

Citizen Soldiers in Ethiopia: The Experience and Legal Frameworks of Reserve Force, Conscription and Militia System

Kaleab T. SIGATU¹

This paper aims to offer a historical overview, legal framework and analysis of the reserve force, conscription or compulsory military service, and militia systems in Ethiopia from the period of Emperor Haile Selassie to the present. Methodologically, it employs an empirical examination of literature and legal documents on the reserve force, conscription and the militia. There is an inadequacy of literature on the three major citizen soldier defence institutions in Ethiopia, and this paper is a partial attempt to fill the knowledge gap. The paper discusses the legal framework of the Emperor's effort to create a reserve force named Territorial Army, which more or less met its objective, even though the effort to start national military service failed. The military government's vicious mobilisation of militia and heavy recruitment of the youth for national military service resulted from the extended civil war that ended with the liberation of Eritrea and the toppling of the government. Currently, the government is planning to start national military service; on the other hand, a nominal reserve force exists, and the mostly rural institution of the militia plays an important citizen soldier role.

Keywords: Ethiopia, reserve force, conscription, militia, Emperor Haile Selassie, Derg, ENDF

Introduction

The tradition that citizens have a civic responsibility and a moral obligation to arm and organise themselves to protect their local community and the country temporarily when foreign invaders and internal threats occur is the foundation of the citizen soldier concept

¹ Researcher, Department of International and Regional Security, Defence War College, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, e-mail: kaleab.sigatu@gmail.com

in many literatures such as Chambers,² Doubler,³ Cohen,⁴ Huntington,⁵ Cohen⁶ and Klay.⁷ Citizen soldiers have been playing an important role in Ethiopian military history for centuries. On occasion, peasants left their farm and family when the emperor or regional nobility called them to take up arms against a local or foreign enemy, complete their duty, and then go back to civilian life. This was the norm.

In the modern history of Ethiopia, the battle of Adwa was fought between well-armed Italian troops and the Ethiopian peasant army.⁸ Such traditions also continued during the military government. Bezabih⁹ and Henze¹⁰ described that the Ethiopian workers, led by the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU) and the All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU), organised under workers militia, fought alongside the Revolutionary Ethiopian Army and the Cuban troops in the second Ethio–Somali war from 1997 to 1978. Recently, the *Fano* militia, an informal armed group, fought alongside the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) and other regional government forces against the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which was fighting an 18-month-long civil war against the federal government.

Throughout recorded history, the need for military manpower has challenged states and transformed societies.¹¹ The advent of a professional standing army composed of full-time soldiers, either career soldiers or conscripts alleviated the burden of national defence from the rest of the citizenry. However, in contemporary times, national defence relied not only on a standing army but also on organised citizen soldier systems of reserve forces, conscription and militia systems to meet the necessary demand for military manpower alongside the regular army.¹²

Aside from the full-time, professional army, the three major modern methods of recruitment for military forces or for mobilising citizen soldiers are conscription, reserve forces and militia systems. Conscription or national service means compulsory or voluntary enrolment in military service recruited for a period through the universal service of all citizens. In Africa, countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Algeria and Eritrea have made national service compulsory. Countries such as Kenya, Senegal and South Africa have made the service voluntary. Møller has argued that conscripted armies served as “melting pots”, bringing diverse strands of the population together and thus furthering a sense of community.¹³ For instance, the Eritrean national service has indeed served to promote an enhanced level of national identity and helped to bridge ethnic and religious differences within a country with nine distinct ethnic groups roughly divided equally

² CHAMBERS 1999.

³ DOUBLER 2008.

⁴ COHEN 2015.

⁵ HUNTINGTON 1967.

⁶ COHEN 2001: 23–28.

⁷ KLAY 2016.

⁸ CAULK 1978: 457–493.

⁹ BEZABIH 2022.

¹⁰ HENZE 2000.

¹¹ MJØSET – VAN HOLDE 2002a.

¹² MATTILA et al. 2017: 359–378.

¹³ MØLLER 2002: 277–305.

between Christians and Muslims.¹⁴ However, Kibreab argues that “it has degenerated into indefinite forced labor or a modern form of slavery”.¹⁵ “During the Cold War, the basis for developing military power in most European countries was conscription. Governments made efforts to militarize the whole society, maintain the readiness of various institutions for warfighting, and keep defense expenditures high.”¹⁶

The reserve force, also known as the territorial army or auxiliary force, is an army that stands outside the regular force but is mobilised for routine assignments or activated in times of crisis.¹⁷ Winston Churchill has a famous quote: “The reservist is twice the citizen”¹⁸ referring to the fact that reservists have a civilian career and military occupation. Connelly¹⁹ and Walker²⁰ argue that the recent pandemic and the increasing frequency and larger-scale natural disasters associated with climate change have further highlighted the significance of developing a reservist mass in response to a crisis in many states.

In German military tradition, it is considered that “the lieutenant moved through the world as a young god and the civilian reserve lieutenant as a demigod”.²¹ The reserve system was also considered a retirement scheme in the United States, in which the Congress, convinced of the necessity of cleaning out the upper ranks of the Navy, created a “reserved list” for officers incapable of duty.²² Currently in the United States, as part of the Total Force concept, military reserves are participating in active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.²³ Reservists still comprise the bulk of Israel’s military, whose use (like Finland, Taiwan, or South Korea) is aimed at solving the manpower problems of a relatively small population facing a situation of protracted conflict along its borders.²⁴ In the Hungarian territorial defence reserve system, there are volunteer defence reserves, volunteer operational reserves, trained reserves, and potential reserve systems based on their military background, readiness and deployment.²⁵

The third type of citizen soldier system is the militia. The term militia is used in two ways in literature and in the news media. According to Kurian²⁶ and Tresch,²⁷ in the positive sense, it designates an organisation of citizens whose task is to protect society, the political system, the territory and property; on the other hand, in a negative connotation, it refers to forces that are beyond the government’s control, such as the militias of warlords, better described as terrorist or insurgent in nature.

¹⁴ CLAPHAM 2017.

¹⁵ KIBREAB 2017.

¹⁶ SZÉKELY–Ujházy 2017: 94–101.

¹⁷ SPOHR READMAN 2004.

¹⁸ CURRIE–CROSSLAND 1984.

¹⁹ CONNELLY–BEN-ARI 2023: 7.

²⁰ WALKER 1992: 303–322.

²¹ HUNTINGTON 1967.

²² HUNTINGTON 1967.

²³ BEN-ARI–LOMSKY–FEDER 2011: 361–371.

²⁴ BEN-ARI–LOMSKY–FEDER 2011: 361–371.

²⁵ UJHÁZY 2017: 88.

²⁶ KURIAN 2011.

²⁷ TRESCH 2011: 239–260.

The militia system can be defined as a military organisation of citizens with limited military training, which is available for emergency service, usually for local defence.²⁸ Customary definitions of the term militia typically describe an armed force composed of nonprofessional soldiers tasked with protecting a community during times of crisis.²⁹

Militias serve part time commonly with only a few weeks of drill and training, and generally are fully mobilised only in response to specific emergencies; also, their standards of discipline and expertise are relatively low, and militias are rarely if ever deployed far from home.³⁰ The militia also embodied the democratic principle that defence of the nation was the responsibility of every citizen.³¹

For instance, the militia among the Romans was frequently called Agrarian soldiers.³² Similarly, in Ethiopian modern military tradition, the militia force is a civil defence paramilitary force, which is a largely rural organisation, under the direction of the local government, intended to be a regional force to assist in auxiliary police duties. The most obvious strategic advantage of a militia system is that it allows for the mobilisation of a very large part of the population, which may be relevant in cases of national defence against large-scale invasion.³³

The Ethiopian Army

In the ancient culture of Ethiopian warriorhood, except for monks, priests, merchants and judges, most rural men trained themselves as warriors.³⁴ Military defence was the responsibility of every citizen, not delegated to a small exclusive group. Tsehai Berhane-Selassie states: “Traditionally the soldiers did not constitute a separate section of the population, but were ordinary citizens mobilized by their rulers in time of need.”³⁵ Tsehai uses the term *chewa* in Amharic language as ‘militia’ or ‘citizen soldiery’ or sometimes referring to it as *neftegna* (literally ‘gunmen’), meaning an army, made up of those who self-train.³⁶ “Members of the ancient warrior category known as *chewa* bore personal responsibility for defending land and society in Ethiopia.”³⁷

One of the landmarks in military history of Ethiopia, the First Ethiopia–Italian War, which was concluded at the battle of Adwa in 1896, can be described as a war of citizen soldiers against the standing armies and mercenaries of King Umberto I of Italy. The Ethiopian emperor Menilik II was able to mobilise 100,000 troops from all the regions of

²⁸ Britannica 2022.

²⁹ KURIAN 2011.

³⁰ MJØSET – VAN HOLDE 2002b: 9.

³¹ HUNTINGTON 1967.

³² DUANE 1810.

³³ MØLLER 2002: 277–305.

³⁴ BERTHANE-SELASSIE 2018.

³⁵ PANKHURST 1967.

³⁶ BERTHANE-SELASSIE 2018.

³⁷ BERTHANE-SELASSIE 2018.

Ethiopia, including the newly incorporated southern regions.³⁸ Before going to battle to northern Ethiopia, Menilik sent the following mobilisation decree:

God, in his kindness, has so far destroyed the enemy and expanded the country for me; So far, I have ruled by the grace of God. [...] Now an enemy has come that destroys our country, and changes our religion, across the sea that God has given for us. [...] Now, with God's help, I will not surrender my country. [...] Those who are strong, help me with your strength. Those who are weak, for the sake of your son, your wife, your religion, help me in your prayer. If you fail to help for any reason, you will wrangle with me. I will not forgive you, in the name of Mary!³⁹

The emperor's call was a campaign call that shows duty of the citizens, and when a country is invaded, everyone was asked to march or support as much as possible. This shows a perennial individual sense of responsibility for a country, religion and monarch.

The idea of modern military formation in Ethiopia begins with Emperor Tewodros II (ruled 1855–1868), but it matured in the days of Emperor Menelik II (ruled 1889–1913), and laid the ground for modernity by creating a ministry of defence called Ministry of War.⁴⁰ Emperor Tewodros II made a start towards the creation of a national army whose units comprised of soldiers from different provinces, serving under crown appointees and receiving salaries from the imperial treasury.⁴¹ Probably the most remarkable aspect of Tewodros's military reform was his determination to produce modern weapons locally.⁴²

However, the first modern army can only be mentioned from 1919, when Teferi Mekonne formed the Imperial Bodyguard as a regular standing force, who later became Emperor Haile Selassie I (ruled 1931–1974) and later in 1935, Ethiopia opened the first military officer's training academy. The officer is not a mercenary who transfers his services wherever they are best rewarded, nor is he the temporary citizen soldier inspired by intense momentary patriotism and duty but tirelessly tries to improve himself in the management of violence.⁴³ Thus, this period lay ground for the formation of professional and standing army in Ethiopian history. Consequently, Erlich (1983) states that Haile Selassie's modernisation and centralisation of the army transferred Ethiopia from a country that can mobilise over 200,000 citizen soldiers from various provincial feudal armies to a Western-trained, centralised army of 45,000 through the disarmament of rural Ethiopia.⁴⁴

In 1974, a Marxist military government, the Provisional Military Administration Council (PMAC) (Derg) under the leadership of Lt. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam (ruled 1974–1991) seized power. Mengistu in 1987 with a new constitution continued his leadership as a civilian president of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

³⁸ ZEWUDE 2002.

³⁹ MEKURYA 1991 (translated from Amharic by the author).

⁴⁰ ZEWUDE 2002.

⁴¹ MARKAKIS 1975: 20.

⁴² AYELE 2014.

⁴³ HUNTINGTON 1967.

⁴⁴ ERLICH 1983: 455–481.

(PDRE). According to Bezabih⁴⁵ and de Waal⁴⁶ soon after the military took power mass mobilisation began in 1976, for the “Peasants’ March”, a military operation against the separatists in Eritrea and in 1977, the “Call of the Motherland” to raise recruits for the peasants’ militia or workers’ militia, to face the irredentist Somali army in the Ogaden. During this time, the government was able to build up an estimated number of 100,000 regulars and 150,000 combat-ready militiamen.⁴⁷ According to Lt. Colonel Mengistu, there were 300,000 men aged 18–40 in the people’s militia force.⁴⁸ In the end, between 1974 and 1991, the Ethiopian army grew from about 46,000 to nearly 500,000.⁴⁹ However, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a separatist group managed to overthrow the Derg government in 1991.

In 1991, the EPRDF demobilised 455,000 soldiers of the Revolutionary army and after 1995, under a new constitution, a new national army, the ENDF was established in 1996 with 50,000 troops.⁵⁰ However, the ENDF numbered 350,000 in 1998–1999 due to the Ethiopia–Eritrea war and “stabilized at 135,000 men following demobilization due to the ‘neither peace nor war’ situation between the two states”.⁵¹

The Ethiopian modern experience of reserve force, conscription and militia system

During Emperor Haile Selassie I (1931–1974)

It was Emperor Haile Selassie I who established a modern and centralised army that was under the leadership of the emperor himself and his defence minister. According to Erlich,⁵² Abate⁵³ and Tamrat,⁵⁴ before that, the national army was in practice an amalgam of the armies of the provinces or provincial governors who were expected to contribute fighters voluntarily whenever needed or required according to the 1955 Revised Constitution of the Empire of Ethiopia:

The emperor reserves the right, with the advice and consent of Parliament, to declare war. He, further, reserves the right to decide what armed forces shall be maintained both in time of peace and in time of war. As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, He has the right to organize and commend the said Forces; to commission and to confer military rank upon the officers of the said Forces; and to promote, transfer, or dismiss any of the said officers. He has, further, the right to declare a state of siege, martial law, or a national emergency, and to take such measures

⁴⁵ BEZABIH 2022.

⁴⁶ DE WAAL 1991.

⁴⁷ ERLICH 1983: 455–481.

⁴⁸ WOLDE 2012 (translated from Amharic by the author).

⁴⁹ AYELE 2014.

⁵⁰ FERRAS 2022.

⁵¹ FERRAS 2022: 204–206.

⁵² ERLICH 1983: 455–481.

⁵³ ABATE 1984: 380–400.

⁵⁴ TAMRAT 1968.

as are necessary to meet a threat to the defense or integrity of the Empire and to assure its defense and integrity (Article 29).

Everyone in the Empire has the duty to respect and obey the Constitution, laws, decrees, orders or regulations of the Empire. Ethiopian subjects, in addition, owe loyalty to the Emperor and the Empire, and have the duty of defending the Emperor and the Empire against all enemies, foreign and domestic; to perform public services, including military service, when called upon to do so; and to exercise the right of suffrage, which is conferred upon them by the Constitution (Article 64).⁵⁵

These two articles clearly show that as an absolute monarch and commander in chief of the army, Haile Selassie has the power to organise the armed forces as he wishes and to call for military service.

The Imperial Territorial Army

The Imperial Territorial Army was created by the emperor's order in 1958 by Tsehafe Tazaz Aklilu AbteWold, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Pen.⁵⁶ These auxiliary armed forces were established to provide additional military strength in times of war and to assist in ensuring the internal security of the Ethiopian Empire in times of peace. However, the other motive was also to disarm the numerous guerrilla bands that were roving the countryside after the Italian invasion (1936–1940) and engaging in banditry. Many bandits were recruited into the Territorial Army, provided they brought their weapons with them.⁵⁷

The Imperial Territorial Army was established in all provinces. At the time, Ethiopia was divided into 12 *Taklai Ghizat* (Provinces) and the Eritrean Federation, which joined Ethiopia in 1952. The Imperial Territorial Army was comprised of persons who are holders of *Maderia* land. *Maderia* is a land state retained control over that were given, in lieu of salary, for the maintenance of officials in its service. The officials enjoyed rights over such land only during their period in office. Later, there was a possibility for *Maderia* landholders to convert part of their holdings to permanent possession.⁵⁸ Even in the earlier history of Ethiopia, military service was also closely related to the system of land tenure; anyone who held land would provide service to their master in time of war or other emergency.⁵⁹

However, persons who have agreed to serve in the Territorial Army on behalf of the holders of *Mederia* land and persons who have volunteered for service and have been accepted for service by the Governor General of the Province may be accepted if they are between the ages of 18 and 25 years. For their service, the compensation can be in land,

⁵⁵ SIGATU 2019a.

⁵⁶ Order No. 21 of 1958, Imperial Territorial Army Order, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah Haile Selassie I, Elect of God and Emperor of Ethiopia. The Negarit Gazette.

⁵⁷ OFCANSKY–BERRY 1991.

⁵⁸ MARKAKIS 1975.

⁵⁹ PANKHURST 2001: 69.

in cash, or a combination of both. However, according to Gebru Tareke and Fantahun Ayele, the Territorial Army was poorly trained, poorly armed, poorly paid⁶⁰ and ill-disciplined.⁶¹

The Imperial Territorial Army was under the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior, which supervises not only security and police but also all provincial administration.⁶² The Chief of the General Staff, who holds the title of *Ras* or *Dejazmatch*, (*Ras* means General or, when the Emperor is in the field, Lt. General, *Dedjazmatch* means Lt. General) who is appointed by the Emperor, commanded the Imperial Territorial Army.

Each Provincial Territorial Army was commanded by the Governor-General of the province and discharge his duties pursuant to instructions of the Chief of the General Staff of the Imperial Territorial Army. The Governor-General with the approval of the Minister of the Interior, can mobilise all or part of the Provincial Territorial Army under his command.

The Governors of *awrajas* (local government under *Taklai Ghizat* or Province) were also responsible for carrying out the instructions of the Governor-General of the province concerned with respect to the enlistment of personnel of the Provincial Territorial Army and the organisation, administration and disposition of the Provincial Territorial Army.

It is the Chief of the General Staff of the Imperial Territorial Army, that organises each Provincial Territorial Army, in units of squads, platoons, companies and other army units. For the purpose of rank, the personnel of the Imperial Territorial Army were classified as privates, non-commissioned officers and officers. The personnel of the Imperial Territorial Army held titles following the Ethiopian ancient tradition, according to their rank, as follows: *Ras* (General or when the Emperor is in the field, Lt. General), *Dedjazmatch* (Lt. General), *Fitaurari* (Major General), *Kegnazmatch* (Brigadier General—line or literally, commander of the right wing), *Grazmatch* (Brigadier General—staff or literally means commander of the left wing of an army), *Balambaras* (Lieutenant Colonel), *Meto-Aleka* (Captain), *Amsa-Aleka* (Lieutenant) and *Asir-Aleka* (Sergeant).⁶³

In time of peace, the Imperial Territorial Army rendered services in ensuring the internal security of the Empire, and when called by the Governor-General assisted the police forces in the performance of their duties; it undergoes courses of instruction and training as prescribed by the Chief of the General Staff of the Imperial Territorial Army.

In time of war, its duties were to guard stores of war material, magazines, communication lines and similar installations, to report on landings of enemy paratroopers, to minimise the enemy's fighting power, to carry out guerrilla activities behind enemy frontlines and generally to make the most effective contribution to the defence of the Ethiopian Empire.

Persons who were rendering services in the Imperial Territorial Army as volunteers shall upon the completion of their initial intensive course of instruction and training, be recalled during the period of their enlistment for additional training periods of not more than 2 months per year. Persons rendering services in the Imperial Territorial Army in discharge of military service obligations imposed by the holding of lands shall be called to

⁶⁰ TAREKE 2016.

⁶¹ AYELE 2014.

⁶² HABTE SELASSIE 1966: 74–91.

⁶³ The Crown Council of Ethiopia s. a.

active duty each year for a period of not more than two months, to render services, which shall consist only for the performance of guard duties and similar auxiliary activities.

National Military Service and Reserve Force

The National Military Service launched in 1973, under the rationale of “in order to perpetuate this rich heritage of our forefathers and to enable our country to help preserve world peace, it is necessary that every citizen be steeped in military education”.⁶⁴ Those who were required to give military service are all male citizens between 20 and 21 years old and prior to that, a citizen who has attained the age of 19 years has to register at time and place, determined by the Ministry of National Defence (MoND). Those who passed their medical checkup and standard criteria assigned to the Armed Forces or with the consent of the public authorities or agencies concerned, assigned to fulfil economic and social services in other ministries or governmental agencies.

All those who completed their services in the active duty (full time service in the armed forces) and the ready reserve duty (available for call-up to active duty or to ready reserve training duty) of national military service transferred to the ready reserve and to the reserves (availability for call-up to active duty), respectively.

The service year in the national military service is 24 months on active duty and three consecutive years on ready reserve duty until attaining the age of 45 years. For those on ready reserve duty there was not more than 15 days refresher training each year. Employers were obligated to release an employee who is serving in the national military service or performing ready reserve training duty and to reinstate in his place of employment upon completion.

Public servants and employees of private organisations undergoing ready reserve refresher training continue to receive their salaries and those not employed were entitled to receive pocket money for the duration of the training. Finally, any person who fails to perform national military service duty will be punished with imprisonment not exceeding two years or a fine not exceeding Ethiopian Birr 2,000 or by both.

In November 1973, by the order of the establishment of the National Military Service Board, a Coordinating Board was established to formulate and execute the overall plans for the National Military Service in the field of economic and social development and fix the number of inductees to be assigned in the various types of social service and development programs.⁶⁵ The board was chaired by the MoND and the Minister of National Community Development and Social Affairs, the Minister of Education and Fine Arts, the Minister of Public Works and Water Resources, the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of the Interior and the Head of Planning Commission Office were members.

⁶⁴ Proclamation No. 322 of 1973, National Military Service Proclamation. Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah Haile Selassie I, Elect of God and Emperor of Ethiopia. The Negarit Gazette.

⁶⁵ Order No. 87 of 1973, National Military Service Coordinating Board, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah Haile Selassie I, Elect of God and Emperor of Ethiopia. The Negarit Gazette.

The order also authorises the MoND to establish one Induction and Assignment Appeal Board in the capital each *Teklay Ghizat*, *awraja* administration and at Ethiopian embassies abroad. The *Enderasye* (deputy) of the *Teklay Ghizat* chaired the board with the representative of the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Agriculture, the Commissioner of Police for the *Teklay Ghizat* and the Induction Officer of the *Teklay Ghizat* as members. The Induction and Assignment Board of *awraja* was composed of the *awraja* Administrator as Chairman, a representative of the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, two persons designated by the *awraja* Administrator or, where the *awraja* has local self-administration, two representatives of the *awraja* Council, a public health officer or physician, representing the Ministry of Public Health, and the Induction Officer of the *awraja* as members.

The main functions of the board was to implement the instructions of the MoND regarding National Military Service. It registered all young male Ethiopians who were 19 years old; deferred the period of service of registration according to the regulation of the MoND; dispatched the inductees to military training centres; and kept record of those transferred to ready reserve duty after two years of active duty and of those transferred to reserve duty.

The National Military Service Regulation, which was issued by Lt. General Kebede Guebre, Minister of MoND, described terms and guidelines for the service.⁶⁶ The Office of Induction and Assignment Board assign the registrants for combat services, for service in economic and development projects and social services and determine others as unfit for service according to their health conditions.

Inductees during their military service classified as enlisted men; however, after special training they could be classified as commissioned or non-commissioned officers. Economic and social services in public authorities or agencies and service in the university were also considered military service. Pocket money during the period of service was given and persons on ready reserve and reserve duty who are called to active in time of declared war or state of emergency are entitled to the same salary and other benefits as the regular forces with similar positions and rank.

However, with all their details, the regulations of the national military service, ready reserve and reserve force were not implemented. Since 1973, the imperial government has been challenged by internal and external economic and political pressures and has faced protests from the military and civilian populations; it was too weak to implement this ambitious plan. Finally, in the November 1974 revolution, Haile Selassie I, “Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Elect of God and Emperor of Ethiopia”, became the last of the Solomonic dynasty, an imperial dynasty of Ethiopia that began in 1270.

⁶⁶ Regulation No. 444 of 1973, National Military Service, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah Haile Selassie I, Elect of God and Emperor of Ethiopia. The Negarit Gazette.

During the Provisional Military Administrative Council (Derg) and the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) (1974–1991)

The PDRE constitution states the following concerning national defence and national military service:

- (1) The People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shall strengthen the country's defense capability.
- (2) The People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shall promote the working people's spirit of patriotism and revolutionary valor, and when necessary, mobilize the entire working people for the defense of the country and the protection of the people and the revolution.
- (3) The People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shall foster the spirit of socialist patriotism of the youth and implement the National Military Service.
- (4) The People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shall organize civil defense to withstand natural and man-made calamities (Article 26).⁶⁷

Even though the constitution became active in 1987, as stated above, militia mobilisation started in the early days of the government due to the invasion of Somalia, and national military service was declared early in 1983 because of the civil war in northern Ethiopia. Nevertheless, even before national military service was launched officially, the *Derg* declared "Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment, and Work Campaign", or "*Zemecha*" as soon as it took power on 25 November 1974. It was a non-military national service focusing on educating mostly rural society.

Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign (Zemecha)

Soon after the *Derg* took power from the emperor, the Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign (Zemecha) was declared in November 1974.⁶⁸ One of the main objectives of the Zemecha was to enable the people grasp the philosophy of "Ethiopia Tikdem" (Ethiopia First), which means Hibtetesebawinet or Ethiopian Socialism: equality; self-reliance; the dignity of labour; the supremacy of the common good; and the indivisibility of Ethiopian unity.⁶⁹ During this time, the *Derg* paraded itself to the outside world as the champion of Marxism–Leninism in Africa,⁷⁰ and also it revealed the government was guided by the Ethiopian Socialism which is inspired by the Tanzanian model of African Socialism.⁷¹

Another important objective was to conduct literacy programs in basic education. Moreover, provide basic agricultural, health, technical and other social work education for the masses; teach about the equality of citizens regardless of ethnicity, wealth, authority, or

⁶⁷ SIGATU 2019a.

⁶⁸ Proclamation No. 11 of 1974, Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette.

⁶⁹ Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) 1974: 8.

⁷⁰ CHEGE 1979: 359-380.

⁷¹ DESTA 2016 (translated from Amharic by the author).

education; participate in the relief and prevention of famine in drought-stricken areas; and conduct research and collect data to utilise it for the maximum utilisation of the nation's manpower and natural resources. Most importantly, it indicated the problem of existing land tenures and the new-fangled "Public Ownership of Rural Lands" proclamation, through which the government nationalised all rural land and abolished tenancy.⁷²

The campaign participants were high school, technical schools and university students and teachers. It was decreed that, if anyone fails to fulfil this obligation, was not to be permitted to attend any school or cannot be employed in any government or private organisation, and leave the country. The campaign was up to September 1975. However, in August 1975, the government extended it until July 1976.⁷³ For the reason of requests from the citizens for the continuation of the service of the campaign and because there was a need to continue implementation of the new proclamation of Public Ownership of Rural Lands and the Government Ownership of Urban Lands and Extra Houses.⁷⁴ Around 60,000 students participated in the *Zemecha*.⁷⁵ The alphabetisation program (teaching how to read and write) was the most important single project of the campaign, teaching over 350,000 peasants.⁷⁶

National Military Service

As discussed above, in the second half of the 1970s, the northern civil war and the Ethio–Somalia war demanded any able man that could fight other than the regular army. Also in the 1980s, in the towns and villages of Ethiopia, the talk was about who had been taken for the national military service.⁷⁷ The reason was that the war with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) was getting worse costing many human lives.

In 1983, national military service was declared on the rationale that "every Ethiopian citizen shall have the opportunity to serve and thus, renew his glorious, patriotic heritage in the spirit of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism, laying down a strong and durable basis for the strengthening of the Revolutionary Armed Forces to safeguard the Revolution, defend the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of the Revolutionary Motherland".⁷⁸ The proclamation obliged any Ethiopian from 18 to 50 years of age to serve in the National Military Service, and any Ethiopian from 18 to 30 years of age was obliged

⁷² Proclamation No. 31 of 1975, Public Ownership of Rural Lands. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette.

⁷³ Proclamation No. 48 of 1975, Developing through Cooperation Enlightenment and work Campaign Extension. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette.

⁷⁴ Proclamation No. 47 of 1975, Public Ownership of Rural Lands and the Government Ownership of Urban Lands and Extra Houses. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette.

⁷⁵ WOLDE GIORGIS 1989.

⁷⁶ MILKIAS 1980: 19–30.

⁷⁷ DE WAAL 1991.

⁷⁸ Proclamation No. 238 of 1983, National Military Service Proclamation. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette. Article 12.

to be inducted for active military service. Also prior to this, any Ethiopian who is between 16 and 30 years of age must register for pre-induction military training, and periodic general military education is given while carrying out his regular activity. The inductee will take military training for a period of not less than 6 months. Upon completion of the training, the inductee will render active military service in the Revolutionary Armed Forces, the Revolutionary Police, or the Revolutionary Border Guard for 24 consecutive months. The induction can be postponed in the case of a person who is in the graduating class of a vocational school or higher education institution and is temporarily incapacitated due to health issues.

An inductee who was an employee of any government office, mass or private organisation, on the day of induction has the right to be re-employed therein upon completion of active military service. Moreover, they will get priority in areas such as educational opportunities in national or foreign institutions, medical services, employment, housing, transportation and bank loans.

Eight months after the national military service program was decreed, the then Minister of National Defence Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gebrekidan declared the national military service regulation on 10 January 1984.⁷⁹ The regulation focuses on details of registration, induction, pre-induction military training, training and service, discharge and extension of service, and reserve military service.

According to the regulation, all Ethiopian nationals between the ages of 16 and 30 and those subject to reserve military service must register at their respective *weredas* (districts) of permanent residence. The notice of registration was issued by the Minister of the Interior. The registration offices were in every peasant and urban dweller's *kebele* (urban neighbourhood or the smallest administrative unit in towns) association. The offices were composed of the chair of the *kebele* association, the secretary of the *kebele* association, the chair of the *kebele* Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA), and the chairlady of the *kebele* Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA). The registration offices were accountable to the military commissar of the *wereda*. These offices were responsible for taking legal measures against those who did not respond to call-up notice, deciding cases of postponement of induction, and other related tasks.

All the *weredas*, *awrajas* and provinces have their own induction committees, under the chair of the military commissar, with representatives of the Commission to Organize the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE), the Ministry of Education, the public safety and security chief, mass organisations, the health officer and the police. The accountability goes from the lower level of administration to the higher level of the province, and the provincial induction committee was accountable to the Chief of the Military Commissariat.

Those inductees who have passed the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate examination (graduate high school) or who have achieved higher levels of education can be selected for a reserve officers training course, and those who complete the course shall

⁷⁹ Regulation No. 82 of 1984, National Military Service. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette.

be conferred the rank of Second Lieutenant and shall serve the remainder of their active military service as officers. The period of training and active military service did not exceed 30 consecutive months, with the exception of the time of mobilisation or war. On the application, the military service term can be extended up to two years but not beyond the age of 45. An inductee who has completed at least 8 months of active military service and shows a higher degree of leadership quality and discipline and better performance of duties can be promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal. Higher ranks following Lance Corporal can be awarded every six months.

Reserve military duty

The reserve military duty is also required of any person who has completed his active military service, until he is 50 years of age. An Ethiopian who is between the ages of 30 and 50 after the effective date of the proclamation and any retired member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, the Revolutionary Police, or the Revolutionary Boarder Guard, until he attains 50 years of age. Thus, any person who has reserve military duties will be given refresher military training. The employment of any person undergoing training or performing reserve military service will not be affected, including the salary payment.

There was also an opportunity for an inductee who had completed his training to enrol in a military academy. Then after, to serve as an officer of the Reserve Military Service or to serve as an officer of the standing Revolutionary Armed Forces, the Revolutionary Police, or the Revolutionary Boarder Guard, where he has the necessary military inclinations and outstanding qualities.

According to the 1984 Regulation on Military Service and Reserve Force, persons discharged from active national military service have to register within 30 days at the Commissariat of their respective *wereda* of permanent residence for the reserve military service. In this regard, members of the standing army of the rank of colonel and below who are discharged under the age of 55 years and general officers who are discharged under the age of 60 years have a duty for reserve military service.

Anyone who gave active military service was called for training for a different duration according to his age, length of service, or whether he took part in battles or not. Government and private offices, mass organisations and cooperative societies have an obligation to their employees and members to duly register for national military service, including reserve military duty and undergo induction. In addition, they have to pay their employees' wages until they are sent to the training centre if they are inductees, and their salary, transportation and peridorm for those who are selected to serve as members of induction committees or staffs.

The Peasant Defence Squads, the Revolutionary Defence Committee and the Territorial People's Militia

During the *Derg* regime, the most prominent militia system is called the Territorial People's Militia, which was created in May 1983. Even though in the second half of the 1970s, the "peasants' militia" or "workers' militia" were mobilised against the Somalia invasion, it is during this time the word Militia was officially used in the government Gazette. However, it is important to note that soon after the *Derg* took power it created rural armed units called "Peasant Defence Squads".⁸⁰ Local self-government was granted to peasant associations in rural areas and the associations established judicial tribunals to deal with certain criminal and civil cases, in which the peasant defence squads enforced decisions. In addition, the peasant defence squads safeguard forests, mines, bridges, crops and other such properties, which need safeguarding from time to time.

The Defence Squad had a leader of the squad who is elected by the general assembly of the peasant association and who shall be a member of the executive committee, and other members were elected by the executive committee and the same committee can decide their numbers. The term of service was for two years. The criteria for membership in the Defence Squad were: someone from the broad masses of peasants who stands for their interest; in good health; not addicted to alcohol or other dangerous drugs; esteemed for his wisdom by the local people; not convicted for theft; and over 21 years old.

In May 1982, the government consolidated the powers of peasant associations in the country and established the *kebele* Peasant Association, and Provincial, *awraja* and *wereda* Peasant Associations.⁸¹ It also established an umbrella organisation known as, All-Ethiopia Peasant Association (AEPA), to give central guidance to all Ethiopian peasants and peasant associations as the only national peasant association in the country. Every Peasant Association's Executive Committee had Revolution Defence Committees under them, in all levels of administration. There were Revolution Defence Committees of *kebele* Peasant Associations and *wereda*, *awraja*, Provincial level and there was the AEPA Revolution Defence Committee. All Revolution Defence Committees guide and coordinate the activities in their respective areas and were elected for a two year term.

The members of the Revolutionary Defence Committee did most of the regular security activities. Some of the duties were:

- to follow-up and notify the executive committee of any conspiracies plotted against the revolution, unity and independence of Ethiopia
- where he finds a person in *flagrante delicto* in connection with such an offense, arrest and hand him over to the nearest police station
- to produce any wanted person in accordance with an order legally given by the executive committee or judicial tribunal of a peasant association

⁸⁰ Proclamation No. 71 of 1975, Peasant Association's Organization and Consolidation. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette.

⁸¹ Proclamation No. 223 of 1983, Peasant Association's Consolidation Proclamation. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette.

- to enforce decisions and orders given by the judicial tribunal
- and to protect forests, mines, bridges, crops, or other such public or government property

It was after a few days of the establishment of the national military service program in 1983 that “the Military Commissariat and the Territorial People’s Militia” was declared.⁸² The rationale for the establishment of the two institutions was to make urban dwellers, peasants, professional, women and youth associations and cooperative societies more effective, and enable them defend the country, revolution, and their lives and property. The purposes of the Territorial People’s Militia was “to protect and safeguard the Revolution and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the county, to fight against internal and external enemies, defend the broad masses government and public property from man-made and natural disasters”.⁸³

The duties and responsibilities of the militia were limited locally on its established *wereda*, *awraja*, province, or urban centre. The following were stated duties and responsibilities: to defend against any external attacks and aggressions; to defend against internal anti-revolutionary and anti-unity elements; to participate in the defence of the broad masses, government and public property from man-made and natural disasters; and to engage in economic and social activities in the area of deployment.

Unlike the Territorial Army of the previous imperial government, the Militia can be deployed outside of its administrative units of establishment. Moreover, the regular army and the militia can be jointly deployed, and in this case, the command and supervision was made by the regular army.

The most important institution in regards to the national military service and militia was the Military Commissariat.⁸⁴ The Chief Military Commissariat was established within the Ministry of the Interior with the rank of vice minister. The Chief Military Commissar had the duties of proposing the recruitment criteria, the formation, training, deployment, command of the Militia. Also, follow up the implementation of the national military service program and its mobilisation. Likewise respective provincial, *awraja*, *wereda* and Urban Centre military commissariats, which were established in the particular administration offices, with same duties.

Lastly, it is noteworthy to mention that mass involuntary conscription campaigns of the *Derg* backfired through a growing alienation of the public from the government: “Not only were large numbers of young men taken from their homes and farms to serve in the army, but the fear of conscription forced them to be in a state of readiness to flee to the hills at any sign of soldiers or government officials.”⁸⁵ This was one of the factors that accelerated the speedy disbanding of the government in 1991.

⁸² Proclamation No. 239 of 1983, Establishment of the Military Commissariat and the Territorial People’s Militia. The Provisional Military Administrative Council. The Negarit Gazette.

⁸³ Proclamation No. 239 of 1983. Article 21.

⁸⁴ TECHANE 2014 (translated from Amharic by the author).

⁸⁵ DE WAAL 1991.

Reserve Force and Militia System under the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1991–)

The ENDF established in 1996⁸⁶ incorporated some members of the previous government's Revolutionary Army. All security and defence apparatus of the *Derg* government were demobilised. It was in April 2003 that the National Reserve Force was established. On the other hand, in post-1991 Ethiopia, the militia system continued mostly in rural areas after the indoctrination of the new government's ideology to the rural masses especially after the new constitution of 1995.

National Reserve Force of the FDRE

There are three objectives for the establishment of the National Reserve Force (NRF): to safeguard the country's sovereignty and to protect vigilantly the constitutional order; to be deployed together with the ENDF at times of war and state of emergency; and to reach promptly at any sight and assist wherever human or natural disaster occurs.⁸⁷ On the ground, the major reason to form a reserve force was the Ethiopian government's need for a fighting force, since the Ethiopia–Eritrea stalemate⁸⁸ continued with Ethiopian occupation of disputed territories and the border town of Badme. Moreover, the reserve force became a mechanism to keep round the demobilised Revolutionary Army forces of the previous government, which it recalled since the beginning of the war in 1998. The unique feature of the NRF was unlike the previous government or as commonly used in other states, reserves were not retired soldiers of the regular army or those who completed the national service program.

The National Reserve Force Organization and Coordination Bureau (NRFOCB) is the main office established under the MoND to coordinate and administer as superior authority the work of the NRF. The reserve forces are organised in all federal states and liaison offices are established in all zonal administrations (formerly *awraja*) of the regional states (formerly provinces). Even though by law reserve forces have to be organised at the *woreda* level, in government offices, private or government institutions or public associations, currently the NRF is organised only at zonal level, and also no liaison offices exist in government offices, private or government institutions or public associations.

In regards to the recruitment of the reserve force, it is mostly done from all regional states except the two city administrations, the capital Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Farmers who live in rural regions make up almost all the reserve forces. Except for the age limit, the other criteria for recruitment for the reserve force are the same as for the regular force. For the reserve, those from 18 to 30 years old can serve, but for the regular force,

⁸⁶ Proclamation No. 27 of 1996, Proclamation on the Defence Forces of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The Federal Negarit Gazette.

⁸⁷ Proclamation No. 327 of 2003, Establishment of the National Reserve Force of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). The Federal Negarit Gazette.

⁸⁸ SIGATU 2019b: 79–91.

only those from 18 to 22. The service year for a reserve is seven but does not go beyond 38 years old.

Recruits are given basic military training, and during the training, they are entitled to free rations, lodging, clothing, pocket money, medical care and training aids. There is also a probability to have training and practice with ENDF every year. During the military stalemate with Eritrean forces at the northern border many members of the reserve forces stayed up to six months at the front. However, last reserve force training took place in 2010.

By law, the NRF is enlisted in the ground force or the air force. However, the reserve forces are serving only in the ground force, and there is no recruitment system for the air force. As mentioned above, most of the members of the reserve force are mostly farmers from the countryside. In 2019, the ENDF, in addition to ground and air forces, it added naval force, special operation force and space and cyber forces if necessary, and each force may have reserve forces.⁸⁹ Still, a militia-like reserve force is in practice.

The term of service in the NRF is seven years. There is a possibility to extend service period in mutual consent or during the time of mobilisation and times of war, but not beyond the age of 38. A member of the NRF in time of active service is entitled rations, uniform, transportation, lodging, medical care free of charge and salary. Ranks may be given for the command-and-control positions at *woreda* and *kebele* levels but still there are no directives about it, therefore, reserve forces have no rank neither a system of promotion in ranks.

The main reason for the weakness of the reserve system in Ethiopia emanates from the military doctrine of the EPRDF government (ruled 1991–2018); moreover, as it is mentioned above, the reserve force was a cautionary measure to keep the demobilised forces in the loop. The book entitled *Building an Army in a Revolutionary Democracy* commonly known as the “Red Book” assumed to be written by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenaw (ruled 1991–2012) which was both a military doctrine and a political foundation of the ENDF under the EPRDF government was critical concerning the reserve force.

According to the Red Book, the reason reserve forces were usually limited to infantry units is because it cannot be permanently trained and therefore, it is impossible to make the force to have a high military competence.⁹⁰ It also argues that it takes much time to mobilise reserve forces in less developed states with large geographical size and limited transportation system in sudden emergencies.⁹¹ The doctrine preferred a militia system to either national military service or reserve force.

On the other hand, the new military doctrine, which came out in 2018, after the reform of government in which the EPRDF changed to Prosperity Party (PP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, it endorse both national military service and a reserve force system as follows:

⁸⁹ Proclamation No. 1100 of 2019, A Proclamation on the Defence Forces of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The Federal Negarit Gazette.

⁹⁰ Ministry of National Defence (MoND) 2001 (translated from Amharic by the author).

⁹¹ Ministry of National Defence (MoND) 2001 (translated from Amharic by the author).

A reserve force is a component that can organize manpower with qualified combat skills without compromising the nation's economic potential. Reserve forces enhance our ability to avoid war at a low-cost during peacetime. The reserve force plays an important role in strengthening the manpower capacity of the regular defense forces during wartime. During an emergency, it performs disaster prevention and security duties in place of the regular army. This allows the regular army to focus on critical missions. Therefore, the training and organization of the reserve force will be strengthened in a manner that takes into account current and recent sources of threats.⁹²

Besides, in November 2022, a draft for the amended ENDF bill submitted to the House of Peoples Representatives (HoPR) contains a provision that allows youths who have completed secondary or tertiary education to undergo voluntary military training in the national defence forces. Article 6/4 of the draft proclamation states as follows:

The Ministry may enlist high school or university graduates willing to serve in the armed forces, as a national service, for two years after completing the required military training. After completing their service, and if they choose to serve in the National Reserve Force, they will be entitled to specific rights and benefits. The details will be provided in a subsequent guideline.⁹³

The Militia System

In 1991, militias that were serving under the military government were replaced by armed community volunteers, many of whom were remnants of guerrilla groups that were fighting the *Derg*. Mainly, their duties were to fulfil policing duties, while the *Derg*'s police and militia were either dismissed or retrained.⁹⁴ In the words of Jackson et al., "militia are effectively a politicised paramilitary comprising armed volunteers, frequently from the ethno-nationalist militia that opposed the *Derg*".⁹⁵ As in the previous government, the militia continue to be an important security apparatus usually mount community patrols which operate checkpoints on major roads. Moreover, in most of the federal states, they outnumber the police, and is seen as a political wing of the government.⁹⁶ For instance in Amhara regional state there are approximately 128,000 militias.⁹⁷ Therefore, militias are much more accessible than the police as a source of protection and safety.⁹⁸

In post 1991 Ethiopia, the militia service is under the regional states; it has offices in all regional, zonal, *woreda* and *kebele* levels. The latest regulation on militia describes it as "an armed force of civilians who does not receive any salary, while not detached from

⁹² Ministry of National Defence (MoND) 2020.

⁹³ Draft Proclamation on the Defence Forces of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2022.

⁹⁴ DENNEY-KASSAYE 2013.

⁹⁵ JACKSON et al. 2018.

⁹⁶ JACKSON et al. 2018.

⁹⁷ DENNEY-KASSAYE 2013.

⁹⁸ JACKSON et al. 2018.

their regular production activities, engaged in their own personal business for income and elected by the people to do the local security activities”.⁹⁹

The members of the militia are elected by the people in the local area based on the following criteria: being older than 18 years and not more than 50 years, having a strong conviction to the basic principles of the regional state’s constitution, being known for his good manners, having a fixed subsistence income, having no criminal record, being willing to attend the militia training and being physically fit for military action.

The militia forces are given training for a short period of time that are focused on the relevant judicial systems to increase their legal awareness, on the main areas of crime prevention, community policing, protection of human and democratic rights, military education in theory and practice, and information management and communication skills.

The main duties and responsibilities of militia members include: protecting the country’s sovereignty and constitutional system from any internal and external attacks; respecting and upholding the human and democratic rights of citizens guaranteed by the constitution; when receiving information that endangers the security of the local people, immediately transmitting it to the higher authority; being at the forefront of the development activities carried out by the people in their area; working in coordination with the police and the national defence forces in collecting necessary information and forwarding it to the relevant militia office; and arresting individuals found committing crimes and presenting them to the police.

The militia members have the right to carry arms, not to be held legally responsible for the damage caused while performing a major operation, and to get uniforms according to the need and capacity of the society in their local area. Regarding operation and deployment, the militia forces are only deployed when there are security threats in their local area to missions that should not harm the lives, livelihoods, or farming activities of the militias. The principal deployment area of the militia is his own *kebele*, unless there is a security threat against the sovereignty of the state.

According to the Red Book, the militia system gives a better opportunity to strengthen the political loyalty of the national army by choosing from the militia members who will join the army based on their individual character or their social class.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it argues that in the absence of the military, the militia force can execute security duties along with its regular everyday life, and because it is organised and controlled by every local government, it is easier to give continuous training and ensure that it is ready to mobilise.¹⁰¹ The most important argument in the Red Book after comparing the reserve force, conscription and militia systems is the following:

Taking all options into consideration, the militia system has multiple advantages. To start with, it enables us to use our standby force whenever and wherever we want. It gives us better control over mobilization. While providing continuous training, we can engage the same force for environmental protection and community development services. Not

⁹⁹ Regulation No. 28 of 2005, A Regulation of Militia Management and Organization System of Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State. Debub Negarit Gazeta of Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State.

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of National Defence (MoND) 2001 (translated from Amharic by the author).

¹⁰¹ Ministry of National Defence (MoND) 2001 (translated from Amharic by the author).

to mention it would be much easier to mobilize if need be. Given that the revolutionary democracy ideology has not penetrated and is far from being the dominant factor, and that the army's political indoctrination is not at the level it needs to be, nothing matches the use of the militia system in the context we are in now. Due to historical experience, the attitude towards national military service is by and large negative and would not be any easier to reintroduce. [...] However, the militia system is more or less a practice that has been there for some time and is widely accepted.¹⁰²

Even though the Red Book is no longer a military doctrine, the militia system is still the most important security institution, mostly because more than 80% of Ethiopians live in rural areas as peasants, their livelihood based on farming or cattle herding.¹⁰³ Therefore, the militia system is still a viable system of recruiting citizen soldiers.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that regional states in Ethiopia have other security establishments than the police, called special police, semi-armed force, which created security pluralism and created a security challenge.¹⁰⁴ Particularly, due to the Tigray conflict (2020–2022), the federal government was hesitant about the toughening of regional forces or other irregular forces as long as they support the ENDF against the TPLF. This later resulted in the confrontation of these groups with the federal government.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Since the formation of a professional army in Ethiopia, the four governments of Ethiopia have practised a modern citizen soldier system of reserve force, national military service and militia system in different ways based on the security context of their time and their military doctrine and political ideology.

The Territorial Army of Emperor Haile Selassie's government was the first significant experiment in organising citizen soldiers in a formal reserve force manner for the first time in the country's military history. Armed bands, who have been fighting the Italians in the second Italy–Ethiopia war in various parts of the country, came under state control with their arms. On the other hand, the 1973 national military service, even though it was well organised and planned on paper, never saw the light of day because it was too late for an already too weak imperial government to implement it.

Nevertheless, the military government (1974–1991) was able to build a strong army, both regular and citizen soldier armies, which resulted in the loss of many young lives by immersing the country in the endless civil war. Which also leads to the abhorrence of the military profession and citizen soldiership by the public.

The current reserve force system exists only in name, and if it does, it does so in a militia form without a strong relationship with the ENDF and without unified periodic exercises. Most of the reserve forces also serve with the local militias of their areas. The

¹⁰² Ministry of National Defence (MoND) 2001 (translated from Amharic by the author).

¹⁰³ SIGATU 2018.

¹⁰⁴ FISEHA 2022: 96–130.

¹⁰⁵ The Guardian 2022.

NRFOCB is engaged in setting up the regular army. Most importantly, the militia continue their local security role as the government's wing of security in the absence of police and the army in rural areas. Thus, the need for recruiting for the NRF is almost zero, mainly because of the military doctrine of the government. In addition to this, the security pluralism of several informal and formal militias and different types of police forces also minimises the importance of the NRF.

The newly planned national military service looks better from the outside; however, implementing it might be difficult in a country like Ethiopia, where polarised political and ethnic tensions are present. Thus, it is important for the current government to work toward a national political consensus, which is a key factor in mobilising and arming its citizens. It is also important to learn the lessons of past citizen soldier systems.

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