

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Ethiopia Monthly Briefing February 2026

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#### Ethiopia Summary 24 February 2026

*Prime minister Abiy Ahmed (2018-present) accuses Eritrean forces of war crimes in the 2020-2022 Tigray War, and continuing to occupy Ethiopian territory. Abiy hosts Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (2014-present) and oversees the signing of a new memorandum of understanding (MoU) on energy cooperation. A group of private investors who hold Ethiopian Eurobonds threaten to take legal action after the government announces it would reopen debt restructuring negotiations despite already reaching an agreement. Tigrayan regional security forces clash with federal forces and Amhara nationalist militants in Tsemlet. These clashes are the latest indicator of the deteriorating security environment in northern Ethiopia.*

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#### Relations with Eritrea worsen

The government and **Eritrea** have fallen out in recent months amid a series of tit-for-tat insults and allegations, with Ethiopia accusing Eritrea of supporting and equipping anti-government armed groups, including the **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)** and **Amhara** national militants (known as **Fano**). Eritrea denies this and instead contends that Ethiopia wants to instigate a war to capture Eritrean ports and coastal territory. On 3 February, prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** (2018-present) continued his administration's rhetorical attacks on Eritrea when he [accused](#) Eritrean forces of committing war crimes during the **Tigray War** between 2020 and 2022. Eritrean forces are widely believed to have committed such atrocities, and numerous independent reports cite witness accounts of such crimes.

However, until now, the federal government has refused to acknowledge or adequately investigate these allegations. This is likely due to its complicity, given that these Eritrean forces fought alongside federal troops against the TPLF. Abiy's statement marks a sharp pivot on this matter and indicates that the government is seeking to foment anger towards Eritrea. This is likely in response to its concerns that the TPLF and the Eritrean government are strengthening ties in the face of a common foe – the federal government.

In a similar development, foreign minister **Gedion Timothewos** accused Eritrea of maintaining an armed presence in Ethiopian territory and issued a letter to the Eritrean government [demanding](#) that these forces immediately withdraw. Again, independent reports and observers have claimed that Eritrean forces remain in Ethiopian territory in some areas along the border between the two countries. The federal government has largely refused to engage with these claims in the past. Gedion's letter indicates a break with this policy as the government intensifies its rhetoric against the Eritrean state. It should be noted that Eritrea denied these claims and reiterated its response that Ethiopia is seeking a justification for a conflict.

All this is occurring amid unconfirmed reports that both Ethiopia and Eritrea have deployed additional forces to areas near the shared border. Ethiopia clearly believes it is facing a potential security crisis on its northern border, either a new conflict with the TPLF, a war with Eritrea, or both. Although credible reports indicate that Eritrean forces are guilty of war crimes and continued occupation in recognised Ethiopian territory, the possibility that Ethiopia may welcome a war cannot be discounted. Abiy is open about his belief that Ethiopia needs to secure coastal access as a matter of national security. However, none of the parties involved is yet ready for such a conflict, and thus it is assessed as unlikely in the short-term. The rising tensions, intensifying rhetoric, and increased

presence of armed forces in the **Tigray Region** have laid the foundation for an instigating incident, starting a conflict, whether intentional or not.

### Abiy hosts Turkish president

Abiy [hosted](#) Türkiye's President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** (2014-present) in **Addis Ababa** on 17 February, who visited Ethiopia as part of a three-country regional tour. According to Abiy, the two leaders agreed to work to grow bilateral trade between their two countries to over \$1 billion. This would more than triple the current levels of bilateral trade. In pursuit of this goal, Abiy and Erdogan oversaw the [signing](#) of a new memorandum of understanding (MoU) in energy cooperation. Under this agreement, Ethiopia and Turkey will jointly develop renewable energy projects; this will include the production and installation of hydroelectric power plant equipment and electric turbines.

Ethiopia has maintained strong ties with Turkey for some time and is eager to deepen this relationship, especially economically, as part of its effort to grow and diversify its trade relationships. For its part, Turkey is actively trying to expand its influence in Africa and views Ethiopia as an important partner in this endeavour.

### Bondholders threaten legal action over new restructuring plan

A group of private investors who hold Ethiopian **Eurobonds** (known as the **Ad Hoc Committee**) have [threatened](#) to take legal action after Ethiopia [announced](#) it would reopen debt restructuring negotiations with the group instead of implementing the agreement reached in early January. Ethiopia's finance ministry announced that it would reopen negotiations on 30 January after the country's **Official Creditor Committee (OCC)** found that the earlier agreement did not meet the Comparability of Treatment principle under the G20 restructuring initiative. The agreement with the Ad Hoc Committee on bondholders was dependent on the OCC signing off on the agreement. The OCC represents Ethiopia's major bilateral creditors and is chaired by **China** and **France**.

Under the terms of the agreement with the Ad Hoc Committee, bondholders would take a 15% write-down on the principal amount through an exchange for a new \$850m bond maturing in mid-2029. It further called for the creation of a new value recovery instrument (VRI) that would link payouts to the value of Ethiopia's exports. As such, the bondholders would have received additional payments if Ethiopia had enjoyed strong export-led economic growth.

It appears as if it was the inclusion of the VRI that the OCC was opposed to; the committee believed that the instrument would [lead](#) to "a vastly diverging effort between bondholders and the official creditors". Essentially, the two separate groups of creditors would not receive equal treatment, but the bondholders represented by the Ad Hoc Committee would receive preferential treatment. Notably, the agreement was opposed by debt-focused civil society groups as well, who believe that the VRI would have resulted in Ethiopia overpaying the bondholders.

However, this development is a setback for Ethiopia's debt restructuring efforts, which have been ongoing since the country [defaulted](#) on its Eurobond repayments in December 2023. The prolonged nature of the negotiations and the threat of legal action will place further pressure on Ethiopia's bond market and potentially suppress demand for the country's bonds. It could also complicate Ethiopia's **Extended Credit Facility (ECF)** arrangement with the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**. Reaching a debt restructuring agreement is a key target for Ethiopia under the ECF programme and could impact future payments under the programme.

The IMF may give Ethiopia some leeway in this matter, given that the disruption to the process was not due to government actions but rather due to OCC opposition. In addition, on 11 February, Ethiopia and France [reached](#) a debt restructuring agreement, marking a major step forward in Ethiopia's debt journey. This should pave the way for similar agreements with other OCC members.

## Clashes in Tigray highlights worsening security situation in northern Ethiopia

Tigrayan regional security forces [clashed](#) with federal forces and **Amhara** nationalist militants in **Tsemlet**, located in the western Tigray, on 29 January. These clashes subsequently spread to other areas in western Tigray and [resulted](#) in thousands of people being displaced. The exact cause of the clashes has not been officially confirmed, given the limited media access in the area and the government's reluctance to be transparent about security incidents. However, the situation appears to have been triggered by when troops belonging to the **Tigray Defence Force (TDF)** (the armed wing of the TPLF) entered the area following a withdrawal by **Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)** soldiers. This brought the TDF into conflict with other armed groups in western Tigray, including some Fano fighters, leading to the return of the ENDF. The outbreak of armed violence in Tigray caused significant alarm within Ethiopia's federal government and even resulted in the temporary [suspension](#) of all flights in and out of Tigray. Authorities were evidently concerned that this might mark the beginning of a larger conflict in the region, or even a new Tigray War.

Western Tigray has remained a contested territory ever since the war ended, as Amhara nationalist groups have refused to withdraw from the territory despite the conditions of the 2022 **Pretoria Peace Accords**. The area was historically part of Tigray, but these militant groups claim that the area forms part of the ancestral Amharan lands. As such, the area has seen several bouts of minor ethnically motivated clashes since the end of the Tigray War and has gained symbolic importance for both sides; the TPLF especially views regaining control of the territory as essential to ensuring that the Tigray region remains whole.

The clashes [ended](#) on 1 February after the TDF withdrew its forces from the region. **Tigray Interim Administration** president **Tadesse Werede** claimed that the TPLF ordered the withdrawal of these forces to prevent a larger conflict. However, it is also likely that the TDF were unprepared for an escalating conflict, especially after the ENDF reportedly began carrying out [drone strikes](#) in the area. The three-days of violence have escalated tensions in the area and highlighted the deteriorating security environment in northern Ethiopia.

Relations between the TPLF and the federal government are arguably at the lowest point since the end of the Tigray War. The government has accused the TPLF of conspiring with Eritrea to restart the conflict. The TPLF believes that the federal government is working to depose it and take control of the Tigray region. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that the **National Elections Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)** stripped the TPLF of its official federal recognition as a political party in May 2025 amid a dispute with the party over its electoral conference and registration status (*see ARC Briefing Ethiopia May 2025*). This has ensured that the TPLF will not be allowed to contest the upcoming 1 June general election. Consequently, Tigray will be won by a different party, something the TPLF will refuse to accept, portending a new constitutional and security crisis.

### Planner

20 Apr 2026 **Addis Abana (Ethiopia) European Union (EU)–Ethiopia Business Forum**  
1 Jun 2026 **(Ethiopia)** general election;

### Chronology

23 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) ENA**. Foreign minister **Gedion Timothewos** hosts **Saudi Arabia's** vice foreign affairs minister, **Waleed A.M Elkhareiji**, at his office to discuss Ethio-Saudi bilateral relations;  
22 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) Addis Standard**. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** uses his address at the military's 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Special Operations Command to defend Ethiopia's ongoing military build-up as beneficial for regional security;

21 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The **Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO)** calls on the government to investigate civilian casualties, sexual violence, and property destruction in the **Amhara** and **South Ethiopia** regions;

21 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. The **National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)** unveils the symbols of the 48 political parties registered to contest the upcoming 1 June 2026 general election;

19 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. State-owned **Ethiopian Airlines** announces plans to inaugurate three new domestic airports and flight routes connecting the towns of **Negele Borena**, **Gore Metu**, and **Debre Markos**;

18 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. The **House of People's Representatives** (Ethiopia's lower parliamentary house) approves an eight-month extension for the **National Dialogue Commission**;

17 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. **United States (US)**-headquartered press freedom organisation, the **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)**, calls on the government to reinstate the accreditation of three Reuters journalists who lost their accreditation in what is believed to be retaliation for an investigative report revealing that Ethiopia is hosting a training facility linked to **Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF)**;

17 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. The **8<sup>th</sup> Canada-Ethiopia Political Consultations** is held in Addis Ababa to review the bilateral relationship between the two countries;

16 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Andalou Ajansi*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** uses his **Ramadan** message to reiterate the government's denial that Ethiopia harbours expansionist goals, but also reiterated that the country considers gaining access to a "*maritime outlet*" as an essential national priority;

14 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *African Union*. The **39<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU)** is held at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa;

13 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** welcomes **Italian** prime minister **Giorgia Meloni** to Ethiopia ahead of the **Second Italy-Africa Summit** in Addis Ababa;

12 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** hosts **Saudi Arabian** foreign minister **Faisal bin Frhan Abdullah** for meetings on bilateral cooperation in Addis Ababa;

11 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The central bank, the **National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE)**, amends its foreign exchange directive to enable service exporters to retain more of their proceeds in a forex retention account;

7 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The **National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)** extends the candidate registration deadline for the 1 June 2026 general election until 22 February;

6 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. **Dessalegn Chanie**, a member of the House of People's Representatives from **Bahar Dar City**, announces that he will not seek re-election, claiming that the upcoming elections are unlikely to be free, peaceful, or fair;

4 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. Finance minister **Ahmed Shide** signs a bilateral development cooperation grant agreement with **China's** ambassador to Ethiopia, **Chen Hai**;

3 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. Prime Minister **Abiy** announces that Ethiopia's consumer price inflation fell to 9.7%;

3 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** dismisses claims that the development of the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** was financed by the **United States (US)**;

2 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. **United Kingdom (UK)** foreign secretary **Yvette Cooper** meets with prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** and foreign minister **Gedion Timothewos** to sign cooperation agreements on energy and investment worth around \$400m;

29 Jan 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *EWN*. Officials suspend flights to the **Tigray Region** following clashes between federal and Tigrayan forces;

28 Jan 2026 **Washington, D.C. (United States)** *Addis Standard*. A new report by the US-based think tank **Global Financial Integrity** reveals that Ethiopia lost around \$24.6 billion through trade-related illicit financial flows between 2013 and 2022;

28 Jan 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** meets with **United States (US)** Deputy Secretary of State **Christopher Landau** and General **Dagvin Anderson**, the commander of the US military's **Africa Command (AFRICOM)**.

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