

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING**Ethiopia Monthly Briefing April 2017****Ethiopia Summary 1 April 2017**

Security forces reportedly thwart an attack on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn (2012-present) blames the purported attack on the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM). Lack of verifiable information about the incident results in speculation that government has exaggerated the threat the attack posed. Acute food insecurity is expected to persist until September at the earliest. Amid donor fatigue, the government is bearing the financial cost, potentially diverting funds from state-led infrastructure projects. Parliament extends the state of emergency for a further four months, but lifts some of its restrictions, including the curfew at key economic sites.

Security forces thwart GERD attack

Prime minister **Hailemariam Desalegn** (2012-present) on 1 March claimed that security forces had successfully thwarted a planned attack on the site of the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** hydroelectric project.¹ A successful attack would have disrupted construction at the GERD, but would not likely have caused significant damage to the GERD infrastructure itself. The government claims that the attack involved 20 militants, armed with rocket-propelled grenades and carrying unspecified explosives.² These arms would likely have proved insufficient to cause significant damage to the heavily guarded GERD, which has a significant **Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF)** presence on site, but could have impaired construction through the destruction of related construction equipment and vehicles.³

Security forces claim to have killed 13 militants in an ambush near **Asosa (Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State)**.⁴ This is approximately 140 kilometres from the GERD, suggesting the threat to the site was minimal. The early intervention is testament to **Ethiopia's** border security; roads connecting the centre with the border regions are marked by regular manned checkpoints. There is also an ingrained 'neighbourhood watch' culture of reporting suspicious activity to security officials.⁵ The security forces forced the remaining militants to return across the border to **Sudan**, whose government transferred them to Ethiopian authorities.⁶ Sources in Ethiopia reported in December an increase in weapons crossing into the country from Sudan and **South Sudan** (see *ARC Briefing Ethiopia December 2016*).⁷ It is unclear if the influx of weapons and the attack on the GERD are connected, but the security situation along Ethiopia's borders is deteriorating (see below).

Hailemariam blamed the attack on the **Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM)** which he alleges is backed by the **Eritrean** government. The BPLM was based in Sudan and launched cross border raids on Ethiopian state targets in Benishangul Gumuz between its formation in 1995 and June 2013 when the group reached a peace agreement with the Ethiopian government. The BPLM and Ethiopia signed peace agreements in 2005 and 2012. In April 2014, suspected BPLM gunmen killed nine people in an ambush on a truck carrying passengers in the **Sherkole Zone** in Benishangul-

¹ Addis Fortune, 1 Mar 2017.

² Addis Fortune, 1 Mar 2017.

³ Source, consultant, Ethiopia

⁴ Addis Fortune, 1 Mar 2017.

⁵ Source, diplomatic security officer, Addis Ababa

⁶ Fana Broadcasting Corp, 1 Mar 2017.

⁷ Source, consultant, Ethiopia

Gumuz indicating at least a BPLM faction was still active. The BPLM joined the anti-government **Peoples' Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (PAFD)** coalition in October 2015.⁸ The PAFD includes other ethnically based anti-ruling **Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)** groups, such as the **Gambella People's Liberation Movement**, the **Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)**, the **Oromo Liberation Front** and the **Sidama National Liberation Front**, which operate largely in exile.⁹ In a leaked report in February, the **UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS)** warned that the ONLF had recently increased its activities in the **Somali National Regional State (SNRS)**.¹⁰ However, for the most part, the location of these groups outside Ethiopia makes it relatively easy for Ethiopia to police their activities, often accusing those in Eritrea of treason.¹¹ On 6 March, security forces detained 76 suspected members of opposition political party **Ginbot 7** under the **Anti-Terrorism Proclamation**, alleging their involvement in the killing of two security officers, a planned prison break in **Tigray Regional State**, and the proposed disruption of oil imports from Sudan.¹²

There is uncertainty about the exact involvement, if any, of the BPLM and Eritrea in the most recent incident. Eritrean information minister **Yemane Gebremeskel** denied on 2 March having heard of the BPLM.¹³ There is speculation that Hailemariam has exaggerated the scale of the incident, and the involvement of the BPLM and Eritreans, to justify slow progress at the flagship GERD.¹⁴ The \$6.4 billion 6,000MW GERD is reportedly over 60% complete and scheduled for completion in 2018.¹⁵ However, the government is reportedly facing delays over the GERD's inauguration, while workers have not received pay for several months.¹⁶ Delays are especially significant as the government is banking on regional electricity exports from the GERD providing a regular source of hard currency by 2021 at the latest. **Italy-based Salini Impregilo SpA** is constructing the GERD, which the state-owned **Ethiopian Electric Power (EEP)** will own and operate. In January 2013, state-owned defence company **Metals and Engineering Corp (Metec)** awarded **France-based Euronext Paris-listed power equipment manufacturer Alstom SA** a 250m euro (€) (\$325m) contract for the supply and installation of all electromechanical equipment at the GERD.

The high level of security and the limited capacity of the BPLM and similar groups mean there is very little risk of a major attack causing significant damage to the GERD. BPLM activities, however, expose individuals and cargo related to the GERD to risks of ambush and extortion. While the exact involvement of the BPLM is unclear at this stage, the targeting of government-led infrastructure projects is in line with their strategy of attacking government assets in Benishangul-Gumuz. The heavy security presence in the region and at the site of the GERD mitigates the risk of a successful attack. The BPLM may therefore look to target foreign-owned commercial projects which, as a requirement for large-scale investments in Ethiopia, often have close links to the government.

Humanitarian situation expected to worsen

The humanitarian situation in Ethiopia remains dire since the poor performance of the October to December *Deyr/Hageya* rains.¹⁷ Acute food insecurity is expected to persist until September at the earliest, putting pressure on government resources. The government has estimated that 5.6 million people will require emergency food assistance in the first half of 2017 at a cost of approximately \$948m. The government has struggled to secure support from international donors due to donor

⁸ Bloomberg, 2 Mar 2017.

⁹ Bloomberg, 2 Mar 2017.

¹⁰ Indian Ocean Newsletter, 10 Mar 2017.

¹¹ Source, private sector executive, Ethiopia

¹² Fana Broadcasting Corp, 6 Mar 2017.

¹³ Bloomberg, 2 Mar 2017.

¹⁴ Africa Intelligence, 10 Mar 2017.

¹⁵ Ethiopian Herald, 16 Dec 2017.

¹⁶ Africa Intelligence, 10 Mar 2017.

¹⁷ www.fews.net

fatigue on the back of repeated **East Africa** appeals,¹⁸ forcing the government to fund the majority of the initial response itself.

“This is putting pressure on the Ethiopian government’s budget as it is already struggling with foreign exchange shortages and rising inflation due to massive infrastructure projects that are currently being undertaken here and there, especially the GERD project.”¹⁹

An ARC Briefing researcher accompanied donor government and **United Nations** officials on a visit to government camps for displaced communities in **Warder** in the SNRS. During the visit, **Mitiku Kassa**, head of the **Ethiopia National Disaster Risk Management Commission**, told the researcher that,

“So far the Ethiopian government has allocated more than \$47m for this new drought. We need strong support from the international community to deal with this back-to-back rain failure. The support we got so far is small compared to the need.”²⁰

The *Deyr/Hageya* rains were late by three to six weeks, very infrequent and well below average in terms of quantity. The poor rains have negatively affected pasture and water resources, livestock productivity, and livestock-to-cereal terms of trade.²¹ Food insecurity is mostly affecting the mainly pastoral SNRS, with humanitarian organisations warning of increased numbers of households facing acute malnutrition.²² A pastoralist told the donor and government delegation,

“All the people here, including me and my family, have to wait for up to a week to get turns and be able to provide water for our camels from that well [pointing to a borehole]. I came from a place that is 35km away just to provide water for my camels. If these seven camels don’t drink in three days, they will die.”²³

Consecutive poor rainy seasons in 2015 and 2016 have resulted in water and pasture becoming exhausted several months earlier than normal. Households in these areas have had to migrate their livestock further than normal, putting additional pressure on what traditional water supplies are available. Livestock are in worse condition than usual, putting pressure on household finances. Herd sizes have not recovered since the *El Niño*-related drought in 2015, increasing pressure on household food and income. Prices for major staple foods – sorghum, maize, and wheat grain – remained stable or decreased marginally between December and January in line with seasonal trends as harvests increased market supply.

The situation has improved in parts of Ethiopia, with recent rainfall in the **Oromia** and **Afar** regional states easing pressure on pasture and water availability for livestock. UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs **Stephen O’Brien** told an ARC Briefing researcher,

“These people are really struggling to survive ... We have a very serious situation which we are seeking to address but yet it will be completely wrong to start dramatising by saying this may degenerate into famine.”²⁴

The situation is, however, expected to worsen with the **National Meteorological Agency (NMA)** giving a poor forecast for the *Genna/Gu/Dadaa* rains between March and May, and the main *meher* agriculture season – which produces 85% of Ethiopia’s food supplies – between May and September. Humanitarian agencies warn that below-average rains and harvests will lead to significantly reduced household food before September. According to the government, the worst affected regions are likely to be the SNRS, and Oromia and **Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP)** regional states. An influx of refugees from South Sudan and **Somalia** has exacerbated food shortages. Between

¹⁸ Source, INGO official, East Africa

¹⁹ Source, journalist, Addis Ababa

²⁰ Source, journalist, Addis Ababa

²¹ www.fews.net

²² www.fews.net

²³ Source, pastoralist, SNRS

²⁴ Source, ARC Briefing researcher, SNRS.

December and February, more than 4,500 South Sudanese refugees crossed the border, with the majority arriving in **Gambella Regional State**, while increased numbers of Somali refugees have arrived at the **Dollo Ado** refugee camp in SNRS. **Paul Handley**, head of the **UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Ethiopia**, told an ARC researcher.

“The size of the challenge we are facing is huge. Plus more refugees are already arriving from neighboring Somalia that is compounding the problem here. Close to 1,500 new arrivals are coming to Ethiopia since January alone.”²⁵

Rural Ethiopia will continue to face substantial gaps in basic food needs due to poor rains that have resulted in depleted household assets and livestock deaths. Food insecurity will persist with both humanitarian and economic consequences. Lower output, higher prices and reduced water supplies will threaten the lives of rural communities, but also reduce labour and livestock income, perpetuating poverty.

Government extends state of emergency by four months

Parliament on 30 March extended the six-month of state of emergency for a further four months.²⁶ The state of emergency, which the government first introduced in October, has contributed to increased security in the Oromia and **Amhara** regional states, the centre of anti-government protests across 2016. Defence minister **Siraj Fegessa**, chairman of the **State of Emergency Command Post**, lifted some of the state of emergency’s restrictions on 15 March.²⁷ Siraj cited the “*restoration of law and order in many parts of the country*”.²⁸ Under the state of emergency, the government has detained more than 20,000 people in so-called “*rehabilitation camps*”.²⁹ Siraj notably lifted the night-time curfew that prohibited movement around infrastructure sites, economic installations and both private and state-owned factories.³⁰ The government also removed the authority of security services to arbitrarily detain individuals or conduct searches without court orders.³¹ The government will no longer restrict access to diaspora-based Ethiopian media outlets including **Ethiopian Satellite Television**, or the use of social media to communicate with diaspora groups.³² The government in November had already lifted the restriction on foreign diplomats travelling outside a 40km radius of **Addis Ababa**.

All other state of emergency restrictions remain in place. These include the prohibition on political parties from issuing inflammatory press releases, and the government’s power to unilaterally shut down businesses or rescind services.³³ Another directive barring the “*preparation, distribution and exhibition of material that could incite chaos*”³⁴ also remains effective. Hailemariam had told parliament on 16 March that the government backed the extension of the state of emergency.³⁵ Hailemariam noted the improved security environment, but said,

“However, incidents that warrant the country’s security forces to work under a single command have not been removed fully. Clashes in some areas, highway robbery and breaking of windows of vehicles, attempts, albeit in few places, to cause violence and disrupt learning in educational institutions, and throwing explosives on the premises of some organisations and private homes,

²⁵ Source, journalist, Addis Ababa

²⁶ Reuters, 30 Mar 2017.

²⁷ Ethiopian Herald, 16 Mar 2017.

²⁸ Ethiopian Herald, 16 Mar 2017.

²⁹ www.hrw.org

³⁰ Ethiopian Herald, 16 Mar 2017.

³¹ Ethiopian Herald, 16 Mar 2017.

³² Ethiopian Herald, 16 Mar 2017.

³³ Ethiopian Herald, 16 Mar 2017.

³⁴ Reuters, 16 Mar 2017.

³⁵ Fana Broadcasting Corp, 16 Mar 2017.

are still being witnessed. Although these incidents are limited to a few areas, they are incidents that indicate we need to work harder.”³⁶

The government is keen to lift the state of emergency early to demonstrate its authority and that it is “business as normal”. However, despite the current stability, the security situation remains volatile. Violent protests and heavy-handed state responses may resume in the coming months due to frustration at the government’s failure to implement meaningful reform.

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³⁶ Fana Broadcasting Corp, 16 Mar 2017.