted to \$480 million.

Key Developments in the Security Partnership

Since the onset of violence between Tigrayan forces, Ethiopian federal forces, and regional and ethnic forces aligned with the central government, the U.S. has [suspended](#) large portions of its non-humanitarian aid to the country. The U.S. also publicly [condemned](#) actions by Abiy's government, including its role in restricting humanitarian access, expelling senior U.N humanitarian officials, collaborating with or turning a blind eye to atrocities committed by Eritrean forces, allowing harm to civilians by non-federal forces, and engaging in IHL violations and human rights abuses. Considering that violence remains rampant, humanitarian access remains limited, and the conflict is being defined increasingly in ethnic terms, it is unlikely that any changes on the ground will occur in the near future that might reinstate the full extent of U.S. SSA. In October 2021, the House Foreign Affairs Committee passed an amended version of [H. Res. 445](#), introduced by Rep. Karen Bass, condemning human rights abuses in the country and, among other things, calling for an end to hostilities, the free passage of humanitarian aid, and an investigation into atrocities. In November, Sens. Menendez, Risch, and Coons introduced the [Ethiopia Peace and Democracy Promotion Act](#) of 2021, mandating the immediate suspension of all security assistance to Ethiopia and the imposition of targeted sanctions against individual actors who “undermine attempts to resolve,...profit ...or provide material support to any entity that is

party to the civil war.” In May, the State Department announced [visa restrictions](#) on Ethiopian and Eritrean security forces amid reports of atrocities. In September, U.S. President Biden authorized [sanctions](#) against individuals engaged in the conflict in northern Ethiopia and contributing to “obstruction of the delivery or distribution of, or access to, humanitarian assistance” or the “targeting of civilians through the commission of acts of violence,” among other acts. In [August](#), the U.S. Treasury sanctioned the EDF Chief of Staff. In [November](#), it sanctioned four entities—including the EDF—and two individuals for “undermining the stability and integrity of the Ethiopian state.”

Ethiopia also maintains strong political and security ties with the Arab Gulf, notably the [United Arab Emirates](#), as well as with [Turkey](#) and [China](#), all of which could feasibly supplant portions of Washington's diminished security assistance. At the time of writing, the degree of security cooperation that Addis maintains with these partners, or the calculations they may make regarding supporting the Abiy government or any other armed groups in the country, remain unclear.

Table 1. Top Programs in Ethiopia's U.S. Security Assistance Partnership, FY2000-FY2020

U.S. Security Assistance Program	Total Value of Assistance, FY2000-FY2020
Section 1206 Train and Equip Authority	\$67,383,651
Foreign Military Financing	\$25,966,000
Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund	\$18,676,611
International Military Education and Training	\$12,089,000
International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement	\$6,771,000
Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs	\$4,680,000
Peacekeeping Operations	\$4,000,000
Excess Defense Articles	\$3,620,504
Cooperative Threat Reduction	\$3,295,670
Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program	\$897,467
Regional Centers for Security Studies	\$897,061
Non-Security Assistance - Unified Command	\$431,802
Misc Dept of State & Dept of Defense Non-Security Assistance	\$150,000
Section 1004 Counter-Drug Assistance	\$78,000
Aviation Leadership Program	\$26,259
Developing Country Combined Exercise Program	\$12,000

Protection of Civilians Background

Conflict Background

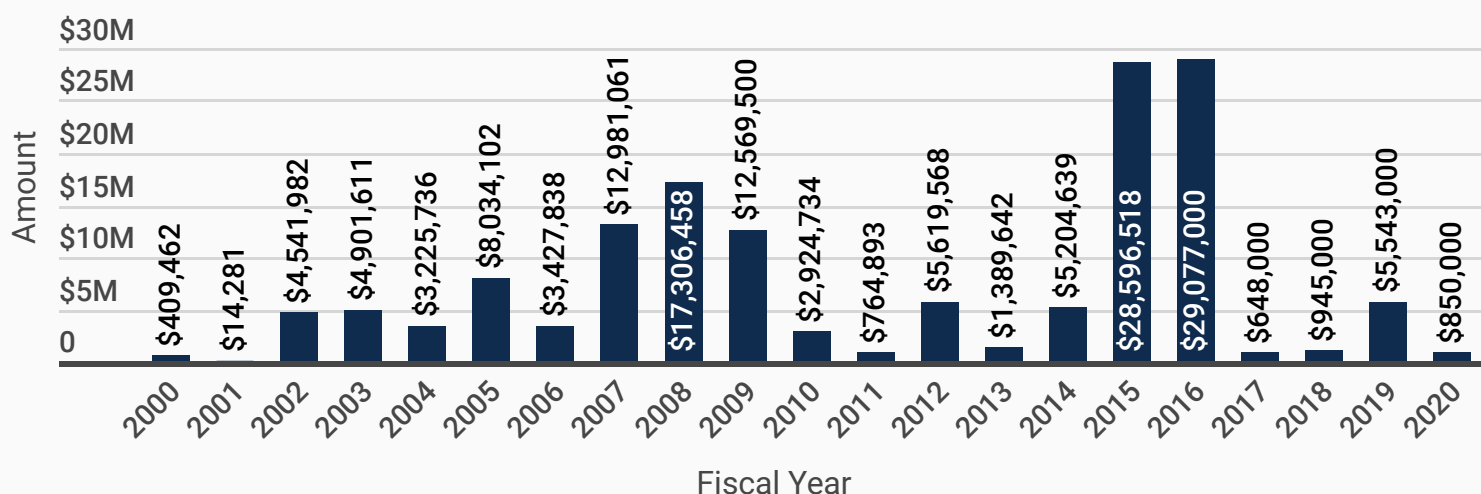
Prior to 2018, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office, the TPLF had been the [dominant political power](#) in Ethiopia for nearly three decades within the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition. In November 2020, tensions between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and central government escalated, and the government [alleged](#) that TPLF forces attacked the Ethiopian military's Northern Command in Tigray. This was [followed](#) by ENDF military operations against the TPLF, in which federal forces partnered with Eritrean military forces, Amhara special forces, and other regional Ethiopian militias. [All parties](#) reportedly engaged in a high level of violence against civilians, resulting in significant harm, damage to infrastructure, displacement, and a massive increase in humanitarian need coupled with extremely challenging humanitarian access constraints. Multiple leading human rights organizations and the U.S. Government have alleged [crimes against humanity](#) and [ethnic cleansing](#) throughout the conflict.

Today, the humanitarian situation in Tigray "remains increasingly [dire](#)." Moreover, the spillover of the conflict into Amhara and Afar regions is further increasing the need for humanitarian assistance in those areas, although access there remains restricted. While the U.N. reports that humanitarians are able to access around 75% of Tigray, an [October 2021 U.N. report](#) recognizes that the inability to access sufficient quantities of fuel and cash is severely hindering the response in the region. Because of the security situation, areas bordering Eritrea in the far north, western, and southern parts of the North-Western Zone remain inaccessible. Ahead of the first anniversary of the conflict, the TPLF made significant territorial gains in other regions of the country and [secured partnerships](#) with other armed groups such as the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA/OLA-Shene), which has reportedly caused [violence against civilians](#). As of [early November 2021](#), the TPLF reportedly advanced to positions within only 200 miles north of Addis Ababa. While the implications of this latest offensive remain to be seen, [unpublished contingency plans](#) being developed by UNHCR estimate that hundreds of thousands of displaced Ethiopians may flee to bordering nations.

Civilian Harm in Conflict

Data on civilian harm in Ethiopia is extremely limited and, in the public domain, incomplete. Continued [suspension of telecommunications](#), coupled with significant access constraints to the Tigray region, have [hindered independent monitors and journalists](#) seeking to document and report on the conflict and human rights conditions in Tigray. The following is based on analysis of publicly available information on the conduct of hostilities and behavior of forces, drawn from a range of media sources, international organizations, government sources, and civil society actors on the ground that have alleged these incidents.

Figure 1. Total U.S. Security Assistance for Ethiopia, FY2000-FY2020*



Civilians in Ethiopia, and Tigray in particular, have been subject to a staggering range of threats related to the conduct of hostilities. On September 13, 2021, U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet addressed the U.N. Human Rights Council on “multiple and severe reports of alleged gross violations of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law” committed by all parties to the conflict in Tigray. It is critical to note that the attribution of harm to specific parties in the conflict remains a consistent challenge. Identifying what activities the Ethiopian Government forces and TPLF have engaged in is complex and inconsistently documented.

Civilian Casualties

In February 2021, opposition leaders in Tigray estimated that over 50,000 people had been killed within the first three months of the [conflict](#). However, it remains undocumented how many civilian casualties the ENDF or TPLF are responsible for. There have been numerous [incidents](#) documenting alleged civilian massacres, including the reported murder of [182 civilians](#) by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces in Abiy Addi in February 2021.

Use of Explosive Weapons

The ENDF is also allegedly responsible for several attacks involving explosive devices which caused civilian harm. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) reported the following information on Ethiopia:

- On June 22, 2021, an airstrike by Ethiopian forces struck a market in Togoga, in the Tigray region, killing 64 civilians and injuring 180. It remains unclear who the intended target was.
- On November 16, 2020, the Government of Ethiopia was responsible for an airstrike in an urban residential area in Mekelle, in the Tigray region. The attack killed one civilian near a stadium and caused minor damage to homes.
- In addition to these two examples, there were a further 18 attacks involving explosive weapons that were committed by unknown actors between 2017 and September 2021. Each attack caused between one and 158 civilian casualties—some were likely perpetrated by Ethiopian Government forces.

Additionally, per [medical personnel](#), a government air campaign in Tigray in late October 2021 killed [at least 16](#) people and injured 55. While officials repeatedly denied targeting civilian facilities, Tigray forces claimed that buildings such as factories and a clinic were targeted, and witnesses in Mekelle said that homes had been demolished. In November 2020, ENDF shelling [struck near schools](#) during military operations. One such incident occurred when the Tsegaye Berhe secondary school in the city of Adwa was hit by a rocket, leaving classrooms littered with smashed computers, chairs, and books. In March 2021, the school had not yet been restored and [remained roofless](#).

Damage and Disruption to Civilian Objects and Critical Infrastructure

According to a May 2021 report from Human Rights Watch, several Mekelle residents stated that Ethiopian forces began using the local Atse Yohannes school as a base in December 2020. They vacated the school after occupying the building for several weeks, looting computers, plasma screens, and food from the facility when they left. Ethiopian soldiers reoccupied the school in February 2021, remaining there for a further [three months](#). Beginning in February 2021, soldiers posted sentries at the school gate and built fortifications around the building.

According to Human Rights Watch, one resident noted that they “saw different women taken inside. Sometimes they would stay two, three, or five days...They appeared beaten and were crying as they would leave. No one could ask the women what happened to [them](#).” Once Ethiopian forces left, Mekelle residents found the school in disrepair. There was significant damage to classrooms, destruction to electrical installations, water pipes, and other property damage. One teacher remarked that “The school won’t be functional even for next year, because of the damage. Everything was taken.” Ethiopian soldiers also left hateful and vulgar anti-Tigrayan graffiti on the [walls](#).

In addition to disruptions to one-stop health centers, non-payment of salaries to health extension workers, and the appropriation of ambulances by armed actors, a March 2021 [MSF report](#) found that around 20 of 106 health facilities the organization visited had been or were occupied by armed actors. They observed significant damage and looting, resulting in a lack of medical services for vulnerable people. Per MSF, 30% of these facilities had been damaged, 73% had been looted, and 87% were no longer fully functioning. ENDF forces allegedly occupied the hospital in Abiy Addi until early March, making it inaccessible to the general population, and reportedly took five ambulance when [they fled the town of Lalibela](#).

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

SGBV has been particularly egregious during the conflict in Tigray, with rape being allegedly used as a weapon of war. In an August 2021 report, Amnesty International reported that Ethiopian Government forces and associated forces in the region, like the Eritrean Defense Forces and Amhara forces, subjected Tigrayan women and girls to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation, and other forms of [torture](#). Survivors recalled being raped in front of family members, including children. Women stated that they were forced to watch other women being raped, indicating that sexual violence is being used to terrorize and humiliate the victims and other members of their respective ethnic group. Survivors also reported that soldiers frequently used ethnic slurs, insults, threats, and degrading comments during these [attacks](#). Many survivors of sexual violence reported testing positive for [sexually transmitted diseases](#).

Between February and April 2021 alone, health facilities in Tigray registered 1,288 cases of SGBV. This figure likely represents a small fraction of assaults during this time, owing to a lack of reporting. Women also reported having “large nails, gravel, and other types of metal and plastic shrapnel inserted into their vaginas, causing lasting and possibly irreparable [damage](#).” It is unclear what percentage of these attacks can be attributed directly to Ethiopian Government forces. 113 women and girls who sought health services for rape between November 2020 and June 2021 at the One-Stop Center in Shire [identified their attackers](#) as members of the Eritrean forces, Fano militia, or ENDF.

TPLF forces have also been accused of committing acts of SGBV. Between August 12 and August 21, when TPLF forces took control of the town of Nifas Mewcha in the Amhara region, more than [70 women](#) reported that they were sexually assaulted. Sixteen women from the town spoke to Amnesty International to disclose their assaults. The survivors recalled being attacked at gunpoint, robbed, and physically and verbally assaulted. Fourteen of the 16 women also reported being gang raped. Survivors also reported being subjected to degrading ethnic slurs. One survivor recalled her attacker saying, “Amhara has massacred our people (Tigrayans), the Federal Defense forces have raped my wife, [now we can rape you as we want](#).”

Use of Child Soldiers and Irregular Forces

In addition to attacks on civilians and SGBV, there have been some reports of TPLF recruiting and using child soldiers in the conflict. Teenagers have, for instance, [reported](#) being taken by force in Mekelle and sent to the Afar region to fight in the war. The TPLF [denied](#) that teenagers were forcibly recruited, claiming they instead joined their ranks voluntarily in response to abuses by Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Amhara forces. In its response to the November [OHCHR-EHRC](#) report, the Ethiopian Government claimed an “extensive use of child soldiers” along with killings, displacement, and sexual violence committed by TPLF forces in Afar and Amhara regions—noting that the temporal and spatial limitations of the investigation have not allowed for an accounting of these abuses. The New York Times described “highly motivated young recruits” and a “scrappy force of local Tigrayan recruits” which “scored a cascade of battlefield victories” against the ENDF and its allies. Following military advances by the TPLF after the summer of 2021, Prime Minister Abiy called on “all capable Ethiopians” to fight the Tigrayan forces, raising concerns that individuals with no formal military training would be involved in the conduct of hostilities. While there remains limited evidence of forced recruitment of child soldiers by the conflict parties, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission noted in a September statement to the U.N. Human Rights Council that “soldiers or fighters of all parties to the conflict and their affiliated groups are credibly implicated with violence against civilians and civilian infrastructures including sexual violence and use of child soldiers.”

Food Insecurity

Food scarcity in Tigray is becoming increasingly concerning after Ethiopian Government forces and allies in the Tigray region, notably Eritrean and Amhara forces, have deliberately burned crops and occupied and looted homes. In Tigray, 400,000 people

currently live in human-made famine-like [conditions](#). According to UNICEF, 160,000 children under the age of five suffer from severe acute malnutrition in Tigray, and this figure is expected to rise significantly over the next [12 months](#). Moreover, as a result of the Ethiopian Government's de facto blockade, medicine, food, cash, and fuel are all but impossible to transport into the region. In this way, the Ethiopian Government is directly inhibiting civilian populations from receiving essential, life-saving humanitarian aid.

Looting

Ethiopian Government forces, the TPLF, and other actors in the conflict have been accused of looting during the conduct of their operations, with homes, schools, and hospitals in Tigray being specifically targeted. An Ethiopian Human Rights Commission investigation revealed that, in November of 2020, residents of Humera reported widespread looting of houses and businesses by a number of actors, including ENDF forces. TPLF forces have also been accused of looting civilian homes. After being sexually assaulted, one Amhara woman reported that after TPLF soldiers took her property, she was "not able to [run] my business as [before since I lost all I had](#)."

Enforced Disappearances

There are widespread reports of enforced disappearances by Government forces—the targeted killings of young men being a particularly concerning trend. Ethiopian security forces have been accused of stopping and arresting Tigrayans in public places, in their homes, and at their workplaces. They have also been accused of conducting warrantless searches. Laetitia Bader, Horn of Africa director at Human Rights Watch, states that "Ethiopian security forces...have carried out rampant arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa." The situation concerning forcibly disappeared peoples "is exacerbated because detainees rely on their relatives to provide them with adequate food, clothes, and other essentials that the government does not provide." Recent reports from September 2021 highlight examples of additional enforced disappearances, mass arrests, and alleged ethnic cleansing that raise significant concerns about the lack of access to bear witness to potential mass atrocity crimes.

Detention

There are also serious concerns about the manner in which Ethiopian Government forces detain and harass Tigrayans, as "federal police held 10 Ethiopian journalists and media workers...incommunicado for nearly a month...the police also held a Tigrayan political activist and an aid worker [incommunicado](#)." "In November and December 2020, the authorities arbitrarily arrested and dismissed from their jobs Tigrayans working in the government security and civil services, profiled Tigrayans during systematic ID checks, and search homes without warrants, in many cases repeatedly. These actions have restricted Tigrayans' freedom of movement throughout the duration of the [conflict](#)." Additionally, there are examples of ENDF intimidating and threatening detainees and their relatives. In Addis Ababa, one detainee said "many of the officers who were in the compound [of our detention center] were insulting me...they were using abusive words that are directly attached with [identity](#)." With respect to harassment, in one example, "seven Tigrayan owners of small restaurants, bars, or hotels said that Addis Ababa police often accompanied by officials from the Addis Ababa City Administration Trade and Industry Bureau, shut down their premises without any notice...these closures cause financial strain with payments due for salaries, rent, and [taxes](#)."

The state of emergency, which came into effect on November 4, has facilitated a new wave of arbitrary arrests and mass detentions of Tigrayans, with victims [allegedly numbering hundreds](#) and possibly thousands—including American and British citizens.

Displacement

As of September 2021 there were [2.1 million](#) internally displaced people in Tigray, 250,000 people displaced in Amhara, and more than 110,000 in the Afar region. However, displacement figures are thought to be [conservative](#) given current access restrictions and lack of ability to confirm true numbers. It is estimated that [hundreds of thousands](#) have sought refuge in the region's main cities. Clashes between returning internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and local communities have also led to secondary displacements in particular [areas](#). While some stay within their communities, others are reportedly sheltering in overcrowded public sites, like schools. Specific examples of ENDF or TPLF forcibly displacing people are not available; however, the constant fighting is the prim-

any driver of displacement, so ENDF or TPLF operations, whether offensive or defensive, continue to contribute to this alarming number. Additionally, there have been [allegations](#) of Amhara authorities and allied forces in western Tigray rounding Tigrayans up or ordering them to leave their communities.

Humanitarian Access

The conflict in Tigray has also been marred by humanitarian access constraints and restrictions affecting the delivery of aid. On September 30, the Government of Ethiopia ordered the expulsion of seven U.N. officials, including senior humanitarian [officials](#) in the region. In November, Ethiopian authorities [arrested](#) 16 local U.N. staff and dependents and 72 World Food Programme (WFP) drivers. In addition, an October 22 government airstrike in Mekelle forced a U.N. humanitarian plane to [abort a landing in the city](#), leading to the [immediate suspension](#) of U.N. Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights to Mekelle. Governmental actions on the ground in Tigray have caused the situation “to deteriorate due to the [continued restrictions](#) imposed on the delivery of humanitarian supplies into the region via the route through Afar (Semera-Abala-Mekelle).” Trucks containing humanitarian aid going into Tigray [have not been returning from the region](#), sparking allegations that these vehicles have been appropriated by the TPLF for their own logistics. In August 2021, the Ethiopian Government expelled MSF-Holland and the Norwegian Refugee Council, citing “public advocacy” and lack of required administrative paperwork. It also expelled the Al Maktoum Foundation for reasons including “[mismanagement of the budget](#).”³

In addition, there is a serious shortage of funding for medical facilities. An estimated \$6.5 million is required each week to sustain humanitarian operations in Ethiopia, provided by either a functioning banking system or by government approval to allow the required quantity of cash to enter Tigray. Since July 2021, only [\\$6.2 million](#) has been cleared or dispatched to [Tigray](#), and the month-long suspension of UNHAS flights to Mekelle ([these resumed on November 24](#)) [has limited the availability of cash](#). Moreover, the Government of Ethiopia has restricted the amount of money officials on these flights can bring to Tigray.

In September 2021, [USAID alleged](#) that TPLF forces had raided emergency relief warehouses in the Amhara region, and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has accused the TPLF of [blocking aid](#) from reaching the Afar region as well.

Government of Ethiopia/ENDF Policies and Practices on PoC and Minimizing Civilian Harm

While this section, like other parts of the fact sheet, focuses mainly on the current government of Ethiopia, it is worth noting that contemporary national policies on the protection of civilians (PoC) are in large part the product of commitments and agreements made by the former TPLF-dominated governments, which reigned from the 1990s until Abiy came to power in 2018. Policies of the current iteration of the TPLF are not currently available or in the public domain.

International Legal Obligations/Policies

Ethiopia is a party to the four [Geneva Conventions](#) and the [first](#) and [second](#) Additional Protocols. The nation is a signatory of the [third Additional Protocol](#), and is not a party to the [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#). In addition, Ethiopia is a party to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#), the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#), the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#), and the [Kampala Convention](#) (African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa). However, while Ethiopia is a party to the [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), it has not ratified the [Optional Protocol to the Convention](#), and the nation is not a party to the [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#).

Regarding national implementation of general IHL principles, per Section 8 of the [Defense Forces Administration Council of Ministers Regulation No. 460/2019](#), “Major Obligations” for ENDF troops include “car[ri]ng...for and treat[ing] war prisoners with humanity” and “protect[ing] and prevent[ing] from attack institutions immune from attack under international humanitarian law.” The ENDF’s Standing Rules of Engagement (2007) states that [civilians](#), “[places resided by civilians](#),” and “[things decisive to the survival of the civilian community](#),” do not constitute military objectives. Ethiopia’s [2004 Criminal Code](#) also contains a provision (Article 270) prohibiting the organization/order of and engagement in war crimes against the civilian population, including “killings, torture or inh-

human treatment;" "wilful [sic] reduction to starvation;" "the compulsory movement or dispersion of population, its systemic deportation, transfer or detention in concentration camps;" "compulsion to acts of prostitution, debauchery or rape;" "the destruction or appropriation of property;" "the confiscation, destruction, removal, rendering useless or appropriation of property such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, health centres, [and] schools;" and the "passing of sentences and carrying out of executions without previous judgment produced by a regularly constituted Court which affords all the judicial guarantees." In addition, Article 273 lists "looting, piracy, pillage, economic spoliation or the unlawful destruction or removal of property on the pretext of military necessity" as "punishable in accordance with Article 270."

Protection of Children and Education

Ethiopia is a party to multiple treaties that pertain to the protection of children, including the [Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour](#) (prohibits the "forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict") and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC) and its [Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict](#). In addition, Ethiopia is a party to the [Protocol on Trafficking in Persons](#) (associated with the [U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#)), an [Optional Protocol to the CRC on Child Trade, Prostitution, and Pornography](#), and the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child \(ACRWC\)](#), all of which include provisions that protect children from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

However, Ethiopia has not endorsed the [Safe Schools Declaration](#), an intergovernmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict, despite participating in the Third International Conference on Safe Schools in 2019. In this regard, Ethiopia has not taken comprehensive action at the multilateral level to strengthen the protection of education from attacks.

On the national level, Ethiopia has enacted multiple provisions related to the protection of children, but gaps in policy remain. Ethiopia's 2004 Criminal Code and the [Defense Forces Administration Council of Ministers Regulation No. 460/2019](#) both [prohibit](#) state military recruitment of individuals under eighteen years old to "take part in" armed conflict. Article 35.2 of Proclamation No. 1176/2020 also associates some sort of criminalization with the recruitment of children by violent non-state actors, but it does not appear to be explicitly criminalized. In addition, domestic law forbids "acts of prostitution, debauchery or rape" against civilians in armed conflict, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and the use of children in illicit activities. As for other provisions, Ethiopia formulated a "comprehensive" National Children's Policy in 2017, but the document contains little directly pertaining to conflict. While the Constitution of the FDRE implies the right to education, it does not appear that the government has implemented any conflict-specific education measures in recent years.

Arms Control

Ethiopia is a state party to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), but has not signed the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) or the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM). However, the nation has supported U.N. General Assembly resolutions encouraging states to join and implement both conventions ([A/RES/48/79](#) [1993] and [A/RES/75/62](#) [2020], respectively), and Ethiopia was one of 17 African states that issued the 2016 '[Addis Ababa Commitment on Universalization and Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions](#).' Ethiopia also attended CCM intercessional meetings in 2012-2014 and [participated as an observer](#) in the Fifth CCW Review Conference in 2016.

In May 2021, the Government of Ethiopia appealed to the international community for support in its efforts to eradicate anti-personnel mines that remain in the region from previous armed conflicts. Within this request, the Government of Ethiopia has asked for military equipment and financial and technical assistance. According to *The Ethiopia Reporter*, "although the exact level of mine contamination is not known, a document Ethiopia submitted to the UN in March 2019 showed 35 confirmed hazardous areas covering an area of 6,304,538 sq.m and 226 suspected hazardous areas covering 1,050,045,013 [meter-square](#)."

On the national level, Article 276 of the [2004 Penal Code](#) punishes "whoever uses, or orders to be used, against the enemy any means or method of combat expressly forbidden by Ethiopian law or international conventions to which Ethiopia is a party." Ethiopia has also enacted a proclamation implementing the [CWC](#) and [claims](#) to "neither possess [a] chemical weapon nor [a] chem-

ical weapon industry," but has not established legislation concerning other relevant arms control treaties. The nation to implement Article 5 of the APMB by 2025 (its new [deadline](#)).

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)

Ethiopia is a state party to the Convention on the [Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#), the Convention on the Right of the Child's [Optional Protocol on Child Trade, Prostitution and Pornography](#), the [Protocol on Trafficking in Persons](#), the [Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others](#), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the [Maputo Protocol](#) (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa), which include preventative provisions with regards to conflict-related SGBV. The nation is also a member of the [WPS Focal Points Network](#), which "serves as a cross-regional forum and provides space in which to share experiences and best practices so as to advance the implementation" of WPS-focused Security Council resolutions. However, while the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) [has a Regional Action Plan](#) for the implementation of the WPS agenda, Ethiopia [does not have](#) a National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325. In April 2019, the nation [committed to developing](#) its first NAP on WPS, and was [still working](#) with IGAD to "devise a concrete roadmap" towards an NAP or "equivalent instrument" as of July 2021.

Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) Declaration Stance

In 2017, Ethiopia participated in a regional conference in Maputo, which produced a [communiqué](#) in which the nation and 18 other African states jointly committed to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. It does not appear that Ethiopia was actively involved in any of the three rounds of EWIPA political declaration consultations (2019-2021).

Domestic Policies and Practices

Transparency and Accountability

In a January 18 [monitoring report](#), the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a state-appointed but independent body, became the first government entity to specifically acknowledge possible ENDF crimes against civilians as part of the Tigray crisis, reporting accounts of multiple killings and beatings due to perceived status as TPLF informants (a charge of which victims and their families believed they were "wrongly accused") and looting of houses and businesses. On March 23, the organization released a [report](#) on preliminary findings from its investigation into grave human rights violations committed in Axum in November 2020, which included allegations of civilian casualties from military airstrikes, the looting of hospitals by some ENDF and Eritrean troops (to the extent that an eyewitness at one hospital reported "Many people died for lack of adequate treatment"), and damage to civilian property by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops. Notably, the report also concluded that Eritrean soldiers killed over 100 civilians in Axum on November 28 and 29.

While the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth and the Ministry of Defence formed a [joint task force](#) in January to investigate allegations of conflict-related SGBV in Tigray, which [concluded](#) the following month that rape had occurred "conclusively and without a doubt," the findings did not mention the ENDF. Government implication of the ENDF and allied forces in crimes against civilians only came in March, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed [acknowledged](#) for the first time that Eritrean troops may have committed war crimes in Tigray, and [stated](#) that "Any member of the national defence who committed rape and looting against our Tigrayan sisters will be held accountable." On March 3, after having [previously played down](#) reports of the killings in Axum and ENDF-perpetrated civilian casualties, Ethiopia claimed that it was investigating "credible allegations of atrocities and human rights abuses" in Tigray.

The first indication of concrete punitive action against ENDF soldiers came on May 21, when the Attorney General published a [document](#) stating that three ENDF troops had been convicted and sentenced for "rape" and one had been convicted and sentenced for "killing a civilian." The summary also noted that military prosecutors had pressed charges against 28 soldiers "suspected of killing civilians in a situation where there was no military necessity" and 25 troops "suspected of committing acts of sexual violence and rape." No details about specific allegations were provided.

The OHCHR–EHRC investigation report released on November 3 revealed more information about legal action taken up to (what appears to be) August 2021. According to the [document](#), 14 soldiers have been convicted for grave rights violations (seven for SGBV and seven for unlawful or extrajudicial killings of civilians). All were sentenced to prison terms over two years long (seven years and above), which would prohibit them from re-joining the ENDF in the future. At the time of the GoE's response, three trials were pending for claims of SGBV, and "several" allegations of SGBV and extrajudicial killings were under investigation. The Attorney General's office also found that 124 civilians were killed in Axum in November 2020 (six by the ENDF and 118 by Eritrean soldiers), but investigations were still underway as of August 2021.

The GoE also plans to take more measures to increase transparency and accountability and [complement](#) established "clear monitoring and evaluation guidelines that include remedial measures when violations of international norms occur during [military] operations." In the OHCHR–EHRC report, the government indicated that it eventually intends to disclose trial records to the public and claimed that it had decided to establish a Special Prosecutor's Office (along with the creation of a dedicated bench in the Judiciary) to handle cases of alleged rights violations associated with the conflict in northern Ethiopia (see p. 87–89 of the report for a breakdown of Ethiopia's civilian and military justice systems). The GoE also stated that it plans to roll out programs for the provision of psychological and medical treatment to victims concurrently with regular and military criminal prosecution procedures, is at "advanced stages of preparation" to establish a transitional justice system, and intends to launch a "reparations scheme." In addition, an inter-ministerial task force responsible for "oversee[ing] redress and accountability measures in response to human rights violations committed in the context of the conflict in northern Ethiopia" adopted a "comprehensive strategy and action plan for the implementation of recommendations" in the OHCHR–EHRC report on [November 29](#). The task force will now "operationalize" a "specialized joint civil-military investigative and prosecutorial unit" to ensure accountability.

While these investigations may facilitate accountability for certain alleged ENDF abuses and violations in the conflict, the Ethiopian Government has not publicly accepted any responsibility for multiple claims of grave human rights violations. Despite [reports](#) of a civilian "massacre" from an ENDF airstrike in Togoga, the military [only acknowledged](#) combatant fatalities, claiming that the fighters in Togoga were dressed in civilian clothes. Reports of a "massacre" in Mahibere Dego by Ethiopian troops have also [yielded a dismissive response](#), with the Prime Minister's Office saying in response to CNN's original April 2021 investigation that "social media posts and claims cannot be taken as evidence." The GoE has denied allegations of ENDF shelling (and associated fatalities) in Mekelle; indicated that the video of a "[massacre](#)" in Debre Abay was "[taken out of context](#)," only acknowledged the "[massacre](#)" in Bora in a general response to allegations of extrajudicial killings in the OHCHR–EHRC report; and has not commented on a February 2021 "massacre" in Abi Addi. In addition, the GoE denied claims of military use and pillage of Tigray schools in the OHCHR–EHRC report, has not issued statements about reported rights abuses concerning [indiscriminate artillery attacks](#) in Humera and Shire, and has [denied](#) targeting civilians in government airstrikes in late October 2021. The OHCHR–EHRC Joint Investigation Team (JIT) expressed concerns that investigations conducted by government institutions "do not match the scope and breadth of the violations it [the JIT] has identified," may not "sufficiently comply with international standards, including with respect to transparency," and "may not be sufficiently addressing issues of command responsibility," and reported GoE [interference](#) with the OHCHR–EHRC probe and the classification of alleged ENDF perpetrators of SGBV and extrajudicial killings as "a [small number of rogue actors](#)" suggest an unwillingness to address more systemic issues.

Before the Tigray crisis, Ethiopia did address some incidents of civilian harm. For example, in March 2018, the government's Ethiopia News Agency (ENA) [acknowledged](#) that Ethiopian soldiers mistakenly killed nine civilians and injured 12 others as the result of "wrong information" in a counter-insurgency operation against the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The government claimed that it had launched an official investigation and that the accused soldiers had been detained and would be tried in military court.

However, overall transparency and accountability surrounding allegations of rights abuses by the ENDF/federal security forces prior to the northern Ethiopia conflict also appears deficient. Security forces (including the ENDF) have long been able to operate with relative impunity despite being implicated in numerous reports of torture and extrajudicial killings, to the extent that alleged torturers (including former soldiers) "[routinely laughed off](#)" questions from Human Rights Watch about fears of being held accountable for their actions. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's advent in 2018 was thought to suggest the beginning of a culture of accountability, as he acknowledged the existence of torture in detention, claimed that his administration would adopt a zero-tolerance policy, [executed high-profile arrests](#) of 63 individuals (including military personnel) on charges of rights abuses and corr-

uption, and facilitated the closure of multiple notorious prisons. However, Ethiopia has still not taken necessary steps to systemically tackle and ensure accountability for historical security force abuses, and the government has not been sufficiently transparent about troubling reports of violations committed after Abiy came to power.⁶ Some more pervasive ENDF-focused violations outside of/in addition to torture and extrajudicial killings that appear to have received insufficient government attention include “alleged unlawful killings” of 14 civilians by members of its AMISOM contingent in July 2016, which do not seem to have been [investigated](#), and “serious violations of international humanitarian law and other serious abuses by Ethiopian military forces” in Gambella (2003-2004), the Somali Region (2007-2008), and Somalia (2006-2008), which [have not been subjected](#) to independent inquiries.

Humanitarian Notification System for Deconfliction (HNS4D) and U.N.-led Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord)

The Ethiopian Humanitarian Country Team (EHCT), the OCHA-led “strategic body that guides international humanitarian response” in the nation, adopted [Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination Guidance](#) on March 13, 2019. The civil-military coordination structures established in the document included the OCHA U.N.-CMCoord Focal Point, which was tasked with “maintain[ing] a relationship with armed actors to ensure a principled interaction with the humanitarian community,” the OCHA Humanitarian Access Focal Point, the EHCT, and the Federal Level Operations Center (FOC), which was to be located in the Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation and bring together “key” humanitarian actors and officers from the Military, Federal, and regional Police. When the conflict first began in 2020, humanitarian organizations explored the possibility of standing up a HNS4D. U.N. agencies coordinated within the ecosystem and with government actors and determined that the real need was for an information sharing and coordination planning platform, and “HNS” was used as a generic reference. This was before the formal agreement (to improve access and coordination) between the Minister of Peace and the Humanitarian Coordinator came into effect. What was ultimately developed was an information-sharing mechanism that operationalized the formal agreement, which was also aimed at bringing together relevant Humanitarian Country Team and government representatives to share information, coordinate planning, and resolve any existing and future operational issues. This mechanism was established in early 2021 and continues to function in the fall of 2021.

An OCHA Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report issued as recently as [June 10](#) mentioned an expressed need to strengthen civil-military coordination, a task for which OCHA [announced that it had deployed](#) five additional staff in a May 19 update. [June 29 testimony](#) before the House Foreign Affairs Committee by the Assistant to the Administrator of USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) echoed the aforementioned call.

Overall Civil-Military Relations; Engagement With Humanitarian Actors

In the years prior to the Tigray crisis, the ENDF attended multiple training events with major humanitarian organizations. In the first half of 2016, the ENDF [organized](#) three training seminars with the ICRC for 110 military legal advisors, and ENDF officers in AMISOM [participated](#) in a workshop with the AMISOM Humanitarian Unit and the Civil Military Working Group on “facilitating humanitarian access.” In 2019, the ICRC [trained 40 officers](#) from the ENDF’s Special Operations Force on basic principles of IHL and international human rights standards (October), and OCHA Ethiopia [presented](#) on humanitarian CMCoord at the ENDF Peace Support Centre (December). The ICRC and OCHA Ethiopia also convened meetings with the ENDF in 2020, [training 41 army commanders](#) on IHL in February and [holding](#) a UN-CMCoord workshop in March at the ENDF Peace Training Centre to, among other things, “facilitate the rolling-out of” the CMCoord guidelines approved in March 2019.

However, ENDF engagement with humanitarian actors at an operational level since the start of the northern Ethiopia crisis has been less constructive. The OHCHR-EHRC Joint Investigation Team found that access restrictions (including ENDF checkpoints) have “impeded or delayed” the delivery of humanitarian assistance to parts of the Tigray and Amhara regions. Additionally, Insecurity Insight [documented](#) eight incidents of ENDF violence against aid operations from November 2020 up to June 2021, and allegations concerning military occupation and confiscation of ICT equipment at U.N. agency offices even made their way into the [July 1 OCHA Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report](#).

As for TPLF/TDF engagement with humanitarian actors in the northern Ethiopia conflict, the OHCHR-EHRC investigation [report](#) found that Tigray forces “were implicated in setting up road blockades that resulted in delay of humanitarian relief” for up to three

days at a time. In addition, in an August 30 interview with the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, the Mission Director of USAID to Ethiopia [alleged](#) that TPLF fighters had looted aid warehouses in the Amhara region, and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed [has accused](#) the TPLF of blocking humanitarian assistance to Mekelle through the Afar region.

Good Practice and Lessons Learned on PoC, e.g., Precautionary Measures Taken in Hostilities

Ethiopia has taken some measures that point toward 'good practice' on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. For example, per a May 28 [Human Rights Watch report](#), the Education Bureau appears to collect some data to track military use of and damage to schools (although authorities have not been able to conduct assessments in towns occupied by Eritrean and Amhara forces). In addition, Ethiopia issued warnings to Tigrayan civilians on November [6](#), [22](#), and [26](#) in advance of planned attacks.⁷ However, the government's aggressive rhetoric" (telling residents to "save themselves" or face "no mercy") inspired statements from [Amnesty International](#) and the [OHCHR](#) reminding conflict parties of their IHL obligations to protect civilians.

The GoE's [response](#) to the OHCHR–EHRC investigation provides more information about ENDF policies and practices concerning PoC. "Standard" precautionary measures (in addition to the warnings mentioned above) reportedly include "cautious assessment of military targets and their proximity to civilian areas" and "the conduct of operations at times that are believed to be optimal to avoid or minimize collateral damage." The following excerpt mentions PoC principles enshrined in a RoE document:

"The consecutive pocketbooks prepared by the ENDF include instructions on the use of force by soldiers. In all three of the pocketbooks carried by every soldier, one of the core values of the ENDF that cannot be breached is the duty to protect people with disabilities, the elderly, women, and children, among others. It further indicates violations of the rules and crimes committed in the field will not be tolerated and entail liability to be tried in military courts."

According to the GoE, the booklet lists basic duties of servicemembers, such as the protection of civilians and other "pertinent norms" of IHL. The GoE also claimed to have given (prior to the conflict) "continuous training" to military and security personnel on principles of IHL, IHRL, and "other norms applicable to the context of an armed conflict," and indicated that the ENDF had taken measures to "avoid recurrence" of SGBV (on which the ENDF has a zero-tolerance policy) in the future.

In addition, the Ethiopian Government has developed policies to address conflict-related internal displacement. In 2019, the Ministry of Peace and the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) ["adopted and began to implement"](#) the Strategic Plan to Address Internal Displacement, which was [intended](#) to "ensure the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return/relocation of conflict-displaced population in seven regions and one administrative city," as well as a Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan. Government-led IDP return operations began in May of the same year, and most IDP sites and camps had [reportedly been dismantled](#) by the end of that month. However, in the Tigray crisis, fighting between the ENDF-led Coalition forces and Tigrayan forces has spurred displacement, highlighting the gap between policy and practice under certain circumstances. With regard to TPLF actions, Tigray forces showed indications of 'good practice' amid hostilities in late October through measures like the issuance of multiple calls (see [here](#) and [here](#)) for Dessie and Kombolcha residents to stay indoors and the closure of Kombolcha Airport to civilian traffic. The TPLF also claimed in a tweet that its forces were trying to avoid street fighting in the two cities.

Civilian Harm Mitigation Policy

Ethiopia does not appear to have a specific civilian harm mitigation policy. More details about Ethiopian national policies and practices that relate to customary IHL rules are available [here](#).

Key Issues in Security Partnership

While information is unavailable as to the extent that the protection of civilians has been prioritized and implemented as part of U.S. capacity-building efforts in its security sector assistance to Ethiopia, the level of abuses and atrocities caused by the ENDF, its allies, and TPLF forces suggest a more systemic and strategic failure by the U.S. to promote political will and military leadership in preventing and mitigating civilian harm.

While information is unavailable as to the extent that the protection of civilians has been prioritized and implemented as part of U.S. capacity-building efforts in its security sector assistance to Ethiopia, the level of abuses and atrocities caused by the ENDF, its allies, and TPLF forces suggest a more systemic and strategic failure by the U.S. to promote political will and military leadership in preventing and mitigating civilian harm.

Thus, despite U.S. diplomatic efforts, sanctions, public statements regarding reports of mass atrocities in northern Ethiopia, there is little evidence of the government making adjustments in response to U.S. pressure. Given the lack of tangible progress on the ground, U.S. leverage over Ethiopia and other conflict parties appears limited. There are also questions around whether measures taken by the U.S. since the start of the Tigray war have been taken in a timely fashion and sufficiently comprehensive. However, there are some remaining avenues at the bilateral and multilateral level the U.S. could pursue to attempt to shape the behavior of Ethiopian security forces in the conflict and learn lessons from this security partnership to prevent and minimize civilian harm in other contexts.

The U.S. should conduct a comprehensive review of its security partnership with Ethiopia to assess its overall effectiveness, notably with regard to civilian harm mitigation and response measures, the promotion of human rights, atrocity prevention, and security governance. Such an inquiry should include an examination of U.S. support to the current government as well as the partnership with the former government and the TPLF and determine how past assistance may have benefited TPLF forces in light of current events. The U.S. should also re-evaluate its partnerships with States cultivating relations with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments or with other conflict parties contributing to civilian harm.

In theory, capacity-building efforts (in concert with other States) to facilitate security forces' compliance with international law and the implementation of military policies, guidelines, training, decision-making processes, and investigations to minimize harm and enable humanitarian access could help close systemic loopholes and produce ground-level reform. This assistance should focus on helping improve policies and practices in areas such as transparency regarding civilian harm incidents and investigations; the enshrinement of proportionality and distinction in standing military manuals, Rules of Engagement, and actual operations; civil-military coordination and humanitarian access; and command and control within federal security forces and with associated forces (e.g., in coalition operations). In practice, however, there are concerns around whether engaging partner forces on compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law while they are engaged in gross and systematic abuses and violations in a current conflict is an effective or relevant strategy at all, hence the utility of a complete review of U.S. security assistance activities in Ethiopia, including with respect to shaping security governance and political leadership on civilian protection.

On a multilateral level, as a P5 member of the United Nations Security Council, the U.S. should help ensure that the northern Ethiopia conflict is formally added to the Security Council's agenda and leverage its influence to encourage the U.N. to appoint a special rapporteur to monitor rights violations committed by parties to the conflict and establish a formal investigative mechanism. The U.S. could also encourage the U.N. to build on its working relationship with the EHRC and organize monthly Security Council briefings with the body in open session on humanitarian access and violence against civilians. The updates could be published online afterward.

Given the escalation of violence in late 2021 in what risks devolving into a full-fledged civil war, there are significant concerns related to the protection of civilians that the U.S. should actively monitor with a view to promoting accountability for civilian harm and learn lessons from its partnership. In this context, key issues to monitor include inter alia: restricted humanitarian access and the treatment of humanitarian actors, systemic abuses against civilian populations in contested areas, forced displacement, conscription of forces with no formal military training, de facto economic blockade and famine-like conditions in northern Ethiopia, and any other evidence of ethnic cleansing and deliberate targeting of civilian populations along political-ethnic lines. The U.S. should monitor the scale of the new government offensives against Tigray forces and the behavior of Tigray forces in this context, as well as the government's response to the threat posed by advancing Tigray forces—for example, violations tied to the newly-declared state of emergency and the Prime Minister's [troubling rhetoric](#) encouraging citizens to take up arms against the TPLF.

In addition, the imposition of sanctions and growing tension in bilateral relations could provide an opportunity for other powers, especially China, [Russia](#), Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, to strengthen ties with Ethiopia and fill vacuums created by decreased U.S. security assistance. And, any continuation of aid with little or no conditionality could disincentivize the government

from making necessary changes to reduce threats of atrocities and taking appropriate measures to respond to civilian harm (see [here](#) for a more thorough discussion of possible sanctions-related externalities). The U.S. should pursue dialogue with other States that have an established rapport with Ethiopia, propose a viable path for focused engagement in tandem with these States, with a view to take additional measures where necessary to help the country reverse course, prevent mass atrocities, and create a climate conducive to the protection of civilians.

Endnotes

1. All security sector assistance data and data analysis in this section is taken from the Security Assistance Monitor Databases, which houses all publicly available information on U.S. security cooperation programming and cites each data point to its original source document. The database for security assistance can be found [here](#) and the database for foreign military training can be found [here](#).
2. See bibliography for the full citation of the AOAV data.
3. MSF's suspension was lifted on October 25, but NRC's suspension was extended by two months on October 28. Al Maktoum Foundation's suspension reportedly ended in October.
4. This document was updated in 2010 to include national practice through 2007. It is unclear if there are any more recent RoE documents publicly available.
5. The findings were allegedly referred to the Attorney General's office.
6. For instance, while the former Ethiopian Attorney General indicated that her office would investigate claims presented in a May 2020 Amnesty International report of grave human rights violations committed by security forces (including the ENDF) in 2019 in the Oromia and Amhara regions, and the ENDF attorney general reportedly heard related cases in military court, further actions and steps taken to redress harm, as well as details about the specific cases, are unclear.
7. The Government of Ethiopia has claimed that "the issuance of advance warnings to civilians to stay at home or leave affected areas temporarily" is one of the ENDF's standard procedures. It does appear that Ethiopian troops also ordered Dessie residents to stay indoors amid fighting in the city in October 2021.

Annexes

Annex 1: Additional Resources

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Annex 2: TIMELINE of major events in Ethiopia: 1974-present

Date	Description
1974	Haile Selassie is overthrown in a military coup.
1975	The TPLF is established in the western lowlands of Tigray in February as one of several insurgent groups.
1977	Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam becomes the leader of the Derg, Ethiopia's pro-Soviet military regime.
1977-79	Thousands are killed during Colonel Mengistu's "Red Terror." The TPLF launches its campaign for regional autonomy.
1984-85	Ethiopia experiences its worst famine in decades. Thousands of civilians are forcibly resettled from Eritrea and Tigray.
1987-9	Under a new constitution, Colonel Mengistu becomes president. By the late 1980s, the TPLF had defeated the Derg in several engagements and became a key partner of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which was a coalition of guerilla movements.
1991	The EPRDF captures Addis Ababa. President Mengistu flees the country. The new EPRDF coalition government is dominated by the TPLF
1993	Eritrea becomes independent.
1994	Ethiopia's new constitution divides the state into ethnically-based regions.

Factsheet: Government of Ethiopia/Ethiopian National Defense Force

Date	Description
1995	Meles Zenawi, a TPLF member, becomes prime minister, remaining in power until his death in 2012. During his reign, Ethiopia became one of Africa's fastest-growing economies and a close U.S. ally. Still, Zenawi was accused of censorship, of limiting freedom of speech, and of limiting freedom of association. Several journalists, both of Ethiopian and international origin, and opposition politicians were jailed during his tenure. Oromo and Amhara populations, as well as Ethiopians classified as "ethnically Eritrean," were discriminated against during Zenawi's tenure, with some populations being forcibly resettled.
1998-2000	War between Eritrea and Ethiopia erupts, which is not resolved until 2018.
2004 (March)	A resettlement program aiming to move more than two million people away from the overworked highlands begins.
2006 (December)	Former dictator Mengitsu Haile Mariam, who has been living in exile, is convicted in absentia of genocide. He receives the death penalty.
2012 (August)	Prime Minister Meles Zenawi dies. He is succeeded by Foreign Minister Hailemariam Desalegn.
2016 (October)	The Government of Ethiopia declares a state of emergency after months of anti-government protests.
2018 (February)	Prime Minister Desalegn resigns while anti-government protests persist.
2018 (April)	Abiy Ahmed becomes leader of the ruling EPRDF and thus becomes prime minister.
2018 (July)	Ethiopia and Eritrea declare that their war is over. Ethiopia agrees to evacuate from disputed territories.
2018 (October)	The Government of Ethiopia signs a peace deal with the Ogaden National Liberation Front. The signing marked the end of a 34-year armed rebellion.
2020 (November)	Tensions between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray region escalate after an election in Tigray is deemed unconstitutional. The Government of Ethiopia sends federal troops into Tigray and alleges attacks by the TPLF on ENDF Northern Command headquarters and bases. Military operations against the TPLF are supported by Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), Amhara Special Forces, and regional militia.

Date	Description
2021 (June)	In late June, Tigrayan forces regain control of Mekelle (the capital of Tigray), and government and Eritrean forces withdraw from most of Tigray. The Government of Ethiopia declares a unilateral ceasefire until the end of farming season (September) on humanitarian grounds.
2021 (July)	The geographic scope of the conflict widens as Tigrayan forces launch a new offensive and push into the Afar and Amhara regions.
2021 (October)	On October 11, the Government of Ethiopia begins a ground offensive to push Tigrayan forces out of Amhara and Afar. The government starts a new airstrike campaign in Tigray the next week.

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