

Ethiopia

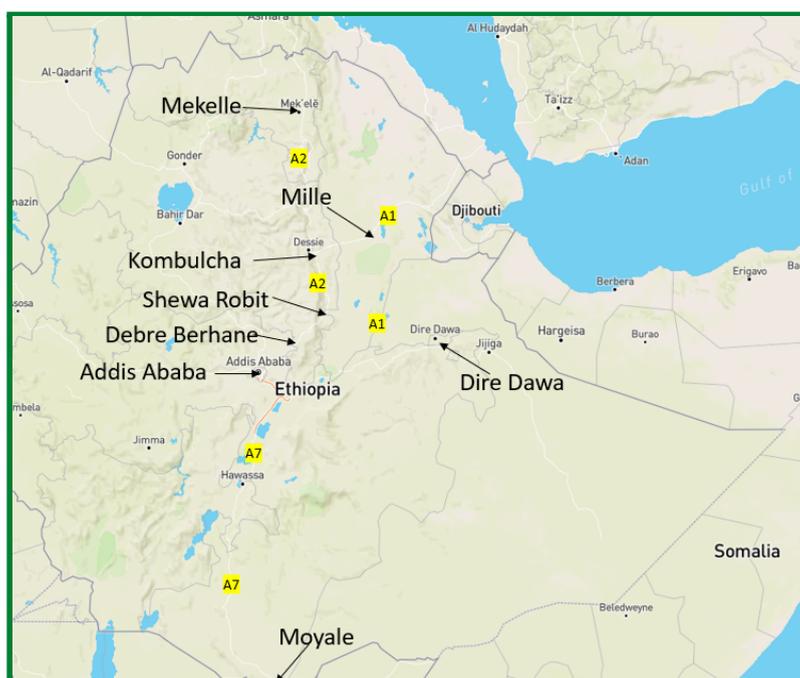
Flash Analysis and Prediction
12 November 2021



The TDF and their new opposition alliance will continue to extend their control over supply routes into Addis, as they seek to remove the current government from power.

The Ethiopian Government declared on 11 November that they “strongly believe that war isn’t the solution”. This follows a three-pronged diplomatic effort by the Africa Union, UN and US over the last week, with AU’s special representative for the Horn of Africa former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo meeting (having flown into Addis Ababa on 04 November) with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front leader, Debretsion Gebremichael, plus the opposition alliance leaders to discuss ceasefire details.

Meanwhile, Head of OCHA Martin Griffiths left Ethiopia on 08 November, having carried out four days of meetings, including travelling to Mekelle, Tigray’s capital, to discuss the current humanitarian situation, where no aid has been allowed in since 18 October. The US Horn of Africa Envoy, Jeffrey Feltman, also flew in on 04 November, discussing the current situation with the government in Addis. This comes as the Government threatened any Ethiopian working for either the UN or AU with arrest if they broke the law, having detained at least 88 UN/WFP local staff members (many of whom had a Tigrayan background) between 09 – 10 November.



Analysis

The Ethiopian Government is under pressure from the fast advance of the new opposition alliance. Recent advances by the TDF and the OLA suggests that their immediate objective is to cut all roads leading to the capital Addis Ababa, and so prevent the Government / ENDF from receiving supplies and reinforcements from Eritrea or the port of Djibouti. Only then, would they be in a position to move towards Addis without risking either a flanking counterattack or strongly reinforced defences. 08 November saw reports of “heavy fighting” around the key town of Mille from pro-opposition social media accounts, with further reports of clashes in the area on 11 November. Mille sits just north of the A1 highway which links Addis with Djibouti. This makes it a key strategic point for both sides as it controls the A1. TPLF leaders had said that they were moving on Mille on 02 November, but government spokespeople have so far rejected reports that fighting is getting closer to Mille; this is the first plausible reporting of significant fighting around the town. The Addis-Djibouti rail link, which runs through Dire Dawa, will also be a key objective.

The OLA and TDF meanwhile have been pushing southwards down the A2 highway, which links the capital to Ethiopia’s north, since the beginning of November. Current reporting suggests that the A2 is still under government control as far north as Debre Berhane although the ENDF was reported to be

regrouping just to the north in Shewa Robit on 04 November. Reports of heavy fighting there on 09 November were followed by claims that the OLA had taken the town that evening. The A2 currently appears to be secure as far as Dire Dawa although there are reports (so far uncorroborated) that a TDF probe against Debre Berhane on 08 November was repulsed with the support of airstrikes.

The military advantage of the alliance and the uptick in diplomatic negotiations appears to have created some traction within the Ethiopian government – though the offer for ceasefire talks is extremely limited. **Addis have stated they will only hold talks with the opposition alliance on four grounds:**

- 1. they withdraw from Amhara;**
- 2. they also withdraw from Afar;**
- 3. the Tigrayan forces cease their attacks; and**
- 4. the legitimacy of the current government is recognised.**

It is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY** that either the Tigrayans or other allied units will agree to the four points given their current strategic advantage and the government's previous actions in declaring them as "terrorist" organisations and enforcing a de-facto humanitarian blockade of Tigray. However, it is **UNLIKELY** that the TDF and allied units will move on Addis in the short term, especially with the recent focus by the UNSC and AU on the current state of conflict within the country. The need for a legitimate political solution in order to avoid an "Afghanistan" situation – especially where a significant part of the country is seen to be in a state of famine – will be paramount to the alliance.



Prediction

- The TDF and the OLA's immediate objective is to cut all roads leading to the capital and so prevent the Government / ENDF from receiving supplies and reinforcements from Eritrea or the port of Djibouti. The Addis-Djibouti rail link, which runs through Dire Dawa, will also be a key objective.
- The government will continue to use air superiority to its advantage where possible, though so far this has appeared to be limited, partly due to concerns over the Tigrayan use of MANPADS (surface-to-air missiles); indeed, the TDF tweeted on 11 November that they had shot down an Mi-35 helicopter gunship in the Mille area, though the ENDF denied this. Regardless, fighting remains heavy around Mille, suggesting that the TDF / OLA have not been able to secure the town as had been anticipated. There is also evidence emerging that the government has acquired a small number of armed drones (probably Iranian) since August and these could also be used to target the strategic routes and infrastructure with greater effect.
- Both sides will continue to covertly negotiate a political solution, particularly the Ethiopian Government, pressured by the opposition's strong tactical position. However, a political solution is **UNLIKELY** in the short term, unless Abiy resigns (which is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY**), or a coup occurs.
- Abiy is currently in a position of political strength in Addis, and there is a strong fear amongst the rest of the country and Government towards the Tigrayans. If Addis is besieged, his position could change, and therefore in the medium term a coup cannot be ruled out. Indeed, it appears that following Obsanjo's negotiations with the AU, the Union accepts that it may have to deal with a TPLF-led government in Addis
- Food, fuel and medical supplies are all **LIKELY** to become harder to acquire if the opposition move on Addis evolves into a de-facto blockade/siege. Drinking water may also become an issue although most of the capital's supply comes from the Gafsara dam, 18 km west of the city in West Shewa Zone, which is not currently threatened.
- The frequent communication blackouts in the north and east of the country will make accurate reporting of the situation there more difficult.



Mitigation

Staff wellbeing

- Advise staff with Facebook presence to use the Ethiopia Lock Profile facility to avoid being profiled by non-'friends': www.about.fb.com/news/2021/11/update-on-ethiopia/
- If staff are arrested - ensure senior level lobbying to ensure release and safety. Advise immediate evacuation if any local staff member is threatened.
- Ensure all staff have enough food, water, fuel and medical supplies considering that transport routes are **HIGHLY LIKELY** to be less open and shortages are **LIKELY**.
- Plan for methods of emergency communication, considering that communication blackouts are **HIGHLY LIKELY**.

Evacuation planning

- **Land routes** to the south of Addis so far **remain open** – including the A7 towards the Kenyan border at Moyale (though this leads through the North Kenyan desert which has seen regular and recent jihadist activity), and also the routes to the west leading into South Sudan (though this is a significantly difficult region to traverse with significant security threats of its own).
- **Land routes** to either the north or east of Addis is **inadvisable** because of the risk of further clashes and checkpoints instituted by both sides as well as local pro-government militias.
- **Civil air routes:** A local source has reported that airport security staff are profiling people leaving the country and preventing those with Tigrayan names from travelling
- **Evacuation south of the country:** Local staff should be offered evacuation to the south of the country - near to Kenyan border (via the A7) if fighting moves to Kombolcha. Contingency plans should be set up to aid their relocation into other countries in the region.

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- Flash Prediction and Analysis: **08 November; 26 October; 12 October**
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