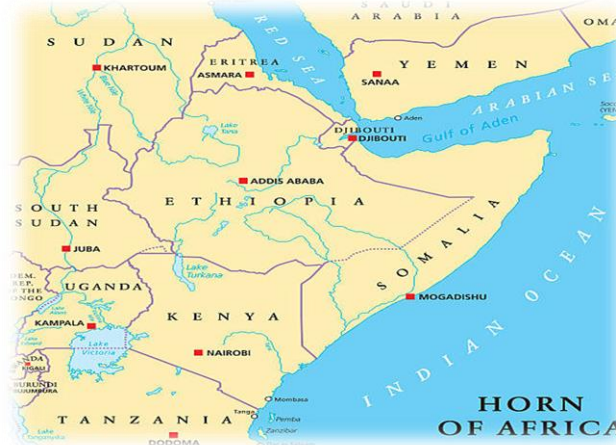


Ethiopia's embattled Prime Minister Abiy may be ousted by Christmas

November 24, 2021



Barring a miracle, the once globally lauded government of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed will probably collapse by Christmas 2021. Ethiopia's ruling party may yet announce a new prime minister to end the ongoing civil strife by year's end. Sensing a 'Visigoths-at-the-gates-of-Rome-moment,' Abiy has given up the trappings of formal powers in Addis Ababa and decamped to the war front as Commander-in-Chief. Late last year, Chad's embattled President Idriss Derby took a similar fatal gamble and lost his life. While Abiy is likely to survive the front, being a trained soldier, his absence from Addis Ababa, amidst the palace intrigues, may yet see him toppled from office from within the ruling party before Christmas 2021. A palace coup removing Abiy from power will effectively end the country's ongoing civil war and return the ethnically divided nation to relative calm ahead of the very important religious holidays. Experienced diplomat and current Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen Hassen may yet emerge from the chaos to lead an internationally supported government of national unity. Abiy may be forced to flee into exile in neighboring Rwanda or South Africa or UAE. Since coming to power in April 2018 Abiy has sought to challenge Ethiopia's system of ethnic federalism by restoring power to the center at the expense of regional governments. The main losers from Abiy's reforms have been the Tigrayans who previously enjoyed disproportionate representation and power within Ethiopia's state and security apparatus. The blowback from such purges, cessations of power, as well as Tigrayan opposition to peace with Eritrea, and Abiy's own high-handedness are the triggers of the current civil conflict.

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Despite talk in Addis Ababa of a 'final' offensive, a decisive military victory remains unlikely. Tigray is a highly militarised and mountainous region home to seven million people. Given the historic conflict front with neighbouring Eritrea there is a significant volume of military materiel in the region. Similarly, prior to Abiy coming to power, around three quarters of the ENDF's senior military leadership were Tigrayan. From a military standpoint, conflict in Tigray favours the defender. Therefore, talk of any final or decisive victory remains delinked from reality and there is a very real risk of a long protracted civil conflict with Tigray region.

The Tigray crisis is already an international conflict. The international community has sought to push for peace, condemning the actions of both sides, while Eritrea is already reportedly involved. When the Ethiopian army began military operations in Tigray, the attention immediately turned to Tigray's northern border and historic conflict front with Eritrea. Eritrea is involved in the conflict.

Asmara has almost certainly already backed and will continue to back Addis Ababa. Although Eritrean and Tigrayan rebels had historical cooperation, this was undone by Eritrea's prevention of famine relief reaching Tigray and the Eritrean-Ethiopian border conflict (1998-2000). The previous divisions between Addis Ababa and Asmara were with a Tigrayan-led regime which remains the main target of Eritrea's grievances with Ethiopia rather than Abiy's government.

The Horn of Africa remains a playground for Gulf politics with the UAE, Qatar and Turkey all using port access to assert dominance in the region. However, landlocked Ethiopia and its population of 110 million remains a consumer rather than a player in this conflict. It is highly unlikely that the Gulf conflict dynamic would play out in Ethiopia at this time, although reports have emerged over the UAE reportedly providing drones in support of ENDF operations in Tigray.

Contact DaMina for a more detailed briefing from our risk analysts:

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