

THE ALLIANCE FOR THE SAHEL—AN ESSENTIAL ACCOMPANIMENT TO THE G5 SAHEL JOINT FORCE

By Dr. Ashley N. Bybee

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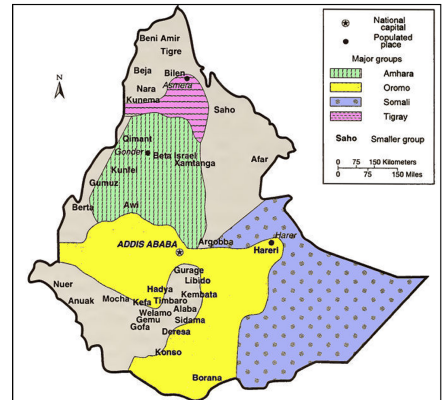
French President Emmanuel Macron, third left, participates in a group photo during the opening session of G5 Sahel force summit in Bamako, Mali, Sunday July 2, 2017. From left, Burkina-Faso President Roch Marc Christian Kabore, Mauritania President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, Macron, Mali President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, Chad president Idriss Deby, and Niger President Mahamadou Issoufou. (Source: AP Photo/Baba Ahmed.)

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ETHIOPIA AT A CROSSROADS

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On February 15, 2018, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, announced his [resignation](#) in response to ongoing protests by Ethiopia's two largest ethnic groups – the Oromo and Amhara. While the demonstrations have pushed Ethiopia's minority-controlled government to make concessions, including releasing some political prisoners, the government is still attempting to consolidate power through a state of emergency declared on February 16. While the [state of emergency](#) may quiet opposition in the short term, the duration and scale of protests suggest the government will need to make greater concessions to avoid further instability. [more...](#)



Major Ethnic Groups in Ethiopia. (Source: Globalsecurity.org, "Ethiopia – Ethnic Groups," accessed 20 February 2018.)

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Background on the G5 Sahel

The G5 Sahel was established in [February 2014](#) in Nouakchott, Mauritania, by the Presidents of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger with the aim of being an institutional framework to strengthen regional cooperation in the areas of development and security in the Sahel. It adopted a [convention of establishment](#) on December 19, 2014, and is permanently headquartered in Mauritania. Reinforcing peace and security is a common theme throughout the convention document and related materials, but Article 5 describes a wide array of non-security-related activities, among them developing infrastructures for transportation, water management, energy distribution, and telecommunications; creating conditions that foster good governance in member countries; and building the resilience of populations by ensuring sustainable food security, human development, and pastoralism. The G5 Sahel is composed of five organs to effectively coordinate these initiatives: the Conference of Heads of State; the Council of Ministers; the Permanent Secretariat (supported by the [World Bank](#)); the Defense and Security Committee; and the National Coordinating Committees for G5 Sahel Actions.

From the outset, the G5 Sahel sought opportunities to convene donors to coordinate financial support to these initiatives. In [July 2014](#), at its second ministerial meeting, which included donors, the Council of Ministers adopted an ambitious regional investment program called the Priority Investment Program (PIP), estimated at \$14.8 billion. The PIP for the period [2017–2019](#) comprises 19 programs and includes 101 projects, at a total cost of approximately \$12.3 billion. These figures, however, reflect donors' pledges and therefore remain aspirational until fully funded.

Alliance for the Sahel

On July 13, 2017, the president of the French Republic and the German chancellor launched the [Alliance for the Sahel](#) in Paris. The alliance includes the main multilateral and bilateral development partners of the G5 Sahel member states (France, Germany, the European Union, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Program), and it serves as a venue for more efficient coordination of donor assistance. The alliance focuses on five sectors: (1) youth employability (education and training); (2) agriculture, rural development, and food security; (3) energy and climate; (4) governance; and (5) decentralization and support for the deployment of basic services. The alliance also announced the establishment of [advisory centers for migration](#) to support returned refugees in domestic job markets. In addition to its support to the FC-G5S, France has pledged an additional \$247 million to member states over the next six years. One of French President Emmanuel Macron's top foreign policy priorities is known to be the Sahel, which he views as



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an important contributing factor to France's own [migration crisis](#). He may therefore view this forum as a means to elicit the international support necessary to address the root causes of insecurity in the Sahel and thus reduce the burden on French troops in the region.

A More Holistic Approach to Insecurity in the Sahel

Unemployment, illiteracy, poor governance, and other underlying conditions have structural roots that cannot be overcome with a military approach alone. In fact, a military-only approach could have significant unintended consequences. For example, if the FC-G5S were to succeed in its mission of disrupting illicit trafficking networks without providing alternative sources of income for the populations that rely on illicit trade for their livelihoods, the conflict might continue and possibly expand.

The alliance considers addressing these structural challenges as an essential component of a successful strategy for countering insecurity in the Sahel. France's UN envoy François Delattre, for example, referred to long-term economic development and an enhanced security presence as "[absolutely inseparable](#)." Addressing the structural sources of insecurity will also deflect [suggestions](#) that France's and Europe's support to the FC-G5S is largely self-serving, aimed at addressing their own domestic terrorist threats.

Conclusion

The purpose of G5 Sahel is to foster peace through the implementation of programs that support economic and human development, develop infrastructure necessary for the region to be relevant on the global stage, create conditions that foster good governance, and build the resilience of local populations. The G5 Sahel has positioned itself as a key regional interlocutor on issues of Sahelian security, and the EU's recent [doubling](#) of its funding for the FC-G5S will ensure that it continues in that role. While a heightened regional security posture is responsive to the continued insecurity in the region, any military solution should be accompanied by a concomitant emphasis on improving the livelihoods of local populations and reducing the appeal of violent extremism.

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Ethiopia Struggles with Minority Control

Ethiopia has long struggled to balance ethnic and political power. As Africa's [oldest](#) independent country, Ethiopia was historically governed by a monarchy controlled by its second-largest ethnic group, the [Amhara](#). In 1974, mutinying soldiers overthrew the monarchy and formed the [Derg regime](#), plunging Ethiopia into costly border wars, economic collapse, and starvation.

In [1989](#), the regime was overthrown by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a rebel movement of the minority Tigrayan population. In 1991, the TPLF adopted ethnic federalism, forming a coalition government called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which governs Ethiopia today. While the EPRDF coalition includes parties representing major ethnic groups, including the Amhara, Oromo, and southern nationalities, the [TPLF](#) remains in control of government policy.

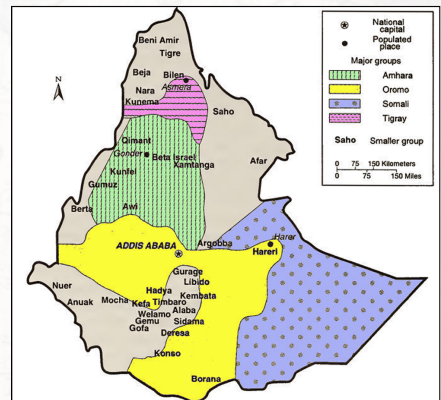
Tigrayan control of the government has long proven a source of tension. In 2005, after opposition parties performed particularly well in national elections, the EPRDF became more [authoritarian](#), imprisoning opposition leaders and exercising increased control over civil expression. Although the government has made symbolic gestures toward power-sharing, such as appointing [Hailemariam Desalegn](#), a southerner, as Prime Minister in 2012, the TPLF has made few real concessions despite increasing opposition.

Protests Get Results

As [Africa Watch](#) previously reported, the most recent protests began in response to a 2014 announcement that the government would expand the capital, Addis Ababa, into land held by the country's largest ethnic group, the Oromo. The resulting protests spread throughout 2015, notably bringing both Oromo and Amhara to the streets to challenge their lack of political representation and government brutality. The government responded harshly, declaring a [state of emergency](#) in October 2016 and arresting an estimated 20,000 people.

When the state of emergency was lifted in August 2017, protests and strikes continued. Although the government continued to arrest organizers and members of opposition parties, the [Oromo People's Democratic Organization](#) (OPDO), which is part of the EPRDF coalition and has historically been seen as under TPLF control, began to position itself as a quasi-opposition party and press for reform.

As protests continued, the government was forced to make significant concessions. In January, Hailemariam [announced](#) the government would be releasing prisoners. Despite some confusion, the government followed through in February, [releasing](#) nearly 6,000 political prisoners, including leaders of the opposition Oromo Federalist Congress.



Major Ethnic Groups in Ethiopia. (Source: Globalsecurity.org, "Ethiopia – Ethnic Groups," accessed 20 February 2018.)

Although Ethiopians have celebrated the prisoners' releases, protestors [continued](#) to push for further concessions, including Hailemariam's resignation and the appointment of an Oromo prime minister. Given Hailemariam's increasingly fractious relationship with Tigrayan leadership and pressure from Oromo protestors, his resignation was [expected](#), although the [timing](#) came as a surprise as most analysts expected him to stay in office until the EPRDF Congress planned for March 2018. The Ethiopian government is now under pressure to meet protestors' demands to appoint an Oromo politician to replace Hailemariam. [Some view](#) the newly declared state of emergency as an effort to control public discontent if the EPRDF Council selects a successor favorable to continued Tigrayan influence rather than a reformer as protestors want.

International Community Pushes for Peaceful Reform

Hailemariam's resignation and the announcement of the state of emergency have caused concern among the international community. The [United States](#) and the [European Union](#) released statements urging peaceful reform and criticizing the state of emergency. Ethiopia is a key [partner](#) in counterterrorism efforts in East Africa, providing forces in Somalia and South Sudan. Internal instability therefore threatens the international community's regional interests. As Bronwyn Bruton of the [Atlantic Council](#) has suggested, however, the Ethiopian government does not have a strong track record of responding positively to international criticism. It seems therefore unlikely that current international outreach efforts will have decisive impact.

Conclusion

Ethiopia's legacy of authoritarianism has made the path to political reform complex. Having dominated political and economic life for nearly 30 years, the TPLF has much to lose in any move toward power-sharing. The newly declared state of emergency suggests the TPLF intends to use traditional hardline tactics to maintain political control. Given the failure of the 2016–2017 state of emergency to dampen protests, however, this approach seems unlikely to be successful. Further, should the TPLF wait too long to make good-faith efforts toward reform, the resulting backlash may grow too strong for the government to manage, putting Ethiopia at risk for even more internal instability.

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