



BRIEFING PAPER

UNDERSTANDING THE FANO INSURGENCY IN ETHIOPIA'S AMHARA REGION

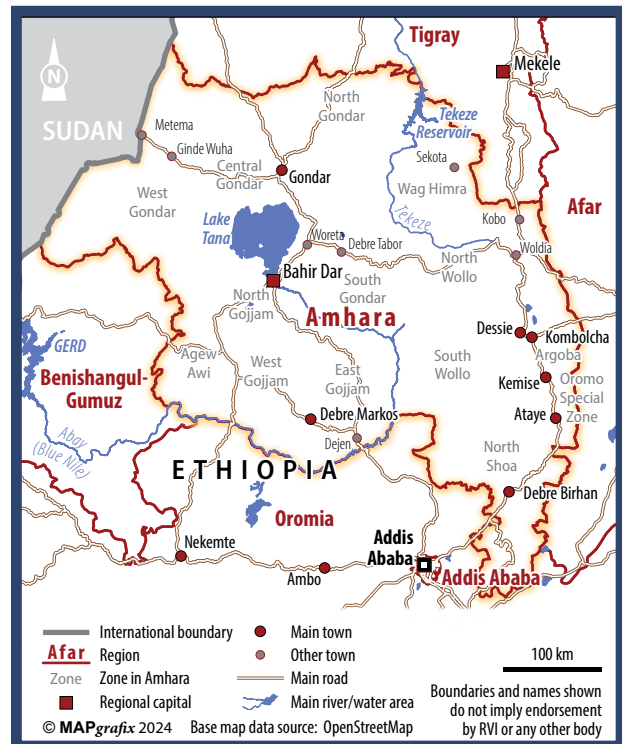
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FEBRUARY 2024

The *Fano* insurgency, emerging in Ethiopia's Amhara region in August 2023, has added another layer of conflict to a country already rocked by the Tigray war (2020-22), and suffering from ongoing strife in the Oromia region. As well as causing widespread deadly violence—largely between the Fano, federal security and local government forces—affecting the region's civilian population, the insurgency has severely disrupted the economy of the Amhara region and beyond.

While the Fano have retained a decentralized and loosely coordinated command structure, their widespread support from within the region, and the Amhara diaspora, suggests they are likely to have an enduring influence on the political and security environment in the region for some time to come. The federal government's recent decision to extend the state of emergency in the region for another four months, governing through a military command post and the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), suggests that the government will continue its military operations with or without negotiations with the Fano.

The Fano groups' lack of cohesive leadership has made this more difficult, but the current low-level insurgency, with no sign of an end, is not sustainable, and will likely require more creative political solutions to resolve.



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ORIGINS OF THE FANO

In contemporary Ethiopia, Fano are understood to be armed groups from the Amhara region which see themselves as defending the interests of the region's population. However, the origin of the term goes back centuries, and in Amharic refers to 'someone who travels of their own volition' or a 'band of leaderless soldiers who were not accountable to anybody'.² In pre-twentieth century Ethiopia, Fano were an important source of armed labour for regional rulers for whom they could be mobilized and fight at times of need.³ During the twentieth century, Fano were also mobilized under the more centralized administration of Haile Selassie to repulse the Italian invasion and occupation from 1936-41.⁴ Later, in the 1960s, the Marxist-Leninist Ethiopia Student Movement used the term 'Fano' to describe its members in their struggle against the Haile Selassie and Derg regimes.⁵ More recently, in 2016, youth-led protests in the Amhara region coined themselves as 'Fano', although the (mostly) peaceful nature of the demonstrations marked a break with the previously armed character of the groups. In combination with the Oromo *Qerroo* protest movement, the Fano challenged the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), significantly contributing to the accession of Abiy Ahmed and the Prosperity Party (PP) to power in 2018. In the years that followed, however, the interests and demands of the Fano movement were perceived by some of its members as having been ignored by the new political establishment. This resulted in a continuation of youth-led protests in the Amhara region, including the *#beqa* (*#Stop*) demonstration in 2021, which condemned identity-based attacks against the Amhara, particularly those living outside their home region.⁶

Increasingly, signs of Fano militancy and involvement in armed conflicts started to appear, particularly those associated with causes seen as being important to Amhara nationalist interests. For example, Fano were mobilized and involved in sporadic clashes with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) over the disputed Al-Fashaga region from 2020 to 2023.⁷ They also played prominent roles in areas where Amhara populations are often perceived as being under threat—often outside of the Amhara region—such as in the border areas between Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regions (particularly in the Metekel Zone); in the area around Ataye, in the Oromo Special Zone; and the border with North Shewa.⁸ The outbreak of war between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in November 2020 saw the involvement of Fano on the government—federal and regional—side. They played a particularly significant role in advancing the claims of the Amhara region over the contested areas of Wolqayt-T(s)egede), T(s)elmet, and Raya, as well as countering Tigrayan advances into the region, particularly in 2021.⁹

The war provided an opportunity for the Fano to build camps, recruit and train fighters, and utilize the logistics, security, and administrative networks of the government. This in turn enabled them to widen their societal networks, attract new members, and strengthen their military capacity. The growing

2 Tsehai Berhane-Selassie, 'Ethiopian Warriorhood: Defence', land and society, 1800-1941, Melton: James Curry, 2018, 15.

3 Tsehai Berhane-Selassie, 'Ethiopian Warriorhood'.

4 A. Sbacchi, 'Italian colonialism in Ethiopia, 1936-1940', *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, 32/4 (1977): 503-516.

5 During this period, a popular song included the lines: 'Fano go to the bushes, Fano go to the bushes, Like Ho Chi Minh and Like Che Guevara'—demonstrating the revolutionary association with the term. Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement*, c. 1960-1974, Oxford: James Curry, 2014.

6 'News: Protests happening in multiple cities in Amhara region denouncing reports of targeted attacks against Amhara community', *Addis Standard*, 20 April 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/news-protests-happening-in-multiple-cities-in-amhara-region-denouncing-reports-of-targeted-attacks-against-amhara-community/>.

7 See, for example, 'Ethiopian gangmen kill Sudanese herder in border area', *Sudan Tribune*, 31 January 2023, <https://sudantribune.com/article270226/>.

8 'The Fano Insurgency: Main Hurdles to Unifying Fano', Ethiopian Peace Observatory, 19 January 2024, <https://epo.acleddata.com/2024/01/19/epo-december-2023-monthly-the-fano-insurgency-main-hurdles-to-unifying-fano/#>.

9 'Ethiopia's Amhara region in turmoil', ACCORD, 31 August 2023, <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/ethiopia-amhara-region-in-turmoil/>.

stature of the Fano, and their defence of Amhara interests, has alarmed the federal and regional governments, which see their existence outside of the official security architecture as a threat.¹⁰ As a result, beginning in May 2022, the opportunities and advantages given to the Fano groups started to be removed and efforts were made to disband and reintegrate the groups into the community. This was strongly opposed by the Fano, many of whom refused to engage in the process, which resulted in some armed confrontations with government security forces.¹¹

Due to the latent mistrust and hostility of the Fano towards Abiy Ahmed's government, coupled with the groups' fragmented structure, demobilization proved difficult. The hostility between the two parties, and the failure of the federal and regional governments to sufficiently weaken, or disrupt the groups, meant a collision course became inevitable. In April 2023, an armed confrontation broke out after the federal government announced that it was disbanding regional special forces across Ethiopia. However, many in the Amhara region believed that the process was specifically designed to target the Amhara Special Forces (ASF). They saw the disbanding in the context of unresolved issues, particularly the future of areas disputed between the Amhara and Tigray regions (specifically Wolqayt-T(s)egede, T(s)elemet, and Raya—locations where the ASF played a prominent role in their control). Following the ASF's official disbanding, many of its former members—the Federal Ministry of Peace believes approximately fifty percent—joined the Fano.¹²

UNPICKING THE FANO FACTIONS

The Fano insurgency includes a wide range of loosely aligned groups, the majority of which are small and operate autonomously. The movement is generally decentralized, fragmented, organized from the bottom up, and lacks a formal organizational structure that unites groups in the different parts of the Amhara region where the Fano are most active: Shoa, Gondar, Gojjam, and Wollo.¹³ However, some of the larger groups are now evolving into politico-military forces with a national agenda—at its most radical this is the overthrow of Abiy Ahmed's government, albeit this objective seems rather unlikely.¹⁴ Given the inherent difficulty of achieving this, the Fano groups have begun to use language that suggests they recognize the need to build alliances with other nationalist groups to pursue their objectives.¹⁵ The main Fano—organized by area—are outlined below.

GONDAR (Central, West, North and South Gondar Zones)

Major Groups: Amhara Fano Unity in Gondar (AFUiG); Fano for Existence, Justice and Democracy Movement (FEJDM); Amhara Fano Unity Council (AFUC).

Key Figures: Habtie Woldie, Mesafint Tesfu, Sefer Melese, Dereje Belay, Arega Alebachew, Wubante Abate, Kefeyalew Dessie, Baye Kenaw, Sisay Ashebir.

Gondar has been a long-time stronghold for Fano and the earlier iteration of the movement played an important role in the Amhara protests against the EPRDF since 2016. Gondar's Fano are

- 10 'Ethiopia: Tense security situation likely to persist in Amhara Region at least through mid-June amid ongoing military operations', *Crisis 24*, 26 May 2022, <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2022/05/ethiopia-tense-security-situation-likely-to-persist-in-amhara-region-at-least-through-mid-june-amid-ongoing-military-operations>.
- 11 Kalkidan Yibeltal & Danai Nesta Kupemba, 'Lalibela fighting: Amhara Fano militia and Ethiopian army clash in historic town', BBC, 8 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67361386>.
- 12 'News: 50 percent of defunct Amhara Special Force joined Fano, says Minister of Peace', *Borkena*, 15 August, <https://borkena.com/2023/08/15/ethiopia-defunct-amhara-special-force-joined-fano-says-minister-for-peace/>.
- 13 This reflects the old (pre-1991) provincial or geographical Amhara sub-divisions.
- 14 Martina Schwikowski, 'Is Ethiopia on the brink of a new war?', DW, 28 September 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-war-has-the-tigray-peace-agreement-failed/a-66943103>.
- 15 'በአማራ ክልል ወራትን ያስቆጠረው ግጭት ዋነኛ ተዋናይ ፋኛ ፍላጎት ምንድን ነው?', BBC Amharic, 7 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/cok2dy1dp2no>.

probably the oldest and their establishment is closely linked to the Wolqayt-T(s)egede question.¹⁶

The **Amhara Fano Unity in Gondar (AFUiG)** is a prominent group led by Mesafint Tesfu (Chair) and commanded by Sefer Melese. Since its establishment in March 2022, the group has expanded and established sub-units throughout Gondar's different administrative zones.¹⁷ The groups that fall under the banner of AFUiG have specific areas of deployment that they generally see as containing their social base. Among the AFUiG groups, the Tewodros Fano group, named after Ethiopia's emperor Tewodros, is one of the most prominent. It is led by Habtie Woldie, who was recognized by the Amhara regional government for his involvement in the fighting against the Tigrayan forces through the mobilization of a Fano (mostly from Gondar city). An increasing number of sub-units also exist. Another sizable group is the Guna division in the South Gondar Zone (led by Kefeyalew Dessie), whose members mostly joined during the counter-offensive to prevent the Tigrayan forces' entry into the South Gondar Zone in 2021. The **Fano for Existence, Justice, and Democracy Movement (FEJDM)**, under the leadership of Wubante Abate, is another relatively new Fano group in the Gondar area, most active in South Gondar Zone.

The **Amhara Fano Unity Council (AFUC)** was established in Gondar by the Amhara Popular Force, East Amhara Fano (EAF), AFUiG, Shoa Fano, and Bahir Dar Amhara Fano groups in November 2022. It is commanded by Sefer Melese.¹⁸ The establishment of the AFUC was an attempt to provide a recognizable regional structure to the otherwise diverse Fano groupings in the Amhara region. Following the government crackdown from April 2023, some AFUC representatives were arrested and imprisoned, disrupting its operations and reach.

The **Amhara Popular Front (APFr)**, established by Eskinder Nega, the former journalist and president of *Balderas for True Democracy*, claims the affiliation of some Fano in Gondar.¹⁹ The group has the support of a well-resourced diaspora and appears to be expanding its influence throughout the region, fortifying its links with Fano leaders and the communities in which they operate.²⁰ Some Fano now have dual loyalties to different 'umbrella' groups. The formation of the **Gondar Command**—an attempt to bring the Gondar Fano groups together under a single, cohesive, command—was announced in January 2024 under the command of Habtie Woldie.²¹ While the formation of this group could, in theory, help in the direction of a coordinated insurgency, the disparate nature of the groups' leaderships, motivations and support base, suggest that this will be difficult to achieve.

16 The Kefagn movement, which resisted Tigrayan control of Wolqayt-Tsegede, emerged in the 1970s.

17 North, South, West and Central Gondar Zones, Gondar City, and Debre Tabor town. The groups can be identified through names mostly drawn from key public personalities and places. These include: Gondar, Negat Chora, Gebereye, Asamenew, Senteqe, Tana, Fasildes, Nebelebal, Aysheshim, Tewodros, Gobe, Ras Gayint, Begemdir, Mebereqe, Quareganaw, Qosequse, Birlaw, Menlik, and Ras Bitwoded Adane. Interview with a key informant-I, 20 December 2023.

18 'የአማራ "4-ኛ አንድነት ምክር ቤት" መቼ ተቋቋመ?', *Fanovoice*, <https://fanovoice.org/?p=929>.

19 One of the APFr's founding aims is to establish 'peoples' administrations in the Amhara region liberated from the Prosperity Party administration. The group uses an approach that enables individual leaders to work with Eskinder Nega. It seems that many Fano groups in Gondar, Shoa, Gojjam, and Wollo have tried to use their support of Eskinder to strengthen their connections with the supporters of Eskinder abroad. Even while the APFr claims on social media to have brought all the Amhara organizations active in the insurgency together, it is far from having cohesive authority over locally decentralized Fano groups.

20 Interview with a key informant-III, 27 December 2023.

21 'Part(1) Ethio 360 Zare Min Ale የጎንደር ዕዝ ምስረታ እና የአይቀሬው ድል ብስራት ዋዜማ', Ethio 360 Media, 31 January 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LML5T6gao2A>.

GOJJAM (East and West Gojjam Zones)

Major Groups: Amhara Popular Force (APF), Amhara Popular Front (APFr)

Key Figures: Zemene Kassie, Asres Mare, Eskinder Nega, Zenabu Lengereh, Manchelot Esubalew

The epicenter of the Fano insurgency is the Gojjam area of the Amhara region, which borders Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz. The Gojjam Fano, including the **Amhara Popular Force (APF)** under the leadership of Zemene Kassie,²² have presented themselves as being defenders of the Amhara people and have assumed a prominent position in Amhara politics, vehemently condemning identity-based attacks against Amhara populations in different parts of the country. During the Tigray war, when Tigrayan forces advanced into the Amhara region, Gojjam was not directly affected. During this time, the leadership of groups that would later become known as the Amhara Popular Force concentrated on recruiting and training Fano members in East and West Gojjam Zones, establishing a significant military strength. When the armed clashes between the Fano and government forces escalated in August 2023, the Fano groups from this area briefly took control of major towns in Gojjam, including Bahir Dar, the regional capital, freeing prisoners from the city's largest prison in the process.

The Amhara Popular Front (APFr), led by Eskinder Nega,²³ is also influential in the Gojjam area and the AFUC is also present. In November 2023, Gojjam Fano Command, led by Zenabu Lengereh, was established with four divisions drawn from East and West Gojjam Zones.²⁴ It was proposed that the leader and deputy leader of the political wing of the group would be filled by the leaders of the Amhara Popular Front (APFr) and Amhara Popular Forces (APF). However, the process of uniting Gojjam Fano groups under this command may be challenging due to the likely pushback from supporters of Zemene Kassie, who has not formally announced whether he will join the command. Given the significance of Zemene in the Gojjam area, this non-participation would likely affect its wider popularity.

SHOA (North Shoa Zone)

Major Groups: One Amhara Fano in Shoa (OAFiS), Amhara Fano Free People Movement (AFFPM), Amhara Fano Unity Council (AFUC).

Key Figures: Asseged Mekonen, Meketaw Mamo, Abebe Mulat

The Shoa area of the Amhara region is made up of the North Shoa Zone, which is bordered by the North Shoa Zone and the East Shoa of the Oromia region. Shoa's location as a borderland on the frontier between the Amhara and Oromia regions has influenced the development of nationalistic Amhara political sentiment, including the growth of Fano. North Shoa Zone also borders the Oromo Special Zone (part of the Amhara region) and is the closest part of the Amhara region to Addis Ababa—linked by an important north-south highway that runs through the major towns of Kemise and Dessie to the north. In late 2021, the Tigrayan forces made an incursion into North Shoa, including a major battle for control of Shoa Robit in November and December 2021, also involving Oromo militia forces (usually described as being part of the Oromo Liberation Army).²⁵ North Shoa is the site of regular conflict between the Fano and militias from the Oromo Special

22 Zemene Kassie was imprisoned by the regional government in Bahir Dar but released in June 2023.

23 Dawit Wolde Giorgis (Ret. Maj.), a renowned public figure, is said to coordinate support from abroad.

24 They have multiple sub-groups including those affiliated with Colonel Tadesse Muluneh, Belay Zeleke, Dejen Gubaya Zambera, Abayshaleqo, Asamenew Tsige, and Ayalew Mekonen. Interview with a key informant-III, 27 December 2023.

25 'EPO Weekly: 4-15 April 2022', Ethiopia Peace Observatory, 19 April 2022, <https://epo.acleddata.com/2022/04/19/epo-weekly-9-15-april-2022/>.

Zone, which has influenced the wider activities of the Fano in this part of the region.²⁶ In August 2023, Fano groups temporarily seized control of Shoa Robit and Debre Birhan (a large town south of Shoa Robit on the Addis Ababa highway), and Fano activity—albeit less intense—has continued in and around the town sporadically since.

Prominent Fano in North Shoa include the **Amhara Fano Free People Movement (AFFPM)**, led by Asseged Mekonnen, who participated in the **All-Amhara People Organization (AAPO)** movement, which resisted the EPRDF government in the 1990s. Another significant group is the **One Amhara Fano in Shoa (OAFiS)**, which also has a chapter in South Wollo.²⁷ The Shoa Fano are comprised of many sub-groups that draw their names mostly from key public personalities and places including: Dejezemach Tesema Ergete, Asamnew Tsige, Menlik, Meberequ, Asemare Dagne, Mekedella, Taytu, and Ras Abebe Aregawi. The Amhara Popular Front and Amhara Fano Unity Council also have ties to different groups in Shoa. Local sources also indicate that there are moves to establish a **Shoa Fano Command**.

WOLLO (North and South Wollo Zones)

Major groups: East Amhara Fano (EAF), Bete Amhara Fano (BAF), Amhara Fano Unity Council (AFUC)

Key Figures: Colonel Fentahun Muhabaw, Mihret Wedajo, Colonel Moges Zegeye, Fikru Mulat, Solomon Ali, and Dr. Mulugeta Degafie

North and South Wollo Zones, which border the Tigray and Afar regions, were part of the Amhara region most affected by the Tigray war. Large parts of Wollo, including major towns such as Kobo, Woldiya, Kombolcha and Dessie, were fought over and, for periods, controlled by the Tigrayan forces. The Fano now operating in Wollo mainly emerged from the context of these events. The feeling of humiliation regarding the Tigrayan invasion (and control), and the desire to mobilize forces to defend the locality, appears to have substantially motivated recruits there more than in other parts of the Amhara region. As such, the Fano in Wollo also attracted ex-ENDF and ASF members, including at senior levels (for example, former ENDF colonel, Fentahun Muhabaw).

Similar to other parts of the Amhara region, the Wollo Fano is made up from several different groups. Most prominent among these are the **East Amhara Fano (EAF)** and **Bete Amhara Fano (BAF)**. The EAF, led by Mihret Wedajo (or Mire Wedajo), is the largest Fano in Wollo and is closely associated with the pro-Amhara nationalist movement. Despite an antagonistic relationship with the federal government, the group actively participated in the war against the Tigray Defense Force (TDF), particularly on the ‘Raya front’, in partnership with the ENDF.²⁸ The EAF is a part of the **Amhara Fano Unity Council** but operates as a separate entity in Wollo. The Bete Amhara Fano is made up of several smaller groups. Despite claims to be functioning as a single organization, it is unclear how cohesive this Fano is. There are reports that Wollo Fano Groups have established a command, led by Mire Wedajo and Colonel Fentahun Muhabaw.²⁹ However, it is unclear to what extent these plans have advanced.

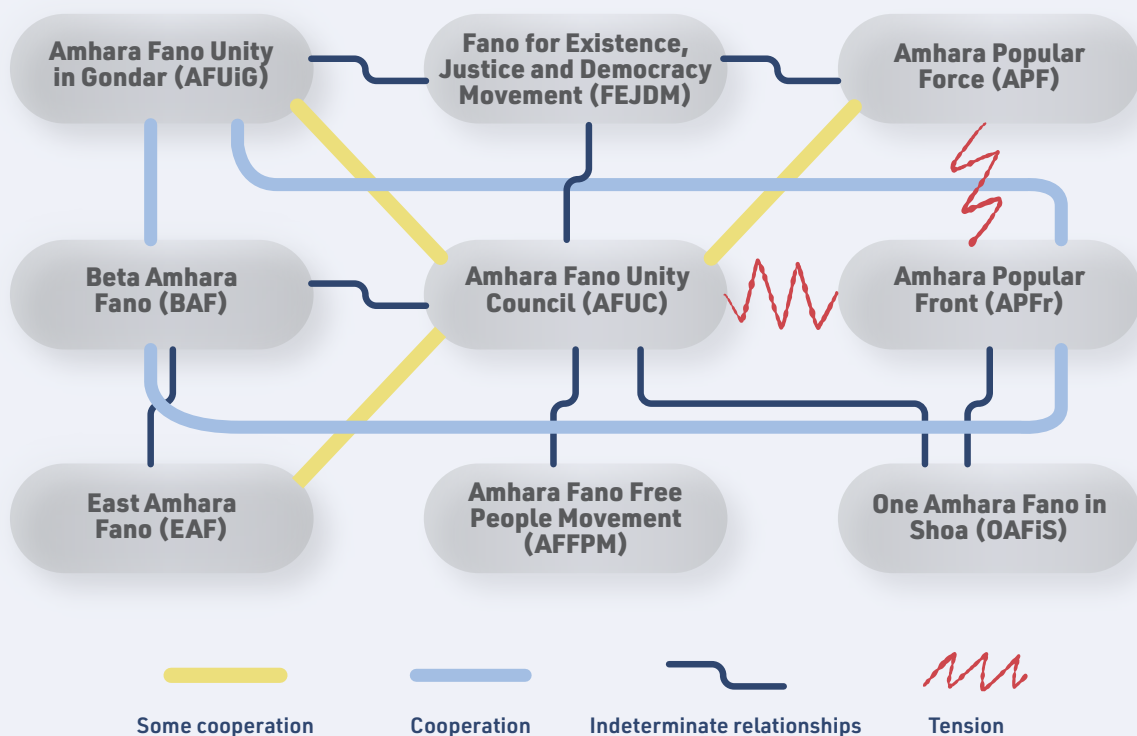
26 Interview with key informant-II, 27 December 2023.

27 In Wollo the group is known as, One Amhara Fano in Wollo. Interview with key informant-IV, 28 December 2023. OAFiS also claims a presence in Wollo.

28 ‘Raya front’ is used to refer to the battle to control the disputed area of Raya, otherwise known as Southern Tigray. Raya is currently under Amhara control.

29 ‘ከአማራ ፋኖ ወሎ ዕዝ የዕዙን መመስረት አስመልክቶ የተሰጠ መግለጫ’, 14 December 2023, ፋኖ ልሳን, <https://fano-lisan.org/117/>.

RELATIONS BETWEEN FANO GROUPS



FANO-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Until now, the Fano generally have had a positive relationship with the population of the Amhara region. This is largely due to their role fighting alongside the ASF and ENDF during the Tigray war. This has helped the Fano to establish a social base amongst the civilian population. Since the end of the Tigray war, popular mistrust of the federal and regional government by Amhara nationalists has contributed to the widespread support for the Fano insurgency, which can also be linked to the youth-led protests that broke out in 2016 against the EPRDF administration. Several important questions with political salience in the region have not been resolved. Firstly, the fear of the return of disputed territories (Wolqayt-T(s)egede, T(s)elmet and Raya), currently under Amhara control, to Tigray as a result of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the TPLF and the federal government.³⁰ Second, freedom of movement for Amhara within Ethiopia, which is currently seen as constrained, particularly by the Oromia and Addis Ababa administrations. Third, the attacks on, and displacement of, Amhara living in other regions. These grievances, widespread across the region, have combined to help the Fano grow their support base.

In areas of the Amhara region with particularly strong Fano presence, for example, East and West Gojjam Zones, local communities appear to be closely collaborating with the groups. This seems to include information sharing, logistical support, and the provision of safe havens. The structure of the

³⁰ There is a widespread feeling amongst the Amhara that they were excluded from the political agreement that ended the war despite playing an important military role and a significant part of the fighting taking place within the Amhara region.

Fano, which mostly involves small groups operating in or near their home areas, means that they are able to rely on close ties with local communities.

Since the outbreak of the conflict, the Fano have mostly only controlled territory for brief periods. Only in a few areas, especially in Gojjam, have Fano maintained territorial control. Because the government rarely delivers services to the population, Fano have taken advantage of this limitation to try and gain more public support by providing security and protection in these areas. Thus far, the Fano groups have not begun exercising formal governance by taking over local administration and delivering services. There is some informal ‘tax’ collection³¹—often collected via checkpoints on major roads—which is frequently coercive.

Initial attempts by the Fano to gain political leverage by taking control over major towns including Gondar, Bahir Dar, Woldiya, Debre Birhan, Shoa-Robit, and Lalibela resulted in civilian deaths, displacement, and the general disruption of everyday life. Furthermore, travel restrictions and alleged forced conscriptions risk eroding public support for the Fano and their broader campaign. In rural areas, the violent confrontation with the ENDF backed by the regional forces has caused civilian casualties and the destruction of property. If the conflict becomes protracted, significantly disrupting daily life, it could cause a decline in support for the insurgency. Also, the non-hierarchical, decentralized nature of the groups, which have generally not operated in a cohesive, coordinated manner, may undermine public confidence.³² When the ENDF seized territories previously controlled by the Fano, civilians faced harassment and imprisonment for supposedly working with the groups. In turn, the Fano took measures against those individuals who collaborated with the ENDF.³³

The impact of provincial and religious elements on Amhara nationalism and the Fano movement has yielded both positive and negative consequences. Particularly during the early stages of the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA), specifically up to the second Debre Birhan Conference, these factors served as divisive elements, especially the religious aspect. There were concerns that this could have a detrimental effect on the Fano insurgency. Nevertheless, the shared grievances against the ruling party within the region have allowed the Fano movement to overcome these challenges and garner support across the entire area. Consequently, at present, Fano leaders encompass followers of various religious beliefs.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

While the Fano are still generally comprised of many smaller groups that operate largely autonomously in their local areas, they are increasingly interacting with, or being engaged by regional, national, and even international interests who have attempted to propagate a wider agenda. This includes national Amhara politicians; activists in the diaspora; and allegedly by neighbouring countries (particularly Eritrea) that see an opportunity to use the Fano as leverage in their wider relations with Addis Ababa.

The Amhara diaspora

The Amhara diaspora is playing an important role in providing funding and political support for the Fano insurgency. In general, over the last three decades, the Ethiopian diaspora has established an important role in the country’s politics. The region’s diaspora organizations generally reflect the old provincial or geographical Amhara sub-divisions—Gondar, Gojjam, Wollo, and Shoa—and while some attempts have been made to establish an overarching union between these organizations, there has

31 The rates of tax hinge on the wealth of the individuals with the business community paying the largest sums.

32 Interview with key informant-I, 20 December 2023.

33 ‘ብጥቅምት ወር በታሪካዊቷ የላሊበላ ከተማ የተከሰተው ምንድን ነው?’, BBC Amharic, 27 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/cokyrql44lo>.



been little success.

The diaspora's involvement in the Fano insurgency is varied, involving foreign relations, diaspora-based human rights activism, and financial support. In international settings, the foreign relations of the Fano have been taken care of by a diverse mix of diaspora advocacy groups. Groups that are acting as representatives of the Fano in international contexts include the Amhara Association of America (AAA), International Amhara Movement (IAM), One Amhara Association (OAA), International Fano Coordinating Committee (IFCC), Amhara Popular Front (APF), Amhara Emergency Fund (AEF), Amhara Community in United Kingdom (ACiUK), and Amhara Professionals Association (APA). These groups are mostly attempting to generate political pressure on their host government to stop the war in the Amhara region. In this vein, demonstrations have been undertaken in different parts of the world, especially in the US, UK, and Germany.³⁴ The Amhara diaspora has attempted to lobby and influence powerful policymakers. For instance, members of the various Amhara diaspora organizations under the auspices of the Amhara Association in America (AAA) met and discussed the plight of the Amhara with Mike Hammer, United States Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa.³⁵ The discussion within the US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa regarding the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia has also been influenced by the engagement of the Amhara diaspora.³⁶

The Amhara diaspora is also engaged in fundraising activities with millions of USD reportedly being raised through diverse online platforms. Although it is difficult to accurately estimate how much money was raised with such diverse and fragmented fundraising avenues, Ethio360 media³⁷ reportedly raised more than a million USD in a live YouTube broadcast to provide logistical support to the Fano. Sorces say that the money has reached leaders of Fano groups.³⁸

Through various media outlets, diaspora advocacy groups put pressure on Fano leaders relative to the recent successes or failures of their military activities.³⁹ The groups' fortunes are likely to be increasingly linked to the financial contributions elicited by their diaspora supporters—this also has created a degree of accountability towards the diaspora groups. While the diaspora is interested in creating a region-wide Fano organization, the difficulties in doing so are likely to provide a significant barrier to achieving this through external pressure.⁴⁰ However, in pursuit of this goal, diaspora groups have improved communication, coordination, and cohesion among the different Fano factions in the Amhara region.

Diaspora-based media—Ethio360, Anchor Media, Mereja TV, etc.—provide updates on the insurgency as well as striving to expose civilian casualties and perceived human rights violations during the government's counterinsurgency. These outlets not only provide information to the diaspora but are also viewed by Ethiopians at home. However, the tendency towards exaggeration and strongly anti-government sentiment has made much of their material unreliable, or actively biased, in favour of the

34 'Ethiopian Protest in Support of Fano and Amhara People in Washington, DC', *The Habesha*, 10 August 2023, <https://zehabesha.com/ethiopian-protest-in-support-of-fano-and-amhara-people-in-washington-dc/>.

35 'Amhara Diaspora Delegation Meets with SEHOA Mike Hammer to discuss Abiy Regime's #WarOnAmhara', Amhara Association of America, 18 August 2023, <https://www.amharaamerica.org/post/amhara-diaspora-delegation-meets-sehoa-mike-hammer-to-discuss-abiy-regimes-waren-amhara>.

36 Statement of Ambassador Mike Hammer, Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, U.S. Department of State, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa Hearing, 'Ethiopia: Promise or Perils, The State of U.S. Policy', November 30, 2023. A documentary screening of 'We're Still Breathing: Amhara Genocide in Ethiopia' was held in Washington, D.C. The documentary was not only aimed at raising awareness and funds for the Amhara diaspora in the US, but also to expose human rights violations. "Special Documentary Screening of 'We're Still Breathing: Amhara Genocide in Ethiopia'", Amhara Association of America, 20 November 2023, <https://www.amharaamerica.org/post/aaspecial-documentary-screening-of-we-are-still-breathing-amhara-genocide-in-ethiopia>.

37 A US-based media group that broadcasts via satellite and on social media such as Facebook and YouTube.

38 Interview with key informant-II, 23 December, 2023.

39 Interview with key informant-IV, 28 December, 2023.

40 Interview with key informant-I, 20 December, 2023.

Fano position.

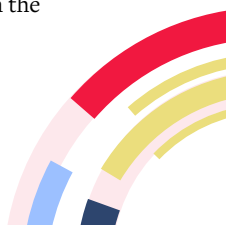
Support from neighbours?

Since the Fano insurgency began in 2022 there have been persistent rumors that some of the groups are being backed by Ethiopia's neighbour, Eritrea, either through funding, provision of weapons and other equipment, or training (in some cases in Eritrea).⁴¹ However, it is unclear and difficult to determine the extent of the relationship. The reasons for possible Eritrean support to the Fano is clear: Asmara may see the groups as a useful point of leverage over Addis Ababa to pursue its agenda in Ethiopia, particularly with respect to the Tigray region and the recent tensions over Ethiopia's access to the sea. In common with the Amhara region, Asmara was formally excluded from the peace process which resulted in the CoHA that ended the Tigray war in November 2022. It has viewed the agreement, which allowed the TPLF to retake control of the administration of the Tigray region, as being too soft on the group, which it sought to destroy both militarily and politically (neither of which objectives was ultimately achieved). Since the signing of the agreement, the relationship between Addis Ababa and Asmara has deteriorated including Abiy's—somewhat reckless—suggestion that Ethiopia might be prepared to annex the Eritrean port of Assab in pursuit of an outlet to the sea. However, any engagement with the Fano is likely to stop short of joint operations, or Eritrean presence in the Amhara region, as Asmara does not currently seek a direct military confrontation with Ethiopia.

CONCLUSION AND LOOKING AHEAD

The crisis in the Amhara region looks set to continue with no sign that the Fano will end their armed insurgency any time soon. While the Fano remain decentralized and without unified command or political structures, they are more broadly united by their shared belief in the protection of Amhara interests and their opposition to the government of Abiy Ahmed. The federal government's decision to renew the state of emergency in the region suggests that it continues to think that a military-led approach can succeed. There has been some pressure from major international partners, including the US, UK, and EU, to hold talks with the groups, but so far this has not led to any concrete action from the government. The Prosperity Party has lost much of its credibility in the region and major Amhara figures within the government appear unpopular amongst the population. Given the positions of the two sides—the Fano and the government—it seems the conflict will continue at a low level, without serious attempts to achieve a resolution, for some time to come.

41 PRF sources suggest that Eritrea is already training groups from eastern Sudan in Eritrea as part its response to the civil war in Sudan. Asmara opposes the Rapid Support Forces and sees its interests in eastern Sudan as more aligned with the Sudan Armed Forces.





ABOUT THE PRF

This briefing paper was produced by the Ethiopia Peace Research Facility (PRF).

The PRF is an independent facility combining timely analysis on peace and conflict from Ethiopian experts with support for conflict sensitive programming in the country. It is managed by the Rift Valley Institute and funded by the UK government.

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