

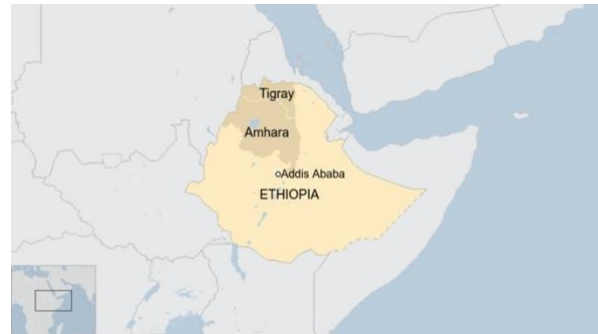
Security Advisory - Ethiopia

SUMMARY

Ethiopian PM announces final offensive as calls for dialogue are ignored.

ETHIOPIA'S PM VOWS FINAL OFFENSIVE

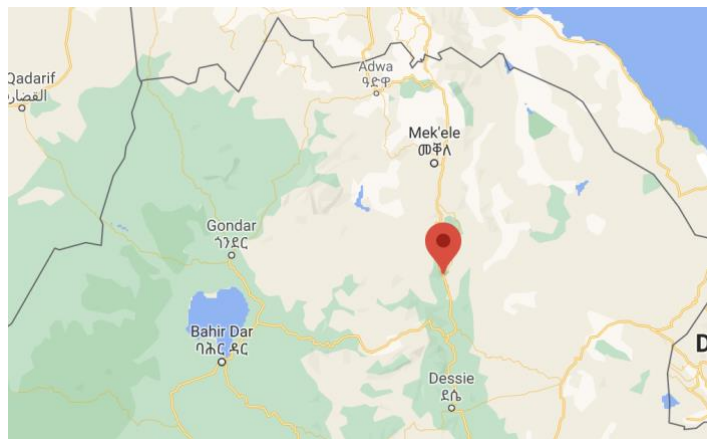
On Tuesday 17 November, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared “the final and crucial” military operation will launch in the coming days against the government of the northern Tigray region after stating that the deadline for surrender had expired. The offensive will pave the way for a push on Tigray’s capital, Mekele. In a social media post, the prime minister declared that a three-day deadline given to the Tigray region’s leaders and special forces “has expired today.” This comes as the federal government on 17 November confirmed that it had carried out new airstrikes outside the Tigray capital, calling them “precision-led and surgical.” It also denied the Tigray government’s assertion that civilians had been killed after Tigray TV showed what appeared to be a bombed-out residential area, with damaged roofs and craters in the ground.



Meanwhile the Ethiopian leader, who won last year’s Nobel Peace Prize, continues to reject international pleas for dialogue and a de-escalation in the two-week conflict, which has already spilled over into Eritrea and Sudan, and which risks further destabilizing the wider Horn of Africa region. Neighbouring Kenya as well as Uganda have called for a peaceful resolution to the ongoing conflict, though Abiy’s government continues to view the Tigray regional government as being illegal after it defiantly held a local election in September.

ETHIOPIA CAPTURES ANOTHER TOWN

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s government has confirmed that it has captured another town in the northern Tigray region after nearly two weeks of fighting. A task force set up by the prime minister to handle the government’s response to the crisis has reported that troops had “liberated” the town of Alamata from the TPLF, adding that “they fled, taking along around 10,000 prisoners,” without specifying where they were from. So far, there have been no comments from Tigray’s leaders on events in Alamata, which is located near the border with Amhara state, about 120 km (75 miles) from Tigray’s capital Mekelle.



UN: REFUGEES CONTINUE TO ENTER SUDAN

UN refugee agency spokesman Babar Baloch has confirmed that more than 27,000 Ethiopian refugees have entered Sudan, noting that some 4,000 refugees are arriving every day, in what he called a “very rapid” rate. He further disclosed that “it’s a huge number in a matter of days...It overwhelms the whole system,” warning of a “full-scale humanitarian crisis” that the remote part of Sudan has not seen in two decades.

While on 16 November, Prime Minister Abiy stated that his government is ready to “receive and reintegrate” the refugees and that federal forces would protect them, many refugees say that those same forces sent them fleeing in the first place.

CONTEXT

On 4 November, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced that he had ordered a military offensive in the Tigray region after he accused security forces aligned with the regional TPLF of attacking Ethiopian National Defence Forces’ (ENDF) positions in the state. The operations comes after two years of rising tensions between the TPLF and the federal government in Addis Ababa amidst claims that the Tigray Region was being marginalized by the Prime Minister’s sweeping reforms. Prior to that, the TPLF had dominated the government before the appointment of Abiy as Prime Minister in 2018. Tensions however escalated significantly in September 2020 when the TPLF staged their own regional elections in the Tigray region in defiance of a move by the federal government to suspend national elections due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after the election, the federal government declared the vote illegal while in early October, the upper house of Ethiopia’s parliament voted to withhold budgetary subsidies to Tigray. With tensions rising significantly, on 3 November, regional authorities issued a statement, accusing Addis Ababa of planning a war in the Tigray region.

TRAVEL ADVISORY

The situation across the Tigray region remains fluid and the security situation could deteriorate with little notice. Further security operations and clashes are likely in the Tigray region in the near term and disruptions to transportation and communications services are ongoing. There is also a realistic possibility of civilian harm in major flashpoint areas.

A six-month state of emergency has been declared in the Tigray region in response to recent attacks. As of 17 November communications across the Tigray region, including Internet and mobile phone networks, remain blocked, effectively limiting information on the military operations occurring in the region. Overland travel restrictions have also been reported in Mekele, where local authorities have banned civilian vehicles from the roads. Similar restrictions are likely to be imposed in other areas of the Tigray region. Airspace over the region also remains closed as of Friday and flights to Mekele (MQX), Shire (SHC), and Axum (AXU) remain suspended, though those from Gondar (GDQ) resumed on 5 November.

Neighbouring Sudan on 5 November closed its border with Ethiopia in the wake of violence erupting in the Tigray region. Authorities in Kassala state disclosed that the closure is intended to stop any potential entry of fighters into Sudan. It currently remains unclear when the border will re-open.

MS RISK ADVISORY: Anyone currently in the Tigray region is advised to closely monitor the situation and to remain vigilant at all times. You should closely monitor the local media for information on the evolving situation and you should remain aware of ongoing security operations and militant activity. Expect a heightened security presence in several areas. You should carry identification documents with you at all times, avoid large gatherings, protests and demonstrations as they may turn violent with little or no notice, and adhere to all instructions issued by the local authorities and their home governments. Anyone in the Tigray region and planning to travel via the closed airports is advised to monitor the situation, confirm flights itineraries, review contingency and evacuation plans and remain vigilant.

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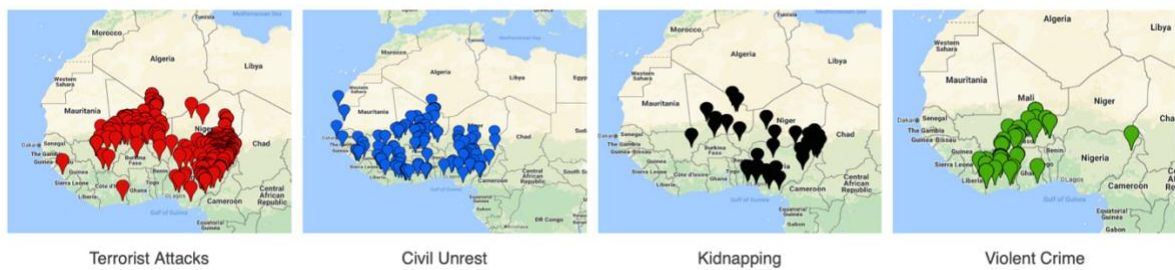
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