

Situation Report EOPA HORN No. 46 - 5 January 2021

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Military situation (as confirmed per 4 January 2021)

- Clashes between Ethiopia and Sudan ended last week, after the Ethiopian army withdrew away from the border.
- More sources are saying that the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) is retreating from rural areas in Tigray towards the capital Mekelle. This corroborates earlier sources.
- Fighting continues to take place around Mekelle. Shelling has been observed near Hagere Selam, 50 kilometers from the regional capital.
- Civilians are afraid of ENDF soldiers as they are said to take revenge on civilians after losing a battle.
- Mechanised infantry of the ENDF is being moved to Tigray, and is heading to Mekelle.
- Satellite pictures show that many fields surrounding the ENDF Northern Command HQ have been burned. In total 12 ha of land has been set on fire.

Regional situation (as confirmed per 4 January 2021)

- The negotiations on the GERD dam between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia have collapsed after Sudan did not attend. Sudan wants to give a greater role to AU experts and observers to facilitate negotiations and reconcile opinions. The EU, US, and AU are observing the talks.
- A Sudanese radio station has reported that Amhara militias kidnapped and killed herders in Sudan. A source told the radio that "the incident is just part of a series of killings and kidnappings carried out by Ethiopian shifita gangs, supported by Ethiopian government forces."
- The Sudanese government has opened a new refugee camp for Tigrayan refugees. This new camp, in Gedaref state, has a capacity of 30 thousand. 500 refugees are being transferred every day.
- An outbreak of coronavirus in one of the refugee camps has slowed down the transfer of refugees to the new camp.
- Egypt and Sudan have increased cooperation to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood. It includes training in the tolerance of Islam, promoting anti extremist discourse, and a joint missionary convoy.

Situation in Ethiopia (as confirmed per 4 January 2021)

- FEWSNET, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, released its outlook for the coming months (up to May 2021), predicting large food insecurity across Ethiopia. Half the territory will be in the stress or crisis phase. Current and programmed international humanitarian aid are already included in the model.
- In Tigray, food security will likely remain at crisis levels until May.

- Swarms of locusts have caused large scale damages between October and December. Up to 60% of crops were lost as a result. Many eggs are now hatching in the Somali region. They will remain a threat in the coming months.
- FEWSNET predicts below average rainfall in most regions. This will likely result in smaller crop yields and have a negative impact on food security. Low rainfall also encourages locust swarm formation.
- The Amhara Chief Commissioner of Police, Abere Adamu, has given a speech on the involvement of Amhara forces in the conflict with Tigray. According to him, Amhara special forces played an important role in positioning ENDF forces prior to the conflict. The President of Amhara was allegedly also aware that a conflict was going to take place.
- Amhara continued playing an important role in coordinating and guiding ENDF forces, he stated.
- The Amhara Commissioner also said that “deployment of forces had taken place in our borders from east to west. The war started that night, after we have already completed our preparations” implying that the involvement of the Amhara special forces had been prepared and was well on the way before the start of military operations on 4 November 2020.

Situation in Tigray (as confirmed per 4 January 2021)

- A preliminary report by the interim Tigray administration has been released on the damages of the conflict in the region. According to their assessment 4.5 million people need humanitarian assistance. Many houses have been completely destroyed, and 2.2 million people have been internally displaced (IDPs). Half of these IDPs come from Western Tigray.
- The status of 78% of the health facilities in Tigray is unknown. Many of the hospitals have been potentially destroyed or pillaged.
- At the start of the conflict Tigray counted 40 hospitals and 296 ambulances. The report assesses that only 31 ambulances, in four hospitals, remain. The remaining ambulances were stolen or destroyed.
- The University of Mekelle has at least partially been looted. Pictures show that the offices of the College of Veterinary Medicine have been destroyed.
- A delegation from Mekelle University is reportedly in Addis Ababa negotiating the future of the university. Discussions are taking place about the functioning of the university and the take over of Adigrat University students and staff. Future international partnerships are also being discussed.
- Many people in Mekelle fear leaving their houses. They fear being forcefully conscripted into the army.
- Checkpoints have been set up in Tigray, complicating movement in the area.
- A source has said that 150 civilians have been killed by Eritrean soldiers near Nebelet town. This would include 4 muslims guarding the local mosque (at Adi Argudi).

International Situation (as confirmed per 4 January 2021)

- The British minister for Africa, James Duddridge, has said that the UK government is deeply worried about the situation in Tigray and the wider region. The British government continues to raise the importance of the respect for human rights with the Ethiopian government. The UK also works with other regional actors to find a peaceful solution.

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Links of interest

<https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/eastern-sudan-herder-killed-by-ethiopian-militia>
<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/egypt-sudan-train-imam-religious-muslim-brotherhood.html>
<https://addisstandard.com/news-analysis-amhara-region-police-chief-reveals-how-regions-police-force-guided-federal-steel-clad-mechanized-forces-to-join-war-in-tigray/>
<https://www.davidalton.net/2021/01/04/in-a-letter-from-the-africa-minister-james-duddridge-mp-he-says-we-are-deeply-worried-about-the-risks-the-conflict-poses-to-civilian-lives-access-to-tigray-remains-restricted/>
<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/desert-locust-bulletin-507-4-january-2020>