



NIAS Area Studies
AFRICA WEEKLY

NIAS-STIR Programme



Discourses | Trajectories | Forecasts

NIAS Africa Studies
Africa Weekly #40, Vol. 1, No. 40
29 November 2022



IN FOCUS

The ceasefire in Ethiopia

AFRICA IN BRIEF

Regional | Economy | Gender | Climate Change | Migration | Peace and Conflict |
International | Sports



COMMENTARY

A war and truce between Ethiopia and Tigray

Tigrayans are divided on the effectiveness of the peace deal as a particular section consider the deal a surrender while the others consider it as a signal that Abiy Ahmed would return to his peaceful ways. Only time can tell whether the deal is genuine or an act to deal with the concerned parties' immediate predicaments vis-à-vis the war.

S Shaji



Image source: Reuters

Government of Ethiopia and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the dissident group from Tigray, a northern state in Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa, signed a Peace Agreement on 2 November 2022, which was brokered by the African Union (AU). Accordingly, both the sides agreed for the permanent cessation of hostilities. The Agreement, which was signed on November 2nd in Pretoria, South Africa, is considered to be a significant step in ending the civil war which broke out in 2020. In fact, there has been huge criticism from various quarters from across the world that there is significant digression from the path of democracy in Ethiopia in recent times, a State which was applauded for its democratic turn under the leadership Abiy Ahmed, a few years ago. Abiy Ahmed, the Ethiopian President, once a favourite political figure in the Western discourse, began to face confrontation for his role in the Tigray civil war which killed and displaced thousands.

From various news reports, it is understood that the agreement has put forth various

clauses which are promising but seem overambitious. For instance, the deal suggests that TPLF would agree to the previous constitutional order and would disarm itself and would also provide adequate representation to Tigrayan population in employment and education. In other words, the deal envisions the restoration of the Ethiopian government's constitutional authority in Tigray region. In addition, the deal also includes provisions for access to Tigrayans to obtain civilian services, which were denied to them in the last two years, mainly through the blockade that the Ethiopian government had imposed on the people from the region. It is also reported that 13 million people would require humanitarian assistance, most notably in terms of food and medicine supply. It is further agreed that the federal government would facilitate the return of several thousand displaced families. In addition, the implementation of the deal is to be monitored by a group of experts (around 10), appointed by AU. Of course, the Government of Eritrea is not party to the deal though they have ongoing feuds with TPLF. The issues in Western Tigray which remain unresolved are also not covered in the deal. The truce also speaks about introducing a 'Comprehensive National Transitional Justice Policy' to deal with justice and accountability issues. In addition, the Federal Government of Ethiopia has promised to remove the tag linked to TPLF as a terrorist organization.

If one looks at the background of violence in Ethiopia, like many other conflicts in Africa, it is closely linked to historical and ethnic fault lines and ethnic nationalism. On the ethnic front, Oromos and Amharas constitute nearly 60 per cent of the Ethiopian population whereas Tigrayans constitute less than 10 per cent of the population. At certain points in the past, Tigrayan had a substantial presence in the government, bureaucracy and so on, under the notion of ethnic federalism that came into existence in 1991. The capture of power by the majority group - Oromos and Amharas, in Ethiopian politics substantially reduced the power and representation of Tigray groups, which led to the emergence of Tigrayan ethnic nationalism which took a violent turn in 2020. In 2020, Tigray regional elections led to the war, with the Abiy Ahmed led Ethiopian Government questioning the validity of electoral processes in Tigray region. In the said election, according to the electoral officials, TPLF won more than 98 per cent votes. This was the time when Abiy Ahmed refused to hold general elections in the country citing Covid- 19 related restrictions. Thus, the conflict over the validity and the timings of the elections led to the Ethiopian troops, along with Amhara militia attacking the Tigray region in the western part of Tigray while Eritrean troops occupied the northern region.

Africa observers point out certain problems in the peace deal. For instance, the deal has not included the Eritrean Government, which is also a party to the conflict, though certain clauses indirectly imply dealing with forces inimical to both parties involved in the deal (the Ethiopian government and TPLF). Second, the deal does not include the Government of Tigray, but only the TPLF. Third, the deal does not talk about a broad monitoring, verification, and

compliance mechanism to supervise the implementation of the deal. The mechanism, envisaged in the deal, is restricted to a committee of just 10 eminent persons, appointed by AU and reports to the latter, which is headed by Olesegun Obasanjo, the former Nigerian President. In other words, international actors such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (a prominent aid partner) are completely overlooked in this connection. Similarly, justice and accountability mechanisms are weak; a broad form in terms of a comprehensive transitional justice policy at national level is proposed which is not mandated to be supervised by prominent international human rights organisations.

Of late, it is also reported that Tigrayans are divided on the effectiveness of the peace deal as a particular section consider the deal a surrender while the others consider it as a signal that Abiy Ahmed would return to his peaceful ways (of pre-2020). If the Guerrilla warfare continues in the region even after the truce, it can weaken the perceived peace dividend. Several thousands of people in Tigray were subjected to unprecedented violence to the extent that their very survival itself has been at stake. Therefore, as a way out, the truce has been agreed upon. From an Ethiopian standpoint, it requires the support of the West and wants to avoid the interventions of outside parties in the internal conflicts of the country. Only time can tell whether the deal is genuine or an act to deal with the concerned parties' immediate predicaments vis-à-vis the war.

However, one can emphatically assume that inclusive policies and genuine federalism that addresses the concerns of various ethnic groups is the route to resolve conflicts in a multi-ethnic State like Ethiopia in the long run.

Ethiopia-Tigray ceasefire, and the complex roadmap for peace

The Ethiopia-Tigray peace agreement is a delicate opportunity to consolidate a permanent ceasefire and long-term stability in Ethiopia, though initial steps appear complex.

Anu Maria Joseph

On 2 November, the Ethiopian government, and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) agreed to a permanent ceasefire ending two years of conflict that left half a million people dead, thousands displaced and nearly nine million in urgent need of humanitarian aid. The peace talks were brokered by the African Union under mediation of former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in South Africa.

On 13 November, military leaders from Ethiopia and the Tigray region held another meeting in Nairobi, where they agreed to unhindered humanitarian access to the region and to form a joint disarmament committee.

The AU Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat said the deal is a "unique opportunity towards the restoration of peace." Obasanjo said that both the parties have agreed on an "orderly, smooth and coordinated disarmament" along with "restoration of law and order," "unilateral access to humanitarian supplies," and "restoration of services." Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said: "The commitment to peace remains steadfast and our commitment to collaborating for the implementation of the agreement is equally strong. The TPLF said: "Ultimately, the fact that we have reached a point where we have now signed an agreement speaks volumes about the readiness on the part of the two sides to lay the past behind them to chart a new path of peace." The UN Secretary-General Antonio

Guterres welcomed the agreement, and his spokesperson said: "It is very much a welcome first step, which we hope can start to bring some solace to the millions of Ethiopian civilians that have really suffered during the conflict." The US Department of State spokesperson said: "The African Union's announcement of the signing of a cessation of hostilities between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front represents an important step towards peace."

Four takeaways of the ceasefire agreement

The following are the major takeaways of the ceasefire agreement:

First, a permanent cessation of hostilities. Following the agreement, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF agreed to a permanent cessation of hostilities, including acts of violence, airstrikes, obstruction, "hostile propaganda, rhetoric and hate speech." In addition, both the parties agreed not to intrigue with any external forces hostile to either of the parties as well as agreed on the protection of civilians who have been affected by the violence.

Second, Disarmament. Both the parties agreed on a single defence force for Ethiopia and on TPLF entering a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme. Besides, TPLF has agreed to a full disarmament, including light weapons within 30 days. In addition, Ethiopian forces

will return to their former military base in Mekelle, Tigray regional capital.

Third, restoration of federal authority and political inclusion of Tigray. Based on the agreement, a new interim administration will be appointed for Tigray until elections after both sides agree on the restoration of Ethiopia's federal government in Tigray. TPLF also committed to "cease all attempts of bringing an unconstitutional change of government." Meanwhile, the Ethiopian government has agreed to an inclusive representation of Tigrayans at the centre addressing the fundamental issue of ethnic marginalisation.

Four, restoration of humanitarian aid and services. Since the conflict began in November 2021, the Tigray region was deprived of basic communication and essential services. Besides, nearly 5 million people were at the brink of famine after food and humanitarian aid to the region were constantly blocked.

Now, both sides have agreed to abide by international humanitarian law. The federal government has committed to work with humanitarian agencies to allow unhindered access to aid in Tigray. The government has also agreed to facilitate restoration of essential services and the return and repatriation of the displaced.

What does the ceasefire mean?

The sudden ceasefire is a significant achievement, a hope to end the two-year deadly conflict. The successful peace deal is an achievement for the African Union and its objective of 'African solution to African problems.' However, achieving a permanent ceasefire in Tigray won't be easy.

The conflict is rooted in a long-standing ethnopolitical rift, violent regime change, failed truce, and a large humanitarian crisis which makes the ceasefire agreement seem increasingly volatile. The ceasefire was reached on the sidelines of intense pressure by Ethiopian forces and Eritrean forces on TPLF and the international community on the Ethiopian government. Besides, the uncertainty over unaddressed issues and the critical question of how and when the key provisions of the agreement would be implemented on the ground remain unclear.

The agreement makes no explicit mention of Eritreans or forces from Ethiopia's neighbourhood that have fought alongside the Ethiopian army. Though the agreement states that the Ethiopian army will protect the country from "foreign incursion," many are sceptical about whether Eritrea, TPLF's sworn enemy, would abide. In addition, political issues including territorial disputes between Tigray and neighbouring Amhara region remain unresolved. Lack of trust between the warring parties is challenging. Furthermore, uncertainty persists over the AU's lack of effective mechanisms to oversee and enforce the peace process. The question of implementation of key provisions in the deal including Tigray's interim administration, elections, distribution of humanitarian aid and resumption of blocked services remain unresolved. In sum, the agreement is a delicate opportunity to consolidate a permanent ceasefire and long-term stability in Ethiopia, though the initial steps appear complex.

(The commentaries were previously published in NIAS-IPRI-KAS Conflict Weekly 150th issue)

AFRICA IN BRIEF

22 November - 28 November

By Anu Maria Joseph and Apoorva Sudhakar

SOUTH SUDAN

County commissioner orchestrated gangrape, says UN panel

On 28 November, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan said that it had reasons to believe that the Unity state's county commissioner oversaw the gangrape of several women and girls at a military camp. A Commission member said sexual violence related to conflict resulted from impunity and that it had become systematic. The Commission quotes witnesses who said the commissioner had planned the sexual violence and his deputy carried it forward; patterns similar to the above offence were observed in other places. However, the South Sudan Information Minister dismissed these claims accusing the UN officials of falsely reporting the above to make money. ("[UN panel accuses South Sudan officials of overseeing gang rapes,](#)" *Al Jazeera*, 28 November 2022)

ETHIOPIA

AU mediators visits Tigray

On 24 November, BBC reported that the African Union mediators are visiting the war-devastated Tigray region as part of their latest effort to implement a peace deal signed between the federal government and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Though a peace deal has been signed between the warring parties, the BBC report says little food, medication and other essentials have reached Tigray. Another issue being the disarmament of Tigrayan forces, and the withdrawal of Eritrean forces. The government says the issue of presence of foreign forces will be dealt with

when the federal forces are deployed in Tigray borders. ("[AU mediators visit war-devastated Tigray,](#)" *BBC*, 24 November 2022)

SOMALIA

Hotel siege by al Shabaab leaves eight dead

On 28 November, security forces ended a siege by al Shabaab of a hotel near the president's residence in the capital Mogadishu. A police spokesperson said that eight civilians and a policeman had been killed and 60 were rescued. The spokesperson said one of the al Shabaab terrorist blew himself up and security forces killed five after the attack began on 27 November. The environment minister was residing in the hotel; he said the government would not give up the fight against al Shabaab. (Abdiqani Hassan And Mukelwa Hlatshwayo, "[Somali troops overpower militants to end hotel siege,](#)" *Reuters*, 28 November 2022; "[Eight civilians dead as Somalia hotel siege ends,](#)" *News24*, 28 November 2022)

SOUTH AFRICA

President Ramaphosa visits Buckingham palace

On 23 November, King Charles hosted South African President Cyril Ramaphosa as the first state visit of his reign at Buckingham palace. He hailed the cultural and trading links between the UK and South Africa as well as acknowledged the difficult legacy of colonialism. The King said: "We must acknowledge the wrongs which have shaped our past if we are to unlock the power of our common future." He called for

better partnerships which would tackle the “existential threats of climate change and biodiversity loss.” In response, Ramaphosa called for improved trade and investment relations with the UK and South Africa and to help the country in dealing with the power outage issue. (“[King hails Mandela friendship on South Africa state visit Published](#),” *BBC*, 23 November 2022)

NAMIBIA

Statue of German colonial officer taken down

On 23 November, the statue of a controversial German colonial officer Von François was taken down after a successful petition. The statue was erected in 1965 honouring the officer as the city’s founder. Von François was a senior officer in the then colony of South West Africa, current day Namibia. He was the commanding officer during the Hoornkrans massacre which was an operation against the Nama rebellion where at least 80 people were killed. Activist Hildegard Titus, who led the petition to take down the statue said that François had “wrongly been called the founder of Windhoek” and that he was a symbol of “colonial oppression.” (“[Namibia takes down statue of German colonial officer](#),” *BBC*, 23 November 2022)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Clashes resume despite ceasefire

On 25 November, clashes between the M23 rebel group and the army resumed, two days after a ceasefire was declared by DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, and Uhuru Kenyatta, the former president of Kenya and a mediator. On 24 November, Al Jazeera quoted an M23 spokesperson: “M23 has seen the document on social media ... There was nobody in the summit [from M23] so it doesn’t really concern us ... Normally when there is a ceasefire, it is between the two warring sides.” (“[DRC fighting resumes, M23 say ceasefire deal doesn’t affect them](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 25 November 2022)

SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

Coup attempt contained, says PM

On 25 November, Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada said a coup attempt had been foiled and six people, including former national assembly president Delfim Neves, had been detained for the same. The Economic Community of West African States condemned the development. The ECOWAS Chairman, also the Guinea-Bissau President, Umaro Sissoco Embalo emphasised that Sao Tome and Principe was known to be a model democracy in the continent. (“[Coup attempt thwarted in Sao Tome and Principe, PM says](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 25 November 2022)

About the authors

S Shaji teaches at the Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad. Apoorva Sudhakar is a Research Associate at the School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. Anu Maria Joseph is a Research Assistant at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.



About NIAS Africa Studies

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

About the team

Apoorva Sudhakar

Apoorva Sudhakar is a Project Associate at the School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Her areas of interest include peace and conflict in Africa and South Asia. She has previously worked on the conflict over the Nile Dam and the abductions in Nigeria.

Anu Maria Joseph

Anu Maria Joseph is a Research Assistant at the School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Her areas of interest include peace and conflict in Africa, Afro-European and Afro-China relations.

Poulomi Mondal

Poulomi Mondal is a postgraduate scholar at the South Asian Studies Centre at the Pondicherry University. Her interests include governance in the Sahel, Eastern and Central Africa, and issues related to maritime governance and non-traditional security.

©NIAS Africa Studies

Editor: D. Suba Chandran

Assistant Editors: Apoorva Sudhakar and Anu Maria Joseph

