

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 116 - 31 March 2021

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Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia (as per 30 March)

- Assena TV reports that a delegation led by General Filipos Woldeyohannes, chief of Staff of the Eritrean military, is set to discuss issues including the opening of Assab port to Ethiopia.
- In March 2019, France signed an agreement to re-build the Ethiopian navy.
- The mission would echo unconfirmed reports that talks would begin on a federation between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as reported by the HornDaily news site.
- According to the HornDaily: "Just prior to the conflict erupting in Tigray, President Isaias brought his closest political and military advisers together for an intense discussion on how to proceed."
- It says President Isayas told the advisers "that the country had to accept that it has a small and not very viable economy and a lengthy Red Sea coast, which Eritrean cannot patrol on its own."
- President Isayas offered the idea that "some sort of 'union' with Ethiopia might be possible, at least in terms of economic co-operation and maritime security."
- According to the HornDaily this idea "echoed Prime Minister Abiy's dream of re-establishing the unity of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Part of this vision involved a potential Ethiopian Navy."
- Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Dina Mufti alludes to the possibility of a Eritrean-Ethiopian federation.
- Answering questions in a press conference he stated: "By the way if Eritreans were asked, they do not celebrate the day they left Ethiopia and those abroad say this. There is also the same feeling from the Ethiopian side."
- Dina Mufti continued: "It would be good if we could be one nation with our neighbouring countries. The relationship we had with Eritrea, we are one people and one country. This is the result of Cold War politics."
- He also suggests a federation "is a good wish or vision. Unity increases influence, market etc. We have to think this also about Kenya and other neighbours. IGAD was established with this purpose: first economic integration and then moving into unity."
- Multiple reports received from Eritrea, that, as youth were allowed to return to school after a COVID-19 lockdown, they are now rounded up for national service, presumably to be sent to Tigray.
- The messages come in parallel to a figure released by a source close to the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence that 100.000 to 150.000 Eritrean forces (mainly the senior & middle commanders, trainers & mechanized & some infantry personnel) will be integrated into ENDF.
- The agreement would include that Eritrean soldiers will be paid by Ethiopia. The Eritreans are paid 15.000 birr a month, which is 372 USD. In Eritrea soldiers receive in their pocket a very small stipend, which can be as low as 3 USD a month.
- Ethiopian soldiers receive 7.500 birr a month, which is half of the amount reportedly offered to the Eritrean soldiers to be integrated in the Ethiopian army.
- The new army in which Eritrean troops are integrated will be led by Eritrean army General Filipos Woldeyohannes, Chief of Staff.

- According to the report, the details of the integration of the Eritrean forces are worked out by Ethiopian Ministry of Defense, Dr. Kenea Yaddeta and Eritrean Security chief, Abraha Kassa.
- In the Ethiopian election campaign, the Amhara Prosperity Party has been showing maps of Ethiopia which included Eritrea. They claim that they are going to bring it back into a Federation. The text on the map reads “being PP means sustaining Ethiopia in the face of external and internal enemies.”
- In an opinion piece in al Jazeera, Awol K Allo, a lecturer in Law at Keele University, has argued that Ethiopia urgently needs a national dialogue. The current conflict in Tigray is a result of different views of how the Ethiopian constitution should be organised.
- When the TPLF came to power in 1991, they imposed an ethnic federalist perspective on Ethiopia. PM Abiy, who came to power on the promise of reform and a stronger voice for the Oromo community, has instead started the process moving Ethiopia towards a Unitary state, argues Awol.
- He argues that the current Ethiopian federation is largely built on top of the foundations of the Ethiopian Empire, which was dominated by the Amhara ethnic group.

Reported Situation in Tigray (as per 30 March)

- Mekelle city interim administration Mayor, Ataklti Haileselassie was fired from his post. He said once in public that Eritrean forces are in Tigray.
- Internal sources in Tigray indicate fighting is ongoing between Eritrean troops and Tigray regional forces near Selekleka, a strategic town in the northwestern zone of Tigray (between Aksum and Shire).
- Eritrean forces are moving 30 trucks of troops to help their force in Selekleka. They are also moving troops from Adwa towards Selekleka.
- After almost three months, this is the first time fighting is taking place in the northwestern zone of Tigray, indicating that the Tigray regional forces may be increasing their coverage of battle beyond the southern and central zones of the region.
- Recently deposed deputy bureau head in the Tigray interim administration, Amdom GebreSelassie says they did not expect the war to be aimed at the general public.
- “We thought that a law enforcement campaign would only focus on its leaders. Property has been looted from homes in both rural and urban areas and the murder is horrific,” added Amdom.
- Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reports on the harsh conditions for displaced populations in Adwa, Aksum and Shire. Most settle in informal settlements, lacking food, water and sanitation aid. Particularly, Shire is overcrowded, as it is often the first town entered by people fleeing western Tigray.
- Some IDPs MSF spoke to have fled from one city to another. “In the early days of the crisis, they saw their hometown filling up with people fleeing violence elsewhere and later witnessed it being attacked by Eritrean soldiers.”

Reported International situation (as per 30 March)

- US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has spoken to UN Sec. Gen. Guterres. Among other things they spoke about Tigray, the need for an independent investigation and the withdrawal of Eritrean troops.
- In the parliament of the United Kingdom, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Eritrea was re-established. An early priority of the group is to assess Eritrea’s role in Tigray.

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Links of interest

<https://www.horndaily.com/2021/03/29/breaking-new-unconfirmed-reports-suggest-an-ethiopian-eritrean-federation-soon/>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ethiopia-france-idUKKBN1QT2W0?edition-redirect=uk>

<https://www.msf.org/ethiopia-tigray%E2%80%99s-cities-fill-displaced-people-need-aid>

https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/408124/Egypt/Politics-/No-one-can-take-a-drop-of-water-from-Egypt_-Sisi-s.aspx

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/3/30/ethiopia-urgently-needs-inclusive-national-dialogue>

<https://addisstandard.com/breaking-mekelle-city-interim-mayor-resigns/>