



United States Imposes Restrictions on Ethiopian and Eritrean Officials Over Human Rights Violations Committed During the Tigray Conflict

The United States has imposed sanctions on Ethiopia and Eritrea over the ongoing human rights violations in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia. Several Ethiopian and Eritrean officials have been hit with a visa ban, and military and economic assistance to Addis Ababa has been cut, with the exception of humanitarian supplies. The United States has been vocal in calling for an end to the months-long conflict in Tigray, where federal Ethiopian and Eritrean forces have been credibly accused of war crimes and human rights offenses. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the imposition of sanctions was in response to the lack of meaningful steps to end hostilities in Tigray. Thousands of people have been killed since the fighting began several months ago, with an additional two million displaced. The violence has raised concerns of an ethnic cleansing campaign, with Ethiopia's ethnic Tigrayan population being vulnerable to abuse by government forces.

The ongoing conflict in Tigray originally broke out back in November of last year, after Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent federal troops to the region to detain members of the ruling Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The TPLF is Tigray's preeminent political party, and ruled Ethiopia until Abiy Ahmed came to power. Prime Minister Ahmed alleged that Ethiopian military outposts had been attacked by militants allied with the TPLF, and designated the entire organization as a terrorist entity. Ahmed has been keen to diminish the influence of the TPLF, which has sought to contest his political strategy of centralizing decision-making with the executive. Ethiopia's campaign in Tigray has come at a huge cost of life, with soldiers routinely accused of war crimes. This has been exacerbated by the entrance of Eritrea into the conflict, which has been opposed to the TPLF since it was the ruling party in Ethiopia.

The sanctions placed on Ethiopia are significant due to the relationship the United States has with the country. Addis Ababa is a key regional ally, and assists the United States with counter-terrorism measures in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, among its sub-Saharan neighbors, Ethiopia receives the greatest amount of aid from the United States, to the tune of nearly \$1 billion annually. Most of this money is earmarked for humanitarian resources, as well as economic and security funding, with most of the latter now due to be cut as a result of the sanctions. In response, Ethiopia accused the United States of trying to interfere with its upcoming elections, and warned that it could be forced to re-evaluate its relationship with the United States. However, Washington has a strong position, and could block Ethiopia from receiving international funding through the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which could significantly derail Abiy Ahmed's agenda and force him into accepting American demands.

Conversely, critics of the sanctions have warned that they could push Abiy Ahmed into a closer relationship with the authoritarian leader of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki. Afwerki and his government have long been under international sanction, and the imposition of additional punitive measures are unlikely to influence Eritrean policy. The measures against Ethiopia and Eritrea have been imposed as the humanitarian situation in Tigray has started to reach a breaking point. Over five million people are currently in need of humanitarian aid that is being blocked by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops. The region is also at a severe risk of famine, with experts projecting major food shortages by September of this year if the situation isn't resolved.