

Summary

The recent clashes in the Amhara region between the Amhara militia Fano and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) are likely to fuel tensions in Addis Ababa. Whereas widespread violence has not yet been reported in the capital, the growing regional confrontation threatens to destabilise it. Attacks and protests targeting both the government and the Amhara ethnic groups are therefore expected in the upcoming weeks.

Recent events and developments

On August 1 2023, clashes erupted in the Amhara region between Amhara militia Fano and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). On August 4, the national government declared a state of emergency in the region. These clashes come after a statement by the government on April 6 that it would disarm all regional forces and unite them in a centralized armed force. This decision sparked widespread unrest in the Amhara region.

During this timeframe, in Addis Ababa, Amharan activists have reported the arrest of thousands of Amharas living in the capital. The government has confirmed that arrests were made but did not reveal any number. Additionally, on August 4, an opposition leader of the National Movement of Amhara was also arrested by the police in Addis Ababa. Another series of detentions related to the unrest in Amhara took place in July, although authorities claimed that the police did not act based on ethnicity. These current developments are taking place amid lingering conflict between Ethiopia's two biggest ethnic groups: the Amhara and Oromo peoples, fighting for territorial control and self-determination.

Impact assessment

The recent events in Amhara and subsequent arrests in Addis Ababa increase the risk of ethnic tension in the form of protests in the capital. The Tigray War of 2020-2022 showed that ethnic conflict in an Ethiopian state is likely to reverberate in Addis Ababa. Similar to the Tigray War, the Fano-ENDF conflict now significantly increases the likelihood of protests and attacks. Those are also likely to be incited by the reports of mass arrests. Demonstrations supporting the different parties may occur, possibly turning violent with little notice. This can escalate in case of retributive actions by the security forces, as they often use tear gas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition to disperse protestors. Rallies are likely to take place near government institutions and in areas and buildings that are associated with the Amhara region. Bystanders can become collateral targets if caught up in such protests. In addition, attacks on Amharas in Addis Ababa perpetrated by other ethnic groups remain possible. Explicit expressions of ethnic identity, such as flying a regional flag can spark confrontations.

Advice from Forth Global

- Make sure all employees travelling to Ethiopia undertake a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Advise staff to avoid all kinds of demonstrations.
Advise staff to avoid expressing their personal opinion on the political situation in Ethiopia, including on social media.
- Continuously monitor local news and liaise with local partners to stay up to date with any developments in the region of operations.

Customized advice

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