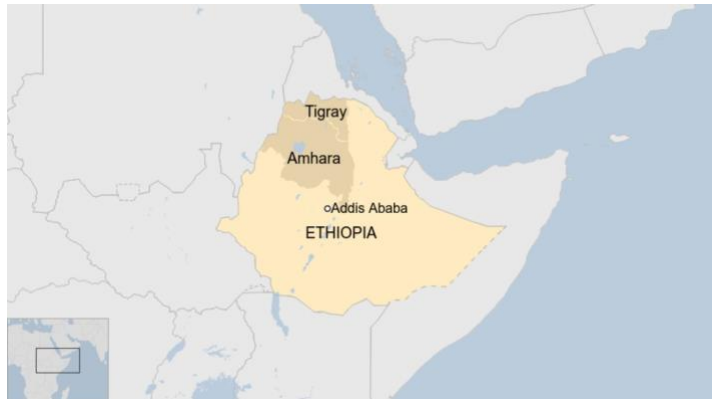


Security Advisory - Ethiopia

SUMMARY

Concerns over a refugee crisis have started to mount as more people arrive in Sudan, fleeing ongoing violence in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, where fighting has continued and tensions remain high between Tigrayan officials and the federal government in Addis Ababa.



BLAST REPORTED IN CAPITAL CITY

According to a federal police spokesman, a blast seriously injured an individual in the capital Addis Ababa on Wednesday, with local reports indicating that the incident occurred under the Adwa Bridge. As of Wednesday afternoon, the cause of the blast remains unclear and there currently are no indications of whether the incident is linked to the ongoing conflict in the northern Tigray region.

MS RISK ADVISORY: Anyone currently in Addis Ababa is advised to monitor the situation, remain vigilant at all times and adhere to instructions issued by local authorities and their home governments.

SUDAN BRACES FOR REFUGEE CRISIS

Sudanese officials reported on 11 November that up to 200,000 refugees could enter the country, fleeing the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Ethiopia's Tigray region. So far, at least 6,000 people have crossed the border, including some wounded in the fighting, with officials reporting that the flow of refugees is rapidly growing.

UN AND AID WORKERS STRUGGLE TO HELP

The United Nations humanitarian chief in Ethiopia has reported that inside the Tigray region, long lines have appeared outside bread shops, and supply-laden trucks remains stranded at its border. Sajjad Mohammed Sajid reported, "we want to have humanitarian access as soon as possible," adding that "fuel and food are needed urgently." Late on 10 November, Sajid disclosed that up to 2 million people in Tigray have a "very, very difficult time," including hundreds of thousands of displaced people. Fuel is already being rationed in the Tigray region, and the UN Refugee Agency has warned that it and its partners "will struggle to continue running their operations in the next two weeks."

Communications across the Tigray region remain severed a week after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced a military offensive in response to an alleged attack by regional forces. Despite calls from the international community for calm, the Ethiopian leader has insisted that there will be no negotiations with the regional government, which he considers to be illegal, until its ruling "clique" is arrested and its well-stocked arsenal is destroyed. In the wake of the ongoing fighting, reports have emerged of the targeting of ethnic Tigrayans across Ethiopia, the Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau disclosed in a post on Facebook. The prime minister however has warned against ethnic profiling. Meanwhile the administration in Addis Ababa has announced rallies in support of the federal government's measures there and in other cities in the Oromia and Amhara regions for 12 November, along with a blood drive for the Ethiopian army.

The ongoing standoff between the officials in Tigray and the federal government in Addis Ababa has left nearly 900 aid workers in the Tigray region from the UN and other groups struggling to contact the outside world, with Sajid reporting that "nine UN agencies, almost 20 NGOs, all depending on two offices" with the means to communication. Additionally, more than 1,000 civilians of different nationalities, including tourists, are stuck in

the region as countries urgently seek to evacuate them. Sajid has confirmed that airports remain closed in Tigray, roads are blocked, internet services are cut off and even banks are no longer operating, adding that this “makes our life very difficult in terms of ensuring almost 2 million people receive humanitarian assistance.” Currently there is no sign of a lull in the fighting, which in recent days has included multiple airstrikes by federal forces and hundreds of people reported killed on both sides.

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 11 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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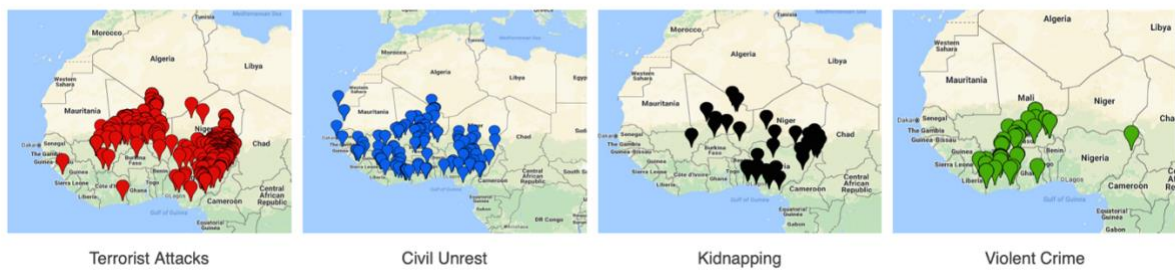
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