

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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The National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) suspends the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) for three months after the party fails to hold a party general assembly. This will aggravate tensions with the TPLF as well as between the party's hardliners and federal authorities. The conflict in the Amhara Region persists, in which the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) faces further allegations of war crimes and intentionally killing of civilians. Ethiopia's ongoing conflicts and humanitarian challenges will compound the negative impact of the United States' (US) decision to drastically reduce official development assistance (ODA), including aid to Ethiopia.

Electoral authority temporarily suspends TPLF

The **National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)** announced on 13 February that it had issued the **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)** with a three-month suspension for failing to hold a party general assembly in the allotted timeframe which will aggravate tensions within the TPLF itself as well as between the party and Ethiopia's federal authorities.¹

This development had been expected ever since the NEBE refused to recognise the TPLF's disputed 14th party congress, which was held in **Mekelle** on 13 August.² The TPLF has refused to organise a second assembly and has also rejected the NEBE's insistence that it must register as a new party in accordance with Ethiopia's **Party Registration and Ethics Reform Act**.³ NEBE claims that the TPLF's actions ahead of and during the **2020-2022 Tigray War** meant that the party was removed as a political party in Ethiopia and that it needs to hold a full party assembly and re-register as a political party to contest elections. The TPLF, for its part, has refused this on symbolic grounds and demanded that NEBE restore its pre-war legal standing.

NEBE's decision to suspend the TPLF as a political organisation for three months will lead to a showdown between the two organisations. If the TPLF refuses to give in to the NEBE's instructions, the electoral agency will bar the party from contesting Ethiopia's upcoming 2026 general election. Should this occur, the TPLF will likely refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the election and could seek to renew its armed conflict with the federal government.

Central to the TPLF's refusal to hold a new party assembly is the ongoing factional power struggle within the party (*see ARC Ethiopia Briefing Jan 2025*). The party is split between a faction loyal to TPLF chairperson **Debretsion Gebremichael**, who was restored to this position following the August 2024 party congress, and the faction backing former TPLF deputy leader **Getachew Reda**, who is the current head of the **Tigray Interim Administration**.

The divide between these two factions is deepening and threatens to split the TPLF and endanger the fragile peace that currently exists in the Tigray Region. This power struggle has spilled into the party's rank and file and numerous rival rallies took place on 23 February across towns in Tigray in support of either Debretsion or Getachew.⁴ These divisions are suspected of fuelling political violence in the region. Indicative of this, at least 20 people were injured in a shooting incident in Tigray's **Seharti**

¹ Reuters, 13 Feb 2025

² Borkena, 12 Aug 2024

³ Addis Standard, 10 Aug 2024

⁴ Borkena, 26 Feb 2025

district on 19 February, which the Getachew-led Tigray Interim Administration implied was orchestrated by security forces loyal to Debretsion.⁵

Incidents such as the shooting in Seharti suggest that reports that regional security force commanders are dividing along factional lines are accurate. Such a split within the TPLF's armed forces would also increase the likelihood of an armed conflict breaking out between the two sides. However, Debretsion is more likely to attract the support of Tigrayan security forces as he led the party during the Tigray War and is generally respected and supported by Tigrayan forces. Getachew's standing with the region's security forces is also likely to be undermined by the perception that he is the federal government's preferred figure.

Compounding these concerns, local reports on 1 February claim that the ongoing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme in Tigray has halted.⁶ These reports have not been independently verified but would present a serious security concern if accurate. The DDR programme is reportedly facing numerous challenges, including a lack of funding. At present, there are at least 75,000 former combatants in Tigray who remain armed and would be drawn into any future conflict.

Any conflict within the TPLF's faction would risk reigniting hostilities between the Debretsion faction and the federal government. Peace in the region has been tenuous since the end of the war, and many figures within the TPLF remain resentful that the party signed the **2022 Pretoria Accords** ending the conflict. These figures want to resume fighting the federal government, which is considered militarily weaker now as it is managing conflicts in the **Amhara** and **Oromia** regions and is no longer on such good terms with neighbouring **Eritrea**. At present, a renewed Tigray War is considered unlikely in the short term but cannot be discounted as a possibility over the medium-term horizon.⁷

Government forces accused of killing civilians in the Amhara Region

Ethiopia's government is likely eager to avoid a resumption of hostilities in Tigray, given that it is currently fighting several nationalist conflicts in the country, the most significant of which is in Amhara. The security situation has continued to deteriorate across the country as the **Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)** continues to battle the various **Fano** Amhara nationalist militia groups in the region. The most intense fighting is taking place in the region's **Gondar** and **Gojjam** areas.

It is unsurprising, then, that these areas have also been the site of most of the ENDF's alleged war crimes, specifically the targeting of civilians. ENDF soldiers reportedly killed 20 civilians in two incidents on 21 January in the **Qarit** area of Gojjam and the **Alefa** district in Gondar.⁸ Similarly, on 31 January, Ethiopian soldiers were accused of killing 10 local farmers in **North Mecha** in Gojjam. Witness accounts indicate that the soldiers pulled the farmers from their homes and executed them without trial.

Such extrajudicial killings do not include the high number of civilian casualties incurred in the ENDF's drone strikes in Amhara. On 13 February, a drone strike killed 17 civilians, including four members of the same family, in **South Wollo** in Gondar.⁹ Then, a week later, on 20 February, a drone strike killed 16 civilians, including at least one child, in the **Goncha Enese** district of **East Gojjam**.¹⁰

The high rate of civilian casualties indicates that the ENDF both lack effective training in the use of drones and the identification of enemy combatants as well as an indifferent attitude to civilian casualties. However, the ENDF's numerous civilian casualties and rate of extrajudicial killings will be a major factor in driving recruitment for Fano groups in the Amhara region.

⁵ Borkena, 21 Feb 2025

⁶ The Reporter, 1 Feb 2025

⁷ The East African, 25 Feb 2025

⁸ Borkena, 25 Jan 2025

⁹ Borkena, 15 Feb 2025

¹⁰ Borkena, 21 Feb 2025

United States aid suspensions impact Ethiopia

The numerous conflicts in Ethiopia have compounded the country's challenges, which are yet to recover from the effects of the Tigray War. Ethiopia relies on external aid to address its health, food security and education challenges; as such, the country is set to be severely impacted by the **United States (US)** government's decision to suspend foreign aid. On 21 January, US President **Donald Trump** (2025-present) ordered that all US foreign assistance be suspended for 90 days pending a review.¹¹ This decision was motivated by the new US administration's sharp pivot away from internationalism and towards more isolationist policies as part of Trump's so-called 'America First' ideology. Although some international assistance, particularly programmes pertaining to HIV/AIDS, remains active, most humanitarian and development aid has been disrupted.

Central to this aid suspension has been the effective dismantling of the **US Agency for International Development (USAID)**, which has effectively halted all of its operations. This is particularly concerning for Ethiopia, as the country is one of USAID's largest beneficiaries.¹² US State Department data indicates Ethiopia receives approximately \$1.5 billion in official development assistance (ODA) from the US each year, of which around \$1.3 billion comes from USAID.

Nearly all of this funding is dedicated towards emergency humanitarian relief programmes, especially urgent health and feeding schemes. The USAID also provides funding to numerous local and international charities and NGOs that operate in Ethiopia. As such, Ethiopia's food security situation is at risk of a sharp deterioration in the coming weeks as these various programs run out of operational funding, food, and medical supplies. Tigray is expected to be particularly hard hit as many of these projects were aimed at alleviating the food security crisis in the region following the Tigray War.

Although Ethiopia will feel the effects of the withdrawal of USAID funding first, the impact of the US's hard pivot away from providing foreign aid will have long-term impacts. US ODA is unlikely to recover during Trump's presidency, which ends in January 2029. Even then, the US government's plan to reduce USAID from a 10,000-person workforce to less than 300 employees with only 12 focused on Africa means that this aid is unlikely to be restored. Furthermore, this ideological shift by the US will translate into reduced US funding for other organisations such as the UN's various humanitarian organisations. Trump has already withdrawn the US from the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, which will likely lead to that agency experiencing a funding shortfall, which will impact its operations in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia lacks the financial wherewithal to adapt to this sharp decline in funding. The country is financially constrained and faces liquidity challenges. In fact, the government is still in the process of negotiating debt restructuring deals after defaulting on its debt in 2023.¹³ This inability to intervene to mitigate the effects of this aid suspension meaningfully will result in a marked deterioration in health and food security in Ethiopia, especially in the country's rural and conflict-affected areas.

Planner

Mar 2025 **Ankara (Turkey)** Next round of Ankara between **Ethiopia** and **Somalia**
2026 **(Ethiopia)** general election;

Chronology

25 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The exchange rate of the Ethiopian birr is set at ETB 135.6/\$1 during the latest currency auction;

¹¹ AP, 21 Jan 2025

¹² US State Department, 27 Feb 2025

¹³ Reuters, 9 Feb 2025

23 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Intercommunal clashes leave at least 13 people dead along the Ethiopia-Kenyan border in the **South Omo Zone** of Ethiopia's **South Ethiopia Regional State**;

23 Feb 2025 **Mogadishu (Somalia)** *Borkena*. Somali and **Ethiopian** security officials sign an agreement to enable Ethiopian forces to remain in Somalia as part of the **African Union (AU) Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)** peacekeeping force;

22 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. **Oromo** opposition parties, the **Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)** and the **Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)**, announce their intention to form a **Transitional National Unity Government of Oromia** to address the deteriorating political and security crises in the **Oromia Region**; notably, the Oromo regional government rejects these new formations;

21 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *VOA*. **Gambella Regional Health Bureau** officials reveal that an ongoing cholera outbreak in the **Gambella Region** has resulted in at least 306 infections and at least 15 confirmed fatalities;

17 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Al Jazeera*. Former president **Mulatu Teshome Wirtu** accuses **Eritrean** president **Isaias Afwerki** of seeking to foment a new conflict in the Tigray region;

17 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Bloomberg*. Ethiopia's sovereign wealth fund, **Ethiopian Investment Holdings**, signs a shareholding agreement with **United Kingdom**-based private equity firm **Asset Green** for a \$600m dairy farming and processing project in Ethiopia;

17 Feb 2025 **Lagos (Nigeria)** *Semafor*. Nigerian industrialist **Aliko Dangote** indicates plans to invest \$400m to increase his cement production operations in **Ethiopia**;

16 Feb 2025 **Ankara (Turkey)** *Hiraan*. **Ethiopian** and **Somali** officials begin technical negotiations to implement the **Ankara Agreement** that was signed last December to ease tensions between the two countries;

15 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The central bank, the **National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE)**, reveals that 18 companies have exited Ethiopia and over 11,500 jobs have been lost since the country was suspended from the **United States (US) African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)** in January 2022;

15 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *VOA*. The **African Union (AU) Heads of State and Government Summit** takes place at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa;

14 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *New York Times*. A magnitude 6.0 earthquake is recorded in the **Oromia Region**;

12 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *FANABC*. Ethiopia is elected as a member of the **AU Peace and Security Council**;

9 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Reuters*. Finance minister **Ahmed Shide** reveals that Ethiopia is in the final stages of its debt restructuring negotiations;

2 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** is re-elected as the leader of the ruling **Prosperity Party** at its second congress;

1 Feb 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The **Amhara Peace Council** calls for the **African Union (AU)** and the **Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)** to be involved in facilitating a negotiated peace in the **Amhara Region**;

24 Jan 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The **Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)** released a report raising concern about the increase in extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances in Ethiopia.

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