

ETHIOPIA | Trends in Conflict and Cooperation

SECURITY

During the reporting period the overall internal security situation in Ethiopia continued to be relatively stable in all central and most peripheral regions of the country. The notable exception is the Somali National Regional State (SNRS) where the military conflict between the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and government forces continues. On 21 October, the military wing of ONLF reported that it has killed over 140 Ethiopian troops in one week in the Wardheer zone. On 4 November, the ONLF also claimed to have deployed large numbers of fighters in five separate engagements and to have killed 270 government soldiers in the period of 26 October through 1 November. The government denied the number of casualties but admitted local government-aligned militia may have been involved in the fighting. The Ethiopian government and the ONLF also continued to trade mutual accusations of human rights violations committed against the civilian population. The ONLF continued to call upon the international community for an independent investigation of the human rights violations in the region.

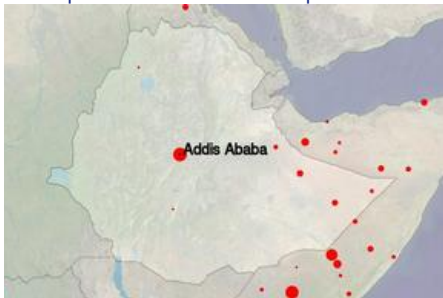
Arrests and harassment of civilians allegedly supporting insurgents were reported to be on the increase in different regions, especially in Oromiya. On 27 September, an Ethiopian rights group alleged that 17 people had been killed and 201 others held without charge by security forces in several regions (with most cases occurring in the Oromia region) over the past four months alone. During the last week of October, the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) complained about government arrests and harassment of civilians in the region. In parliament Prime Minister Meles Zenawi

explained that the arrests were part of an ongoing operation against the OLF, which "hopefully will bear fruits within several months."

On 25 October, the Afar Regional State reported that close to the Bure Front with Eritrea government forces and community members apprehended 28 rebels, who admitted to being members of the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Front (ARDUF) with bases in Eritrea. The regional administration claimed that the group had been behind the kidnapping of five Britons along with several Ethiopian drivers and translators in March in the remote desert area of the Afar region.

There were no reports of new major community clashes or religious conflicts with the exception of a minor clash between Christians and Muslims near Jimma in mid-October. This decline in ethnic and communal tension is at least partly due to the success of the Ethiopian Millennium Celebration (EMC), which comprised an initiative for national consensus and revival and in several rural communities, the advancement of thrust building activities.

Risk Map of Conflictive Events in Ethiopia



Source: FAST event data

SOCIAL

The desperate humanitarian situation in the SNRS continued due to the military conflict between government forces and the ONLF but contrary to earlier fears, a widespread humanitarian catastrophe could be averted as urgently needed food supplies began to arrive in the conflict zones. At the beginning of October, the government and the United Nations agreed on a protocol on working together to ensure that aid reaches the people in the conflict zones without benefiting the rebels. On 8 November the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that several other UN agencies had already set up offices in Kebridehar and Degehabur. It was also reported that 12 NGOs have been accredited to work in the five zones of Degehabur, Gode, Fik, Warder and Koraha.

POLITICAL

The EPRDF continues to dominate the political landscape, while the legal opposition is on the defensive driven by internal conflict and suffering from the absence of a clear vision and strategy on how to effectively confront the ruling party. While the government has toughened its stand on its dealings with the legal opposition, the run-up to the local, district and by-elections for the Addis Ababa Council and the parliament scheduled for next year already has begun amid vociferous complaints by the opposition of unfair treatment. Internal and external actors had put pressure on the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and on the government to reform the electoral law as a precondition for fair elections in the future, but it seems that yet again the electoral process will only exacerbate the conflicts between the government and its political opponents.

The internal split of CUD representatives in national parliament continued to fester with the leadership of both factions resorting to the courts to win official recognition as the leadership of the party. Long-simmering conflicts among the released CUD leaders openly erupted during their long tour abroad in North America and Europe. The released leaders not only failed to resolve differences between the two wings of the external leadership but became fractured into two bitterly opposed factions each aligned with one of the external factions. One faction is led by Hailu Shawl, chairman of the CUD, and the other by CUD's Vice-President Birtukan Mideksa and Berhanu Nega. Underlying this split are personality issues but also different concepts on how to lead and to reunify the CUD. The splits within the CUD "family," the political mud-slinging, and the whiff of a financial scandal deeply

disappointed the political base of the CUD causing the released CUD leaders to begin losing political support. Furthermore, the recent declaration of Hailu Shawl and the leaders of other faction in the USA that CUD "shared neither a common agenda nor strategy with any political forces that have opted for armed struggle like the ONLF" clearly contributed to intensify the rifts besetting the external support base of CUD.

The fragmentation was not limited to the CUD. The same fate befell the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the old foe of the TPLF, due to bitter internal conflicts over intra-party democracy and the interference of the party in the CUD crisis. Inside Ethiopia internal conflicts within the Oromo National Congress (ONC) centering on its leader Merara Gudina could not be healed. When Merara failed to win recognition of his leadership from the NEBE, he finally withdrew and formed the Oromo People's Congress (OPC). The OPC took the position of the ONC in the coalition Union of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), whereas the remaining ONC now operates outside of the UEDF.

In late October, the NEBE announced the registration of two new national and two new regional parties. The official recognition of the OPC further fragments the legal political opposition among the Oromo and reduces its electoral prospects. The Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty Party (ATDSP) formed by Gebru Asrat, former President of Tigray, and other former TPLF-dissenters who were expelled from the TPLF in 2001, could possibly pose a serious challenge to the absolute hegemony of the TPLF in Tigray, since its leaders are historical figures of the TPLF still commanding much grass root support. On 22 November, UEDF, OFDM and CUDP issued a joint statement, which accused the NEBE of violating the provisions of the amended electoral law. Although the parties announced their participation in the elections, they put forward several preconditions that need to be fulfilled before elections should take place. At the end of October, the NEBE reported upon the request of opposition parties that the date for the March 2008 elections will be postponed till early summer. It also announced that the closed office of the OFDM in Addis Ababa has now been reopened and will take up the issue of closed party offices in the regions with the regional governments.

INTERNATIONAL

Ethiopia's political relations with Kenya, Djibouti, Sudan and the transitional federal government of Somalia continued to be stable. In early October Ethiopia expressed its willingness to contribute 5,000 peacekeepers to the proposed 26,000 joint United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force in Sudan's war torn Darfur region. The Ethiopian military continued to be present with a large military force in Somalia and will continue for some time since African states are reluctant to deploy more troops for AMISOM in view of the deteriorating security situation in Somalia.

Ethiopia's relationship with Eritrea took a turn for the worse after the failed meeting of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission (EEBC) in early September. The military buildup along the boarder over the past few months has reached alarming proportions. The UN estimates that Eritrea and Ethiopia respectively maintained 124,000 and 100,000 troops along the border. The EEBC announced that it will close down at the end of November unless it is allowed to proceed to demarcation. On 13 November, the Security Council held a meeting and urged both countries to take concrete steps towards implementing the EEBC decision immediately and without preconditions. On 15 November, Ethiopia announced that it fully accepted the call from the UN Security Council and expressed its commitment to the demarcation according to international practice and norms.

Ethiopia continues to maintain its good relation with donors including Norway, which donated USD \$15.4 million for the UNFPA/UNICEF joint five-year project on 2 November. The World Bank and other development partners also subscribed huge programs for Ethiopia and announced their intention to re-instate direct budgetary support that was cut two years ago in the aftermath of the 2005 elections. While the U.S. House of Representatives has approved a bill (HR 2003) linking non-humanitarian aid to Ethiopia to improvements in Ethiopia's human rights and democracy record, President George W. Bush and some parliamentarians opposed the house bill, arguing that the EPRDF government is an important ally in preventing Al Qaeda from gaining a foothold in the Horn of Africa.

OUTLOOK

A political solution to the conflicts between the legal, the external and armed opposition is not to be expected in the near future as long as the government is unwilling to share power and the opposition remains fragmented. Military operations against armed opposition forces will continue and in the run-up to the elections the conflicts between the ruling party and the legal opposition will increase. The ruling party will close its ranks and will try to deny the opposition a meaningful showing during the elections.

Backed by the US and the AU Ethiopia will continue its military presence in Somalia regardless of the deterioration of insecurity in Somalia. The greatest risk to national and regional stability is the danger of a renewed war with Eritrea, which some observers say is already inevitable and decided by the leaders of both countries.

Relations with the international community and the US will remain stable regardless of the US bill HR 2003, which most likely will be vetoed in the senate or by the president. However, in the event of a renewed war with Eritrea, international relations could also greatly suffer.

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