

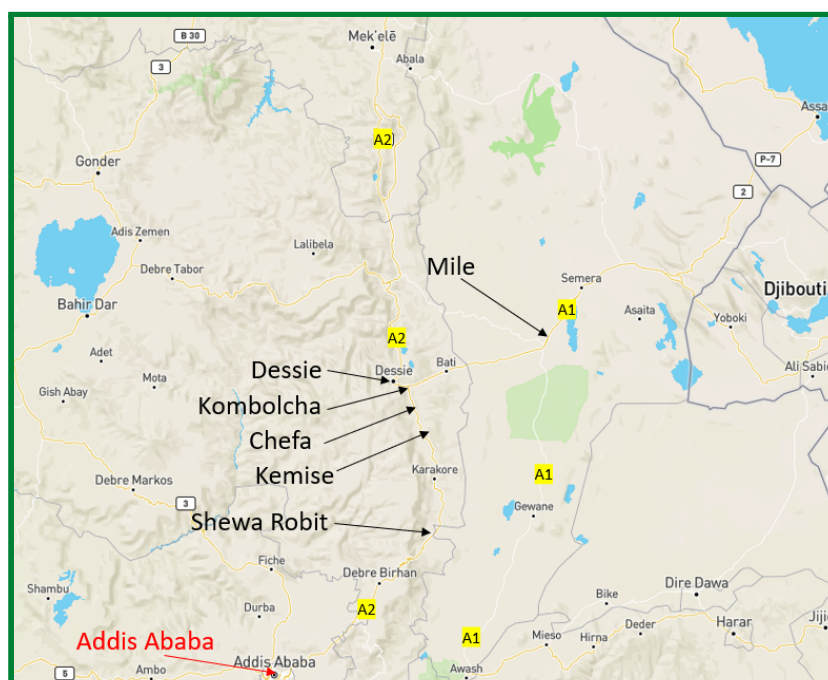
Ethiopia

Flash Analysis and Prediction
08 November 2021



The new opposition alliance remains capable of further advances towards Addis Ababa but a desire for international legitimacy means an assault on the city is unlikely in the short term; longer term the government is likely to be forced to change.

The Ethiopian Government issued a call on 05 November for ex-combatants to rejoin the Ethiopian National Defence Force by 24 November. Nine opposition groups joined forces to pressure Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his government. The new group, the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces, includes, among others, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)/Tigrayan Defence Forces (TDF) and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and builds on the original alliance between the two groups which they affirmed a few days prior to the new group being formed, when the OLA said that they would join forces with the TDF to move against the capital.



This comes following the declaration of a state of emergency by the Ethiopian Government on 02 November, following the TDF's taking Kombolcha and Dessie by 31 October (a development still denied by the Ethiopian Government which at the same time has accused the TDF of widespread looting and of having killed 100 Youths in the town). The OLA has also claimed to have taken Dessie, 326 km/67 hours walk away from Addis Ababa on 03 November – though this has not been confirmed.

Meanwhile the regional states of Harar, Gambella, Afar and Southern Nations Nationalities and

Peoples (SNNP) have issued statements calling on Ethiopians to stand up against the TPLF whilst Oromia Regional State has urged its forces to mobilise to protect the country. Amhara state has also imposed a curfew and suspended government services. The new opposition alliance then announced on 05 November that its goal is to bring down Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed by force or negotiation to form a transitional government.



Analysis

The TDF and OLA – if their current claimed positions are confirmed – have moved fast against a depleted Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), whose use of airstrikes has failed to stall the alliance's advances. The government has denied the advances by the TDF/OLA, claiming the fighting was 80 km from Mille. Fighting was also reported 100 km (60 miles) north of Shewa Robit (in Amhara, A2 route), 57 km south of Kombolcha. The Ethiopian Government called for citizens to defend the capital on 02 November. This and the plea for ex-combatants to bolster the ENDF suggests that the Ethiopian Government is concerned by the TDF/OLA advance. Indeed, Kenya has reportedly closed

its borders, whilst Canada, Qatar, the UK and the US have now advised all non-essential staff to leave; Israel, the US and Saudi Arabia have advised all their citizens to depart.

If the TDF/OLA are able to cut off the A1 and A2 routes to Addis Ababa, this will effectively stop supplies including food and fuel from Djibouti via the A1 from reaching the capital, thus bringing a de facto state of siege on the city. However, the TPLF is **LIKELY** more focused on opening up supply routes into Tigray that the ENDF had blocked.

Although other provinces have so far pledged support to the government, this so far has been ineffective at stalling the TDF/OLA advance – though with a communications blackout the current tactical situation from both sides is difficult to verify.

The ENDF reportedly killed 38 civilians in air-strikes near Chefa, Wollo 11.5 km from Kombolcha on the main A2. Further air-strikes in Kemise over the last two days reportedly killed at least 50 civilians. The location of these reported air-strikes add credibility to the extent of the TDF/OLA advance.

Meanwhile international efforts to broker a ceasefire between the two sides are ongoing with Uganda calling for an emergency AU meeting, as US Special Adviser Jeffrey Feltman arrived in the capital, following the US decision to suspend Ethiopia from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) "for gross violations of internationally recognized human rights...". However, senior TDF commander Tsadkan Gebretnsae has ruled out any talks with the government stating "The war is ending...Who are we going to talk with? We have other options."



Prediction

- Tigrayan commander Tsadkan Gebretensae's comments that "the war is almost over, and the next step will be a post-Abiy national dialogue" bringing "all stakeholders together" reinforces the assessment that the TPLF wants international legitimacy. This means that US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman's statement ("We oppose any TPLF move to Addis or any TPLF move to besiege Addis") is **LIKELY** to be heeded for now at least, despite the new alliance's aim of bringing down Abiy Ahmed by force or negotiation – so long as the OLA keep up military pressure from their side. This is **LIKELY** given that OLA has declared that its military offensive will only end once it has seized Addis.
- Nonetheless, the TDF/OLA/OLF-Shene are **LIKELY** to continue advancing towards Addis, while the ENDF withdraws. However the distance required to move as an armed force against the capital will take at least a week, more likely a month at present.
- The strategic A1 route from Djibouti towards Addis would need to be secured by the TDF, with their Main Effort towards the strategically placed town of Mille. If the ENDF is able to use its air force effectively (which it has so far failed to do) – then this would delay the TDF/OLA advance considerably.
- If the TDF captured Mille, this would secure the highway running from Djibouti to Addis for the TDF. It would also open up supply routes into the formerly-blockaded Tigray province. The TDF will want to ensure that the international media and aid organisations see and report on their rule.
- The OLA has stated that it will be aiming to cut off the roads to the capital. However, although they may succeed in disrupting some traffic, closing the main roads into the capital city will require an extent of firepower and discipline the OLA is lacking.
- Abiy's 03 November statement that his government's enemies would be buried "with our blood" suggests that he hopes that he can continue to fight the TPLF/OLA. The new communication blackouts in the north and east are part of this – and will also make any reporting difficult and more dangerous.

- In the longer term, if the TPLF win it is **HIGHLY LIKELY** that the Eritreans will seek to disrupt the TDF victory— probably covertly initially, but it will not be a stable border/peaceful relationship.
- It is also **HIGHLY LIKELY** that the country could dissolve into civil war in the longer term as competing regions seek to enforce their political and strategic views.



Mitigation

- Prepare clear communication on your organisation’s humanitarian principles.
- Strengthen adherence to principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and organisational independence among all staff.
- Ensure preparedness for a possible fall of Addis Ababa.
- Ensure sufficient cash supply within offices throughout the country – though take precautions against robbery and theft. Consider paying staff salaries in advance to prevent hardship.
- Explore possible mobile payments/block transfer options to local staff should local banking structures fail.
- Reinforce hibernation rules and ensure that all staff are familiar with procedures.
- Plan for methods of emergency communication, taking into account that communication blackouts are **HIGHLY LIKELY**.
- To evacuate expatriate staff: Be aware that most countries require a negative COVID-19 PCR test. Ensure the ability to obtain such a test prior to any necessary evacuation in addition to flight tickets.

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