

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Ethiopia Summary 26 March 2026

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (2018-present) calls on fuel distributors, service stations, and consumers to conserve fuel and prioritise essential services due to concerns over possible supply constraints due to the ongoing war in the Middle East. Tensions between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the federal government intensify as the 1 June 2026 general election approaches. The Sudanese government issues a warning to Ethiopia, claiming that drone and militant attacks on Sudanese targets are originating from Ethiopian territory. Landslides in South Ethiopia Regional State kill over 150 people.

Fears of fuel shortages rise due to the Middle East conflict

Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed** (2018-present), on 16 March, [called](#) on fuel distributors, service stations, and consumers to conserve fuel and prioritise essential services due to concerns over possible supply constraints due to the ongoing war in the **Middle East**. Later that same week, the **Petroleum and Energy Authority** [issued](#) new rules regulating the consumption and sale of petroleum products, which prioritise the security and defence, manufacturing, agriculture, and public transport sectors. These developments underscore the deep concern within **Ethiopia's** federal government that the country could face severe fuel shortages in the coming weeks due to the impact of the ongoing conflict in the **Persian Gulf**.

The war began on 28 February when the **United States (US)** and **Israel** [attacked](#) **Iran**; Iran retaliated to this aggression by targeting both **Israel** and the regional Gulf states, which host US armed forces. As the war escalated, Iran pivoted to targeting gas and oil facilities in these countries and constraining maritime traffic through the **Strait of Hormuz**, critically disrupting oil and gas exports from states in the Gulf. As a consequence of this conflict, the price of Brent Crude oil has surged from around \$70 a barrel before the conflict began to a high of over \$111 on 19 March. As of 24 March, the price was oscillating around \$99.

Surging oil prices and restricted exports from states in the Persian Gulf present a serious economic threat to Ethiopia. The country imports all its oil and refined petroleum products and is highly exposed to external energy market shocks. In an effort to shield consumers from a fuel price shock, the government [confirmed](#) on 16 March that it had introduced subsidies to keep the prices stable. The finance ministry announced that as of 16 March, diesel was being supplied at ETB 139.84 (\$0.90) a litre, supported by a subsidy of ETB 98 (\$0.63), while the government is subsidising petrol at ETB 73.56 (\$0.48) a litre to maintain a price of ETB 132.18 (\$0.85) a litre. These subsidies are placing a strain on the national fiscus and Ethiopia's foreign exchange reserves; they are also not sustainable over the long term, especially if the war continues or intensifies, which could lead to even higher oil prices.

A large proportion of the country's petroleum imports comes from refineries based in the Persian Gulf, particularly the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, exports from which have been severely disrupted. Global stocks of refined fuel are particularly constrained as **China**, which is a major global supplier of refined fuel, [banned](#) its refiners from exporting fuel in order to prioritise its own energy security. Ethiopia now needs to compete with other states to rapidly develop alternative supply lines and secure available fuel supplies. There is a real possibility that the country will experience fuel shortages within the coming weeks. If this does occur, the government will enforce rationing as indicated by the Petroleum and Energy Authority's new regulations.

Widespread fuel shortages will cause significant economic disruption, exacerbate social tensions, and increase the risk of civil unrest. The federal government's control of Ethiopia's fuel market is already a source of concern, and any rationing would lead to allegations of favouritism and claims that certain ethnic groups and regions are being favoured. Even before the current global fuel crisis, the **Tigray Interim Administration (TIA)** had [accused](#) the federal government of disrupting the steady supply of fuel to the **Tigray Region**.

Electoral tensions deepen in the Tigray Region

Such allegations of abuse of power and bad faith engagement are expected to increase in frequency in the coming months as tensions between the federal government and the **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)** intensify. Two catalytic events are expected to aggravate these tensions: the [expiration](#) of the TPLF-led TIA's mandate in April and the 1 June general election. There is a possibility that the federal government will not extend the administration's mandate through to the June election and will attempt to either place Tigray under federal administration or appoint a new interim body led by non-TPLF figures. Either way, the TPLF is unlikely to recognise such a move and will probably refuse to surrender administrative control. The TPLF is also expected to refuse to accept the general election results, given that the party has been excluded from the vote after the **National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)** deregistered it as a political party in May last year (*see ARC Briefing Ethiopia May 2025*). As a consequence of this, the Tigray regional election, which will occur at the same time as the general election, will be won by a regional opposition party.

The tense political situation was further elevated on 23 February when the **House of Federation** (the upper legislative house) [revealed](#) it had instructed the NEBE to strip Tigrayan authorities of oversight of five electoral districts located in western Tigray. [According](#) to the House of Federation, this was done due to the current unresolved "*ownership claim*" of Western Tigray. Control of the **Setit Humera, Kafta Humera, and Wolkait** districts is disputed between the Tigray and **Amhara** regions. These districts are officially part of Tigray but were seized by Amhara nationalist forces during the 2020-2022 Tigray War – these nationalist groups claim that these districts form part of ancestral Amhara lands. However, the federal legislature more likely took this action to weaken the TPLF's ability to influence or disrupt the general election and to lay the foundation to permanently redistrict these areas away from Tigray.

Any threat to Tigray's geographical integrity will increase the threat of a renewed conflict between the TPLF and the federal government. This threat is already heightened by the fact that the TPLF will not recognise the election results or surrender control of the region, challenging the federal government to enforce the election outcome, and will only increase as the election draws nearer.

Sudan accuses Ethiopia of interference

The threat of a renewed conflict in northern Ethiopia makes security developments in eastern Ethiopia even more concerning. The **Sudanese** government, on 2 March, accused Ethiopia of interfering in its ongoing civil war with the paramilitary **Rapid Support Forces (RSF)**, [alleging](#) that the drones which have carried out attacks on Sudanese territory originated from across the border in Ethiopia. The Sudanese foreign ministry [denounced](#) this as "*hostile behaviour*" and warned Ethiopia that Sudan "*affirms its right to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity*". This statement fell short of accusing the Ethiopian government itself of orchestrating these attacks.

This is the latest confirmation that Ethiopia is supporting RSF forces in their conflict with the Sudanese army. In February, [investigative reports](#) indicated that Ethiopia is hosting an RSF training camp in its territory where an estimated 4,300 fighters are receiving training and equipment. The UAE is reportedly financing this camp, which is also backed by both the UAE and Ethiopian security services.

If Ethiopia is facilitating RSF attacks in Sudan, including [ground assaults](#), it could risk the Sudanese conflict spreading into Ethiopian territory. The **Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)** are unlikely to tolerate continued drone strikes and RSF incursions from across the Ethiopian border and will

eventually be compelled to try and strike RSF targets within Ethiopia. The likelihood of this has increased given that the UAE will need to scale back its presence in Ethiopia and Sudan to prioritise its own security amid the ongoing conflict in the Persian Gulf.

This is a serious risk for Ethiopia, which already faces an overly complex security environment. There are ongoing domestic conflicts with nationalist groups in the Amhara and **Oromia** regions and the prospect of renewed conflict with the TPLF and Eritrea. Ethiopia's security resources are currently stretched and can ill afford to be embroiled in a cross-border conflict with Sudan.

Ethiopia has taken on this risk largely out of an interest in weakening the SAF and extending its influence over power players in Sudan. This is motivated by tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan over control of the **Nile**. Sudan, along with **Egypt**, was opposed to the construction of the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** as it views it as a threat to its own security. Abiy likely views a weakened (or compliant if the RSF win the civil war) Sudan as beneficial to Ethiopia's own long-term security interests. Furthermore, this position has brought Ethiopia closer to the UAE, strengthening economic, security, and intelligence ties with the UAE.

Landslides in South Ethiopia Regional State

South Ethiopia Regional State officials [confirmed](#) on 16 March that landslides in the region's **Gamo Zone** killed at least 124 people. The landslides were caused by heavy rainfall in the area; flooding and landslides related to this inclement weather displaced an estimated 11,000 people. These landslides have caused widespread travel and operational disruptions in the area, which have complicated relief efforts.

Landslides occur frequently in the mountainous areas of southern Ethiopia, such as the Gamo Zone. The threat of landslides is elevated during the region's rainy season, which typically lasts from June until August. Although inclement weather and landslides can occur outside this period, as indicated by this latest incident.

There is a strong possibility of further flooding and landslides in the coming months, as the bulk of the rainy season is still to pass. These disasters frequently result in a large number of casualties. In July 2024, landslides killed 157 people in the **Gofa Zone**.

Planner

26 – 27 Apr 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** 8th African Science, Technology and Innovation Forum

1 Jun 2026 **(Ethiopia)** general election;

Chronology

21 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. The opposition **Coalition for Ethiopian Unity (CEU)** accuses the government of targeting its members with political harassment and illegal detentions in the **South West Ethiopia People's Region**;

19 Mar 2026 **Djibouti (Djibouti)** *Addis Standard*. The **Djibouti Ports and Free Zones Authority** reveals that **Ethiopian Investment Holdings** (Ethiopia's sovereign wealth fund) is seeking a 10-hectare plot of land near **Djibouti Port** on which to develop a large-scale fuel storage facility;

18 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Suspected **Amhara** nationalist (Fano) gunmen kill at least five people in an attack on security officials in the towns of **Nefase Mewucha** and **Hamusit** in the Amhara region;

18 Mar 2026 **Rome (Italy)** *Borkena*. Finance Minister **Ahmed Shide** leads a high-level delegation to Rome and meets with Italian officials to discuss ongoing bilateral cooperation and development assistance;

18 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed (2018-present)** holds a phone call with **Emirati President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (2022-present)** during which Abiy condemned the Iranian attacks on the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** during the ongoing war in the **Persian Gulf**;

18 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. Finance Minister Ahmed and his **Italian** counterpart **Giancarlo Giorgetti** sign a bilateral debt restructuring agreement under the **G20 Common Framework**;

17 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Business Insider Africa*. Ethiopian Investment Commissioner **Zelege Temesgen** reveals that Ethiopia attracted \$18,6 billion in foreign direct investment over the past five years;

16 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. The **Amhara Fano National Movement (AFNM)** rebel group calls on opposition parties to boycott the upcoming general election in June;

8 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. The **National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)** reveals that 47 political parties have registered to contest the 1 June general election;

8 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. The AFNM accuses the government of shelling a church in the town of **Amhara Saynet** (Amhara region), killing five people and injuring 21 others;

7 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. The NEBE launches voter registration for the upcoming 1 June general election;

6 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Amnesty International*. Global human rights organisation, **Amnesty International**, calls on the government to investigate allegations of sexual violence, summary killings and torture by **Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)**, an Oromo nationalist militant group, fighters;

5 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Africa News*. Abiy denies claims that his administration is seeking a new conflict with either the **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)** or **Eritrea** despite claims that Ethiopian security forces are amassing in the country's north;

3 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The **Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)** accuses the OLA of carrying out mass attacks against civilians in the Arsi zone of the Oromia region;

2 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. The AFNM claims that its forces killed 132 government soldiers in clashes in the **Jawi** district of the Amhara region;

2 Mar 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. Abiy holds a call with the **Kuwaiti** crown prince, **Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (2024-present)**, and denounces **Iranian** attacks on Kuwaiti sites;

25 Feb 2026 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Anadolu Agency*. **President Taye Atske Selassie (2024-present)** meets with his Israeli counterpart, **Isaac Herzog (2021-present)**, who is in Ethiopia for a two-day visit to bolster bilateral ties;

24 Feb 2026 **New York (United States)** *CPJ*. The **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)** criticises the **Ethiopian Media Authority** for its decision to revoke the registration of the independent media outlet, **Addis Standard**, denouncing the move as retaliation for the outlet's coverage of the government.

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