

Events in Tigray Overview 2020 - Briefing EEPA HORN No.2 - 31 Dec 2020_en

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Key points

- *More than two million children in Tigray do not have access to food, water and safety and may have been displaced, while there is a severe humanitarian situation regarding 100.000 Eritrean refugees in Tigray; full humanitarian access has not been given.*
- *Serious concern that war crimes are being committed against civilians in Tigray.*
- *Military situation likely to evolve into a protracted guerilla war situation.*
- *Destabilisation of peace in the region.*
- *Destabilisation in Ethiopia with increased ethnic fighting in the preparation of the elections.*
- *Facts on the ground in Tigray remain unclear due to a two-month communication lock-down.*

Short overview

- Ethiopia PM Abiy claims that the regional government of Tigray state is undermining the central authority of Addis Ababa, by carrying out elections in September 2020, which were not recognised by Addis Ababa. National elections had been postponed due to the COVID-situation.
- Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) won a new mandate, it claims, through the elections it held. It claims that PM Abiy was in cohort with Eritrean Pres Isayas to undermine Tigray.
- PM Abiy ordered a reorganisation of the Northern command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). This constitutes an important part of the ENDF, stationed in Tigray region due to the earlier conflict with Eritrea. This conflict ended with an agreement between Abiy and Afwerki in July 2018. Abiy ordered the split of the Northern command.
- After PM Abiy sent a general to carry out the division of the Northern command, the TPLF sent him back to Addis Ababa. In a next move, PM Abiy sent troops in a cargo plane on 3 November to the Tigray capital Mekelle. The TPLF ordered the arrest of the troops. Details on what happened with them are missing and contradictory.
- Shooting from the main camp of the Northern Command in Qwiha/Mekelle was reported starting from ca. 10 pm. Different sources claim that some members of the ENDF had sided with Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) and other parts of the ENDF resisted, which led to bloodshed. Similar events are reported from other military posts in Tigray around the same time. Sources from inside the TPLF, claimed that it was a pre-emptive strike due to

preparations for an immediate attack by the federal government. PM Abiy called a law and order operation with the aim to restore his authority over the region.

- PM Abiy instated a temporary provisional government in Tigray to replace the elected TPLF regional government. He declared a six-month state of emergency in Tigray.
- Operations to get control over the Tigray capital Mekelle started 28th of November. The TPLF withdrew from the capital and the ENDF took control of the capital.
- Eritrea participates in the war, by providing support to Ethiopian troops within Eritrea and by sending troops into Tigray. The latter is denied by both PM Abiy and Eritrea President Afewerki. However, the evidence from Tigray and Ethiopia is overwhelming. The US State Department declared Eritrea was engaged in the war after studying evidence.
- Tigray has been in shut down since the start of the military hostilities, with no phone, internet and bank access. In Mekelle phone contact was restored in December. More than two million people do not have access to food, water and safety and are displaced.

Current Military Situation

- ENDF have stated that they control the situation in Tigray regional state.
- This is contradicted by the TPLF and TDF who state they are involved in large parts of Tigray and have claimed victory in several battles in which they would have been able to capture soldiers, weapons, ammunition and vehicles.
- TPLF had 250.000 troops at the start of the war and claimed it had gained control over parts of the Northern command of the ENDF. This has weakened ENDF, and increased its dependency on Eritrea. Amharic militia, including the youth militia Fano, are fighting alongside ENDF forces.
- Eritrean troops have been fighting alongside ENDF forces; although it is difficult to give exact numbers, there is reason to believe that an extensive number of divisions and mechanised divisions of Eritrea are involved.
- The UAE has been alleged of engaging in the war initially by giving air-support with drones flown in from the Eritrea port of Assab, where the UAE has a military base.

Regional Stability in the Horn

- Sudan: A border conflict broke out between Sudan and Ethiopia concerning fertile land originally from Sudan but in use by Ethiopian farmers. Both sides mobilised troops and clashed after Sudanese troops claimed to have been ambushed and soldiers were killed. The army Chief of Staff al-Barun of Sudan personally oversaw the operation.
- South Sudan: Ethiopia is the major contributor of UNMISS and UNISFA-Abyei. Ethiopia is the head of the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangement Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMM) and contributes forces to CTSAMM. The crisis in Ethiopia is affecting its ability to engage with South Sudan.
- Somalia: Ethnic Tigray troops were removed from AMISOM and replaced by Eritrean troops. AMISOM's mandate includes overseeing the threats posed by Al Shabaab and other terrorist groups. In the past Al Shabaab was supported and trained by Eritrea as reported by the UN Monitoring Group.

Refugee situation

- Shire, Tigray: four large camps hosting 100.000 refugees from Eritrea under international protection were among the places targeted in the military operations. It is estimated that thousands of refugees were abducted by Eritrean troops and forcefully returned to Eritrea. Refugees were forced to engage in the fighting against the local population. Refugees were killed and many fled from the camps. Two camps, Adi Harush and May Aini received the first food aid from World Food Programme on 27 December. The other camps, Shemelba

and Hitsats have not received any food for three months. Five humanitarian workers in the camps have been killed.

- Eastern Sudan: Over 60.000 refugees from Tigray have arrived in Eastern Sudan. They report massacres and cruel killings and many dead. Many lost their relatives. Ethiopian troops and militia from Amhara regional state have been reported to block refugees from reaching Sudan.
- Addis Ababa: Eritrean refugees who fled from Shire, Tigray to Addis Ababa have been arrested and forcefully transported back to the refugee camps in Tigray, despite the lack of safety, food and water in those camps and the threat of forced refoulement to Eritrea.

Ethnic profiling, civilian targeting, looting

- Reports of massacres across Tigray, especially in Humera and Adigrat, cruelties and mass executions.
- Widespread profiling of ethnic Tigrayans has been reported in Tigray. In Ethiopia ethnic profiling has affected ethnic Tigrayans, who have been suspended from work, travel and have been subject to harsh security measures.
- Heavy looting of properties, allegedly by Amhara militia and Eritrean troops, involving universities and laboratories, industries, commercial places, churches, religious sites and citizens. It is reported that truckloads were transported to Eritrea (military base Asholgol).

Situation in Ethiopia

- In Ethiopia further conflict broke out in the Benishangul-Gumuz region and some officials of the region have been arrested.
- Leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front have been arrested.
- Journalists have been harassed, surveilled, arrested, raising concern of freedom of press.
- National elections have been called by the Ethiopian National Election Board for June 5th.

International response

- AU has appointed 3 special envoys: Mr Joaquim Chissano, former president of Mozambique; Madame Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, former President of Liberia, and Mr Kgalema Motlanthe, former President of South Africa. The envoys have met with PM Abiy.
- US has repeatedly expressed concern over the developing situation. The US has sent the USS Makin Island ship to the Red Sea to relocate US “forces in Somalia to other East Africa operating locations while maintaining pressure on violent extremists and supporting partner forces”. US has expressed concern over the situation.
- EU has suspended budget support to Ethiopia due to violation of Human Rights. The EU has called for a ceasefire and full humanitarian access to the Tigray region.
- UN has asked for full humanitarian access to all parts of Tigray and investigations into the allegations related to what may constitute war crimes.
- IGAD has met on 20th December 2020 in Djibouti to discuss the regional situation.
- Sudan and Egypt increased cooperation on military exercises. 3rd Jan negotiations are planned on the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam which may further increase tension.

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