

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Ethiopia Summary 23 August 2022

Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov arrives in Ethiopia where he pledges support for the country as prime minister Abiy Ahmed's (2018-present) relations with Western countries come under strain over the Tigray conflict. The European Union's (EU) and the United States (US) special envoys for the Horn of Africa, undertake a joint mission to Mekelle (Tigray) to meet the rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The African Union agrees to the inclusion of the United Nations (UN), EU and US representatives in the team tasked with brokering a peace agreement between the government and the TPLF. Ethiopia continues to feel the impact of the acute drought but is set to benefit from some relief from Ukrainian grain products earmarked for affected countries in the region. Oromo Liberation Army calls for a truce to "allow humanitarian agencies to deliver assistance to affected areas". Ethiopian security forces announce the killing of over 800 Al-Shabaab-affiliated fighters in response to a cross-border conflict carried out in end-July. Ethiopia announces the completion of the third filling of its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, stoking further tensions with downstream neighbours. Inflation reaches 33.5% in July, placing further pressure on the consumer. Prospects for an improved economy exist from discussions around a potential IMF deal.

Russia looks to strengthen ties as Ethiopia-Western relations take strain...

Russia's foreign minister **Sergey Lavrov** arrived in **Ethiopia** on 27 July hosted by his Ethiopian counterpart **Demeke Mekonnen**, concluding a four-country tour to **Egypt, the Republic of the Congo (ROC), and Uganda** as part of Russia's attempt to strengthen ties with African leaders as it faces increased global pressure.

Ethiopia, ROC and Uganda did not submit a vote on the **United Nations (UN) General Assembly's** resolution on 2 March to condemn Russia's invasion of **Ukraine** on 24 February (see *ARC Briefing Ethiopia March 2022*). Lavrov stated during his visit that Russia appreciated "the considered African position as to the situation in and around Ukraine".¹ Lavrov stated of his visit:

"We confirmed our firm support for those efforts which the government is making to stabilise the situation and launch inclusive national dialogue to solve the key questions".

Russia and Ethiopia have enjoyed strong ties since establishing diplomatic relations in 1943.² The bilateral relationship has evolved to encompass political, economic, ideological and security interests. Most recently, in March 2021, the Russian government used its position on the **UN Security Council** to protect Ethiopia from censure after UN diplomats reported that Russia, along with **India** and **China**, objected to an attempt by the security council to approve a draft statement which called for "an end to violence in **Tigray**."³

Lavrov's visit to Ethiopia comes as prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** (2018- present) faces strained relations with Western players. In particular, the war in Tigray has stalled the **European Union (EU)** development agenda agreed upon with the Ethiopian government to replace the **National Indicative Programme** which ran from 2014-2020 and for which the EU pledged to provide the Ethiopian government with around €815m (\$815m) in support. The **European Commission** suspended further

¹ Deutsche Welle,

² Wilson Center, 11 Feb 2021

³ Associated Press, 6 Mar 2021

budget support to the government in December 2020 following the outbreak of the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region.⁴

On 11 July the **European Commission** announced that it has earmarked €1 billion (\$1 billion) for development assistance for Ethiopia for the 2021-2027 budgetary period. The commission also immediately approved €81.5m (\$81.5m) from the budget to be channelled towards health and education support in areas impacted by the conflict. The commission has also considered resuming budget support to the government and adopting a multiannual indicative program, which was negotiated with Ethiopian authorities, although this will be conditional on *“improved humanitarian access, the cessation of hostilities, and accountability for human rights violations”*.⁵

Didier Verse, the head of the unit for **East and Central Africa** at the European Commission described Ethiopia as a *“country in crisis”* going on to address the state of the efforts made towards peace in the Tigray conflict, stating:

*“The humanitarian, the political, and the military situation remain very fragile, and positive steps are reversible.”*⁶

On 2 August the EU's and **United States'** special envoys for the **Horn of Africa**, **Annette Weber** and **Mike Hammer** undertook a joint mission to **Mekelle** (Tigray). The envoys stated that they sought to encourage the launch of peace talks between the rebel **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)** and the Ethiopian government (see *ARC Briefing Ethiopia July 2022*).⁷ The envoys also highlighted the need for the resumption of utilities such as electricity, telecommunications, banking and other basic services, stating:

*“With this security assurance there should be no obstacle for the restoration of services to begin.”*⁸

Redwan Hussien, the national security advisor to the prime minister's office criticised this visit, stating that the special envoys:

“Failed to press for unequivocal commitment for peace talks, rather indulging in appeasement and fulfilling preconditions placed by the other party [TPLF]”.⁹

It is, however, positive that both parties continue to support the **African Union's (AU)** position as the chair of the peace talks set to take place between the TPLF and the Ethiopian federal government. On 6 August the AU's **Political Affairs, Peace, and Security (PAPS)** committee agreed to the inclusion of the UN, EU, and US members to be part of the team tasked with brokering a peace agreement between the two factions. Under this agreement, the committee led by former **Nigerian** president **Olusegun Obasanjo** (1999-2007) will work with the UN under-secretary general and special envoy to the Horn of Africa, **Hanna Tetteh**, Weber, and Hammer among the representatives.¹⁰

On 18 August, **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, the director general of the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, and an ethnic Tigrayan himself, described the ongoing crisis in Tigray as *“the worst disaster on Earth”* labelling it *“more than Ukraine without any exaggeration”*.¹¹ In response, the Ethiopian government spokesperson Billene Seyoum described Tedros' comments as *“unethical”* and *“unbecoming of such a high-profile position.”*¹²

⁴ European Union, 11 Aug 2022

⁵ Devex, 11 Jul 2022

⁶ Devex, 11 Jul 2022

⁷ European Union, 2 Aug 2022

⁸ Addis Standard, 2 Aug 2022

⁹ Ethiopian Monitor, 4 Aug 2022

¹⁰ The Reporter, 6 Aug 2022

¹¹ Vatican News, 18 Aug 2022

¹² NPR, 18 Aug 2022

Renewed accusations of breaching the peace agreement by both sides are also dampening the prospects for a lasting peace agreement.¹³ On 18 August, TPLF forces accused federal security forces of firing on them stating:

“The Addis Ababa government has started bombing Tigray forces on different fronts beginning yesterday... therefore, I don’t see any progress towards any peaceful resolution; in fact, it looks like we are back to zero.”¹⁴

As conflict continues to plague the country

The rebel **Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)**, labelled a terrorist group by the Ethiopian federal government, called for a truce on 17 August to “allow humanitarian agencies to deliver assistance to affected areas”.¹⁵ The **Oromia** state has been negatively impacted by the ongoing drought in Ethiopia. However, the government has attributed a recent spate of massacres of **Amhara** civilians in **Oromia** state to the OLA, cracking down on OLA fighters operating in the region. The OLA has denied this, instead placing the blame on a militia group it claims was established by the Ethiopian government (see ARC Briefing Ethiopia July 2022).

On 8 August the government announced that it has recaptured 1,255 out of 1,739 kebelles, controlled by the OLA, in Oromia. The government also announced the capture of 3,180 OLA fighters as well as the establishment of federal command posts in **Wollaga**, **Shoa**, and **Guji**.¹⁶

The Ethiopian government has also sought to contain other instances of conflict and violence which have been on the rise in the country. On 8 August, the government announced the arrest of over 497 members of the “**Junta, Shene, Al-Shabaab and other extremist groups**” found with items including security force uniforms, fake identity documents, electronic equipment, and mobile phones. The statement also announced the arrest of 314 suspects of organised crime as well as 75 state officials on suspicion of corruption.¹⁷

Two days earlier, **Ethiopian National Defense Forces** announced that they had killed over 800 Al-Shabaab-affiliated fighters, including 24 high-ranking leaders. This came in response to a cross-border attack carried out by Al-Shabaab in Ethiopia’s **Somali** region in end-July.¹⁸ US assessments of the situation indicate that the insurgents crossed over 150 metres into eastern Ethiopia, through **Somalia**’s border regions of **Hiran** and **Bakool** before being repelled by Ethiopia’s **Liyu** security forces and the national defence force.¹⁹ The fighting began between the insurgents and Liyu forces in the town of **Bokol** which borders Ethiopia’s Somali region.

Fighting in the border towns continued during the week between the insurgents and government forces, with each side claiming casualties.²⁰ General **Stephen Townsend**, the outgoing commander of **US Africa Command** described this as a “rare attack but always predictable”, stating:

“This is not a fluke. ... I don’t believe this is a one-off”²¹

Somali **Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre** appointed **Mukhtar Robow** as the country’s religious affairs minister on 2 August. Robow was a founding member and high-ranking official in Al-Shabaab until he split from the group in 2013 going on to join the Somali government in 2017.²² The government intends this move to strengthen its presence in Robow’s native Bakool region where Al-Shabaab is active. However, the move has been met with significant push-back from the Ethiopian

¹³ Bloomberg, 19 Aug 2022

¹⁴ Voice of America, 18 Aug 2022

¹⁵ Associated Press, 17 Aug 2022

¹⁶ Addis Standard, 9 Aug 2022

¹⁷ Addis Standard, 9 Aug 2022

¹⁸ Anadolu Agency, 29 Jul 2022

¹⁹ Voice of America, 28 Jul 2022

²⁰ Africa News, 5 Aug 2022

²¹ Voice of America, 28 Jul 2022

²² Reuters, 2 Aug 2022

government which is opposed to cooperation with Al-Shabaan-linked figures.²³ This development as well as President **Hassan Sheikh Mohamud**'s (2022-present) decision to weigh in on Ethiopia's use of the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** (see below) poses a risk to the parties' relationship as they face a stronger threat from Al Shabaab.

Tensions with Nile neighbours continue

Abiy announced on 12 August the completion of the third filling of GERD located in the **Benishangul-Gumuz** region, after it began this process in July.²⁴ Power production from the second turbine was launched on 11 August. Abiy stated during his announcement:

*"The Nile is a gift of God given to us for Ethiopians to make use of it"*²⁵

Despite Ethiopia's continued use of the dam, a regional dispute is still raging between the country and its downstream neighbours, particularly Egypt and **Sudan**, over the use of the dam (see *ARC Briefing Ethiopia June 2022*). Neighbouring Somalia also appears to have waded in on the tensions. Following a 25 July official visit to Egypt by Somali president Mohamud, president **Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi** (2014-present) stated:

*"I discussed with Somalian President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam issue, and we have highlighted the danger of unilateral policies when implementing projects on transboundary rivers."*²⁶

On 30 July, Egypt's foreign minister **Sameh Shoukry** addressed a letter to the president of the UN's **Security Council** to register the country's "*objection and complete rejection*" of Ethiopia's filling of the GERD, and unilateral use thereof, as Ethiopia, Egypt and **Sudan** continue to struggle to reach an agreement on the filling and operation of the dam.²⁷ In contrast, the Sudanese government has stressed the "*necessity of cooperation and coordination*" between all three countries, instead calling for them to reach a binding agreement to govern the use of the dam.²⁸

Ethiopia's economy facing brighter prospects from potential IMF deal

Ethiopia is facing economic stress, driven by several factors including the global fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, drought, and hyper-inflationary pressures with inflation reaching 33.5% in July.²⁹ However, the country faces some respite over the medium term as on 23 July local news outlet, **Addis Standard** reported that the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** hinted during a creditor's committee meeting under the **G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatments** on 19 July that it was considering sending a "*program negotiation mission*" to Ethiopia between "*late September to early/mid-October*" but that this was contingent on some conditions.³⁰ The mission could enable Ethiopia to begin a new program with the institution by 2024, boosting creditor confidence. After a meeting with **William Roos**, the co-chairperson of the **Paris Club** in mid-July, Ethiopia's state minister of finance divulged:

*"Mr Roos briefed the Ethiopian delegation on the promising progress by the creditor's committee and assured that all of the bilateral creditors who are part of the committee stand ready to support Ethiopia's request."*³¹

The **Central Statistical Agency** also reported on 5 August that while inflation is still high, it was down from 34% in June. Food price inflation decelerated to 35.5% in July from 38.1% in June while

²³ The Conversation, 21 Aug 2022

²⁴ Al-Monitor, 18 Jul 2022

²⁵ Al-Monitor, 18 Jul 2022

²⁶ The East African, 27 Jul 2022

²⁷ Egypt Independent, 30 Jul 2022

²⁸ The New Arab, 19 Aug 2022

²⁹ Al Jazeera, 1 Jun 2022; Financial Times, 3 May 2022

³⁰ Addis Standard, 23 Jul 2022

³¹ Addis Standard, 23 Jul 2022

non-food price inflation increased to 30.4%, up from 28.2% in June.³² The government has set the ambitious goal of reigning inflation at 11.9% in the upcoming fiscal year.³³

Famine and drought place millions at risk

Ethiopia continues to face an acute drought as seen across the Horn of Africa, as the region's rainy season, from March to June, reported the lowest rainfall levels in 70 years, significantly impacting agricultural output.³⁴ Ethiopia will receive some relief as on 16 August a ship chartered by the UN left the **Yuzhne** port of Ukraine, carrying 23,000 tonnes of grain, set for **Djibouti**. The grain will be transferred to Ethiopia as part of a programme by the **World Food Programme (WFP)** to assist countries in the Horn of Africa facing famine spurred by the ongoing drought.³⁵ On 22 July, the Ukrainian and Russian governments were able to reach an agreement with **Turkey** to resume the carriage of grain from Ukraine via the **Black Sea**. This had been disrupted since Russian forces entered Ukrainian territory in February.³⁶

However, **David Beasley**, the director of WFP cautioned:

*"It will take more than grain ships out of Ukraine to stop world hunger, but with Ukrainian grain, back on global markets we have a chance to stop this global food crisis from spiralling even further."*³⁷

The WFP also warned on 23 June that 20 million people in Ethiopia faced the threat of conflict and hunger as the organisation's food and nutrition support declined.³⁸ The WFP, UN **Refugee Agency** and government's **Refugees and Returnees Service** also appealed for \$73m to provide food aid to over 750,000 refugees in Ethiopia, for the next six months. WFP asserts it will run out of food supplies for refugees in 22 camps across the **Afar**, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, **Gambella**, Somali and Tigray regions of Ethiopia by October.³⁹ **Claude Jibidar**, WFP's representative and country director for Ethiopia stated:

*"Three quarters of a million refugees will be left with nothing to eat in just a matter of weeks unless we receive funding immediately"*⁴⁰

The WHO too appealed for \$123.7m on 2 August, to provide emergency aid to the region. WHO assistant director-general for emergency response, **Ibrahima Soce Fall** called it *"very unfortunate"* that *"people's access to healthcare is more restricted because they are on the move in search of food, water, and pasture"*.⁴¹

Residents of the Afar region, also afflicted by spill over conflict from Tigray are reportedly facing famine, lamenting that aid is primarily being targeted toward Tigray.⁴² The state-funded **Human Rights Commission** released a report on 26 July indicating that Afar was not included in the list of drought-afflicted regions for which the commission advocates for government intervention.⁴³ However, local humanitarian actors implore the government to declare a drought in the region as residents of the region are reported to lack food, drink as well as clothing. US-based media outlet **Voice of America** quotes a resident of Afar as saying: *"We expect God first and then the government to help us."*⁴⁴

³² Central Statistical Agency, 5 Aug 2022

³³ Quartz Africa, 5 Jul 2022

³⁴ Relief Web, 5 Aug 2022

³⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 16 Aug 2022

³⁶ ABC News, 15 Aug 2022

³⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 16 Aug 2022

³⁸ UN News, 23 Jun 2022

³⁹ World Food Programme, 9 Aug 2022

⁴⁰ World Food Programme, 9 Aug 2022

⁴¹ Voice of America, 2 Aug 2022

⁴² Africa News, 3 Aug 2022

⁴³ Addis Standard, 27 Jul 2022

⁴⁴ Voice of America, 29 Jul 2022

Planner

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Chronology

22 Aug 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Worldometers/ Our World in Data*. The number of active Covid-19 cases in Ethiopia continues to decline after a period of acceleration between April and June. While the country entered the fifth wave of infections in June, this appears to have been short-lived. The number of active Covid-19 cases in Ethiopia's population of 118 million as of 21 August was 14,104, down from 15,523 a month earlier. As of 21 August, Ethiopia had recorded 492,968 Covid-19 infections and 7,571 Covid-19-related deaths since the WHO declared the pandemic on 11 March 2020;

22 Aug 2022 **Gembella (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. **Gatbel Moon**, head of the disaster risk management bureau of the **Gembella** regional state, reports that over 4,000 households have been displaced by flooding which affected the region;

20 Aug 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Xinhua*. At least six people are killed after a warehouse building collapses in Addis Ababa;

20 Aug 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *All Africa*. 72 local civil societies operating in **Tigray** call for the lifting of the blockade on basic services which has been in place in the region since May 2022;

20 Aug 2022 **Dar es Salam (Tanzania)** *New Business Ethiopia*. Ethiopia's water and energy minister **Itafa Habtamu** and his Ugandan counterpart **Sam Cheptoris** call for the members of the **Nile Basin Initiative** to expedite ratification of the **Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement**;

17 Aug 2022 **Oromia (Ethiopia)** *The East African*. The **Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)**, labelled a terrorist group by the Ethiopian federal government, calls for a humanitarian truce with the Ethiopian federal government to enable the humanitarian organisations to deliver aid to affected areas;

16 Aug 2022 **Yuzhne (Ukraine)** *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. A ship chartered by the **United Nations** leaves the **Yuzhne** port of **Ukraine**, carrying 23,000 tonnes of grain from the country, set for **Djibouti**. The grain will then be transferred to Ethiopia as part of a programme by the **World Food Programme** to assist countries in the **Horn of Africa** facing famine spurred by the ongoing drought;

12 Aug 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Al Jazeera*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** announces the completion of the third filling of the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** This comes after the state launched power production from the second turbine at the GERD on 11 August. The third filling reached 600 metres, 25 metres more than the second filling;

9 Aug 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *World Food Programme*. The **United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)**, the **UN Refugee Agency** and the **Ethiopian Government Refugees and Returnees Service** appeal for \$73m to provide food aid to over 750,000 refugees in Ethiopia, for the next six months. WFP asserts it will run out of food supplies for refugees by October;

6 Aug 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The **African Union's Political Affairs, Peace and Security committee** agrees to the inclusion of **United Nations (UN)**, **European Union** and **United States** members to be part of the team tasked with brokering a peace agreement between the government and the **Tigray People's Liberation Front**;

6 Aug 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Voice of America*. **Ethiopian** security forces announce that they have killed over 800 **Al-Shabaab**-affiliated fighters, including 24 high-ranking leaders. This

is in response to an attack by Al-Shabaab which crossed into Ethiopia's **Somali** region and saw them clash with **Liyu** forces;

2 Aug 2022 **Tigray (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. The **European Union's** and **United States'** special envoys for the **Horn of Africa**, **Annette Weber** and **Mike Hammer** undertake a joint mission to **Mekelle** (Tigray) to meet with the leaders of the **Tigray People's Liberation Front**;

30 Jul 2022 **Cairo (Egypt)** *Egypt Independent*. **Egypt's** foreign minister **Sameh Shoukry** writes to the president of the UN's Security Council to register the country's "*objection and complete rejection*" of Ethiopia's filling of the GERD, and unilateral use thereof, as Ethiopia, Egypt and **Sudan** continue to struggle to reach an agreement on the filling and operation of the dam;

29 Jul 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Reuters*. Government forces report the killing of over 150 **Al-Shabaab** fighters in clashes on the border between **Ethiopia** and **Somalia**. Al-Shabaab also claims the killing of 103 Ethiopian forces in the town of **Aato**;

27 Jul 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Al Jazeera*. **Russia's** foreign minister **Sergey Lavrov** arrives in **Ethiopia** on 27 July concluding a four-country **Africa** tour which included official visits to **Egypt**, **the Republic of the Congo**, and **Uganda** as well;

27 Jul 2022 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. The **United States** announces \$488m in funding to enable the provision of in critical humanitarian assistance because of the drought in Ethiopia.

About Africa Risk Consulting:

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