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POTENTIAL FOR DEMOCRATIZATION OF ETHIOPIA

by
Abby Marie Sonnier

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2021

Approved by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who got me through the two completely separate thesis ideas I pursued over the past year and a half. Thank you all for the long nights in the honors college, the pod market runs in the middle of the night, the ever-present listening ears, and constant support.

ABSTRACT

ABBY MARIE SONNIER: Potential for Democratization in Ethiopia

(Under the direction of Dr. William W. Berry)

The United States is losing the competition for global power to China, especially on the African continent. This thesis aims to analyze opportunities for the United States to take advantage of China's withdrawal from Ethiopia in order to develop relations with the quickly growing country and influence the country toward democratization. This author found that while democracy is not likely, through increasing relations with Ethiopia's prime minister, the United States has an opportunity to push for increased individual freedoms for Ethiopians. The author relied on open-source information and strategic analytic techniques often employed by the U.S. intelligence community.

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Introduction

The United States is losing the global competition for influence and power to China. This thesis aims to provide a pathway for the U.S. to gain more influence in a continent they have mostly ignored in order to counter significant Chinese power in the region by answering the question: “Is there a significant opportunity for the United States to influence Ethiopia towards becoming a more democratic state in order to counter Chinese influence in the region?”

I chose Ethiopia as an area of focus because of Ethiopia’s massive population size, growing economy, strategic location, and regional influence. These factors make Ethiopia a favorable candidate to develop relations with and China’s withdrawal from the country leave an opening for the U.S. to gain a foothold in Africa as a way to counter growing global Chinese influence— an objective pertinent to U.S. national security as put forth by the Director of National Intelligence.¹

This paper could be used to inform policymakers of the importance of Ethiopia as a strategic partner and intends to encourage them to invest more heavily both economically and diplomatically. The matter at hand is time sensitive and needs to be acted upon within the next five to ten years in order to forge a relationship before their inevitable boom that will provide them with a larger panel of options throughout the globe.

The key points of this paper are that Ethiopia is a strategically important state to develop relations with, there is an opening for a foreign actor to insert themselves as a

¹ Coats, D. (2019, January 29). Worldwide Threat Assessment for the U.S. Intelligence Community. Retrieved from <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR---SSCI.pdf>

player in Ethiopia because of Chinese withdrawal in the country and ethnic conflict that needs to be dealt with by leadership, and that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is open to increasing individual freedoms in Ethiopia.

This thesis first describes the location and government of Ethiopia. Then it details the most significant conflicts and historical events in Ethiopia's history. Chapter Two explains current Chinese and U.S. interests and investments in Ethiopia. Then, this thesis provides a leadership profile of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. As prime minister, Ahmed is the primary person any outside leader would want to work with to develop relations, therefore, understanding him is incredibly important to understanding how and why the U.S. should invest in Ethiopia. The next chapter analyzes where Ethiopia currently is in terms of individual freedoms. The last chapter identifies areas that the U.S. could use to increase freedoms for Ethiopians.

Chapter One: An Introduction to the Structure and History of Ethiopia

This chapter will provide general information about the country of Ethiopia including location, demographic information, system of government, and relevant historical events. This chapter is included to give the reader a historical and contextual understanding of the country as it impacts Ethiopian views and actions today.

Location and General Information

Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa region in Eastern Africa and is a landlocked country bordered by Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti. Ethiopia has a population of 110,871,031 with a growth rate of 2.5 percent. Forty percent of the population is below the age of fifteen, the average age is 19.8 years old, and the average life expectancy is 67.9 years.²

Ethiopia has a large portion of land designated for agriculture (thirty-six percent) and eighty percent of the population lives in rural areas. Addis Ababa, the nation's capital, is the largest urban area in the country.³

The literacy rate of Ethiopia, defined as the percentage of people over age fifteen who are literate, is 51.8 percent. Children, on average, attend school for nine years. Youth unemployment, accounting for unemployment of people between ages fifteen and twenty-four, is 25.2 percent. Sanitation facility access is unimproved ("flush or pour-flush systems not piped to a sewer system, septic tank or pit latrine, pit latrine without a

² Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

³ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

slab or open pit, bucket, hanging toilet, shared facilities, no facilities, or bush/field”⁴) is 50.3 percent in urban areas and 94.3 percent in rural areas. The risk of disease in Ethiopia is ranked as “very high.”⁵

Ethiopia does not have significant natural resources, but has small reserves of gold, platinum, copper, potash, natural gas, and hydropower because of the Nile River’s mouth being located in Northern Ethiopia. Coffee, grain sorghum, and castor bean are three major crops that all originated in Ethiopia. Though only forty-seven percent of the country has access to electricity, hydroelectric plants bring in about eighty-six percent of Ethiopia’s consumed energy.⁶

Ethiopia’s military is allocated 0.7 percent of their annual gross domestic product (GDP) and is comprised of 150,000 active-duty Army troops and 3,000 Air Force troops. In 2020, Ethiopia reinstated their Navy. Each of Ethiopia’s nine states has their own security forces. The main terrorist organization present in Ethiopia is al-Shabaab- a regional terrorist organization linked to al-Qaeda that is most active and influential in Somalia.⁷

Ethiopians are primarily of Ethiopian Orthodox church (43.8 percent). Muslims comprise 31.3 percent of the population, and 22.8 percent is Protestant.⁸

⁴ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

⁵ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

⁶ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

⁷ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

Lederer, E. M. (2020, October 29). US focused on disrupting finances for Somalia's al-Shabab. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/terrorism-somalia-united-nations-3a7b0dbdf009596374179249eeb62d36>

⁸ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

Governance

Ethiopia is a Federal Parliamentary Republic with nine ethnically divided states and two non-ethnic self-governing regions.* They are as follows:

State/Governing Region	Ethnicity (with percentage of population)
Adis Abeba*	Addis Ababa
Afar	Afar (.6 percent)
Amara	Amharic (27.9 percent)
Binshangul Gumuz	Various (<.5 percent)
Dire Dawa*	Somali (<.5 percent)
Gambela Hizboch	Various (<.5 percent)
Hareri Hizb	Harari (<.5 percent)
Oromiya	Oromo (34.9 percent)
Sumale	Somali (2.7 percent)
Tigray	Tigray (7.3 percent)
Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples	Gurage (2.8 percent) Sidama (4.1 percent) Welaita (3 percent) Hadiya (2.2 percent) ⁹

The federal government consists of an executive, legislative, and judicial branch, but most of the power resides in the head of government, the prime minister (Abiy Ahmed since 2018). The majority party of the House of People’s Representatives

⁹ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

chamber of parliament selects the prime minister after legislative elections conclude. The chief of state (Sahle-work Zewde since 2018) is the president, but she holds little influence or power in the government. The president is elected indirectly by both chambers of parliament and serves a six-year term with no term limit. There is a Council of Ministers selected by the prime minister that is approved through the House of People's Representatives in the parliament.¹⁰

The legislative branch consists of a bicameral parliament made of the House of Federation and the House of People's Representatives. The 153 parliamentarians in the House of Federation are elected indirectly by state assemblies and serve five-year terms. The 547 parliamentarians in the House of People's Representatives are directly elected in single seat constituencies every five years.¹¹

Each house is responsible for different functions of government. The House of Federation interprets the constitution and any federal or regional issues; it functions similarly to the Supreme Court of the United States. The House of People's Representation is responsible for passing legislation.¹²

The Judicial system includes a Federal Supreme Court and subordinate courts. The Federal Supreme Court has eleven judges, two of which (the president and vice-president of the court) are recommended by the prime minister and appointed by the House of People's Representatives. The Federal Judicial Administrative Council, a body of ten members chaired by the president of the Federal Supreme Court and appointed by

¹⁰ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

¹¹ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

¹² Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

the House of People’s Representatives, nominates other nine judges. All judges serve through age sixty when they are required to retire. It is important to note that the Federal Supreme Court does not have the power to interpret the constitution. Subordinate courts include federal high courts, federal courts of first instance, state court systems that mirror the federal system, sharia courts, and customary/traditional courts.¹³

Ethiopia has had four constitutions: 1936, 1955, 1987, and 1995. The 1995 constitution is still the constitution being used today.¹⁴

In November 2019, Ethiopia’s ruling coalition approved the merge of three out of its four ethnic-based political parties which were all previously united as the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which included the parties from Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, and the Southern Nations combining into one national party- the Prosperity Party to be led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.¹⁶ The previously prominent Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) boycotted the vote because they viewed the process as “wrong as well as undemocratic.”¹⁸ Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed called the merge that created the Prosperity Party “unanimous” as the dissenting members were not in the room when the other members voted.¹⁹ Ahmed tweeted that this move is part of a

¹³Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

¹⁴Ofcansky, T. P., Berry, L. B. & Library Of Congress. Federal Research Division. (1993) Ethiopia: A Country Study. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O. [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/92000507/>.

¹⁶ Fick, Maggie. “Ethiopia’s Ruling Coalition Agrees to Form Single Party Ahead of 2020 Vote.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, November 21, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics/ethiopias-ruling-coalition-agrees-to-form-single-party-ahead-of-2020-vote-idUSKBN1XV24H>.

¹⁸ “Ethiopia’s Ruling Coalition Merges Into Single Party.” Voice of America, November 22, 2019. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ethiopias-ruling-coalition-merges-single-party>.

¹⁹ Fick, Maggie. “Ethiopia’s Ruling Coalition Agrees to Form Single Party Ahead of 2020 Vote.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, November 21, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics/ethiopias-ruling-coalition-agrees-to-form-single-party-ahead-of-2020-vote-idUSKBN1XV24H>.

larger effort to “strengthen and apply a true federal system” in Ethiopia.²⁰ The Prosperity Party remains in power today and continues to draw criticism from former members of the EPRDF who view the consolidation as a “betrayal.”²¹ This will likely continue to be a source of tension for parties like the TPLF who lost a significant amount of power because of this merger.

History

Ethiopian history is vast and complicated, but throughout the last 100 years, ethnic tension and conflict has arisen often. Following is a brief history of Ethiopia and its major ethnic conflicts that impact ethnic tensions and policies today.

Kingdom to Empire

Ethiopia was established in approximately 980 BCE and has existed as the oldest, continuously independent nation in Africa for over 2000 years.²² Ethiopia began as the Kingdom of Axum as a regional trading power that flourished from the Third to Sixth century CE. It is largely believed that the kingdom declined toward its downfall in the Eighth century because of overuse of agricultural land. In 1137, the former Kingdom of Axum became the Kingdom of Zagwe. This kingdom fell only a bit over 100 years later because of constant disputes over the line of succession. Immediately following in 1270, the Solomonid dynasty rose to power and renamed Zagwe to the Kingdom of Abyssinia. The Christian dynasty claimed they were direct descendants of King Solomon of the Bible and used this as their justification for their claim to the throne. By 1538, the

²⁰ Ahmed, Abiy. “Tweet.” Twitter. Twitter, November 21, 2019. <https://twitter.com/AbiyAhmedAli/status/1197568275024142336>.

²¹ Gardner, T. (2020, January 21). Will Abiy Ahmed's Bet on Ethiopia's Political Future Pay Off? Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/21/will-abiy-ahmed-eprdf-bet-ethiopia-political-future-pay-off/>

²² Rodriguez, C. (2019, March 28). 10 Oldest Countries in the World - AllTheRooms - The Vacation Rental Experts. Retrieved from <https://www.alltherooms.com/blog/oldest-countries-in-the-world/>

kingdom spread so far that the Christian population no longer outnumbered the Muslim population, and the kingdom fell apart as the Muslim majority did not view the monarchy's claim to the throne as a convincing justification for power. The name Abyssinia stayed around as the nation transitioned from kingdom to empire.²⁴

Ethiopia's ancient history informs how Ethiopians view themselves today. Ethiopians, especially those who live in regions that have always been part of Ethiopia, come from one of the oldest countries in the world and have never lived under colonial rule. This spirit of independence is seen throughout their more modern history and attitudes that persist today.

Italian Invasion

In 1934, Italy invaded Ethiopia after the signing of a friendship treaty in 1928 after a diplomatic dispute over road construction.²⁵ Italy declared war after ensuring support and neutrality from France and Japan in 1935. Ethiopian forces were able to hold off Italian ground troops but fell because of heavy air bombardment. Addis Ababa fell for the first time in history on May 5, 1936, to Italy. In 1941, Britain freed Ethiopia from Italian occupation.²⁶

Government Crackdown

The Red Terror, an intense crackdown on political opposition by the monarch Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1977, targeted the largest opposition group at the time, the

²⁴ Cartwright, M. (2019, April 9). Kingdom of Abyssinia. Retrieved from https://www.ancient.eu/Kingdom_of_Abyssinia/

²⁵ Demichelis, M. (2012). Italo–Ethiopian War. In *Cultural Sociology of the Middle East, Asia, & Africa: An Encyclopedia* (Vol. 2, pp. 308-310). SAGE Reference.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX4182600405/GVRL?u=mag_u_um&sid=GVRL&xid=34ee6926

²⁶ Demichelis, M. (2012). Italo–Ethiopian War. In *Cultural Sociology of the Middle East, Asia, & Africa: An Encyclopedia* (Vol. 2, pp. 308-310). SAGE Reference.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX4182600405/GVRL?u=mag_u_um&sid=GVRL&xid=34ee6926

Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). The EPRP incited violence against the government for years, but Mengistu cracked down so hard that state-sponsored violence in 1977 outnumbered EPRP violence significantly.²⁷

The Red Terror became a rallying point for opposition groups and led to two major insurgencies developing. In the North, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) formed and began calling for revolution, eventually teaming up with Eritrean causes for independence from Ethiopia. In the South, the Ogaden Liberation Front (OLF) rallied once more and began a rebellion for independence with help from Somalian forces.²⁸

These insurgencies become relevant a few years later, but this will be addressed in a section below.

Eritrea

Following Britain's freeing of Ethiopia from Italian occupation, Britain occupied neighboring nation Eritrea from 1941 until 1950 when the United Nations federated Eritrea and Ethiopia.²⁹

At the time of federation, Eritrea was a democratic state while Ethiopia was an absolute monarchy. Ethiopia spent the next twelve years dismantling voting rights, free press and speech, and other pillars of democracy until the country was no longer recognizable to the nation it was in 1950. Ethiopia replaced Eritrea's languages, Tigrinya

²⁷ Ethiopia: Red Terror and Famine. (2015, August 7). Retrieved from <https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/ethiopia/>

²⁸ Ethiopia: Red Terror and Famine. (2015, August 7). Retrieved from <https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/ethiopia/>

²⁹ Eritrea. (2008). In J. Middleton & J. C. Miller (Eds.), *New Encyclopedia of Africa* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 289-295). Charles Scribner's Sons. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3049000216/GVRL?u=mag_u_um&sid=GVRL&xid=ce49186c

and Arabic, with their own language, Amharic, further erasing the culture and independence of Eritrea. In 1959, Eritrea lowered their flag and three years later, in 1962, there was a formal abrogation of the federation as Ethiopia annexed Eritrea into the Ethiopian empire.³⁰ Eritrea gained independence in 1993 via United Nations monitored referendum by Ethiopia.³¹

One of the most lasting effects of the annexation of Eritrea in Ethiopia today is that it instilled a sense of otherness to the Tigrayan ethnic group. The annexation of Eritrea combined with the horrors of the Red Terror led to calls for self-autonomy and independence that are still heard today.

From 1998 to 2000, a bloody war between Eritrea and Ethiopia over border disputes broke out and led to over 80,000 casualties.³² Eritrea extended a peace deal to Ethiopia in 2000, but the deal was never accepted because the deal stipulated that Eritrea would take control over “key border locations” that Ethiopia was unwilling to hand over. Over the next 18 years, conflict broke out occasionally which lead to more death and injury.³³

³⁰Eritrea. (2008). In J. Middleton & J. C. Miller (Eds.), *New Encyclopedia of Africa* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 289-295). Charles Scribner's Sons.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3049000216/GVRL?u=mag_u_um&sid=GVRL&xid=ce49186c

³¹ Eritrea. (2008). In J. Middleton & J. C. Miller (Eds.), *New Encyclopedia of Africa* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 289-295). Charles Scribner's Sons.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3049000216/GVRL?u=mag_u_um&sid=GVRL&xid=ce49186c

³² *Ethiopia and Eritrea declare end of war* (2018). . Washington, D.C.: NPR. Retrieved from <http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/other-sources/ethiopia-eritrea-declare-end-war/docview/2066972664/se-2?accountid=14588>

³³ Anna, C. (2019, October 11). A look at the Ethiopia-Eritrea war whose end brought a Nobel. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/03cd0e26e0b84c38b6de352e519ccad>

Ethnic Conflicts

Ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia are important to the context of politics, policy, and worldview of all Ethiopians. This section will highlight some of the most important ethnic conflicts in recent years including the Ogaden/Somali conflict, a coup led by Tigray, protests from 2015-2018 led by Oromo and Amhara, and the recent Tigray conflict that nearly led to civil war in 2020.

Ogaden Conflict

At the end of the Nineteenth Century, Ethiopia claimed a piece of land that was part of what is present day Somalia then called the Ogaden region, but now known as the state of Somali.³⁴ Britain held the land from the time that they freed Ethiopia from the Italians until 1948, when they declared it once again part of the Ethiopian state, further supporting Ethiopia's claim to the region.³⁵

When the Republic of Somalia was created in 1960, it claimed that all Somali-occupied regions belonged to them which included Ethiopia's Ogaden region. Later that year, military collisions began to occur at the border between Ethiopia and Somalia and escalated when Ethiopia began conducting air raids on Somalian villages.³⁶ Tensions continued to rise and culminated in the Ogaden Liberation Front (OLF) launching a rebellion against Ethiopia in 1963.³⁷ Ethiopia relinquished from their interest in Ogaden

³⁴ The Ogaden and the Haud. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <http://countrystudies.us/ethiopia/26.htm>

³⁵ Ethiopia/Ogaden (1948-present). (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/69-ethiopiaogaden-1948-present/>

³⁶ The Ogaden and the Haud. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <http://countrystudies.us/ethiopia/26.htm>

³⁷ Ethiopia/Ogaden (1948-present). (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/69-ethiopiaogaden-1948-present/>

from this time until 1973 when the discovery of oil in the region led to a resurgence in fighting.³⁸

In 1977, the Western Somalian Liberation Front (WSLF) began working with the OLF to launch a second rebellion against the Ethiopian presence in the Ogaden region. This, along with Somalia's contribution of weapons to the insurgent groups, led to Ethiopia's declaration that Somalia invaded their territory. Ethiopia called for assistance in stopping this invasion, and the Soviet Union and Cuba responded, quelling the rebellion and invasion by 1978.³⁹

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) officially established in 1984, even though at the time the region was officially called Somali, and deadly armed conflicts persisted until 2018, peaking from 2004 to 2007.⁴⁰

EPRDF Coup

In 1991, a coalition of rebel groups led by the TPLF called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) launched an insurgency against the communist Ethiopian government. Within the year, the EPRDF defeated the Ethiopian army and took control of Addis Ababa. King Mengistu Haile Mariam fled the country and Meles Zenawi, the Tigrayan leader of the EPRDF, took over and ended Marxist rule.⁴¹

³⁸ The Ogaden and the Haud. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <http://countrystudies.us/ethiopia/26.htm>

³⁹ Ethiopia/Ogaden (1948-present). (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/69-ethiopiaogaden-1948-present/>

⁴⁰ Ethiopia/Ogaden (1948-present). (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/69-ethiopiaogaden-1948-present/>

⁴¹ Ethiopian capital falls to rebels, ending 17 years of Marxist rule. (2010, February 09). Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/ethiopian-capital-falls-to-rebels>

2016 Protests

In 2016, authorities in the small village of Ginchi in the Oromia region seized a football field and a forest for an investment project that was part of a larger move to expand Addis Ababa. This prompted locals to begin protesting the action as an example of government abuse but protests quickly spread to over 400 locations around the region and into Amhara because of general popular anger with the government.⁴² Protesters complaints were over “abuses by security forces, the government’s approach to development, unequal distribution of power and economic benefit in favor of those aligned to the government, and decades of historical grievances.”⁴³ Oromia security forces began shooting live ammunition into the crowds of almost entirely peaceful protestors, killing 148 people including many primary and secondary schoolchildren. Security forces arrests thousands and were found to have tortured many of them.

The protests continued for two years, prompting a state of emergency and the prime minister to resign.⁴⁴ This is important to keep in mind as this event effected all Ethiopians and their personal views on government and the potential for change in Ethiopia when popular anger is able to be organized.

⁴² Ethiopian Protests. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.hrw.org/tag/ethiopian-protests>

⁴³ Ethiopian Protests. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.hrw.org/tag/ethiopian-protests>

⁴⁴ "Such a Brutal Crackdown". (2019, January 02). Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/15/such-brutal-crackdown/killings-and-arrests-response-ethiopias-oromo-protests>

Tigray Conflict

Tensions have always been high between Ethiopia and the Tigray region. Tigray wants autonomy while Ethiopia continues to fight to keep the region under their control. In 2020, high tensions culminated in what many have called a civil war.⁴⁵

In September 2020, Tigray proceeded with elections in defiance of orders from Prime Minister Ahmed to cancel all elections until after the COVID-19 pandemic was over. Opposition from the Tigray region, whose ruling party the Tigray People's Liberation Front dominated Ethiopian politics prior to Ahmed's government, accused the prime minister of delaying the election in order to prolong his rule and threatened that intervention from the federal government would be considered a "declaration of war." Ahmed and his government called the vote illegal and unconstitutional but ruled out responding with force.⁴⁶

In November 2020, Ahmed ordered the military to attack Tigray after an alleged attack on an army base that has never been confirmed by non-governmental sources.⁴⁷ Ethiopia declared a six-month state of emergency soon after.⁴⁸ Tigray alleged on November 5 that the Ethiopian government ordered a bombing on its capital city.⁴⁹ As of

⁴⁵ Walsh, D., & Dahir, A. L. (2020, November 05). Why Is Ethiopia at War With Itself? Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/05/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-conflict-explained.html>

⁴⁶ Meseret, E. (2020, September 09). Ethiopian region votes, defying federal government and PM. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/local-elections-national-elections-elections-abiy-ahmed-africa-d9bde847b216728d6f30d9c6fc7b79b9>

⁴⁷ Meseret, E. (2020, November 04). Ethiopia near civil war as PM sends army into defiant region. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/abiy-ahmed-ethiopia-nears-war-7e525d01c44c5eaf4fdd576650eee5dc>

⁴⁸ Meseret, E. (2020, November 04). Ethiopia near civil war as PM sends army into defiant region. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/abiy-ahmed-ethiopia-nears-war-7e525d01c44c5eaf4fdd576650eee5dc>

⁴⁹ Meseret, E. (2020, November 05). Ethiopia says forced into 'aimless war' as bombings alleged. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-abiy-ahmed-africa-ethiopia-kenya-268321050c766661de9fcf843dde3d94?mc_cid=d7693645a0&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

November 8, the UN claimed that there were clashes between federal troops and Tigrayan forces in eight different locations.⁵⁰

Soon after, Ahmed closed roads, airports, and banks to counter the mass number of citizens fleeing towards Sudan.⁵¹ On November 19, Ahmed launched an airstrike on Tigray university.⁵² Ahmed called for Tigray to surrender within 72 hours or face a full attack on the capital.⁵³ A few weeks later, the U.S. confirmed that Eritrea was aiding Ethiopia in the fight against Tigray.⁵⁴ The conflict then turned toward a guerilla style conflict.⁵⁵ In March 2021, reports of executions and systemic rape emerged that accounted internationally criminal war-crimes by Ethiopian troops to Tigrayan civilians.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Ethiopia's army chief sacked as Tigray fighting continues. (2020, November 08). Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54864868?mc_cid=c98a08b708&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

⁵¹ Anna, C. (2020, November 11). Sudan braces for up to 200,000 fleeing Ethiopia fighting. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/international-news-africa-ethiopia-united-nations-kenya-0867b132d6c3f7ffd2e98df83bdc73da?mc_cid=d189a79d0c&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

⁵² Ethiopia: African Union urges ceasefire in Tigray region: DW: 10.11.2020. (2020, November 10). Retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-african-union-urges-ceasefire-in-tigray-region/a-55553815?mc_cid=d189a79d0c&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

⁵³ Anna, C. (2020, November 19). Official: Ethiopia's latest airstrike hits Tigray university. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-airstrike-hits-tigray-bad977901c6b5fd10a9fd02869b72e52>

⁵⁴ Ethiopia PM gives Tigray forces 72 hours to surrender regional capital. (2020, November 22). Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict/ethiopia-pm-gives-tigray-forces-72-hours-to-surrender-regional-capital-idUSKBN28206X?mc_cid=d88c486ece&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

⁵⁵ Stewart, P., & Lewis, D. (2020, December 08). Exclusive: U.S. thinks Eritrea has joined Ethiopian war, diplomats say. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-conflict-eritrea/exclusive-u-s-thinks-eritrea-has-joined-ethiopian-war-diplomats-say-idUSKBN28110X?mc_cid=2d4659b3d2&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

⁵⁶ Al Jazeera. (2021, February 01). In Pictures: Eritrean refugees caught in crossfire in Ethiopia. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2021/2/1/in-pictures-eritrean-refugees-caught-in-crossfire-in-ethiopia?mc_cid=8cc253f6c1&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

⁵⁷ Patta, D. (2021, March 25). Reports of executions and mass-rape emerge from the obscured war in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ethiopia-tigray-news-executions-rape-war-atrocities-genocide/>

Chapter Two: Ethiopia as a Strategic Location for the United States and China

Ethiopia is a strategically important nation in because of its location, regional influence, economic potential, and membership in various international bodies. This chapter will expand on these aspects. The chapter will then detail current Chinese and U.S. involvement in Ethiopia and the region as it pertains to overall U.S.-China global competition.

Ethiopia as a Strategic Location for Foreign Investment

Location and Regional Power

Ethiopia's control of the mouth of the Nile River provides a significant strategic chokepoint that can vastly affect Sudan and Egypt which are downriver from Ethiopia. Egypt in particular is incredibly vulnerable to Ethiopian decisions regarding the river as ninety percent of its water supply comes from the Nile River.⁵⁸ Ethiopia has incredibly fertile soil because of the Nile River and is exceptional for agricultural investments; foreign countries often invest in Ethiopia to gain access to their fertile agricultural land and the food that is grown there.⁵⁹ Additionally, even though Ethiopia is a landlocked nation, the Nile serves as a major trade and transportation route.⁶⁰

As a large portion of the Horn of Africa region, Ethiopia provides a “jumping off” point into the strategically important Bab al-Mandab Strait that connects the Gulf of

⁵⁸ Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute. (2020, April 29). Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/271-bridging-gap-nile-waters-dispute>

⁵⁹ Strubenhoff, H. (2021, February 24). Can agriculture be Ethiopia's growth engine? Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2021/02/24/can-agriculture-be-ethiopias-growth-engine/>

⁶⁰ Nile River. (2019, February 21). Retrieved from <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/nile-river/>

Aden to the Red Sea.⁶¹ It is estimated by the U.S. Department of Energy that 4.8 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum is transported through the Bab al-Mandab Strait every day.⁶² The strait connects the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean, providing the shortest trade route between Europe and Asia.⁶³ While Ethiopia does not touch this body of water, it has an excellent relationship with Djibouti, which is on the coast, and Ethiopia conducts more than ninety percent of its trade through this small neighboring country.⁶⁴ As the largest Horn of Africa country, Ethiopia also serves as a hub between coastal East African countries, North Africa and the Middle East, and more Central African countries.⁶⁵

Ethiopia has demonstrated its regional influence in a number of ways over the past decade, something that would be considered by foreign nations looking to invest in the nation. In 2018, Ethiopia hosted peace talks between numerous rival ethnic groups in South Sudan that led to the signing of a peace agreement to end their civil war.⁶⁶ Ethiopia is one of the African continent's largest host of refugees, demonstrating trust in

⁶¹ Ethiopia Overview. (2020, October 13). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview>

⁶² Aljamra, H. (2019, August 01). Bab-El-Mandeb, Gateway to the Red Sea: The World's Most Dangerous Strait. Retrieved from <https://insidearabia.com/bab-el-mandeb-gateway-to-the-red-sea-the-worlds-most-dangerous-strait/>

⁶³ Aljamra, H. (2019, August 01). Bab-El-Mandeb, Gateway to the Red Sea: The World's Most Dangerous Strait. Retrieved from <https://insidearabia.com/bab-el-mandeb-gateway-to-the-red-sea-the-worlds-most-dangerous-strait/>

⁶⁴ Bereketgab, R. (2016). Djibouti: Strategic Location, an Asset or a Curse? *Journal of African Foreign Affairs*, 3(1/2), 5-18. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26661713>

⁶⁵ Abdel-Latif, J., & Mokaddem, S. (2016, May). Ethiopia: Emergence and Positive Change in a Turbulent Geopolitical Context. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/OCPPC-RP-1604rec.pdf>

⁶⁶ Felter, C. (2020, November 4). Ethiopia: East Africa's Emerging Giant. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ethiopia-east-africas-emerging-giant>

Ethiopia's stability and security.⁶⁷ Ethiopia has also been a leader in numerous United Nations peacekeeping missions in Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan.⁶⁸

An attraction to Ethiopia as an investment partner is driven largely by Ethiopia's "affordable electricity supply and efficient airline" service.⁶⁹ In 2019, twenty-nine foreign direct investment projects in Ethiopia created 16,000 jobs, demonstrating trust in the nation as an investment partner.⁷⁰

Economic Potential

Ethiopia is the second most populated country in Africa and is home to one of the world's fastest growing economies.⁷¹ Ethiopia's large and growing population size presents a major opportunity for potential foreign investors in the next twenty years if they are able to break into the Ethiopian market and develop significant relations with the nation. Ethiopia is currently experiencing the world's fastest GDP growth and is using that increased revenue to invest in programs designed to increase state stability and quality of life.⁷² All of this combines to make Ethiopia an enticing African nation to invest in for the long-term benefit of a foreign country.

⁶⁷ Felter, C. (2020, November 4). Ethiopia: East Africa's Emerging Giant. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ethiopia-east-africas-emerging-giant>

⁶⁸ Felter, C. (2020, November 4). Ethiopia: East Africa's Emerging Giant. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ethiopia-east-africas-emerging-giant>

⁶⁹ Why Ethiopia beat Kenya to foreign investment inflows crown, again. (2019, Dec 30). Business Daily Retrieved from <http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/wire-feeds/why-ethiopia-beat-kenya-foreign-investment/docview/2331222020/se-2?accountid=14588>

⁷⁰ Why Ethiopia beat Kenya to foreign investment inflows crown, again. (2019, Dec 30). Business Daily Retrieved from <http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/wire-feeds/why-ethiopia-beat-kenya-foreign-investment/docview/2331222020/se-2?accountid=14588>

⁷¹ Ethiopia Overview. (2020, October 13). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview>

⁷² Felter, C. (2020, November 4). Ethiopia: East Africa's Emerging Giant. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ethiopia-east-africas-emerging-giant>

International Bodies

Ethiopia is a voting member in various international bodies and is the host of the African Union.⁷³ Ethiopia holds voting membership in the African Union, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Health Organization, among others.

Voting membership in international organizations is a way for smaller, less influential nations to influence the direction of global events. Foreign nations can consider this when determining which countries to invest more heavily in and strengthen relations with.

Chinese Investment and Interests in Ethiopia

China's interest in Ethiopia is largely explained in the larger context of their One Belt, One Road Initiative or, more commonly, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is China's \$4 to \$8 trillion strategy on how to become the next global superpower aimed at rerouting global trade to China.⁷⁴ Sir John Sawers, former director of British Intelligence agency MI6, stated in an interview with The Cipher Brief that, "China's BRI is a commercial economic project and strategic project at the same time. China has some of the same goals with the BRI that the United States had with the Marshall Plan designed to reconstruct Europe after WWII while simultaneously binding them into a longstanding alliance with the United States. China wants to tie economies of countries

⁷³ Visit the AU Headquarters. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://au.int/en/visit-au-headquarters>

⁷⁴ Ellis, S. (Director). (2018, April 5). *China's Trillion Dollar Plan to Dominate Global Trade*[Video file]. Retrieved February 11, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvXROXiIpvQ&v=en>

along the Belt and Road into China economically and make them strategically dependent on China.”⁷⁵

Through the BRI, China has built a train route from London to China, installed gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea to China, built a system of high-speed trains throughout Southeast Asia that route toward China, and developed a chain of seaports across the Indian Ocean. China has invested billions in countries around the Eastern hemisphere including Ethiopia, Pakistan, Italy, Greece, Hungary, Malaysia, and many more in developing roads, technological infrastructure, ports, power plants, etc. all designed to make trading with China easier.⁷⁶

Both China and partner countries benefit from BRI projects. China requires that Chinese firms carry out all projects, which leads to increased job opportunities for the Chinese especially in the construction industry.⁷⁷ Host countries see increased quality of life and GDP growth and are able to finance projects at a zero percent interest rate. China is also much less selective when it comes to determining what countries they will work with on BRI projects while Western investors often require countries to meet significant “environmental and social safeguards.”⁷⁸

While there are benefits on both sides of the partnerships, these are incredibly risky ventures in most cases, especially with their African and Southeast Asian partners who do not have robust economies because of the potential for default by the borrowing

⁷⁵ Sawers, J. (2021, February 22). A New World of Global Security: A Briefing with Sir John Sawers. Retrieved from <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/article/china/a-new-world-of-global-security-a-briefing-with-sir-john-sawers>

⁷⁶ Ellis, S. (Director). (2018, April 5). *China's Trillion Dollar Plan to Dominate Global Trade*[Video file]. Retrieved February 11, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvXROXiIpvQ&vl=en>

⁷⁷ The Belt and Road Initiative and Increased Chinese Military and Security Presence Abroad. (2019, July 22). Retrieved from <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column/soufan-center/the-belt-and-road-initiative-and-increased-chinese-military-and-security-presence-abroad>

⁷⁸ Ellis, S. (Director). (2018, April 5). *China's Trillion Dollar Plan to Dominate Global Trade*[Video file]. Retrieved February 11, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvXROXiIpvQ&vl=en>

country. China knows this and is using it to their advantage through debt diplomacy. Debt diplomacy, in this context, is the loaning of money to nations that the lender can assume with reasonable certainty will default on their payments. When this inevitably happens, the lender allows the borrower to sign over some percentage of control over the venture as a repayment.⁷⁹

The case of Sri Lanka and the Hambantota port exemplifies this strategy. After building the Hambantota port with loans that were part of China's BRI, Sri Lanka defaulted and were unable to pay. Sri Lanka signed over majority control over the strategic Indian Ocean port as payment.⁸⁰ Experts at the Institute for International Security are concerned that China hopes to lead African states in the same direction.⁸¹

China's interest in continued partnership with Ethiopia is explained by this along with Ethiopia's status as a large and quickly growing population and economy and regional power. Currently, China is the largest investor in Ethiopia and has many projects in the capital city and beyond. One resident of Addis Ababa stated to Politico that "China is building the city from the ground up, without China, not much would happen around here."⁸²

In Addis Ababa, China has built a huge national sports stadium and many defining skyscrapers of the city's landscape.⁸³ In the North, China has invested significantly in the Grand Renaissance Dam, a hydroelectric dam at the mouth of the Nile

⁷⁹ How China's debt trap diplomacy works and what it means. (2019, December 13). Retrieved from <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/how-china-s-debt-trap-diplomacy-works-and-what-it-means-32133>

⁸⁰ Lessons from Sri Lanka on China's 'debt-trap diplomacy'. (2018, February 21). Retrieved from <https://issafrica.org/amp/iss-today/lessons-from-sri-lanka-on-chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy>

⁸¹ Lessons from Sri Lanka on China's 'debt-trap diplomacy'. (2018, February 21). Retrieved from <https://issafrica.org/amp/iss-today/lessons-from-sri-lanka-on-chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy>

⁸² Marks, S. (2020, February 07). How an African state learned to play the West off China for billions. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/07/ethiopia-china-west-power-competition-110766>

⁸³ Marks, S. (2020, February 07). How an African state learned to play the West off China for billions. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/07/ethiopia-china-west-power-competition-110766>

river. When the dam is complete, Ethiopia will be able to fully power their own nation and have excess power to export to neighboring countries.⁸⁴ China has also expanded the power grid across Ethiopia so that the population will be able to utilize this power once the dam is operational.⁸⁵

China financed a highly important international railroad that connects Ethiopia and Djibouti and gives Ethiopia access to a port. China also financed a light railway system throughout the capital city and built more than 31,069 miles of roads to include Ethiopia's first six-lane highway.⁸⁶ Outside of governmental investment, Jack Ma, executive chairman of Alibaba Group, opened the e-World Trade Platform in Ethiopia in 2019.⁸⁷ China's only overseas military base is also in Djibouti, adjacent to Ethiopia, giving them a vested interest in ensuring state stability and promoting peace in the region.⁸⁸

United States' Interests in Ethiopia

According the Department of State of the United States, the America's goals in Ethiopia are to protect any American citizens in country, strengthen democracy and

⁸⁴ Millar, I., & Putz, K. (2020, March 12). Selling Egypt down the river? China supercharges Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam. - US-China Perception Monitor. Retrieved from <https://uscnpm.org/2020/03/12/selling-egypt-down-the-river-china-supercharges-ethiopias-grand-renaissance-dam/>

⁸⁵ Millar, I., & Putz, K. (2020, March 12). Selling Egypt down the river? China supercharges Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam. - US-China Perception Monitor. Retrieved from <https://uscnpm.org/2020/03/12/selling-egypt-down-the-river-china-supercharges-ethiopias-grand-renaissance-dam/>

⁸⁶ Fox, J. (2019, April 23). Ethiopia and the Chinese dream in Africa. Retrieved from <https://www.rte.ie/news/world/2019/0423/1045064-ethiopia-china/>

⁸⁷ E-commerce mogul jack ma launches platform in Ethiopia: CHINA ETHIOPIA. (2019, Nov 25). EFE News Service Retrieved from <http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/wire-feeds/e-commerce-mogul-jack-ma-launches-platform/docview/2317585608/se-2?accountid=14588>

⁸⁸ Headley, T. (2018, December 07). China's Djibouti Base: A One Year Update. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/chinas-djibouti-base-a-one-year-update/>

expand human rights, promote economic development and growth, and advance security and peace in the region.⁸⁹

One of the primary goals of the United States is to ensure the safety of its citizens at home and abroad.⁹⁰ The presence of Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, not far outside Ethiopia's borders provides an added layer of significance to the United States ensuring the stability of Ethiopia for the 4,000 troops stationed nearby in order to ensure the safety of its citizens abroad.⁹¹

The United States is the largest contributor of humanitarian aid to Ethiopia with an annual average contribution of \$500 million. Because Ethiopia supports a large number of refugees, the United States provides almost \$100 million annually in support in order to promote internal stability. The United States and Ethiopia have a decent trading relationship with the United States exporting aircrafts, wheat, machinery, and vegetables and importing coffee, oil seeds, and textiles.⁹² While most American investment in Ethiopia has been in the form of aid, Adam Boehler, CEO of America's International Development Finance Corporation (the investment branch of the U.S. government) has affirmed the United States' intention and desire to "make multibillion-dollar investments in Ethiopia."⁹³

In an article in the Atlantic Council, Grant Harris argues that the "United States cannot afford to underinvest in Africa" because of its large, growing population and

⁸⁹ U.S. Relations with Ethiopia - United States Department of State. (2021, January 14). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-ethiopia/>

⁹⁰ Diplomacy: The U.S. Department of State at Work. (2008, June). Retrieved from <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/ei/rls/dos/107330.htm>

⁹¹ Welcome to Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from https://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnreura/cent/installations/camp_lemonnier_djibouti.html

⁹² U.S. Relations with Ethiopia - United States Department of State. (2021, January 14). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-ethiopia/>

⁹³ Marks, S. (2020, February 07). How an African state learned to play the West off China for billions. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/07/ethiopia-china-west-power-competition-110766>

potential economic and political power.⁹⁴ Harris argues that even though African countries are typically not leaders in the global economy, that will not be the case forever. Africa's middle class is growing and will constitute twenty-five percent of the global population by 2050. Other countries, most notably China, are investing heavily in African countries which will diminish the United States' global influence. As noted, African countries have votes in international bodies and can set the course of the global movement towards major worldwide goals such as denuclearization or stopping terrorism. Harris notes that the continent's trouble with conflict and humanitarian issues provide a moral pressure for the United States to be present on the continent to act as a global leader in "advancing human dignity."⁹⁵

Every point that Harris makes is easily applied to Ethiopia. Ethiopia, as noted previously, is the second fastest growing population and economy in Africa and will eventually yield global influence. China was Ethiopia's largest foreign investor, investing in sixty percent of approved foreign projects in Ethiopia in 2019.⁹⁶

Ethnic conflicts and humanitarian crises are common as seen as recently in the near civil war with Tigray in 2020 and the refugee crisis that followed.⁹⁷ Even with that said, the primary reason the United States needs further investment in Ethiopia for the same reasons they need to in all of Africa— China has beaten them to it.

⁹⁴ Harris, G. (2021, February 04). Why Africa matters to US national security. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/why-africa-matters-to-us-national-security/>

⁹⁵ Harris, G. (2021, February 04). Why Africa matters to US national security. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/why-africa-matters-to-us-national-security/>

⁹⁶ Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Ethiopia. (2021, March). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/ethiopia/investment>

⁹⁷ Why has civil war returned to Ethiopia? (2020, December 10). Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2020/12/10/why-has-civil-war-returned-to-ethiopia>

Ethiopians want the democratic influence that the U.S. wants to project. A 2020 survey by Afro Barometer, an African survey group, found that ninety percent of Ethiopians would prefer a more democratic state that was “accountable to citizens, a prime minister monitored and answerable to Parliament, and elected officials who are accountable to their constituents.”⁹⁸

If the United States seized this moment to invest more heavily in Ethiopia either through governmental support or in providing incentives for U.S. private companies to invest in the country, it could garner enough popular support and outcry for a more democratic state, something the United States strives toward across the world. This is something the Biden administration is interested in pursuing. On March 24, the Biden administration announced that they were creating a special envoy for the Horn of Africa largely in order to deal with Ethiopia and build relations with these strategically important countries.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Overwhelming majority of Ethiopians support democracy seek accountable governance. (2020, October 30). Retrieved from <https://afrobarometer.org/press/overwhelming-majority-ethiopians-support-democracy-seek-accountable-governance>

⁹⁹ Gebre, S. (2021, March 25). U.S. Creates Special Envoy Post to Address Crisis in Ethiopia. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-25/u-s-creates-special-envoy-post-to-address-crisis-in-ethiopia>

Chapter Three: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

Understanding a nation's leader is incredibly important when considering how to approach building relations with a country. In an authoritarian state like Ethiopia, it becomes even more important as the prime minister carries a majority of the weight in decision making and international relations. This section will discuss Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's background, worldview, and any potential areas of cooperation that would be important to anyone approaching increasing relations with Ethiopia.

Background

Abiy Ahmed was born in Beshasha, Ethiopia, a small town in the Oromia region. Both his parents were ethnic Oromos, though his mother was an Orthodox Christian and his father, a Muslim.¹⁰⁰ Ahmed is a practicing Pentecostal Christian.¹⁰¹ The Prime Minister speaks four languages: Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo, and English.¹⁰² He is married to Zinash Taychew Bere, who he met while serving with her in the military, and has three daughters Deborah, Rakeb, and Amen, and one adopted son, Million.¹⁰³

Prime Minister Ahmed has an extensive educational background. In 2001, Ahmed earned his degree in Computer Engineering from the Microlink Information Technology College in Addis Ababa. He earned two master's degrees: Transformational Leadership from Greenwich University in collaboration with Addis Ababa's International Leadership Institute and a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from Lead Star College of

¹⁰⁰ Alexandropoulos, K. (2019, October 21). Who Is Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.insideover.com/indepths/politics/who-is-abiy-ahmed.html>

¹⁰¹ McKenna, A. (2020, September 8). Abiy Ahmed. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abiy-Ahmed>

¹⁰² Alexandropoulos, K. (2019, October 21). Who Is Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.insideover.com/indepths/politics/who-is-abiy-ahmed.html>

¹⁰³ https://www.pmo.gov.et/first_lady/

Management and Leadership in Addis Ababa. In 2017, he earned a doctoral degree in Peace and Security Studies from the University of Addis Ababa.¹⁰⁴

Ahmed joined the military at age fourteen as a wireless operator to fight against the Dergue, the communist ruling party at the time, and eventually rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel.¹⁰⁵ In 2006 after leaving the military, Ahmed founded Ethiopia's cyber intelligence service, the Information Network Security Agency.¹⁰⁶

Ahmed then began his political career through election to the House of Peoples' Representatives as a representative of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), a member of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)—the ruling coalition—in 2010. In 2016, Ahmed became the Minister of Science and Technology of Ethiopia but left the post only a few months later to become the Vice President of Oromia's regional government. The next year, he was elected to be the head of the secretariat, the permanent administrative office, of the OPDO. This positioned him well to become head of the EPRDF and then the prime minister after Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned following the Oromo protests.¹⁰⁷ Ahmed is the first Oromo to ever be the leader of Ethiopia.

Ahmed moved quickly to enact much needed reforms in Ethiopia as soon as he became prime minister in 2018. He immediately extended a gesture of peace to Eritrea, which was accepted, formally ending the longstanding conflict. Many were surprised at the action, but Ahmed stated that Ethiopia has “tried war and found it useless,” and

¹⁰⁴ Alexandropoulos, K. (2019, October 21). Who Is Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.insideover.com/indepths/politics/who-is-abiy-ahmed.html>

¹⁰⁵ Alexandropoulos, K. (2019, October 21). Who Is Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.insideover.com/indepths/politics/who-is-abiy-ahmed.html>

¹⁰⁶ Alexandropoulos, K. (2019, October 21). Who Is Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.insideover.com/indepths/politics/who-is-abiy-ahmed.html>

¹⁰⁷ McKenna, A. (2020, September 8). Abiy Ahmed. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abiy-Ahmed>

emphasized the importance of family reunification that has been impossible since conflict broke out.¹⁰⁸ As a sign of goodwill, Ahmed released the remaining prisoners from the 2016 protests and lifted the state of emergency the country had lived under for the past two years.¹⁰⁹ Ahmed ended a thirty-four year armed conflict in the state by signing a peace deal with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in 2018 as well.¹¹⁰ Outside of Ethiopia, Ahmed increased Ethiopian soft power by leading peace efforts in South Sudan, negotiating maritime trade agreements between Somalia and Kenya, and supporting political transition in Sudan.¹¹¹ As detailed in Chapter One, Ahmed also engaged in deadly conflict with Tigray in 2020 and created the controversial Prosperity Party in 2019.

Worldview

Understanding a leader's worldview can be exceptionally useful in understanding their decision making and understanding of events around them. The most important factors to understanding Abiy Ahmed's worldview are some key events throughout his life, his education, status as a "man of the people" prime minister, and his outward projections.

The year 1977, a year after Ahmed was born, was an incredibly painful year for Ethiopia and shaped the way adults that would have been in his life saw the world. The Red Terror of 1977 killed 60,000 people throughout Ethiopia, largely in neighboring

¹⁰⁸ Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister. (2019, October 11). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007>

¹⁰⁹ Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister. (2019, October 11). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007>

¹¹⁰ Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister. (2019, October 11). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007>

¹¹¹ Alexandropoulos, K. (2019, October 21). Who Is Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.insideover.com/indepths/politics/who-is-abiy-ahmed.html>

areas to Addis Ababa like Oromia, for their political views.¹¹² In February 1977, a rebellion broke out in the Somali (formerly Ogaden) region. Help from the Soviet Union and Cuba eventually squashed the rebellion, but conflict continued until 2018, leading to thousands of deaths.¹¹³

Ahmed lived his entire life under the Dergue, an authoritarian military government characterized by harsh, oppressive policies that did not allow for dissent.¹¹⁴ Ahmed joined the military at a very young age to fight this regime, implying that he is against authoritarianist policies and practices.¹¹⁵ As part of this military service, in the year after the Rwandan genocide, Ahmed served as a United Nations peacekeeper in the country—potentially leading to his lifelong endeavor for peace in Ethiopia.¹¹⁶

Ahmed's educational decisions reveal his views on leadership. His choice of earning a degree in transformational leadership and peace and security indicate that he views leaders as people with power to ensure the peace and security of their states. His MBA means that he has the education to be able to efficiently and effectively run and manage an organization and government.

Ahmed appears to view himself as a “man of the people” kind of leader. This means that he views his own views as speaking for the people and approaches conversations with other states as a representative of all Ethiopians. Ahmed's education is completely Ethiopian. Every institution he attended and earned degrees from was either

¹¹² Ethiopia: Red Terror and Famine. (2015, August 7). Retrieved from <https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/ethiopia/>

¹¹³ University of Central Arkansas: UCA. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/69-ethiopiaogaden-1948-present/>

¹¹⁴ Selassie, B. H., & Bereket (2014). Emperor haile selassie. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>

¹¹⁵ Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister. (2019, October 11). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007>

¹¹⁶ Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister. (2019, October 11). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007>

in Ethiopia or a collaboration between an international school and an Ethiopian body. Ahmed's ethnicity permits him to speak on behalf of all Ethiopians as well. He is Oromo, the ethnicity that makes up the largest portion of Ethiopian's seven major ethnicities. Ahmed is a protestant but was raised in a household of Orthodox Christians and Muslims- allowing him to understand the traditions, values, and views of the three largest religious groups in the nation.¹¹⁷

The most important factor in Ahmed's view of himself as a representation of all of Ethiopia is his approval among Ethiopians. According to a survey by Afro Barometer and the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy, two well respected Afro-centric organization focused on opinion research, 64.3 percent of Ethiopians trust Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and 67.2 percent approve of his job performance.¹¹⁸¹¹⁹ When Ahmed assumed his role as prime minister, opposition leaders voiced that they were "cautiously optimistic about the future" about his outspoken, competent, and participatory leadership. Jawar Mohammed, an activist and journalist in Ethiopia, described Abiy Ahmed's appointment to the role of prime minister as a "unique opportunity [for a] peaceful transition to democracy."¹²⁰ All of these factors mean that the people of Ethiopia view Ahmed in a positive light; Ahmed is well liked by a significant majority of Ethiopia and views himself as a representative of the views and desires of all Ethiopians.

¹¹⁷ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

¹¹⁸ #Ethiopia: How much do you approve the Prime Ministers 12 months of performance? For more detail, please register at: <https://t.co/NrRApMwOi2> pic.twitter.com/CVWX7bSPIX. (2020, September 25). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://twitter.com/CARDEthiopia/status/1309420960777469952>

¹¹⁹ #Ethiopia: How much do you trust each of the following: The Prime Minister? (2020, September 25). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://twitter.com/CARDEthiopia/status/1309384223762022400/photo/1>

¹²⁰ Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister. (2019, October 11). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007>

Abiy Ahmed's outward projections of himself demonstrate his view of himself as a player on the global stage. Most of Ahmed's posts on his social media sites are entirely in English.¹²¹ Occasionally he will provide an Amharic translation of the caption, but that is a small minority.¹²² This indicates that Ahmed wants to communicate primarily with English speakers in the West. Additionally, his account only follows ten accounts: National Geographic, National Geographic Travel, Ursula von de Leyen (President of the European Commission), Emmanuel Macron (President of France), Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister of Canada), Kristalina Georgieva (Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund), Tedros Ghebreyesus (Director General of the World Health Organization), Bill Gates, Paul Kagame (President of Rwanda), and Barack Obama (Former President of the United States).¹²³ The majority of these leaders are international leaders of western and progressive countries and organizations. This social media following indicates that these are the leaders Ahmed wants to emulate.

In the majority of public appearances, Ahmed usually dresses in a suit and tie. This contrasts with the more common military fatigues and traditional ethnic clothing that the majority of African leaders chose. Ahmed likely draws this line intentionally in order to more closely align himself with Western, modern leaders.

The Tigray conflict of 2020 received significant international backlash.¹²⁴ In response, Ahmed published a defense of his actions, not to his people, but instead in

¹²¹ PM Abiy Ahmed. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.instagram.com/pmabiyahmed/>

¹²² Ahmed, A. (2020, October 11). Instagram Post. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from https://www.instagram.com/p/CGNXI_ahVi3/

¹²³ Abiy Ahmed Following. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.instagram.com/pmabiyahmed/following/>

¹²⁴ Dahir, A. L. (2020, November 26). Ethiopia's Leader Escalates Assault on Tigray Region, Putting Civilians at Risk. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/26/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-abiy-ahmed.html>

English on an international media site, Project Syndicate.¹²⁵ He affirmed his government's determination to "address and dispel" concerns over the conflict and quoted Thomas Jefferson saying, "'a decent respect to the opinions of mankind' compels [him] to explain why [he] acted" in the way it did in Tigray.¹²⁶ Most leaders do not publish explanations to the international community over domestic conflict, and Ahmed's decision to demonstrate his commitment to ensuring his good standing on the international stage.

As a whole, Ahmed views himself as a player on the global stage who represents the views of all Ethiopians. His worldview is largely informed by the events of his early childhood and educational experience.

¹²⁵ Ahmed, A. (2021, February 06). Toward a Peaceful Order in the Horn of Africa by Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ethiopia-removal-of-tigray-tplf-will-benefit-region-by-abiy-ahmed-2021-02>

¹²⁶ Ahmed, A. (2021, February 06). Toward a Peaceful Order in the Horn of Africa by Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ethiopia-removal-of-tigray-tplf-will-benefit-region-by-abiy-ahmed-2021-02>

Chapter Four: Potential for Increased Individual Freedoms in Ethiopia

This chapter will detail the trajectory of Ethiopia in terms of scaling up freedoms for citizens and potential for the United States to assert more democratic influence in Ethiopia. It will do that by first explaining Ethiopia's freedom score as assessed by the author and determining where change is ongoing and may persist into the future. Second, this chapter will explain technological changes going on in Ethiopia that may help in achieving increased freedom. Third, it will describe areas of potential cooperation between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and U.S. President Joe Biden.

Current Freedom Score

In 2020, Ethiopia received a “global freedom score” of twenty-four points out of one-hundred possible points in which one-hundred points would be the most democratic by Freedom House, a global research institution dedicated to furthering democracy across the world. The score is determined by adding two major factors: political rights (nineteen points out of forty points) and civil liberties (fourteen points out of sixty points). This score is abysmal but has improved every year since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018. In 2019, Ethiopia had a score of nineteen points, in 2018 and 2017, twelve points.¹²⁷ This indicates that Ethiopia is on an upward trajectory in terms of democratization.

This section will detail why Ethiopia received the score it did most recently and identify key areas where improvement may be found or is already in action. This

¹²⁷ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

assessment is based on the methods of Freedom House but relies primarily on information found and assessed by the author. The conclusion in this section is twofold: the prime minister of Ethiopia wields the majority of power in influencing the direction of the country, including of the country's freedoms, and that Prime Minister Ahmed has proven that he is committed to positive change and will continue to push for a freer Ethiopia even though he will not implement or support a change in governmental structure that is needed to enhance democracy.

Author's Assessments

Political Liberties

In the political sphere, Ethiopia has made significant gains, and it continues to engage in progressive rhetoric. Nevertheless, Ethiopia's practical policy remains in need of improvement.

The first category to assess is the electoral process. Ethiopia has universal suffrage of all citizens over age 18.¹²⁸ On average, voter turnout for Ethiopia is an impressive 89.77 percent over the past 20 years.¹²⁹ This is countered by the number of electoral offices Ethiopians are able to directly elect, however. In Ethiopia, only the members of the House of People's Representatives are directly elected, and these elections are only held every five years, so that figure only represents four elections (2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015) as the 2020 elections were postponed because of concerns over COVID-19.¹³⁰ The ruling majority of the House of Peoples' Representatives elect

¹²⁸ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

¹²⁹ IFES Election Guide: Country Profile: Ethiopia. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2021, from <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/70/>

¹³⁰ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

the president and prime minister, significantly diminishing the say of any non-majority party factions' voice in the matter of who runs the country at the executive level.¹³¹ Some question the independence of Ethiopia's election management body, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, as it has been found to block leaders of certain political parties outside of the ruling coalition from running in elections.¹³² With that said, Afrobarometer found that 45.9 percent of people still trust the NEBE and that eight percent of those surveyed did not know enough to respond.¹³³ In 2019, the Ethiopian parliament passed 149 new election ethics laws that substantially changed the electoral process to prevent corruption and promote diversity in elected bodies.¹³⁴

One concerning move by Ahmed was the consolidation of the previous ruling coalition, the EPRDF, into the Prosperity Party. The intentions behind the move appear to be good; Ahmed wanted to create a pan-Ethiopian party that wasn't focused on ethnicity. The EPRDF consisted of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM). Ahmed called the 2019 merger that created the Prosperity party a "unanimous decision" even though the TPLF was ardently against the merger and did not join the Prosperity Party along with the rest of the EPRDF.¹³⁵ The TPLF went so far as to say that the merger would "put Ethiopia on the road to

¹³¹ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

¹³² Ethiopia: Abiy's First Year as Prime Minister, Review of Democratic Institutions and Political Space. (2019, April 7). Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/07/ethiopia-abiy-first-year-prime-minister-review-democratic-institutions-and>

¹³³ Twitter. (2020, September 25). Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/CARDEthiopia/status/1309403555233697793/photo/4>

¹³⁴ Kiruga, M. (2019, August 29). Ethiopia passes new laws ahead of 2020 elections. Retrieved from <https://www.theafricareport.com/16693/ethiopia-passes-new-laws-ahead-of-2020-elections/>

¹³⁵ Ethiopia's ruling coalition agrees to form single party ahead of 2020 vote. (2019, November 21). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics/ethiopias-ruling-coalition-agrees-to-form-single-party-ahead-of-2020-vote-idUSKBN1XV24H>

disintegration,” something that was seen being carried out by the TPLF over the last six months.¹³⁶

Overall, Ethiopia’s electoral processes are improving and will likely continue to do so with Ahmed in power. Access to voting is good and if Ahmed continues with his trend toward opening up the electoral system, Ethiopia will only improve in this area.

The second factor in the political sphere is political pluralism- the prevalence of numerous political parties and the ease at which non-ruling parties can form and rise in power.¹³⁷ Ethiopians generally have the right to form political parties free of “undue obstacles.”¹³⁸ In 2018, Parliament removed multiple ethnic political parties from their list of official terrorist organizations and Ahmed released thousands of political prisoners from the previous administration.¹³⁹ Ahmed pledged that his administration will pursue reforms that will make it easier for opposition political parties to operate, though, in practice, this is still yet to be felt like some expected it to.¹⁴⁰ In controversy to his rhetoric on the subject, Ahmed did place a number of Tigrayan officials in prison during the ongoing Tigray conflict primarily for the opposing political beliefs.¹⁴¹

As described previously, Tigray was severely harassed by the military for carrying out their elections in the Fall of 2020, though typically, elections are free from

¹³⁶ Ethiopia's Ruling Coalition Merges Into Single Party. (2019, November 22). Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ethiopias-ruling-coalition-merges-single-party>

¹³⁷ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹³⁸ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹³⁹ Freedom In The World 2020 Ethiopia. (2020, March 17). Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1259401/download>

¹⁴⁰ Freedom In The WORLD 2020 Ethiopia. (2020, March 17). Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1259401/download>

¹⁴¹ Ethiopian military says it killed 15 members of rebellious Tigray forces, captured 8 others. (2021, January 11). Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict/ethiopian-military-says-it-killed-15-members-of-rebellious-tigray-forces-captured-8-others-iduskbn29f0jf?Mc_cid=4c17adaecd&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

extra-political influence. Telecommunications are state owned, and the government has enforced communications blackouts occasionally. In a positive trend, Ethiopia announced in February 2021 that the sector was opening up for privatization which will lead to less extra-political influence on things like protests and elections since the government will no longer have that option in their back pocket.¹⁴²

Prime Minister Ahmed has repeatedly emphasized his belief in political plurality and participation, but practically he has contradicted himself in that belief over the past several months. Ahmed seems to support pluralism as long as it is not impacting his ability to lead which may become an issue later on. One area where Ethiopia seems to be doing very well in pluralism is in gender diversity in elected positions. Currently, 50 percent of Ahmed's cabinet, 39 percent of members of the House of People's Representatives, and 32 percent of members in the House of Federations are women.¹⁴³

The last factor in determining political liberties is how well the government functions. Only 8.8 percent of Ethiopians, according to a survey by Afrobarometer, think their elected representatives in the House of People's Representatives listen to their concerns and represent those in the government.¹⁴⁴ These are the only members of national government who are directly elected, so the lack of faith in their ability or willingness to represent their constituents is a bad sign for the functioning of the government in the way it was intended to. At the head of state level, Ahmed has made rooting out corruption a key priority of his role as prime minister and has carried out

¹⁴² Getachew, S. (2021, February 23). The World Bank wants greater competition in Ethiopia's telecom sector plans. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/africa/1976070/ethio-telecoms-privatization-and-mobile-money-plans/>

¹⁴³ Ethiopia World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>

¹⁴⁴ Twitter. (2020, September 25). Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/CARDEthiopia/status/1309384223762022400/photo/3>

many arrests of high-level officials for corruption.¹⁴⁵ Though he is dedicated to decreasing corruption within the government, he still does not often explain executive decisions and is a fairly non-transparent leader.¹⁴⁶

Civil Liberties

Ethiopian's civil liberties are expanding but are currently and previously have been severely lacking. Prime Minister Ahmed has enacted policies aimed at closing this gap between the ideal and the practical, but have either not yet impacted everyday Ethiopians or have not been followed strictly by the state. Civil liberties can be divided into four categories: freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights. The lines between these categories are easily blurred, so discussion of aspects that make up each will be broken into thematic groups rather than these strict categories.

Ethiopians are legally allowed to freely express their views and religious beliefs, but in reality, many constitutionally protected rights continue to be oppressed. While it is not at the hand of the state, many houses of worship of various religions were and continue to be vandalized and burned across the country.¹⁴⁷ In a state more dedicated to protecting religious freedoms, the government would be pursuing legal action against the perpetrators of these attacks, but this has not been the case in Ethiopia.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Meseret, E. (2018, November 12). Ethiopia arrests 63 suspected of rights abuses, corruption. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/09863def4f734e79bbecc6b3b09c8202>

¹⁴⁶ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹⁴⁷ Ethiopia - United States Department of State. (2020, December 01). Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/>

¹⁴⁸ Ethiopia - United States Department of State. (2020, December 01). Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/>

Academic freedom has always been severely restricted as all primary schools and universities are run by the national Ministry of Education and must follow strict guidelines on what is allowed to be taught and discussed in schools. Recently, this has begun trending up as more political discourse has been allowed at the university level.¹⁴⁹ Ethiopians are able to freely engage in political discourse online and in other ways outside of the education system, but social media and electricity access is limited. Only 20.6 percent of Ethiopians use social media and only 49.98 percent of Ethiopians have access to electricity (down from 80 percent in 2006).¹⁵⁰¹⁵¹ Because social media and the internet are today's public square, there is limited access for Ethiopians to express their views freely because of the lack of access to forums to do so.¹⁵² Additionally, there is no independent media that could be used to express dissenting views from the government.¹⁵³ Ahmed announced that he would like to create a freer media environment, but as of now, the entire sector is still state-owned.¹⁵⁴

When dissent does fester and is able to spread to enough people, constitutionally, their right to assemble should be protected.¹⁵⁵ However, in practice, nearly every protest in recent history was met with significant police backlash.¹⁵⁶ Today, a continuation of the

¹⁴⁹ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹⁵⁰ Kemp, S. (2021, February 11). Digital in Ethiopia: All the Statistics You Need in 2021 - DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-ethiopia>

¹⁵¹ Access to electricity (% of population) - Ethiopia. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2021, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS?locations=ET>

¹⁵² Kennedy, A. (2017, June 19). *Packingham v. North Carolina*, 582 U.S. ____ (2017). Retrieved from <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/582/15-1194/#tab-opinion-3749201>

¹⁵³ Ethiopia: Mass media. (2020, April). Retrieved from <https://www.eisa.org/wep/ethmedia.htm>

¹⁵⁴ Alexandropoulos, K. (2019, October 21). Who Is Abiy Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.insideover.com/indepths/politics/who-is-abiy-ahmed.html>

¹⁵⁵ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹⁵⁶ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

2015 Oromo protests exists, but strictly as a hunger strike since that is the only way to organize protest without meeting state violence.¹⁵⁷

Typically, Ethiopia is very receptive to non-governmental agency (NGO) participation and aid throughout the country.¹⁵⁸ However, in the recent Tigray conflict, this was not the case. It took over a month from the beginning of the armed conflict until United Nations affiliated aid workers were able to access the Tigray region.¹⁵⁹ Once they were allowed in, UN teams were shot at by Ethiopian forces even though they identified themselves as unarmed aid workers.¹⁶⁰ Many in the region are still in need of aid and the Ethiopian government continues to restrict aid access.¹⁶¹

Land rights and ease of business is an issue in Ethiopia. The state owns all land throughout the country, so residents are only ever able to lease their land from the government. This was the inciting factor that led to the still ongoing Oromo dissatisfaction and protest with the government; in 2015, Ethiopia wanted to expand the capital city and seized Oromia land citizens lived on and businesses operated on to do so.¹⁶² Many business sectors are also controlled by the state, especially in key, profitable

¹⁵⁷ 'No way they'll back out': Tensions rise amid Ethiopia opposition hunger strike. (2021, February 17). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/17/tensions-rise-amid-ethiopia-opposition-hunger-strike>

¹⁵⁸ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹⁵⁹ Ethiopia gives UN 'unimpeded' access to Tigray to deliver aid. (2020, December 02). Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/2/un-says-deal-signed-with-ethiopia-for-aid-access-to-tigray-ap?mc_cid=2e7fcd616b&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

¹⁶⁰ Ethiopia gives UN 'unimpeded' access to Tigray to deliver aid. (2020, December 02). Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/2/un-says-deal-signed-with-ethiopia-for-aid-access-to-tigray-ap?mc_cid=2e7fcd616b&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

¹⁶¹ Almost 2.3 million people need aid in Ethiopia's Tigray - U.N. report. (2021, January 08). Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict/almost-2-3-million-people-need-aid-in-ethiopia-tigray-u-n-report-idUSKBN29D1OZ?mc_cid=19bfcd3b50&mc_eid=0ae7b03589

¹⁶² Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

industries, however, Ahmed announced in 2019 that one goal of his administration is to eventually privatize many of these sectors.¹⁶³

Equal opportunity of education is fairly good in Ethiopia. The country has “near-universal primary school enrollment,” but the quality of education, like in most countries, is much weaker in rural areas.¹⁶⁴ Human trafficking in recent years has been more heavily policed and prosecuted, but there is still significant room for growth.¹⁶⁵ Forced child marriage and female genital mutilation is illegal, but is still common in the rural, more tribal areas of the country.¹⁶⁶ Freedom of movement is protected by the constitution and is typically enjoyed in practice, though regional conflicts occasionally restrict access to certain areas.¹⁶⁷

Laws in Ethiopia are not fairly applied in a majority of cases even though the judiciary is fairly independent.¹⁶⁸ Due process does not exist in practice as many are arrested and held without charges often.¹⁶⁹ Laws do not guarantee equal or fair treatment of everyone as seen in the government’s use of force in Tigray and the major regional

¹⁶³ Raffoul, A., & Raju, V. (2019, September 6). 5 reasons why Ethiopia could be the next global economy to watch. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/5-reasons-why-ethiopia-could-be-the-next-global-economy-to-watch/>

¹⁶⁴ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹⁶⁵ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹⁶⁶ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹⁶⁷ Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report. (2020). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020>

¹⁶⁸ Ethiopia Judicial System. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2021, from <http://countrystudies.us/ethiopia/114.htm>

¹⁶⁹ Ethiopia: Opposition Figures Held Without Charge. (2020, October 28). Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/15/ethiopia-opposition-figures-held-without-charge>

discrepancies between regions in access to governmental services and between genders in access to equal pay, education, land ownership, or other economic factors.¹⁷⁰

Author's Freedom Score

It is necessary to provide their own assessment of Ethiopia's current level of freedom because she does not agree that the Freedom House score is reflective of Ethiopia's level of freedom given their history and trajectory. The level of oppression in the past provides important contrast to where Ethiopia is now, and the trajectory of the state as described above are necessary considerations in determine how free Ethiopians are today. The author relies on the Freedom House analysis as a base, the assessments made above, the historical context of Ethiopia as described in Chapter One, and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's attitudes towards increased freedoms to draw her conclusions.

This author gives Ethiopia a score of 26 out of 40 possible points for political liberties and 29 out of 60 potential points for civil liberties, giving the country a total of 55 points out of 100 points. This assessment is significantly different from the Freedom House's assessment of 24 out of 100 points, but this author feels confident that they have reviewed significant relevant information and considered Ethiopia's present state in historical context to sufficiently draw these conclusions. The scores of each category follows to provide the reader more specificity into how this author drew these conclusions.

Section	Category	Subcategory	Score
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¹⁷⁰ Gavin, M. (2021, February 10). The Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray Region: What to Know. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/conflict-ethiopias-tigray-region-what-know>

Political Liberties	Electoral Process	Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?	0
Political Liberties	Electoral Process	Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?	3
Political Liberties	Electoral Process	Are the electoral laws and framework fair and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?	2
Political Liberties	Political Pluralism and Participation	Do people have the right to organize in different political parties or other	3

		competitive political groupings of their choice and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?	
Political Liberties	Political Pluralism and Participation	Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?	1
Political Liberties	Political Pluralism and Participation	Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere or by political forces that employ extra political means?	2
Political Liberties	Political Pluralism	Do various segments	3

	and Participation	of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	
Political Liberties	Functioning of Government	Do the freely elected head of government and national leg reps determine the policies of the government?	1
Political Liberties	Functioning of Government	Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	3
Political Liberties	Functioning of Government	Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	0
Civil Liberties	Freedom of Expression and Belief	Are there free and independence media?	1
Civil Liberties	Freedom of	Are individuals free to	3

	Expression and Belief	practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	
Civil Liberties	Freedom of Expression and Belief	Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	1
Civil Liberties	Freedom of Expression and Belief	Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	3
Civil Liberties	Associational and Organizational Rights	Is there freedom of assembly?	1
Civil Liberties	Associational and Organizational Rights	Is there freedom for NGOs, particularly those that are engaged in human rights related	3

		work?	
Civil Liberties	Associational and Organizational Rights	Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	2
Civil Liberties	Rule of Law	Is there an independent judiciary?	4
Civil Liberties	Rule of Law	Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	0
Civil Liberties	Rule of Law	Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	0
Civil Liberties	Rule of Law	Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?	1
Civil Liberties	Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights	Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to	3

		change their place of residence, employment, or education?	
Civil Liberties	Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights	Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state/nonstate actors?	2
Civil Liberties	Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights	Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?	2
Civil Liberties	Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights	Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity	3

		and freedom from economic exploitation?	
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Freedom House does not publicize how their scale was determined, but the scale the author created and relied on is below.

Number	Meaning
0	No.
1	No, but trending upward.
2	Either equal number of factors pulling up and down or stagnate situation.
3	Yes, but either trending downward or there is a factor that is holding it back from fully being yes.
4	Yes.

Chapter Five: Opportunities for Cooperation

It is important to understand areas of potential cooperation between Ethiopia and the United States if the U.S. decides to seize this moment of opportunity to assert influence into Ethiopia as China pulls back. This chapter will analyze the primary areas of opportunity for cooperation including Chinese withdrawal, Prime Minister Ahmed's stance toward democracy, increasing access to technology, and ethnic group calls for autonomy.

Chinese Withdrawal

COVID-19 has severely affected Ethiopia's economy, closing 42 percent of businesses in the capital city and lowering their pre-COVID projected 2020 GDP growth rate by 4 points, according to the World Bank.¹⁷² Additionally, Ethiopia is currently experiencing their worst locust invasion leading to decreased agricultural production and threatening food security in the region.¹⁷³ Ethiopia is going to continue to need international aid and assistance as they work to get back their pre-COVID economy.

Though Ethiopia and China have typically enjoyed an established investment partnership, there is room for the U.S. to grow their influence in the region. China has begun to back off from their heavy investments in Ethiopia, moving from \$1.47 billion in 2014 to \$630 million in 2017. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said that Chinese loans actually damage the Ethiopian economy and expressed preference for borrowing from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as that is more like "borrowing from

¹⁷² Dione, O. (2020, October 29). Tackling the impacts of COVID-19 is imperative to Ethiopia's journey to prosperity. Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/african/tackling-impacts-covid-19-imperative-ethiopia-journey-prosperity>

¹⁷³ Ethiopia Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview>

one's mother.”¹⁷⁴ With this preference on both sides turning away from each other, the U.S. could begin investing more in order to fill this gap and strengthen relations between the two countries simultaneously.

Prime Minister Ahmed

There is significant evidence that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed would be open to deepening ties between the U.S. and Ethiopia. In Ahmed's first address to the nation after taking office, he emphasized that democracy was the only way forward for Ethiopia.¹⁷⁵ As addressed in Chapters Three and Four, Ahmed has taken significant steps to free up media, end regional and domestic conflict, and unite the country. Because the prime minister holds a significant amount of power in the country as discussed in Chapter One, Ahmed's proclivity towards democracy and increased freedom provides an avenue for the United States to deepen relations.

Ahmed has the difficult task as prime minister of transforming a nation that has lived under authoritarian, Marxist control for the past 40 years into a democracy. The United States could work with Ahmed to enact meaningful policies that would bring Ethiopia towards this goal and bring the U.S. towards its goal of a more democratic world.

The United States would need to tread carefully in this endeavor. Ahmed has demonstrated distaste for countries openly trying to influence and control Ethiopia, so the U.S. would need to ensure they approach the prime minister in a bilateral rather than

¹⁷⁴ Marks, S. (2020, February 07). How an African state learned to play the West off China for billions. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/07/ethiopia-china-west-power-competition-110766>

¹⁷⁵ Gedamu Lecturer of Political Science, Y. (2020, November 20). Abiy put Ethiopia on the road to democracy: But major obstacles still stand in the way. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/abiy-put-ethiopia-on-the-road-to-democracy-but-major-obstacles-still-stand-in-the-way-140750>

polarizing way.¹⁷⁶ If the U.S. does this, Ahmed will likely be open to working with the country to further his democratic leaning policy goals.

Increasing Access to Technology

The Ethiopian Grand Renaissance Dam, first mentioned in Chapter Two, will bring electricity access to Ethiopians across the country. With this, access to technology will also increase. The internet has the capacity to “elevate the individual voice” of those who were not “formerly heard in the public square.”¹⁷⁷ Technology has the power to “turn our preferences into new laws and new articulations of public will.”¹⁷⁸ Having more access to technology is a positive thing for democracy as more voices can be heard and leaders can better understand what their people want to see happen in government. As discussed, Ethiopia has a leader who is open to these democratic ideas, so increased access to technology and electricity may have a significant impact on the freedoms of regular Ethiopians.

The United States could help aid in the amplification of these voices if they developed a closer relationship with Ahmed. This would be a powerful way for the U.S. to promote democracy in Ethiopia as it would be a highlight of ideas already circulating in Ethiopia rather than pushing U.S. ideas in a foreign country. This would play to Ahmed’s dislike of outsider intervention while still influencing the country toward democracy.

¹⁷⁶ <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ethiopia-removal-of-tigray-tplf-will-benefit-region-by-abiy-ahmed-2021-02?barrier=accesspaylog>

¹⁷⁷ Ma, M. (2018, November 11). The Impact of Technology on Democracy. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-impact-of-technology-on-democracy-1541943796>

¹⁷⁸ Ma, M. (2018, November 11). The Impact of Technology on Democracy. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-impact-of-technology-on-democracy-1541943796>

Ethnic Group Autonomy

The recent conflict with Tigray was a result of a desire for greater autonomy for ethnic states within Ethiopia.¹⁷⁹ While Ahmed is actively pursuing a platform of unity in Ethiopia, there is room for compromise in this area that would bring both sides closer to peace.

If Ethiopia became a more democratic state with a greater number of direct elections and increased transparency between the government and the people, ethnic groups would feel like their voices and concerns were being heard more than they are now. Opening up more of the government to direct election, requiring greater transparency of government, and ensuring representatives were representing the views of their constituencies more than people feel they are now would be a compromise between granting full autonomy to rebelling states and shutting down their voices entirely.

The United States could broker deals between the Tigray and other ethnic groups and the Ethiopian government to come to a compromise that both sides can accept. Ahmed doesn't want war or conflict. Ahmed has said, "We have only one option and that is to be united, not only cooperating and helping each other but uniting in order to live together. The other option is to kill each other; however, no sane person will opt for this. So, our option should be to trust one another, heal our wounds together and work together to develop our country."¹⁸⁰ The U.S. could assist him in pursuing this goal by working with the ethnic groups and federal government to ensure peace moving forward.

¹⁷⁹ Walsh, D., & Dahir, A. L. (2020, November 05). Why Is Ethiopia at War With Itself? Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/05/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-conflict-explained.html>

¹⁸⁰ Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister. (2019, October 11). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007>

Conclusion

Ethiopia is not likely to move to a full democracy, but it is likely that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed will continue to move the country toward increased personal freedoms. The United States has a unique opportunity to assert influence in a growing strategic region of Africa because of the withdrawal of Chinese participation in Ethiopia. They could do this by working with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed who has a preference towards democratic governance to bring Ethiopia away from the authoritarianism they have worked under for decades. The U.S. could take advantage of the increasing access to electricity and technology coming to Ethiopia to amplify democratic ideas throughout Ethiopia and broker peace and compromise between the federal government and various ethnic groups.

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