

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Ethiopia Monthly Briefing February 2022

Ethiopia Summary 20 February 2022

Parliament votes for an early lifting of the state of emergency, imposed in November. President Abiy Ahmed (2018-present) reaffirms during the African Union's 35th Ordinary Session his commitment to pursuing peace in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council calls for a stay of the process of selecting commissioners for the newly introduced National Dialogue Commission. Inflationary pressures persist, while parliament votes to introduce a supplementary budget largely to bolster defence. Tensions are ratcheting up between Ethiopia and its neighbours, Sudan and Egypt, over Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project. The number of new Covid-19 cases continues to decline in Ethiopia, with the country reporting only 61 new infections on 20 February, down from 643 a month earlier.

Ethiopian parliament votes to lift state of emergency ...

Ethiopia's parliament voted on 15 February for an early end to the state of emergency first declared in November, and expected to last six months.¹ The vote to remove this measure indicates that Ethiopian authorities may no longer see the resurgence of the rebel **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)** outside of **Tigray** as a likely or imminent threat, as the appetite for conflict continues to wane on both sides. Out of 312 lawmakers present at the session, the vote recorded only 63 opposing voices and 21 abstentions.²

The state of emergency was established after the TPLF, fighting alongside allies including the **Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)**, captured strategic towns in the **Afar** and **Amhara** regions in October and November and advanced on the capital, **Addis Ababa** (see *ARC Briefing Ethiopia Nov 2021*). The **Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF)**, under the leadership of prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** (2018-present), was able to recapture these territories and largely repel the rebel forces back into the Tigray region in late 2021 (see *ARC Briefing Ethiopia Dec 2021*). However, the state of emergency remained in place.³ The TPLF announced a decision on 20 December to officially scale back its presence in Afar and Amhara and retreat to Tigray (see *ARC Briefing Jan 2021*).⁴

Addressing the **African Union's (AU)** 35th Ordinary Session held in Ethiopia from 5-6 February, Abiy noted that his government has launched an "an inclusive national dialogue with formal legislation", consistent with its "peaceful resolution of conflict" and steadfast commitment "to pursue lasting and durable peace".⁵ However, the formation of the **National Dialogue Commission** that Abiy introduced to help transition the country towards peace faces delays. The **Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council**, a coalition of over 50 registered political parties, on 14 February requested a temporary stay of the election of the 11 commissioners required to lead the national dialogue process, requesting that the process be resumed in an "inclusive and trustworthy" manner.⁶

¹ France 24, 15 Feb 2022

² Al Jazeera, 15 Feb 2022

³ Al Jazeera, 6 Dec 2021

⁴ Bloomberg, 21 Dec 2021

⁵ VoA News, 5 Feb 2022

⁶ Addis Standard, 14 Feb 2022

Meanwhile, as the conflict continues, humanitarian organisations warn that the country is experiencing famine-like conditions. Over 2.5 million people have been forced to flee their homes since the start of the conflict.⁷

... as economic, regional and legal effects of the war mount ...

The conflict in Amhara and Tigray has affected agricultural production and is compounding inflationary pressure in Ethiopia. According to data released by the **Central Statistics Agency** on 8 February, inflation fell slightly to 34.5% in January from 35.1% in the previous month.⁸ The ongoing drought in the **Horn of Africa** region is contributing to food supply shortages and high prices for essential food items. The inflationary pressure is expected to continue over the long term, fuelling further uncertainty in the economy and hardship for the population.

Against this backdrop, the **House of Peoples' Representatives** approved on 28 January a supplementary budget of 122 billion Birr (\$2.4 billion). The defence ministry receives the highest allocation (90 billion Birr) (\$1.77 billion), with 5 billion Birr (\$98.4m) and 8 billion Birr (\$157.6m) allocated respectively to rebuilding areas affected by the war, and humanitarian assistance. This is a significant increase in the government's previous budget of 561.7 billion Birr (\$11 billion) for the 2020/21 year (July-June), which could necessitate cuts to spending on development programmes and key infrastructure projects.

Cuts to Ethiopia's development programmes and major infrastructure projects would negatively impact the country's economic growth trajectory over the medium term, as well as that of its neighbours. **Kenya's** President **Uhuru Kenyatta** (2013 -present) on 25 January called for an urgent resolution to the conflict in Tigray, noting that this would enable Ethiopia as well as its neighbours to focus on rebuilding their economies.⁹ Kenyatta highlighted infrastructure projects of interest to Kenya that depend on peace in Ethiopia. These include the planned roll-out of Ethiopia's second telecommunications network, a venture in which Kenya-headquartered **Safaricom** is a major shareholder. The firm committed to invest \$300m in 2022, and up to \$8.5 billion in its Ethiopian unit over the next decade.¹⁰

Ethiopia is also part of the \$2.1 trillion **Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET Corridor)** project, which brings together Ethiopia, Kenya and **South Sudan** and will comprise of a sea port, highways and pipelines when complete. Since the project's inception in 2012, Kenya has constructed a highway leading to the town of **Moyale (Oromia region)**, on the border with Ethiopia, which is now expected to build its part of the highway leading to Addis Ababa.¹¹ However, the project has faced delays as Abiy's government continues to focus its resources on the conflict in Tigray. Additionally, the OLA's position as an ally of the TPLF presents further security challenges for the planned highway project. To that end, **Ethiopia Federal Police Commission** commissioner **Demelash Gebremichael** and Kenya's inspector general of police, **Hilary Mutyambai**, agreed during Mutyambai's visit to Ethiopia to jointly fight the OLA (designated a terrorist group by the Ethiopian government) and the **al-Shabab** insurgency, along the countries' common border.¹²

The conflict has also resulted in legal challenges for the Abiy regime. In February, **Legal Action Worldwide**, with **United States (US)**-based legal firm **Debevoise & Plimpton** and the **Pan African Lawyers Union**, filed a complaint with the AU's human rights commission, on behalf of Tigrayan civilians. The complaint alleges human rights violations committed by federal forces "including mass killings, sexual violence and military targeting of civilians".¹³ Meanwhile, the **US House Foreign Affairs Committee** voted on 8 February for the proposed **Ethiopian Stabilization, Peace and Democracy**

⁷ The East African, 17 Feb 2022

⁸ Reuters, 8 Feb 2022

⁹ The East African, 25 Jan 2022

¹⁰ Capital Ethiopia, 7 Feb 2022

¹¹ The East African, 25 Jan 2022

¹² Xinhua, 16 Feb 2022

¹³ The Guardian, 8 Feb 2022

Act, which aims to impose sanctions targeting Ethiopians who have been found to be committing human rights abuses, blocking the access of humanitarian aid or “*taking other actions*” that are worsening the conflict. The bill is now awaiting a vote by the full US house, while the US **Senate** is also considering a bill that would allow for the sanctioning of individuals and enable the US to suspend security and financial assistance to the Ethiopian government. It would also enable the US to oppose the **World Bank** and **International Monetary Fund**’s granting of loans to Ethiopia and **Eritrea**.¹⁴

... and regional tensions escalate over GERD

Ethiopia’s large-scale electricity project, the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** on the **Nile River**, remains a source of contention between the country and its downstream neighbours, **Egypt** and **Sudan**, which rely on the Nile for their water needs (*see ARC Briefing Ethiopia Jan 2022*). Prime minister Abiy Ahmed officially inaugurated electricity production from the GERD for the first time on 20 February.¹⁵ The Egyptian government called the move a violation of an agreement between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, made in 2015, which prevents either party from taking unilateral decisions about the use of the Nile’s water.¹⁶

Years of negotiations among the three countries have failed to result in an agreement, stalling altogether in April 2021.¹⁷ Despite this, Ethiopia has pushed ahead with the construction of GERD, divulging on 9 February that the project had reached 80% completion, with plans to begin testing its electricity generation capacity.¹⁸ Egypt’s prime minister, **Mostafa Kamal Madbouly**, stated on 24 January that his country was looking to resume negotiations on the GERD project “*as soon as possible*”:

“Egypt is keen on reaching a legally binding agreement that achieves a balance between Ethiopia’s achieving of maximum possible benefit in the field of electricity generation and sustainable development, but without causing harm to the downstream countries.”¹⁹

Ethiopia continues to insist on a non-binding agreement among the parties. During an official visit to Egypt by **Djibouti**’s president, **Ismail Omar Guelleh** (1999-present), on 7 February, Egypt’s President **Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi** (2014-present) reiterated his country’s commitment to reaching an agreement to support regional security and stability.²⁰ The GERD also featured on the agenda for discussion during a visit to **Cairo** by **Algeria**’s President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present), which commenced on 24 January. Algeria has long played a mediation role in the dispute between the three countries.²¹

However, despite Egypt’s overtures, Ethiopia’s near-term return to negotiations seems unlikely at this stage, particularly as the Tigray conflict has fed into the tensions between the country and its neighbours. Ethiopia’s state minister of foreign affairs, **Redwan Hussein**, stated on 10 February that the GERD project would continue “*regardless of the position of the downstream countries and their illogical objections*”, accusing Egypt and Sudan of interfering in the Tigray conflict:

“Egypt and Sudan are obtaining intelligence as well as Ethiopian public statements from the Tigray rebels... There are foreign hands and Western interests seeking to tamper with the country’s security. ... This has been clear to us through the GERD issue.”²²

Egyptian and Sudanese officials have denied Hussein’s allegations²³ However, his claims further dampen the prospects of resolution on the matter, increasing the risk of tensions escalating among the three countries (*see: ARC Briefing Ethiopia Jan 2022*).

¹⁴ VoA News, 10 Feb 2022

¹⁵ Aljazeera, 20 Feb 2022

¹⁶ Al Jazeera, 20 Feb 2022

¹⁷ Xinhua, 26 Jan 2022

¹⁸ Daily news Egypt, 10 Feb 2022

¹⁹ Middle East Monitor, 24 Jan 2022

²⁰ Daily News Egypt, 10 Feb 2022

²¹ Associated Press, 24 Jan 2022

²² Al monitor, 16 Feb 2022

²³ Al monitor, 16 Feb 2022

Covid cases remain low

Ethiopia is seeing a lower rate in new Covid-19 infections. As of 17 February, it had recorded 468,345 Covid-19 infections in its population of 118 million, with 7,438 Covid-19-related deaths and 409,675 recoveries since the **World Health Organization (WHO)** declared the pandemic on 11 March 2020. The average daily number of confirmed new infections stood at 61 on 20 February, down from 643 a month earlier.²⁴ However, the number of new infections may see a near-term spike following the Ethiopian government's removal of the state of emergency in February as citizens return to unrestricted movement.

Visitors to Ethiopia are required to present a negative PCR test, no older than 120 hours (5 days) before arrival in Ethiopia. This does not apply to those who are transiting through the country.²⁵ Travelers who present a certificate of recovery from Covid-19, no older than 90 days, diplomats, or those who can provide evidence of being fully vaccinated against Covid-19, are tourists or are attending a conference in the country, are exempt from the requirement to isolate at home for seven days on arrival.²⁶

As of 20 February, Ethiopia's health ministry had administered 11.96 million vaccine doses within the country.²⁷ Ethiopia has used several different vaccines including the **British-Swedish** manufactured **AstraZeneca** and US-pharmaceutical company **Johnson & Johnson's Janssen** vaccine, as well as vaccines secured from the **African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT)**.²⁸ The country also received 1.35m vaccine doses donated by **Greece** on 3 February.²⁹

²⁴ Worldometers, accessed on 21 Feb 2022

²⁵ United States Embassy in Ethiopia, last updated 29 Dec 2021

²⁶ Ethiopian Airlines, last updated 10 Nov 2021

²⁷ Reuters Covid9-19 Tracker, Accessed on 20 Feb 2022

²⁸ [Africa CDC](#), 6 Sep 2021

²⁹ Greek Reporter, 3 Feb 2022

Planner

17-23 Feb 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** Addis Chamber International Trade Fair;

Chronology

20 Feb 2022 **Benishangul-Gumuz (Ethiopia)** *Al Jazeera*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** inaugurates the beginning of electricity production at the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam**;

16 Feb 2022 **Amhara (Ethiopia)** *France 24*. **Amnesty International** alleges that rebel fighters from the **Tigray People's Liberation Front** sexually assaulted at least 30 women in the towns of **Chenna** and **Kobo** in the **Amhara** region in August and September 2021.

15 Feb 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Xinhua*. **Ethiopia Federal Police Commission** commissioner **Demelash Gebremichael** and **Kenya's** inspector general of police, **Hilary Mutyambai**, agree during Mutyambai's visit to Ethiopia to jointly fight the **al-Shabab** and **Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)** insurgencies;

15 Feb 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Al Jazeera*. Parliament votes to lift the state of emergency, declared in November and initially intended to last for six months;

14 Feb 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. **Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council** requests a temporarily halt of the selection of 11 commissioners to lead the **National Dialogue Commission**, requesting that the process resume in an "inclusive, trustworthy" manner;

14 Feb 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. Foreign affairs ministry delegation sent to negotiate the release of Ethiopian citizens imprisoned in **Saudi Arabia** fails to reach an agreement with Saudi authorities;

10 Feb 2022 **Washington (United States)** *Voice of America*. **United States House of Representatives** advances legislation to impose further sanctions on Ethiopians found to be committing human rights abuses, preventing the delivery of food aid or "taking other actions that are worsening" the crisis in the country;

8 Feb 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Reuters*. **Central Statistics Office** reports Ethiopia's inflation for January at 34.5%, down from 35.1%;

5 Feb 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Voice of America*. The **African Union's** 35th Ordinary Session begins in Addis Ababa;

1 Feb 2022 **New York (United States)** *UN News*. **United Nations** secretary-general **António Guterres** appeals to all parties involved in the fighting in **Tigray** and other areas to cease the conflict to allow for humanitarian aid to be provided within the affected areas;

28 Jan 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. **House of Peoples' Representatives** approves a supplementary budget of an additional of 122 billion Birr (\$2.4 billion) of which 90 billion Birr (\$1.77 billion) is allocated to the ministry of defence, with 5 billion Birr (\$98.4m) and 8 billion Birr (\$157.6m) allocated for rebuilding areas affected by the war and for "daily humanitarian assistance", respectively;

25 Jan 2022 **Cairo (Egypt)** *Middle East Monitor*. Egyptian prime minister **Moustafa Madbouly** says his government is keen to resume negotiations on the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)**, which stalled in April 2021, "as soon as possible";

24 Jan 2022 **Cairo (Egypt)** *ABC News*. **Algeria's** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** arrives in Cairo for an official visit, with the dispute between Egypt, **Sudan** and **Ethiopia** over the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** set to be a point for discussion with his Egyptian counterpart;

22 Jan 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Al Jazeera*. **Mohamed Hamdan Daglo**, deputy chairman of **Sudan's** transitional **Sovereignty Council**, lands in Ethiopia to meet with meet "several *Ethiopian officials*";

21 Jan 2022 **Gambella (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. **Gambella** region police commission accuses **South Sudanese** militia from the **Murle** tribe of crossing the border into Gambella in an attack that left eight dead and five injured.

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