



## Armed Conflict

13

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### **Ethiopia SITUATION UPDATE: Federal government launches new offensive against Tigrayans in Amhara Region on October 7**

#### Executive Summary

- The federal government launched a new air and ground offensive in Amhara Region after months of mass recruitment and mobilization as well as acquisition of new weapons platforms from the UAE, Iran, and China.
- This was likely timed after the conclusion of the elections, with PM Abiy Ahmed sworn in again on October 4, as well as the end of the rainy season, which will make it easier for the military to maneuver.
- The Tigrayans launched new attacks in Afar Region, likely intended to distract the federal military and disrupt their momentum on the Amhara front. This tactic saw success previously and may be effective due to federal concerns regarding key supply lines from Djibouti in Afar.
- Two additional UN officials departed Ethiopia after seven were expelled in September, underscoring the political sensitivities amid a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe that is only set to worsen.

#### Please be advised

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- Reports citing Tigrayan spokesperson Getachew Reda indicate that federal airstrikes were launched on October 7, targeting three areas in Amhara Region. This reportedly includes Wurgessa, Amhara Region, with Getachew further alleging that Wegel Tena and the Amhara-Afar road were struck.
- Getachew subsequently stated that a large federal ground offensive was launched on October 11 with the intent to push Tigrayan forces out of Amhara Region. Separate reports placed both air and ground offensives around North Wollo.
- TDF General Tsadkan Gebretensae reportedly said on October 12 that the federal troops would be met by a Tigrayan counter-offensive and that the TDF had been preparing for this moment.
- Reports from October 13 indicate that clashes took place in Afar Region near Awra, Fenti Zone. The Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) were accused of using heavy weapons against civilians, which they denied.



## Political & Humanitarian Developments

- The second EU humanitarian air bridge to Tigray reached Mekelle on October 6, delivering 10 tons of aid meant to provide nutrition to children and basic medical supplies. The US said on October 13 that it would airlift aid to Addis Ababa for displaced people in Amhara and Afar.
- Reports from October 12 indicate that multiple UN officials have been recalled from Ethiopia amid investigations into leaked audio recordings by officials alleging political bias among UN leadership.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) released its new World Economic Outlook on October 12 and failed to include economic projections for Ethiopia for 2022-2026 due to what it said was “an unusually high degree of uncertainty”. Only Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Syria received the same note.

## Assessments & Forecast

1. The federal offensive against the Tigrayans is a culmination of months of [large-scale recruitment efforts](#) and the mobilization of thousands of people to the Tigrayan frontline. There have been periodic reports of the federal government assembling brand new recruits with minimal training as well as state militia forces from across the country to bolster the Ethiopian army. This was particularly necessary after the army experienced significant losses in a Tigrayan campaign in June. This new push may have been specifically timed to follow the second round of elections and PM Abiy Ahmed being sworn in for a new term on October 4. This would allow him to move past that political process and showcase his efforts to put the Tigray war to rest.
2. In addition to building up military forces, the federal government has reportedly acquired new weapons platforms, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from Iran and China via the UAE. This would aid the government’s capabilities for surveillance and combat. The use of aerial platforms has already been observed with the heavy round of airstrikes between October 7-10 in

eastern Amhara Region. This is a primary military advantage that the federal government holds over the TDF, which has not been reported to use air assets. These developments have also demonstrated that Ethiopia has been able to maintain some support from foreign allies, though it is likely this is putting the government deeper into debt in an already precarious economic environment.

3. The progress of the federal offensive and the Tigrayan counter-offensive is likely to remain somewhat opaque in the coming days given the continued communications blackouts in Tigray and northern Amhara. It appears that most of the fighting is on the eastern Amhara frontline, which is a result of an effort by the federal military to push the TDF back into Tigray. This area to the southeast of Tigray has been the most dynamic conflict theater in recent months and the government likely perceived the TDF's grip on this area to be the weakest. Moreover, with the end of the rainy season in September, it likely became more feasible to launch a concerted effort to reverse the TDF's summer gains.
4. The clashes in Afar Region are likely an effort to distract the federal campaign and disrupt their momentum on the Amhara front. The relatively slow federal efforts could be intentional in order to be methodical and thus the TDF's goals would be to disrupt the rapid approach in any way possible. Attacking Afar was relatively successful in diverting federal attention and efforts in previous months and the TDF likely hopes it can repeat this outcome. This may prove to be effective, particularly due to persistent fears by the government that the TDF will move toward the Afar interior where the major Djibouti-Addis Ababa transport links are located. Additional fighting is expected in western Afar as both parties retaliate.
5. The new departure of top UN officials follows the government's expulsion of seven UN officials on [September 30](#). This underscores the sensitivities of the conflict, particularly as aid agencies struggle to get employees on the ground and seek to avoid any indications of political conflict with the government in order to be able to continue delivering aid. There continue to be overall challenges in delivering aid amid a de facto blockade on Tigray. Although the EU managed to dispatch the airlift to Mekelle, the amount of supplies entering the region is insufficient, and the crisis has now been exacerbated by the humanitarian consequences of fighting in Amhara and Afar in recent months. This is only expected to worsen as the federal government hinders aid to serve its military strategy in Tigray as well as prevent external observers from witnessing or documenting the conflict.

## Recommendations

1. Avoid all travel to Tigray Region as well as northwestern Amhara Region and eastern Afar Region due to the ongoing armed conflict and changing frontlines.
2. Avoid nonessential travel to rural Amhara Region due to the potential for ethnic violence, civil unrest, and shifting frontlines with Tigray as well as the latent border conflict with Sudan over the El-Fashaga Triangle.