

Ethiopia

Flash Analysis and Prediction
12 October 2021



EDF launch new offensive against Tigrayan forces in Amhara

Getachew Reda, spokesperson for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), said on 11 October that the Ethiopian Defence Force (EDF), supported by militia, had launched an offensive against Tigrayan Defence Forces (TDF) forces in the Amhara region. This comes as the Sudanese military claimed on 26 September that it had repelled an "incursion" by Ethiopian troops into the disputed al-Fashaga territory (a soft border area agreed between the two countries in 2008 dissolved in January 2021). Meanwhile, the UN reacted strongly to **seven UN staff members being expelled** from Ethiopia on allegations of misconduct. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres demanded evidence of the misconduct on 6 October from the Ethiopian Ambassador to the UN Ambassador Taye Atske Selassie Made.



Analysis

We predicted in our **16 July report** that the EDF were likely to move against territory held by the TPLF at the end of the harvest time (Ethiopia's harvest season ends in September) once they had time to re-group and supply. With Tigray cut off from the majority of Ethiopia and supply lines targeted by the EDF and air force, or with erratic access at best, Martin Griffiths, the head of OCHA, noted on 05 October that a three-month-long "de-facto blockade" of Tigray's borders had reduced delivery of aid to only 10% of what was needed, leading to hundreds of thousands of people in Tigray threatened by famine. The EDF will therefore have timed the offensive having re-stocked and with a replenished army to move against a weakened TPLF. Indeed the Ethiopian "incursion" into the Umm Barakit area, al-Fashaga will likely have been to stall any ability by the TDF to establish a supply line from Sudan through al-Fashaga into Tigray.

The UN has reacted robustly against the **expelling of the UN staff**, pushing back at the claim from Ambassador Selassie that the UN had taken sides in the ongoing conflict by inflating the numbers of those affected by the humanitarian crisis, alleging the government was using hunger as a weapon of war and accusing the UN staff of supporting the Tigrayans.

It is **LIKELY** that Griffiths' words had raised the ongoing fallout from the restrictions on humanitarian support to an international level leading the Ethiopian government to react strongly. This came as an unverified social media account released audio suggesting that the UN HQ had been compromised by the fact that some local personnel had become too close to the government in Addis. However, this has not been confirmed – and is more **LIKELY** that the Ethiopian government as reacting to the concerns raised by OCHA.



Prediction

- Although the Ethiopian Defence Forces have had time to regroup and resupply, they are fighting against the TDF. The TDF is a merger of Special Forces of the Tigray Regional Government and defectors who often held key positions in the Ethiopian army. The EDF is entering a war against a guerilla force, who know their geographical location well. Despite air superiority, it is likely this will become a longer protracted conflict over at least the next six months – if not longer, especially if the TDF manages to create a supply line into Sudan.
- The TDF will **LIKELY** try to ensure all remaining food supplies are concentrated on their forces, further exacerbating the humanitarian situation within Tigray.

- Both sides will continue to be accused of or accuse the other side of Human Rights abuses as the conflict continues.
- Unless international pressure forces both sides to the negotiating table – which is **UNLIKELY** for at least the next month – then the conflict is also **LIKELY** to spread with clashes in Oromia and Amhara. Further separatist violence is also **LIKELY** elsewhere in Ethiopia as other movements seek to capitalise on the government’s focus on the TPLF.



Mitigation

- Those travelling in the field need to understand local complexities and ensure their team is composed in a manner that signals neutrality and are able to negotiate intense situations.
- Programs must remain apolitical and transparent with all parties.
- Continue to discuss with local staff concerns over the current political and humanitarian situation and ensure that their concerns are communicated to UN HQ.
- Neutral communication with all forms of Armed Groups – including state actors, and non-state actors as well as IPDs and local elders.

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