

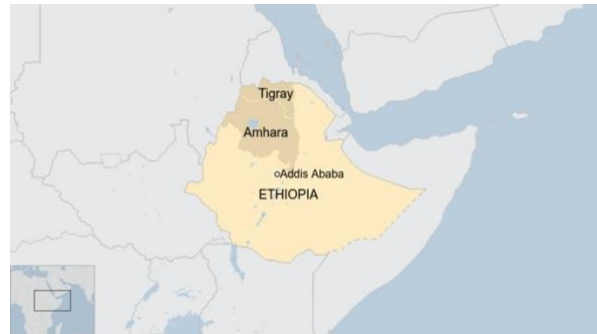
Security Advisory - Ethiopia

SUMMARY

Tigrayan officials declare state of emergency as fighting continues with no end in sight.

OFFICIALS TRY TO RALLY SUPPORT FOR CONFLICT

On Thursday 12 November, hundreds of Ethiopians gathered to donate blood for troops who are fighting a week-old battle in the northern Tigray region. The blood drive on Thursday was organized by the office of Addis Ababa Mayor Adanech Abebe, who claimed the



population was unified against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Speaking to reporters, Abebe disclosed, "the aim of this blood donation is to express our respect for our army," adding that "the attack done by TPLF to our army is shameful for Ethiopia. Never happened in our history. We want to condemn this." The blood drive comes as officials have tried to rally support for the ongoing conflict, with Ethiopian Prime Minister stating that the fighting was going his way.

TIGRAYAN AUTHORITIES CALL FOR PEOPLE TO MOBILIZE

On 11 November, the TPLF declared a state of emergency in the northern Tigray region and called on all Tigrayans to defend themselves against "flagrant aggression" from the federal government, with officials warning that those who fail to cooperate will face consequences.

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES ARRESTS

On 12 November, the Ethiopian government announced that police have arrested 150 people in the capital Addis Ababa. Those arrested are suspected of trying to carry out "terror attacks" on the orders of the Tigray region's ruling party, which the prime minister blames for the ongoing conflict in the region.

A communications blackout remains across the Tigray region. It has been in place since the military operation was launched on 4 November, effectively making it difficult to verify the situation on the ground as both sides have made conflicting statements. On Thursday, in a Facebook post Prime Minister Abiy disclosed that Ethiopian government forces had "liberated" the western zone of Tigray - which is made up of six zones plus the capital city and surrounds. The prime minister also accused TPLF-aligned fighters of "cruelty," stating that when the army took control of the town of Sheraro, they "found bodies of executed defence force personnel whose hands and feet were tied." The TPLF has so far not made any comments on the report.

REGION CALLS FOR CALM

On Wednesday Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, quoted by state news agency SUNA, called for a "stop to the fighting as soon as possible" and a return to the negotiating table. The Prime Minister made the comments as he hosted Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh. It also comes as Sudan prepares for a possible refugee crisis, with the United Nations reporting on 11 November that some 11,000 Ethiopians had already sought refuge in neighbouring Sudan. Meanwhile, Ethiopia has also acknowledged that some of its troops at one point had retreated into neighbouring Eritrea, in a move that effectively highlights the conflict's potential to draw in the wider Horn of Africa region.

The African Union has continued to call for an immediate stop to the fighting. However Ethiopia on 11 November reiterated its position, stating that the "cruelty" of the TPLF "cannot be addressed or redressed by sitting at a table for a negotiation." It further disclosed in a "context document" that was distributed by the prime minister's

office that “negotiation makes sense only when there is good faith and a desire for peace,” adding that “the federal government is determined to enforce the rule of law in the region.”

Meanwhile Ethiopian lawmakers have approved a plan to install what they call a “caretaker administration” in the Tigray region assuming that the federal government can assert its control over the region. On 11 November, lawmakers voted to lift the immunity of 39 TPLF members, including Tigray regional President Debretsion Gebremichael. However the significance of the move remains unclear given the fact that TPLF MP’s resigned en masse last month.

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 12 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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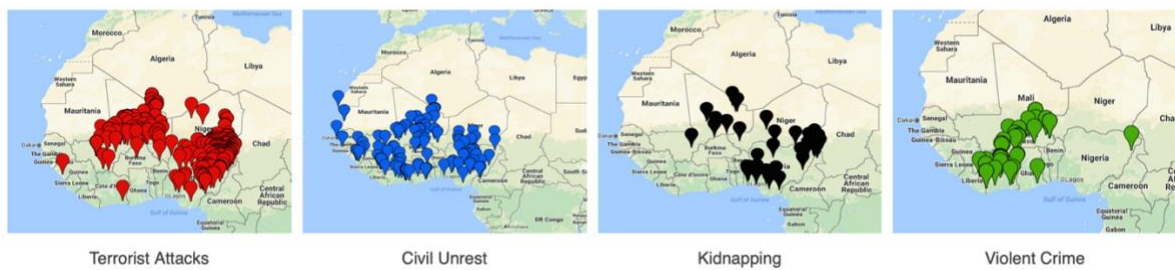
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