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CONFLICT TRENDS ANALYSIS / MARCH 2026

PEACE AND INSTABILITY: TIGRAY SINCE THE PRETORIA AGREEMENT

Summary

- The November 2022 Pretoria Agreement ended two years of war between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), halting the large-scale fighting that had displaced millions, but it postponed rather than resolved the conflict's root causes.
- Implementation of core security provisions began in early 2023: The TDF handed over heavy weapons to the ENDF and Eritrean troops largely withdrew from Tigray's heartland, though they entrenched themselves in contested border areas.
- Amhara forces vacated most of Tigray but refused to relinquish Western Tigray, leaving tens of thousands of Tigrayan IDPs in limbo, a crisis that culminated in starvation deaths at Hitsats camp in late 2025 and remains unresolved.
- An Interim Regional Administration established in March 2023 was quickly undermined by factional competition between IRA President Getachew Reda's more federally cooperative camp and TPLF hardliners around Chairman Debretsion Gebremichael, resulting in Getachew's removal in April 2025 and replacement by Lieutenant General Tadesse Werede.
- The national electoral board's cancellation of TPLF's registration in May 2025 effectively bars the region's dominant political force from the June 2026 elections, raising the spectre of a repeat of the 2020 electoral dispute that triggered war.
- A new armed faction, the Tigray Peace Force (TPF), emerged in 2025, composed of fighters dissatisfied with TPLF rule and tacitly backed by federal authorities; its incursions into Tigray from Afar triggered intra-Tigrayan clashes.
- A rapprochement between TPLF and the Eritrean government, dubbed *Tsimdo*, produced people-to-people reconciliation at border towns from mid-2025 but alarmed Addis Ababa
- These events combined with federal fuel and financial restrictions, drone strikes and military mobilization have brought the peace process to its most acute point of strain since Pretoria.
- The post-CoHA period reveals a structural impasse: Territorial disputes, TPLF's exclusion from electoral politics, a stalled DDR process, unaddressed transitional justice and deepening mutual mistrust between Mekelle and Addis Ababa mean the conflict is more paused than resolved, and the risk of renewed large-scale hostilities remains real.

Background

Tigray region is home to an estimated 6–7 million people, predominantly agrarian Tigrinya-speaking Orthodox Christians with minority Irob, Kunama and Muslim communities. It occupies the northernmost part of Ethiopia, bordering the region of Amhara to the south, Afar region to the east, Sudan to the west and Eritrea in the north.¹

Historically, Tigray has been relatively autonomous and powerful, though at times its leaders have complained of marginalization since Emperor Menelik II's era began in 1889 after the death of Emperor Yohannes IV, who was from Tigray.² That has led to a series of rebellions from Tigray, notably in the 1940s against Emperor Haile Selassie's rule and the 1975–1991 armed resurrection against the Derg military government.

The second period of resistance against Addis Ababa ended with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) becoming the dominant power in Ethiopian politics for almost the next three decades, notably through the extensive influence of Meles Zenawi, TPLF chairman and Ethiopian Prime Minister until his death in 2012. The TPLF oversaw Eritrea's secession in 1993 and the subsequent 1998–2000 Ethiopia–Eritrea war. It rebuilt Ethiopia's armed forces, reshaped Ethiopia into an ethnic federal state and largely controlled the ruling coalition and federal government, in particular national security institutions. This led to widespread accusations of dictatorial Tigrayan minority rule from opposition actors.

Opposition to the TPLF and the authoritarian system it instituted led to sustained anti-government protests from 2014, primarily in Oromia region and then Amhara. After Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's ascent to power in 2018 on the back of this discontent,³ he removed Tigrayan leaders from key federal positions and many of them retreated to Tigray after TPLF refused to join his Prosperity Party in 2019.⁴ The new party was formed from merging three of the four regional ruling parties that comprised the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) as well as incorporating five parties allied with the EPRDF that ruled the remaining regions.

The break-up of the EPRDF system led to a surge in communal territorial disputes, including those related to the ethnic-based constitutional arrangements, such as historical Amhara claims over areas that were part of Tigray in the federal era. Such structural grievances, multiple competing claims of historical marginalization, opposition to the ethno-federal system and TPLF leaders' contentious relations with other elites, notably those from Amhara and Oromo as well as Eritrea, formed the roots of conflict that broke out in late 2020.

Proximate and triggering factors

The proximate cause of the 2020–2022 northern Ethiopia war was a power struggle between Addis Ababa and Mekelle. Mutual mistrust worsened after TPLF rejected Prosperity Party and each side made accusations against each other; Abiy Ahmed said TPLF was stoking discord across the country and the TPLF argued they were being scapegoated to distract from the new government's failings. In 2020, the disagreement became a constitutional one when the federal government postponed elections because of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ Tigray rejected the decision and proceeded to hold its own regional vote in

1 ACAPS, 'Ethiopia: Pre-Crisis Situation in Tigray', Secondary Data Review, 22 February 2021. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20210223_acaps_secondary_data_review_ethiopia_pre-crisis_situation_in_tigray.pdf.

2 'Systematic Oppression in Ethiopia', *Omna Tigray*, 22 May 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://omnatigray.org/slide-deck/systematic-oppression-in-ethiopia/>.

3 'Abiy Ahmed Elected as Chairman of Ethiopia's Ruling Coalition', *Al Jazeera*, 28 March 2018. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/3/28/abiy-ahmed-elected-as-chairman-of-ethiopias-ruling-coalition>.

4 'TPLF Cites Legal, Procedural Shortfalls to Decline Merger', *Addis Standard*, 22 November 2019. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://addisstandard.com/news-tplf-cites-legal-procedural-shortfalls-to-decline-merger/>.

5 'Ethiopia: Delaying Polls Trigger Constitutional Crises', *Anadolu Agency*, 12 May 2020. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/ethiopia-delaying-polls-trigger-constitutional-crises/1837553>.

September 2020, which TPLF won by a landslide, in defiance of federal authority.⁶

This escalating political-legal dispute reached breaking point on 3 November 2020 when hostilities broke out at bases in Tigray of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces' Northern Command. The federal government characterized it as an unprovoked attack on the national military by TPLF's paramilitary force, while Tigray's leadership described it as an act of 'anticipatory self-defence' against imminent attack.⁷ A large-scale federal military offensive followed as the tensions exploded into a two-year civil war marked by ethnic-based mobilization, multiple atrocities, mass displacement, property destruction and an economic siege.⁸ Amhara militias and Eritrean troops fought alongside the ENDF against the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF).⁹ In the first weeks of the conflict, Amhara forces seized Tigray's western and southern zones, reinforcing Tigrayans' sense of existential threat. By late 2022, after significant swings on the battlefield—the federal government had quickly forced the TPLF from power in Mekelle but Tigray's leaders regrouped in rural areas, and the TDF advanced toward Addis Ababa in 2021 before being pushed back north—the war reached a point in late 2022 where the federal government and TPLF were ready to negotiate.¹⁰

The Pretoria Agreement

On 2 November 2022, on the second anniversary of the war, the two main belligerents signed an 'Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)'.¹¹ The key terms of the accord (known as the Pretoria Agreement or the CoHA) centred on TDF disarmament, withdrawal of 'foreign and non-ENDF' forces (taken by many as a reference to Eritrean and Amhara fighters) from Tigray, restoration of federal authority and services in Tigray, unfettered humanitarian access and the establishment of an inclusive Interim Regional Administration (IRA) until elections could be held. There was also the follow-up Nairobi declaration on 12 November 2022 by military commanders from both sides that agreed TDF's heavy weapons disarmament would be concurrent with the withdrawal of non-ENDF forces and light weapons disarmament per a joint committee's plan.¹²

The CoHA envisaged a transitional justice process and the lifting of TPLF's 'terrorist' designation to enable its renewed political participation. The agreement was thus designed to end hostilities, restore

- 6 'Tigray Regional Council Decides Regional Elections Due No Later than September 2020', *Addis Fortune*, 12 May 2020. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://addisfortune.news/news-alert/tigray-regional-council-decides-regional-elections-due-no-later-than-september-2020>; 'TPLF Wins Regional Election by Landslide', *Addis Standard*, 11 September 2020. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://addisstandard.com/news-tplf-wins-regional-election-by-landslide/>.
- 7 'Tigray Regional Council Decides Regional Elections Due No Later than September 2020', *Addis Fortune*, 12 May 2020. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://addisfortune.news/news-alert/tigray-regional-council-decides-regional-elections-due-no-later-than-september-2020>; 'TPLF Wins Regional Election by Landslide', *Addis Standard*, 11 September 2020. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://addisstandard.com/news-tplf-wins-regional-election-by-landslide/>.
- 8 'Conflict in Ethiopia', Council on Foreign Relations, 20 March 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ethiopia>. 'Ethiopia Sends Army into Tigray Region, Heavy Fighting Reported', *Reuters*, 4 November 2020. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/ethiopia-sends-army-into-tigray-region-heavy-fighting-reported-2020-11-04/>.
- 9 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 'Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia', 3 November 2021. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf>.
- 10 'Tigrayan Forces Take Over Capital Mekelle; Federal Government Accepts Interim Administration's Call for Unilateral Ceasefire', *Addis Standard*, 28 June 2021. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://addisstandard.com/news-update-tigrayan-forces-take-over-capital-mekelle-fed-gov-accepts-interim-admins-call-for-unilateral-ceasefire/>.
- 11 Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, 'Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)', Pretoria, 2 November 2022. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/10038>.
- 12 Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, 'Declaration of Senior Commanders on the Modalities for the Implementation of the Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities between the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front', Nairobi, 12 November 2022. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag2464_6391cad1825da.pdf.



constitutional governance in Tigray and begin the process of healing. Experts observed that, while the agreement had a monitoring and verification mechanism put in place by the African Union (AU) for the security components, its political terms were thin and did not have guarantor.

Situating CoHA in the conflict trajectory

The CoHA followed a third round of fighting in the second half of 2022. By October, joint Ethiopian–Eritrean–Amhara forces had again captured strategic Tigrayan cities, including Sheraro, Shire, Aksum, Adwa and Alamata, forcing Tigray forces into retreat.¹³ This military pressure, combined with the war’s major humanitarian toll, created the conditions for a negotiated end to the conflict under international auspices at the talks in Pretoria, South Africa. For Tigray, the agreement halted the economic siege and the battlefield killing. For Addis Ababa, it preserved sovereignty and created a path to reintegrate Tigray into the federation without further bloodshed. The agreement, however, did not resolve core disputes, such as the final status of Western Tigray, but rather postponed them to be worked out via dialogue. In effect, it froze front lines and transitioned the conflict into a post-war phase fraught with implementation challenges. The CoHA thus marks the end of active combat and the beginning of a contested period of reconstruction and political negotiation. This report examines how this post-CoHA phase unfolded through December 2025, charting the progress, setbacks and emerging trends.

Key developments since Pretoria

End of hostilities and immediate aftermath

The Pretoria ceasefire silenced the guns in November 2022, ending two years of warfare. By January 2023, implementation of core security provisions was underway. On 11 January, TDF began the handover of their heavy weapons to the ENDF under AU supervision.¹⁴ This fulfilled a primary obligation of the CoHA and in theory paved the way for the phased withdrawal of Eritrean troops. Indeed, following the announcement of TDF’s disarmament, Eritrean forces began pulling out. By late January, Eritrea’s army had largely withdrawn from Tigray’s heartland, taking their vehicles and heavy armaments across the border.¹⁵ Complete withdrawal, however, did not occur: Eritrean units entrenched themselves in contested border areas—including Badme, the flashpoint of the 1998 war, as well as parts of Zalambessa and Irob—which Asmara claims were awarded to Eritrea by a 2002 United Nations boundary commission but had remained under Tigray’s administration.¹⁶ This lingering presence in frontier pockets meant that, despite Eritrea’s absence from central Tigray, tensions over the unresolved boundary persisted. Simultaneously, Amhara forces that had fought in Tigray also withdrew from most areas, yet Amhara militias refused to relinquish control of Western Tigray.

By early 2023, humanitarian relief began trickling back into Tigray after having been almost completely blocked during the war’s final phase.¹⁷ The federal government and aid agencies moved to rush food, medicine and fuel to a population on the brink of famine. Essential services were gradually restored: Electricity was reconnected, telecoms networks came back online and Ethiopian Airlines prepared to resume flights to Mekelle.¹⁸ In December 2022, banks reopened branches in major Tigrayan towns for the first time in more than a year.

13 Alex de Waal, ‘Tigray Faces a New Onslaught by Eritrean–Ethiopian Forces’, *Responsible Statecraft*, 14 October 2022. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/10/14/tigray-faces-a-new-onslaught-by-eritrean-ethiopian-forces/>.

14 ‘Tigray Forces Start Handing Over Heavy Weapons in Ethiopia’, *Deutsche Welle*, 11 January 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.dw.com/en/tigray-forces-start-handing-over-heavy-weapons-in-ethiopia/a-64348081>.

15 Alena Walta Hager, ‘A Video Footage Showing the Withdrawal of Eritrean Forces from Tigray Region’, *YouTube*, 29 January 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFQ9QWjaCRE>.

16 Permanent Court of Arbitration, ‘Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission (PCA Case No. 2001-01)’, Permanent Court of Arbitration. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/99/>.

17 ‘Ethiopia Conflict: How Is Aid Flowing to Tigray?’, *BBC News*, 6 January 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/57929853>.

18 ‘Ethiopian Airlines to Resume Flights to Tigray Capital Mekele’, *France 24*, 27 December 2022. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20221227-ethiopian-airlines-to-resume-flights-to-tigray-capital-mekele>.

These steps, amounting to the lifting of the wartime blockade, alleviated the most acute deprivation. Nonetheless, needs remained enormous. In late 2022 and early 2023, millions of Tigrayans still relied on emergency food aid and healthcare, education and other basic services had to be rebuilt.¹⁹ International humanitarian actors, such as the United Nations, US Agency for International Development (USAID) and NGOs scaled up operations in Tigray once access opened, but in mid-2023 they faced setbacks when reports surfaced of aid diversion.²⁰ An investigation found that large quantities of food aid were being misappropriated by various actors. In response, donors including USAID suspended food distributions pending reform of the system. This four-month pause exacerbated hardship and underscored the fragile nature of the recovery.²¹

Formation of interim administration and initial reforms

A cornerstone of the Pretoria Agreement was the formation of an interim administration to govern Tigray until elections could be held. After negotiations, the federal government removed its designation of TPLF as a terrorist group²² and TPLF agreed on a formula that excluded some of the most controversial figures from the IRA. On 23 March 2023, Abiy appointed Getachew Reda as IRA President, in line with Pretoria's stipulation that an interim government will be formed within 30 days of TPLF's delisting.²³ A federal regulation was also issued to create the administration.²⁴ Getachew, a senior TPLF figure, former federal government communications minister and Tigray's main wartime spokesperson, assumed office in Mekelle and assembled a cabinet of 27 drawn from TPLF, TDF, civil society and the opposition.²⁵ Notably, two renowned Tigrayan generals, Lieutenant General Tadesse Werede, the TDF's top commander, and Lieutenant General Tsadkan Gebretensae, another senior TDF figure, were named as Getachew's deputies. This aim was to balance civilian and military influence, in part to reassure TDF fighters of their stake in the peace.

Despite these arrangements, tensions simmered beneath the surface in Tigray. A faction of the TPLF led by chair Debrezion Gebremichael and his deputy Fetlework Gebreegziabher, having lost its military leverage, sought to ensure it would not lose its political dominance. From the outset, other Tigrayan actors accused TPLF of monopolizing the interim setup.

On 8 February 2023, TPLF unilaterally formed a nine-member Interim Government Organizing Committee, ostensibly to design the structure of the upcoming administration. Yet all members were either TPLF Central Committee appointees or senior TDF officers allied with TPLF, with no representation from opposition parties or independents. Opposition groups like the Tigray Independence Party, *Salsay Woyane* and *Baytona* denounced this opaque process, casting it as a ploy for TPLF to 'secure a better place in the Interim Government' at their expense.²⁶ Even Tsadkan, despite being part of the interim leadership, criticized TPLF's handpicking of committee members and demanded an 'all-

19 Refugees International, 'Scars of War and Deprivation: An Urgent Call to Reverse Tigray's Humanitarian Crisis', 14 November 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/scars-of-war-and-deprivation-an-urgent-call-to-reverse-tigrays-humanitarian-crisis/>.

20 World Food Programme, 'WFP Statement on Diversion of Food Aid in Ethiopia', June 9, 2023, <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-statement-diversion-food-aid-ethiopia-0>. Office of Inspector General, *Emergency Food Assistance in Ethiopia: Gaps in USAID's Award Administration, Monitoring, and Incident Reporting Hindered Its Ability to Detect Widespread Food Diversion*, Report No. E-000-25-002-M, 26 February 2025. Accessed 20 March 2026, <https://oig.usaid.gov/node/7477>.

21 'UN Food Agency Failed to Act as US Aid Was Looted in Ethiopia', *Reuters*, 18 October 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/famine-aid-ethiopia/>.

22 FDRE House of Peoples' Representatives, 'House of Peoples' Representatives Decides to Lift TPLF Terrorist Designation', @FDREHOPR on X, 22 March 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://x.com/FDREHOPR/status/1638500768985632770>.

23 'Prime Minister Appoints Chief Administrator for Tigray Region Interim Administration', *Ethiopian News Agency*, 23 March 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng_2619334.

24 Office of the Prime Minister Ethiopia, 'Formation of the Tigray Interim Administration', @PMEthiopia on X, 24 March 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://x.com/PMEthiopia/status/1638829233546862592>.

25 'IRA President Getachew Reda Announces His Interim Cabinet', *BBC News Amharic*, 5 March 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/cn4r6z638480.lite>.

26 'Joint Statement of the Baytona, Tigray Independence Party, and Salsay Woyane Tigray on Formation of the IRA Cabinet', Baytona Facebook Page, 17 February 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/BaytonaTigray/posts/pfbidoxFt3M1Ki9SKRSM5jbnN3WotXTq2S7D3BepRvGDhDcs2dMQn9K7c8ANoRgXuiveXY1>.

inclusive, open and democratic process' for forming the interim government.²⁷

This intra-Tigrayan political rift—youth, opposition parties and some military figures versus the TPLF establishment—hinted at the struggles to come. In late March 2023, the IRA was established with TPLF at the helm and federal blessing. Its mandate included coordinating humanitarian aid, restoring services, launching reconstruction, election preparation and liaising with the federal government on the CoHA's implementation.

One early IRA success was the resumption of federal budget subsidies to the region after two years of suspension. In April 2023, Getachew announced that his administration had secured sufficient federal funds to pay salaries and restart basic government functions across the region.²⁸ This infusion—reportedly covering civil service payrolls, water projects and the revival of a safety-net programme for vulnerable households—provided a much-needed economic stimulus.

Getachew's team also coordinated the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) where possible.²⁹ In May, the IRA drafted plans for phased returns of Tigrayan IDPs and refugees to their home areas, starting with those from Southern Tigray and parts of Northwestern Tigray zone, such as Tselemti. The interim authorities urged displaced families to await organized returns and 'avoid any individual means' of going back, emphasizing the need for peaceful coexistence with 'local brothers' in contested areas. Yet these return plans largely stalled as Western Tigray remained occupied by Amhara forces, making safe return impractical. The plight of the IDPs would fester, coming to a head in December 2025 with the Hitsats camp hunger crisis (see below).³⁰

TPLF legal status and growing factionalism

Throughout 2023, the promise of peace was tempered by disputes over CoHA and power struggles in Tigray. A major contention was TPLF's legal status. The agreement implied a restoration of TPLF as a political actor, and to that end, the federal House of Peoples' Representatives had removed the terrorist designation in March. Yet in May the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) refused to automatically reinstate the party's registration, citing legal hurdles.³¹ After protracted back-and-forth, NEBE, on 9 August 2024, granted TPLF a conditional re-registration under 'special circumstances', requiring the party to hold a General Assembly within six months under NEBE's supervision.³²

TPLF bristled at these conditions. It proceeded with its own 14th General Assembly on 13 August 2024, without NEBE oversight, insisting that the CoHA guaranteed its political status and that electoral laws should not override the peace deal.³³ This defiance prompted NEBE to first suspend the TPLF on 13

27 Tsadkan Gebretensae, 'Towards the Formation of an Acceptable Interim Administration in Tigray: Comments and Suggestions', *Tghat*, 22 February 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.tghat.com/2023/02/22/towards-the-formation-of-an-acceptable-interim-administration-in-tigray-comments-and-suggestions/>.

28 'Ethiopian Federal Government to Release Budget for Tigray', *Borkena*, 30 March 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://borkena.com/2023/03/30/ethiopian-federal-government-to-release-budget-for-tigray/>.

29 *Tigray TV*, 'Lt. Gen. Tsadkan Gebretensae Interview, inter alia, IDPs Return', *YouTube*, 22 April 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZJuePPhyYo>.

30 'News: Over 1,700 IDPs at Hitsats center in Tigray in critical condition amid severe hunger, lack of medical care', *Addis Standard*, 22 December 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://addisstandard.com/over-1700-idps-at-hitsats-center-in-tigray-in-critical-condition-amid-severe-hunger-lack-of-medical-care/>.

31 National Election Board of Ethiopia, 'Rejection of TPLF Application for Reinstatement after Delisting from Terror List', National Election Board of Ethiopia Facebook Page, 13 May 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=&id=100066827943709.

32 National Election Board of Ethiopia, 'Conditional Registration of TPLF under Special Circumstances Pursuant to the Amended Law', National Election Board of Ethiopia Facebook Page, 9 August 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0Bz15iZyPpHjAp9vUyBmmn9iqDrMRXBZrNyG7mPpL11LNhCzufmUJHwgQTnTeZPdpl&id=100066827943709.

33 TPLF, 'Conclusions and Decisions of the 14th TPLF General Assembly', TPLF Official Facebook Page, 20 August 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/tplf.official/posts/pfbid06qCoEYJDUdzs5KFnmrUoFQYoHBCXBaeAQiX3Mo7uwjcEjU6tEJVELfSmSw5nGY12l>.

February 2025 and the next day to cancel TPLF's registration due to non-compliance.³⁴ The decision in effect barred TPLF from upcoming elections and struck at the heart of Tigray's representation in the federation. TPLF leaders sharply criticized it as a bad-faith move that violated the Pretoria Agreement. The federal government maintained that no group is above the law, setting the stage for another political-legal showdown.

Meanwhile, governance in Tigray had grown increasingly turbulent as factions emerged. Getachew initially worked in tandem with the TPLF leadership. Over time, however, a rift developed between the 'IRA camp', aligned with Getachew's more cooperative approach with Addis Ababa, and TPLF hardliners around Debretsion. Key points of friction included reforms, the election timetable and the control of regional security forces and local administrations. By late 2023, signs of this intra-Tigrayan power struggle were evident. In May 2023, Debretsion criticized the interim administration for sidelining the party and ruling by cabinet decree without party oversight. He argued that under the long-standing TPLF practice of 'democratic centralism', major decisions in Tigray should still be cleared by the TPLF Executive Committee before the IRA acted.

Tensions boiled over when on 15 October 2023 Getachew fired six Tigray zonal administrators seen as loyal to TPLF.³⁵ TPLF leaders convened an urgent meeting to protest this 'unilateral' move, accusing Getachew of breaching party discipline and amassing personal power.³⁶ In late October, the confrontation escalated into a physical standoff in Mekelle. More than 650 TPLF cadres defied an IRA ban to gather for a party meeting, which Getachew tried to physically prevent with police, until TDF generals intervened to broker a truce. The outcome was an uneasy stalemate: TPLF condemned Getachew's actions and plotted to remove him, while Getachew entrenched himself in the administration, even trying to block the TPLF's 14th General Assembly, which had the theme of 'Let's save TPLF to enable it to fulfil its historic mission'.³⁷

The TDF, renamed the Tigray Security Force (TSF) after the CoHA, remained loyal to the TPLF establishment and mistrustful of the federal government. Its leaders began acting as political kingmakers. On 6 January 2024, prominent TSF generals intervened directly in TPLF's internal politics to insulate Debretsion and Fetlework from attempted ouster by party 'reformists'. The military officers warned that removing the leadership could spark chaos, making clear their intention to preserve the status quo.

The situation had worsened further by mid-2024. In July–September, Getachew's cabinet attempted to assert IRA's authority as a full-fledged government rather than a mere caretaker. It moved to place the TSF under civilian control, issuing regulations that the force must obey interim government orders.³⁸ It also sought to freely hire and fire local officials, steps that would diminish TPLF's influence at zonal and district levels.

TPLF rejected these moves. In a 24 September statement, it argued that the interim administration was 'transitional' and had no right to transform itself into a sovereign regional government or command the

34 National Election Board of Ethiopia, 'Suspension of TPLF from Political Activities', National Election Board of Ethiopia Facebook Page, 13 February 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbido5c6twdsHZKWRLBWFk5sKU7LfuPVijS2PArXMXqaaCMaLNqmKG9R67A9Jc9tKCg9l&id=100066827943709. National Election Board of Ethiopia, 'Cancellation of TPLF as Political Party following Three Months of Suspension', National Election Board of Ethiopia Facebook Page, 14 May 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbido2RkGARKfyZHwEGYETeYWoxyvvdAnsho5XHfpgHpPntTqQgr9gr6D5ATUbddzaik3Tl&id=100066827943709.

35 Office of the IRA President, 'Getachew Reda Removes Officials from Government Posts', Tigray Government Facebook Page, 20 October 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/Tigraygovernment/posts/pfbido2kUoJbBGmDSYKb3znhqczgakniRatTcghdsnHH23DTngquCJMneEqaJ5DThoF9VZMl>.

36 TPLF, 'TPLF Cadre Decision Regarding Getachew Reda's Firing', TPLF Official Facebook Page, 29 October 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/tplf.official/posts/pfbido2F2yjHrj9NVAj9RxCdKBQnrTYAvmnnavvnKXfnfsf3PbpbGJHz8AEan4YyyysyGxSDl>.

37 Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau, 'Ban on Convening 14th TPLF General Assembly', Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau Facebook Page, 26 July 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/TigrayCAO/posts/pfbidoRW7ebFwbHZ5PhJazq8WXS9kyjBdDcsibiz29pSaSxDmatun2wAyMk2ADJF5PxL98l>.

38 *Tigray TV*, 'IRA Cabinet Claims Full-Fledged Government and TDF under Its Authority', *YouTUBE*, 22 September 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMJSU2fex1M>.

TSF.³⁹ The party asserted that putting the TSF under IRA control would effectively make it accountable to the federal government and ‘dissolve its autonomous status’, an unacceptable outcome according to TPLF. Many in Tigray, recalling ENDF’s harsh occupation in 2020–2021, shared concerns about exposing the TSF to federal influence. The majority of TSF officers stood with TPLF, with some spreading warnings that Getachew’s group was conspiring to dissolve the force.

The standoff left the IRA constrained. It could not command the region’s armed forces, and any aggressive move risked fragmenting the security apparatus and inviting intervention by Addis Ababa. Ultimately, the TSF remained outside IRA control, essentially a law unto itself aligned with Debretsion’s camp.

By late 2024, the region had two competing centres: The IRA under Getachew against the TPLF party establishment with its loyal security commanders. A once-unified Tigrayan front was fragmenting, all against a backdrop of a traumatized populace craving normalcy. Applying a bottom-up strategy of taking over *kebele*, *woreda* and then zonal administrations, this factional competition resulted in the removal of Getachew in March 2025 by TPLF with the backing of TSF Commanders.⁴⁰ This set the stage for armed resistance against TPLF power in Mekelle by the federal government-backed Tigray Peace Force, and the creation by the now Addis Ababa-based Getachew of an opposition party, Tigray Democratic Solidarity, known as *Simret*.

Federal-Tigray strains and the Amhara insurgency

The unresolved Amhara-Tigray territorial dispute soon intertwined with a fresh conflict in Amhara. In April 2023, the federal government moved to dissolve special police forces and militia at regional level (to be either folded into the ENDF, local police or demobilized).⁴¹ The announcement came in the context of CoHA’s stipulation of removing ‘external forces’ from Tigray, and sparked a major backlash in Amhara region. By August, a full-blown insurrection by Amhara Fano forces against the federal government erupted.⁴² Heavy fighting broke out across the region in August as Fano units seized towns, clashing with federal troops sent to subdue them.

Getachew seized this moment to align with Addis Ababa. On 13 August, the IRA declared support for the federal military operation against Fano, framing the Amhara hardliners as ‘anti-Pretoria extremists’ and re-affirming Tigray’s choice of peace.⁴³ The IRA took pains to deny any direct Tigrayan military involvement in Amhara, but welcomed the crackdown as it potentially removed a barrier to regaining Western and Southern Tigray. The IRA likely calculated that weakened Amhara forces would ease pressure on contested areas, allowing federal forces eventually to hand them to Tigray without local resistance. The optics of an IRA-federal alliance against Amhara insurgents were not lost on the Ethiopian public. Recent foes, Oromia and Tigray ruling elites, were now perceived as allied against a common Amhara ‘extremist’ threat. This realignment fed Amhara narratives of betrayal, vindicating their fear that Pretoria meant empowering Tigray at Amhara’s expense.

39 TPLF, ‘Response to the IRA Cabinet Move to Place TDF/TSF under Its Authority’, TPLF Official Facebook Page, 24 September 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/tplf.official/posts/pfbid0aR3TPUUTd2aCBW3cEJFGomHwUp6vTY6imWuL2A45HJanb1BxA9LcBLrnmSctxbu6l>.

40 TPLF, ‘Taking Over Local Administrations in Tigray: Adigrat City’, TPLF Official Facebook Page, 11 March 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/tplf.official/posts/pfbid02ELrBJcVK78EdEQNFgjEWonrKdU26xuaZj5Q5kUWkVFauKpmCkCGtmfHyq4bUQ8A61>. Woyen Media, ‘TDF/TSF Top Commanders Decisions’, YouTube, 23 January 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSuxQLyeQpI>.

41 Dawit Endeshaw, ‘Ethiopia to dismantle regional special forces in favour of “centralized army”’, Reuters, 6 April 2023. Accessed 20 March 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-dismantle-regional-special-forces-favour-centralized-army-2023-04-06/>.

42 Atraw Necho and Yared Debebe, ‘Understanding the Fano Insurgency in Ethiopia’s Amhara Region’, Peace Research Facility, Rift Valley Institute, February 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Understanding-the-Fano-Insurgency_final.pdf.

43 Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau, ‘IRA’s Support for the Disarmament of the Amhara Fano’, Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau Facebook Page, 13 August 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/TigrayCAO/posts/pfbid02QzsytebFyUj8HFDa2VvuAP5r78Ku5XGaiJTYz4aJEu1TEne2S7pqvitYzwcAjmn8l>.

The Amhara conflict delayed any further political negotiation over Welkait and Raya, as the disputed areas in western and southern Tigray, respectively, are often referred to in Amhara. It also diverted ENDF units that had been stationed on Tigray's border. Indeed, on 15 September 2023, Eritrean troops re-entered some vacated border areas in eastern Tigray, Irob and Gulo Mekeda woredas when Ethiopian troops redeployed south to Amhara. Locals were alarmed at the return of Eritrean soldiers who told them their lands now belonged to Eritrea as per the 2002 boundary commission ruling.⁴⁴ The federal government stayed largely silent on these incursions, in effect tolerating an Eritrean presence despite CoHA's stipulation for the removal of 'external forces'. By late 2023, implementation of the Pretoria Agreement appeared stalled, even deadlocked, on all contentious fronts: The territorial dispute, IDP returns and disarmament. The Amhara uprising was threatening to unravel the peace gains.

Security development, 2024-2026

Despite the end of the war, violent incidents underscored the fragility of peace. In March 2024, protests by locals against unregulated gold mining in northwestern Tigray (Asgede woreda in the Hitsats locality) escalated into a clash that left TSF soldiers dead and injured.⁴⁵ The confrontation, which pitted disenfranchised villagers backed by some TSF fighters against a mining operation protected by other TSF units, highlighted the proliferation of illegal mining, light weapons, local power brokers and economic grievances in post-war Tigray. It pointed to the erosion of centralized control. The IRA's presence in remote areas was weak due to factional conflict, and disgruntled fighters were taking sides in local disputes. Meanwhile, border skirmishes were largely avoided, but the unresolved status of Southern Tigray led to sporadic tension with pro-Amhara locals.⁴⁶ Usually, elders from Tigray and neighbouring Amhara and Afar communities initiated local dialogues to prevent clashes, an encouraging grassroots peacebuilding trend.

The most consequential security development, however, was the emergence of a new Tigrayan insurgent force. By 2025, dissident Tigrayans—including former mid-level TDF officers and disaffected local officials—lost faith in both TPLF and the interim setup. They united into the Tigray Peace Force (TPF), an armed resistance movement vowing to 'liberate' Tigray from TPLF's one-party rule.⁴⁷ The first hint of this came in April 2025 when Shewit Bitew, a young former TDF fighter, appeared in a widely-circulated post announcing the TPF's formation and denouncing TPLF leaders as corrupt authoritarian warlords.⁴⁸ Shewit quickly became the TPF's mouthpiece, framing it as a reformist movement seeking a more democratic and peaceful future for Tigray. Behind him stood Brigadier General Gebreegzabeher Beyene ('Wedi Antiru'), a former TDF commander who had fallen out with the TPLF hierarchy.⁴⁹

TPF established bases in parts of Afar just across Tigray's south-eastern border, with either overt or covert acceptance by federal authorities. By mid-2025 they had gathered a small but battle-hardened force. On 1 July 2025, the conflict within Tigray turned hot. A TPF unit crossed from Afar into Wejerat woreda in Southeastern Tigray zone and clashed with TSF units in what was the first armed confrontation between Tigrayan factions. The TSF repelled the incursion, but the brief firefight signalled a dangerous new phase—an incipient intra-Tigrayan conflict.

Similar clashes recurred on 29 July in Milazat, 8 August in Dederba TibTam and more violent ones on 2-7 November along the Tigray-Afar border, prompting the IRA to respond.⁵⁰ Then, after calming

44 *Tigray TV*, 'Eritrean Officials Announce to Irob Communities to Stay as Eritrean or Leave', *YouTube*, 3 April 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVKopFiLc9E>.

45 *Red Sea Observer*, 'Reports from the Field: Illegal Goldmining in Tigray', *YouTube*, 20 March 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF1zkXdHlpA>.

46 'Getachew's Statement on Conflict in Southern Tigray', *BBC Amharic News*, 24 April 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/c6pysvox2v2o>.

47 *Axumawian Media Network*, 'Tigray Peace Forces Position Statements', *YouTube*, 20 July 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKbY_2A18Vk.

48 *Rara Media*, 'Shewit Bitew Announces the Commencement of Armed Struggle Against TPLF Leaders', *YouTube*, 12 April 2025, 7:18. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdrkomRcU2U>.

49 *BBC News Tigrinya*, 'Interview with the Hara Meret Rebel Forces Commander Brig. Gen. Gebregzebeher Beyene (Wedi Antiru)', *YouTube*, 10 November 2025, 13:03. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLc9Geieqmw>.

50 Tigray Region Communication Affairs Bureau, 'Statement Regarding Provocation in Southern Tigray Region', Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau Facebook Page, 6 November 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/TigrayCAO/posts/pfbido22S8A6ceGWKdLVJti7kuNLzmPzVJxKcerF6TMP3V9CfVBvUfjTr6bCy4mJbChseil>.

down for more than three months, the TPF—supported by ENDF drone strikes and artillery—clashed with TSF from 29 January to 4 February 2026 in the Tigray–Afar border areas of Wajirat, Bala and Chercher. Concurrently, TSF clashed with ENDF in Tselemti from 26–31 January. During this period, TSF managed to retake control of large parts of Tselemti. Following ENDF escalation, including drone strikes inside Tigray, the TSF withdrawal on 31 January signalled the readiness for dialogue of Tadesse Werede, Getchew’s replacement as IRA president.⁵¹

Additionally, tensions were high in the Southern zone of Tigray around Maichew and Mehoni, which had become strongholds of anti-TPLF sentiment. The area’s administrators, led by Haftu Kiros, had been close allies of Getachew and resisted what they perceived as re-centralization by the TPLF establishment. When Debretsion hinted in May 2025 that TPLF intended to restructure or replace local administrators in the south,⁵² as it had done in other zones, thousands of residents took to the streets in protest.⁵³ Demonstrators, some carrying arms, warned any attempt by TPLF to strip the zone’s right to self-administration would be met with resistance, invoking local militia like the *Hamed Mekoni* as potential defenders. This popular backlash, unseen in Tigray for decades, illustrated community fatigue with TPLF’s dominance and support for alternative leadership. The Southern zone, having suffered occupation by Amhara forces during the war and only recently returned to Mekelle’s control, viewed itself as caught between two governments, the TPLF ‘establishment’ and the IRA.

By July 2025, events reached another breaking point. President Tadesse dismissed Haftu as chief of the southern zone.⁵⁴ In response, Haftu and hundreds of local militia and officials defected to TPF ‘to reclaim freedom from oppressive [TPLF] rule’, taking with them local police, officials and militia.⁵⁵ This swelled the insurgents’ ranks and entrenched TPF’s presence just as the national political situation was reaching a critical juncture.

IRA leadership change and the road to elections

Within Tigray, the most significant development in 2025 had been a leadership change at the interim administration that was designed to heal internal divisions and improve federal relations. Although the CoHA did not specify a duration, the understanding was that the IRA would be in place for two years until regional elections, setting March 2025 as the presumed end of its mandate. Recognizing that key tasks were unfinished—notably preparing Tigray for elections, addressing contested areas and facilitating IDP returns—the federal parliament on 1 April 2025 amended the law to extend the interim administration by up to one year.⁵⁶ This was immediately applied to Tigray and the IRA’s mandate was extended to March 2026. The extension acknowledged ‘daunting tasks’ remaining two years after Pretoria.

Along with the extension came a major reshuffle. On 8 April, Abiy replaced Getachew with Tadesse as president of the IRA.⁵⁷ The former TDF supremo who had been serving as an IRA vice-president, was

51 *Tigray TV*, ‘Lt. Gen. Tadesse Werede Announcement of TDF Withdrawal from Tselemti’, *YouTube*, 1 February 2026, 1:12:45. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTm1KDrA5Ro>.

52 *Woyen Media*, ‘TPLF Chairman Debretsion Announcement of Planned Replacement in Southern Tigray Administration’, *YouTube*, 10 May 2025, 1:15:20. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tq8MDpKdP4o>.

53 *Tigray 360°*, ‘The Southern Zone Will Not Allow Itself to Be Dominated by One Group: Administrator of the Southern Zone Mr. Haftu Kiros at the Maichew Protest’, *YouTube*, 15 May 2025, 11:08. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p38oelb-v8w>.

54 *Dimtsi Weyane Television*, ‘Current Statement by the President of the Tigray Interim Administration, Lt. Gen. Tadesse Werede’, *YouTube*, 22 July 2025, 29:33. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYDSA6CD8d8>. *Woyen Media*, ‘Those Who Commit Crimes in a Land of Law and Order Will Not Escape Accountability: Chief Administrator of the Southern Zone of Tigray, Zinnabu Gebremedhin’, *YouTube*, 28 August 2025, 12:07. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fZ-WbIc5lc>.

55 *Landa Report*, ‘Why Did Haftu Kiros Enter the Armed Struggle? Interview with Haftu Kiros’, *YouTube*, 15 September 2025, 22:34. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOA4MTzxxso>.

56 ‘Proclamation Approved to Extend the Term of Interim Regional Administrations to Two Years’, *BBC Amharic*, 1 April 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/c62x5ee69pdo>.

57 *EBC*, ‘Presidential Handover Ceremony of the Tigray Interim Administration’, *YouTube*, 8 April 2025, 9:42. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1NziWXn75M>.

seen as a relatively neutral, unifying figure above TPLF's factional fray. In fact, his nomination to lead the IRA had been quietly supported by TPLF as a solution to remove Getachew without violence. Abiy initially floated an open call for candidates,⁵⁸ a move TPLF rejected, citing COHA's provision that the interim leader be decided in dialogue.⁵⁹ Eventually, Abiy acceded to TPLF's preference for Tadesse, after Tadesse privately agreed to certain commitments and to avoid stoking conflict with TPLF. The handover was peaceful, though no senior TPLF politicians attended the Addis Ababa event. Tadesse immediately assumed eight commitments upon taking office, including to facilitate IDP returns, complete disarmament, participate in the national dialogue, cease any unconstitutional foreign relations (presumed to refer to growing TPLF-Eritrea ties), lay groundwork for elections and uphold the rule of law.

In the short term, this leadership change calmed the crisis. Public relief was tangible. Tadesse enjoyed respect as a war hero, and his appointment eased tensions both within Tigray and between TPLF and the federal government. Many Tigrayans hoped he could bridge the gap between IRA and TPLF factions and refocus on common goals. The IRA could now broaden its consultations. Indeed, Tadesse convened local meetings and included various groups, albeit not fully inclusively, in what was called 'Tigray Discussion and Understanding Forum', as he tried to bolster the IRA's grassroots legitimacy.⁶⁰ He also maintained pressure on unresolved issues. For example, in November 2025, the Tigray leadership, now relatively in sync, reiterated demands for full CoHA implementation.

Three years after Pretoria, Tigray remained in a transitional limbo—far better off than during war, but not yet at durable peace. The extension of interim rule through 2026 stabilized the situation and likely averted immediate collapse or renewed war, but it also underscored how much remains undone. Regional leaders were still unelected, economic recovery slow and the core grievances were unresolved by February 2026.

By late 2025, the focus had shifted to national elections scheduled for June 2026, and whether Tigray would participate.⁶¹ The cancellation of TPLF's party registration in May 2025 cast a long shadow. On 26 November, TPLF declared that 'no elections will take place in Tigray' unless it is allowed to operate and compete.⁶² TPLF spokesperson Michael Asgedom warned that the party—still widely supported in Tigray—would not recognize or permit any voting while it remained excluded. This stance harks back to 2020, when Tigray defied the federal postponement and held its own election.

The interim administration under Tadesse found itself caught in the middle of this standoff. He urged the federal authorities to clarify a roadmap for Tigray's return to constitutional governance and quietly pushed for a compromise that would reintegrate TPLF in time for elections. Other Tigray parties, like Salsay Woyane and Tigray Independence Party, also set conditions—notably demanding restoration of Tigray's pre-war boundaries and the return of displaced Tigrayans—before elections could be considered legitimate.⁶³

Furthermore, on 23 February 2026, NEBE removed five contested constituencies—Humera, Adi Remets, Tselemti, Korem Ofla and Raya Alamata—from Tigray's regional oversight for the upcoming election, placing them under direct federal administration. The decision followed a 2 February directive

58 Abiy Ahmed, 'A Public Call for Nomination of IRA's President', @PMAbiyAhmedAli Facebook Page, 26 March 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/PMAbiyAhmedAli/posts/pfbidobjddX9JNgxD6cb8AgYgc4DxzjvE2arp6mznuHSqVTPtTiHHwVsoNhT4oTGPIjETaTW1>.

59 Abiy Ahmed, 'A Public Call'.

60 *Tigray TV*, 'The Tigray Dialogue and Consultation Forum Stated that It Is Conducting Discussions Aimed at Clarifying Issues that Enable Finding a Way Out for Tigray', *YouTube*, 22 November 2025, 3:58. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWIEvwcrcho>.

61 National Election Board of Ethiopia, '7th National Election Schedule'.

62 *Woyen Media*, 'TPLF Spokesperson's Statement to Local Media Announcing No Election without TPLF Reinstatement', *YouTube*, 26 November 2025, 1:11:59. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbbmtllWtAM>.

63 *Tigray TV*, 'Salsay Woyane Tigray's Chairman Statement on the Scheduled 2026 National Elections', *YouTube*, 20 December 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdZMoLqrc4I>; *TBS TV*, 'Tigray Independence Party's Chairman Statement on the Scheduled 2026 National Elections', *YouTube*, 20 December 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yWLMoAices>.

from the House of Federation ordering that elections in these areas be conducted outside the authority of both the Tigray and Amhara regions until a constitutional resolution is reached.

This ruling elicited a sharp response. Prominent Amhara parties in Addis Ababa and Wolkait welcomed the move, praising NEBE and the House of Federation for acting to protect the will of voters in those districts.⁶⁴ By contrast, Tigrayan actors, including IRA, TPLF⁶⁵ and Getachew's Simret denounced it as a provocation.⁶⁶ The IRA said the ruling was unconstitutional and a breach of the Pretoria framework, urging the federal government to focus on fostering unity rather than spreading division.⁶⁷ Simret appealed the decision at the Federal High Court and IRA-TPLF organized protests throughout Tigray.

The upshot of these developments was that by February 2026, Tigray's political future remained in limbo, with the credibility of Ethiopia's peace and democratic processes similarly hanging in the balance.

Socio-economic conditions

While politics and security dominated headlines, the humanitarian situation in Tigray was a mix of improvement and continued crisis. Throughout 2023 and 2024, basic services slowly came back; schools reopened, health facilities were repaired and commerce revived in urban areas. Markets in Mekelle and other towns buzzed again, though prices for goods were initially high due to shortages, and poverty and unemployment remained dire. Rural communities, many of which missed multiple farming seasons during the war, required food aid. Cooperation between the interim and federal authorities enabled some large-scale relief operations. For instance, in March 2024 IRA granted amnesty and released 212 ENDF prisoners of war as a goodwill gesture after an AU-led implementation review, and called on Addis Ababa to reciprocate by freeing Tigrayan fighters from federal prisons.⁶⁸ Days later, in early April, the federal government did release a handful of high-profile Tigrayan prisoners, signals of goodwill that helped humanitarian and reconstruction programmes move forward.⁶⁹

By 2025 there were glimmers of reconciliation alongside intransigence. Grassroots peace initiatives gained traction. For instance, the story of Ayele Yesigat, an Amhara elder who in March 2024 donated over 1,100 quintals of grain to hungry communities in Tigray, received national praise. His courageous act amid inter-ethnic hostility was televised and celebrated in Tigray, showing the potential for people-to-people healing.⁷⁰ Likewise, religious reconciliation remained mixed. While Tigray's Orthodox Church maintained its breakaway stance from the Ethiopian Holy Synod, in January 2024 the Tigray Islamic Council rejoined the national Islamic body after receiving an apology, becoming the first Tigrayan religious organ to reconnect after the war.⁷¹ This decision faced backlash from some Muslims in Tigray who felt it was premature or a betrayal of solidarity with Christian counterparts who remained estranged.

64 TBS TV, 'Tigray Independence Party's Chairman Statement on the Scheduled 2026 National Elections', *YouTube*, 20 December 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yWLmoAices>.

65 Tigray People's Liberation Front, 'Statement Regarding the HoF Decision on Tigrayan Territories', TPLF Official Facebook Page, 23 February 2026. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/tplf.official/posts/pfbido2hhrzPP5Gr1yZJv7sNa31du2n1tfiTAXdui8UQtSxCRaz6rXZND2GirsZS9CZTF8vl>.

66 TPLF, 'Statement Regarding the HoF Decision on Tigrayan Territories', TPLF Official Facebook Page, 23 February 2026. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/tplf.official/posts/pfbido2hhrzPP5Gr1yZJv7sNa31du2n1tfiTAXdui8UQtSxCRaz6rXZND2GirsZS9CZTF8vl>.

67 Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau, 'Official Statement from the Cabinet of the Interim Administration of Tigray Regarding NEBE's Decision', Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau Facebook Page, 24 February 2026. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/TigrayCAO/posts/pfbidoJCNjY7Dax7Hri2B4bFbfu646tqKD82AStH9863ZRKv6d2WCUjW5miiKrJELeZbVl>.

68 Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau, 'IRA Released Captured 212 ENDF Soldiers', Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau Facebook Page, 22 March 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/TigrayCAO/posts/pfbido33zkgR78Y9Wbxk1jhAmGJC2yaLZEH7BYeCuuNpb7NgS6SnjKtXJLWtzUFL851y5WKl>.

69 FDRE Ministry of Justice, 'Amnesty to Tigrayan Political Prisoners', FDRE Ministry of Justice Facebook Page, 30 March 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/MOJEthiopia/posts/pfbido34MCEhU4CSxgdTFPtGEKd4sxxcvtpfVodKZi8GD1tjKc2mMBzECctbveoesxwEXml>.

70 *Tigrai TV*, 'Amhara Elder Ato Abate Yasegal Donated 650 Quintal Cereal to Tigray People', *YouTube*, 12 March 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wowsyHVO_T4.

71 VOA *Tigrigna*, 'Tigray Regional Islamic Affairs Council Decides to Resume Severed Relations with the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council', *YouTube*, 26 January 2024, 2:14. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANf2wfrWYUuM>.

On 21 November 2024 the Ethiopian Rehabilitation Commission launched the first round of a disarmament, demobilization and re-integration (DDR) programme in Tigray. It began in Mekelle, Edaga Hamus and Adwa, with an initial intake of 320 ex-combatants and a target of 75,000 within four months—as part of a plan to process more than 270,000 former fighters.⁷² While early batches completed six-day rehabilitation cycles, progress soon slowed. By December 2024, only about 6,650 ex-combatants had been processed—far below targets—amid disputes over financial deductions, shortened rehabilitation periods, questions over the authenticity of registrants, protests by eligible youth and escalating factional tensions within TPLF.⁷³

Political resistance intensified in mid-to-late December 2024, with the Debretsion-led faction criticizing the DDR as premature and unsafe, and by January 2025 senior TSF figures and TPLF supporters openly rejected disarmament, arguing that Tigray's security, territorial and IDP issues remained unresolved. The programme was in effect suspended by late December 2024.⁷⁴ Following a political settlement over the reformation of the IRA, the DDR programme resumed on 10 April 2025 in Mekelle and Edaga Hamus, with a streamlined five-day cycle, increased intake from 320 to 400 and continued focus on injured fighters, women, mothers and previously discharged ex-combatants.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, from June 2025, the programme stalled again as tensions between TPLF-TSF and the federal government-ENDF deepened, with leaders warning that serious resistance would emerge once DDR reached active TSF forces, reflecting unresolved security guarantees, deep trust deficits and the emergence of TPF.

The crisis soon escalated. On 3 July, Abiy warned parliament of a potential return to war,⁷⁶ while on 12 July in Adwa, Brigadier General Haileselassie Girmay issued forceful counter-statements signalling Tigray's readiness to fight, its strongest posture since the CoHA.⁷⁷ The standoff peaked on 21 July when Field Marshal Birhanu Jula, the top ENDF commander, demanded the surrender of heavy weapons and issued the first explicit federal threat since Pretoria, effectively abandoning DDR and leaving the peace process under acute strain.⁷⁸

Certain populations, notably IDPs, saw little relief. Despite several appeals for return and rehabilitation, many still live in harsh conditions.⁷⁹ Most ominously, by late 2025 an acute hunger emergency hit Tigray's northwest. In December 2025, reports emerged of starvation deaths among Tigrayan IDPs at Hitsats camp.⁸⁰ Hitsats, originally for Eritrean refugees, had become a makeshift home to thousands of Tigrayan civilians ethnically cleansed from Western Tigray by Amhara forces. Humanitarian assistance to Hitsats was woefully inadequate. By the end of 2025, children and elderly were dying of hunger and disease in the camp. The plight of Hitsats' inhabitants underscored the unfinished nature of the Pretoria Agreement. Their suffering is a grim continuity of the war's impact into the post-war period. The tragedy fuelled anger among Tigrayans and heaped pressure on authorities to resolve the underlying territorial dispute.

72 National Rehabilitation Commission, 'Launching of the 1st Round DDR Program in Tigray Region', National Rehabilitation Commission Facebook Page, 21 November 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02qjiW163efa4VYBtu5HizUJH_9KG6yvpELGcCnp2LVednWtVaS6yyeLLjwM7okhx9sl&id=100093696420401.

73 *Dimtsi Weyane TV*, 'DDR Progress: Over 6,000 Ex-Combatants Reintegrated', *YouTube*, 19 December 2024, 24:43. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydG8sasVC5o>.

74 *Woyen Media*, 'TDF/TSF Top Commanders Decisions'.

75 Welehmret Gezae, 'Resumption of the DDR in Tigray', Facebook, 10 April 2025 Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/welehmret.gezae/posts/pfbid02qk8EFwLy1X71EuQSWWp5swZaPUB894J3rrkdhhKq7Natnkp7vGLVFvuWSqZqNAbml>.

76 *Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation*, 'PM Abiy Speech to Parliament', *YouTube*, 3 July 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IizuU-V84wI>.

77 *Woyen Media*, 'Brig. Gen. Haileselassie Girmay, Commander of the Central Front', *YouTube*, 12 July 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY31KohhHzE>.

78 *Addis Minch*, 'Field Marshal Speech on Heavy Weapons Surrender', *YouTube*, 22 July 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyY6AcC1kBo>.

79 *Dimtsi Weyane TV*, 'A Large Demonstration to Demand IDPs Return to Western Tigray in Mekelle', *YouTube*, 20 June 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_No-Ya5r6o.

80 *Dimtsi Weyane TV*, 'Hunger in Hitsats', *YouTube*, 23 December 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtQgBYLufPE>.

Notable emerging developments

Among the multitude of post-COHA events, two deserve emphasis for their strategic importance: The TPF's formation and the developing *Tsimdo* alliance between TPLF and Eritrea.

Tigray Peace Force

TPF is composed of Tigrayan fighters and former officials dissatisfied with TPLF rule and the outcomes of the CoHA. They brand themselves as reformists opposing TPLF hegemony.⁸¹ Led militarily by ex-TDF officers such as Wedi Antiru and linked with Getachew's Simret party, TPF established a foothold in Afar region and has mounted incursions into Tigray. Its agenda seems two-fold: Pressure TPLF to cede power, or at least accept an inclusive settlement; and provide Addis Ababa leverage in Tigray's internal contest.

By February 2026, TPF units were active in south-eastern and southern Tigray, skirmishing with TSF. The federal government has been silent, neither condemning nor condoning TPF, which suggests a tacit calculation to let Tigray's internal fissures weaken TPLF's position. Yet the risk of intra-regional war is high, and civilian stability in areas like Raya has deteriorated as a result. TPF's very emergence thus underscores the depth of the political schism in post-conflict Tigray.

Tsimdo, the TPLF–Eritrea alliance

Starting in 2024, a remarkable rapprochement unfolded between two enemies: The TPLF leadership and the regime of President Isaias Afewerki in Eritrea. Through secret talks hosted abroad—notably a first engagement in Dubai reported in March 2024—and subsequent high-level contacts, the sides crafted an informal alliance dubbed *Tsimdo*, which means alliance in Tigrinya.⁸² By May 2025, Eritrean officials and TPLF representatives met openly, and pro-TPLF and pro-Eritrean media began coordinating narratives. *Tsimdo* is essentially an 'enemy-of-my-enemy' pact: Both TPLF and Isaias's government share a desire to counterbalance Abiy's administration. The alliance aims to jointly deter any new offensive from Addis Ababa and to secure mutual support—politically, economically and potentially militarily.

For Eritrea, warming to TPLF is an astonishing pivot given the bitterness of the 2020–2022 war and the decades of hostilities that preceded it. It reflects Isaias's opportunistic strategy to 'neutralize TPLF' not by force alone but by peeling it away from Abiy and forging a united front against perceived common adversaries. Grassroots reaction to *Tsimdo* has been dramatic: People-to-people contacts exploded once borders reopened in mid-2025.⁸³ Emotional reconciliation events were held at border towns like Zalambessa and Badme, with families reunifying after years of estrangement, and joint peace celebrations held with Eritrean and Tigrayan flags raised together.⁸⁴ These displays of fraternity have been popular in Tigray, suggesting war fatigue and a longing for normalized relations with Eritrea. Not everyone though applauds *Tsimdo*. Some Tigrayan opposition voices, including Getachew, denounced it as a 'threat to the CoHA' that could provoke renewed conflict with Addis.⁸⁵ Veteran politician Gebru Asrat called it a vague, dangerous venture by TPLF, while others raised concern that Eritrea might exploit Tigray's desperation for its own ends.⁸⁶

From the federal perspective, *Tsimdo* is alarming. In October 2025, Abiy warned against unconstitutional

81 *Axumawian Media Network*, 'Tigray Peace Forces Position Statements'.

82 *Hidmona TV*, 'ጽዕጽ/Tsimdo Episode 1 (Alliance Episode 1)', *YouTube*, 19 April 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOAK2-dMBtQ>; 'ጽዕጽ/Tsimdo Episode 3 (Alliance Episode 3)', *YouTube*, 3 May 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOSuEIt3H3g>; 'ጽዕጽ/Tsimdo Episode 4 (Alliance Episode 4)', *YouTube*, 19 May 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDLmsNoKd4Y>.

83 *Hidmona TV*, 'Reunification of Ethiopians (Tigrayans) and Eritreans in Mereb River, Kesad Eiqa', *YouTube*, 15 June 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW9mfw9hL34>.

84 *BBC News Tigrinya*, 'Meeting of the Tigrayan Ethiopians and Eritreans in Zalambessa', *YouTube*, 22 June 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilKT_NN2oEY. *Gemri Media*, 'People-to-People Tsimdo in Badme', *YouTube*, 3 August 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djcoTNEznxY>.

85 *BBC News Tigrinya*, 'Meeting of the Tigrayan Ethiopians and Eritreans in Zalambessa', *YouTube*, 22 June 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilKT_NN2oEY.

86 *NBC Ethiopia*, 'Interview with Gebru Asrat', *YouTube*, 30 October 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEGoivolEps>.

relations between TPLF and Eritrea's government, and threatened looming dangers if they persist.⁸⁷ ENDF Chief of Staff Birhanu also accused TPLF of using Eritrean ties to hide heavy weapons and prepare for war. Indeed, by late 2025 Eritrea and the Ethiopian federal military were reportedly supporting dissident groups against each other.

Tsimdo has altered dynamics. It 'turns people-to-people warmth...into lasting peace' between Tigrayans and Eritreans, which could stabilize the Horn if kept to peaceful cooperation. But it could be perceived by Addis Ababa as a hostile bloc, undermining trust and increasing the likelihood of a conflagration should Ethiopia's centre-periphery relations continue to sour.

To recap, the period November 2022–February 2026 in Tigray has seen dramatic shifts from war to tenuous peace, and from external conflict to internal contestation. It has evolved to being characterized by early stabilization to internal fragmentation to external tension and crisis. There is currently a deepening impasse over Tigray's future within Ethiopia, and heightened tensions following the early 2026 clashes, ENDF mobilization toward Tigray, renewed financial and fuel restrictions and the controversial election ruling.

Post-Pretoria dynamics and CoHA implementation

The post-CoHA period has seen continuity and changes driven by the agreement's provisions and evolving dynamics. The following analysis integrates observed realities on the ground with an assessment of the agreement's implementation, highlighting successes, gaps and contested issues.

Unresolved grievances and territorial disputes

Despite the end of hostilities, the root causes of the Tigray conflict have not been resolved, leaving a stalemate on key issues. Chief among these is the territorial dispute over fertile Western and Southern Tigray, with Amhara forces still in Wolkait and Tigrayan authorities insisting on their return via a constitutional process. This unresolved question continues to be a flashpoint, perpetuating the displacement crisis and stoking ethno-nationalist sentiments on both sides.

Likewise, historical grievances persist. Tigrayans' sense of marginalization within Ethiopia was only heightened by the war. The ceasefire did not erase memories of mass killings, sexual violence and starvation. Many Tigrayans continue to harbour anger and trauma, with demands for acknowledgment and justice largely unmet.

Mistrust between TPLF and federal government

Another continuity is mistrust between Tigray and the federal government and among Tigray's factions. Years of war propaganda and demonization have been slow to fade. Although hate speech in media has decreased since the CoHA, mistrust remains entrenched. The Pretoria Agreement envisioned restoring trust through inclusivity and justice, but the reality has been mixed. For instance, the failure to swiftly reintegrate TPLF as a legal political actor signalled to Tigrayans that the federal government still prioritizes dismantling TPLF's influence over genuine reconciliation. Conversely, federal officials doubt TPLF's full commitment to Ethiopia's unity, citing its reluctance to disarm completely and its new relations with Eritrea as evidence of bad faith.

This mutual suspicion has often manifested in hostile narratives, with each side accusing the other of violating the CoHA's spirit, and has hampered cooperation on implementing sensitive provisions regarding DDR and accountability for war crimes. Furthermore, on 3 November 2025 in Bishoftu, Field Marshal Birhanu accused TPLF and Tigrayan generals of conspiring with Eritrea, rebuilding a parallel army in violation of the Pretoria Agreement, and obstructing Western Tigray IDP returns. He branded

87 *Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation*, 'PM Abiy Ahmed Speech to Ethiopian Parliament', *YouTube*, 28 October 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iorTR62GGel>.

Tigrayan commanders as ‘gujile bandas’ (loosely meaning ‘gang of traitors’).⁸⁸ In response, Tigrayan military leaders framed their posture as defensive, and warned that the speech had shattered post-CoHA military trust and sharply escalated the risk of renewed conflict.⁸⁹ These cumulative tensions resulted in the brief early 2026 clash between TSF and ENDF in Tselemti, followed by increasing military mobilization, tension and mistrust.

Humanitarian suffering and economic devastation

Humanitarian suffering and economic devastation also show a through-line from wartime to peacetime. While famine was averted after the ceasefire, chronic food insecurity persists in many parts of Tigray. As highlighted by the Hitsats case, vulnerable groups continue to die from preventable causes. The war’s destruction of infrastructure left Tigray’s economy prostrate; even by early of 2026, the region’s markets and farms have not fully recovered. Unemployment, especially among demobilized youth, remains extremely high. This socio-economic desperation fuels problems like an illegal mining boom, smuggling and banditry, which in turn spark local conflicts such as the March 2024 gold mine clashes.⁹⁰ It also provides fertile ground for political violence: Unemployed ex-fighters are easily convinced to migrate, join insurgencies or protest. Most significantly, the January–February 2026 clash between TDF and ENDF—particularly the drone attacks and the suspension of airline services—sent shockwaves across Tigray, resulting in a mass youth exodus to Addis Ababa, rising prices of essential commodities and a severe cash shortage. Thus, the fundamental human security crisis in Tigray—marked by hunger, unemployment, fear, migration and shattered infrastructure—is a direct continuation of wartime destruction and the stalled CoHA implementation, and it is set to further destabilize Tigray and beyond.

Central actors unchanged

Many of the original conflict actors are still active, albeit in different guises. The Eritrean regime continues to exert influence, whether by holding contested border areas or engaging with Tigrayan leaders under *Tsimdo* for its own strategic aims. Amhara nationalists (such as the *Tekeze Zeb* militia and others) remain uncompromising on territorial claims, meaning the seeds of inter-regional conflict are still present. Within Tigray, the political culture of one-party dominance and militarization did not vanish with the CoHA. TPLF, with weakened legitimacy, maintained disproportionate control over the interim administration and security forces in a continuation of its pre-war rule, though now contested by new challengers. In short, the conflict’s structural DNA endures: Ethnic territorial disputes, centre-periphery competition, contested legitimacy and disputes over elections are as relevant in 2026 as they were in 2020.

Post-CoHA implementation successes and other changes

Cessation of active hostilities

The foremost achievement of the Pretoria Agreement is that it ended large-scale fighting. This has spared countless lives and is a fundamental success of the deal. Additionally, one of the most anxiously awaited steps was partially accomplished. As mandated, Eritrean troops that intervened in support of Ethiopia began leaving Tigray soon after the CoHA.⁹¹ By the end of January 2023, Eritrean units had pulled out from major cities and highways, retreating across the border except for a few contested locations. Likewise, Amhara forces vacated most of north-western, eastern and southern areas of Tigray, though not Western Tigray, which remains under Amhara administration. These withdrawals marked a tangible de-escalation and fulfilled a core obligation of Pretoria, an outcome praised by

88 *Fana Television*, ‘Field Marshal Berhanu Jula Speech During 3rd Year Commemoration of Attack Against Northern Command, (Amharic)’, *YouTube*, November 3, 2025 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tfs3jLamTZg>.

89 *Woyen Media*, ‘Brig. Gen. Abraha Tesfay (Dinkul), Commander of Eastern Front, Speech During Military Graduation of 353 Core in Aksum’, *YouTube*, 2 November 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGroUTseZDs>.

90 *Red Sea Observer*, ‘Reports from the Field: Illegal Goldmining in Tigray’.

91 Alena Walta Hager, ‘A Video Footage Showing the Withdrawal of Eritrean Forces from Tigray Region’.

the AU monitoring mission for helping consolidate peace. Nevertheless, sporadic clashes—including those between TSF and TPF and between TSF and ENDF—along with steadily increasing military mobilizations appear to threaten the foundations of the Pretoria Agreement.

Humanitarian access and basic services

The CoHA opened the doors for a massive humanitarian response. The Ethiopian government committed in the agreement to facilitate ‘unhindered humanitarian access’, and indeed, after November 2022, aid convoys began rolling into Tigray from all directions.⁹² The federal authorities restored access routes and cooperated with the UN and NGOs to reach communities that had been cut off. As a result, famine was averted in early 2023, and life-saving supplies reached previously besieged areas like central and eastern Tigray. During the post-CoHA period, millions of people have been provided with food, clean water and medical care. This is not to say humanitarian needs are fully met, but compared to the wartime blockade, the improvement is dramatic. Also, essential services were gradually restored with federal cooperation.⁹³ This enabled schools to reopen and farmers to plant again.⁹⁴ These steps helped normalize daily life and are concrete successes attributable to the Pretoria Agreement.

Partial disarmament and demobilization

The agreement required Tigray’s forces to disarm in phases. While complete disarmament has not yet occurred, there has been progress. Heavy weaponry (tanks, artillery, rocket systems) was handed over to federal forces in January 2023, a major milestone that neutralized Tigray’s conventional military capability. Subsequent talks produced the Nairobi commanders’ declaration of November 2022 that set terms for light arms disarmament contingent on security guarantees. In practice, full surrender of small arms has been slow, but demobilization efforts did proceed.

By late 2024, a DDR programme for 75,000 ex-combatants was launched, targeting those who had already laid down arms. According to Tigrayan officials, 89 per cent of the eligible former fighters had been demobilized by that stage, mostly older or non-active fighters who had left the ranks after the ceasefire. Reintegration camps and training programmes have been set up for these ex-combatants. Although the more sensitive phase—disbanding the active units—remains outstanding, the start of DDR is itself a success given the challenges. Tigrayan compliance has been acknowledged by the federal side and helped build some confidence that Tigray’s leadership is abiding by the agreement. Yet recently there have been signs of reversal due the military preparations on both sides.

Political measures and confidence building

The Pretoria Agreement had political provisions, some of which have seen progress. One was the delisting of TPLF as a terrorist organization. This legislative act in March 2023 was crucial for allowing TPLF leaders to travel, negotiate and participate in the IRA without legal hindrance. Another measure was the commitment to establish an inclusive interim government in Tigray, which was achieved by April 2023. While not everyone considers it inclusive enough, it did incorporate a broader spectrum of actors than in pre-war Tigray. Furthermore, both sides have engaged in reconciliation steps: The federal government pardoned thousands of Tigrayan detainees and the Tigray authorities freed captured federal soldiers. Such actions, including the resumption of federal budget support to Tigray’s administration and the reopening of Mekelle Airport in 2023, have gone a long way to normalizing conditions. Each represents a successful fulfilment or consequence of the Pretoria accord’s terms.

92 FDRE Service, ‘Statement on the Resumption of Humanitarian Aid and Services’, @FdreService on X, 18 October 2022. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://x.com/FdreService/status/1582338142425653248>.

93 FDRE Service, ‘The Government of Ethiopia Is Coordinating with Humanitarian Agencies to Provide Assistance to Tigray People’, @FdreService on X, 24 October 2022. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://x.com/FdreService/status/1584445886276333568>.

94 *Tigray TV*, ‘IRA Education Bureau Announced the Start of Education in Tigray Region’, *YouTube*, 2 May 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miOJBhYV5CA>.

Establishment of interim administration

The interim administration has brought a degree of pluralism to Tigray's governance by incorporating figures from outside the pre-war ruling circle. While TPLF remained dominant, the inclusion of military figures like Tadesse and Tsadkan, and even some opposition representatives, signalled a shift from outright one-party rule. Moreover, the lifting of TPLF's terrorist designation and engagement with it as a legitimate stakeholder was a change at the national level. Abiy's government had vowed never to negotiate with terrorists.⁹⁵ This pragmatic turn reduced the hate rhetoric nationally. Media demonization of Tigrayans subsided significantly after the peace deal, as emphasis moved to common ties and destiny. The thaw in the relationship between the federal centre and Tigray's leadership contrasts with the previous hostility, even though relations have been souring once more since December 2025.

Shifting alliances

Another notable change is Tigray's external alignments and perception of threats. During the war, Eritrea was Tigray's most implacable enemy; post-CoHA, the rapprochement under Tsimdo has transformed that relationship. Since late 2025, TPLF and TSF leaders state that the once-hostile Eritrean regime is no longer an enemy and speak of a shared front against federal domination.⁹⁶ This realignment is a radical departure from decades of enmity and has introduced new dynamics. For instance, an open border with Eritrea since mid-2025 meant local trade and movement resumed. Conversely, relations between Tigray and Amhara, especially within Amhara ruling party circles, have arguably worsened since Pretoria. Amhara leaders felt sidelined by the agreement and betrayed by Addis Ababa's willingness to negotiate with TPLF. In 2023, the Fano uprising was partly fuelled by grievances that the federal government had not been firm enough with TPLF. Yet, not unlike Eritrea, Fano has also made a tactical alliance with TPLF, primarily to allow it to focus on one enemy at a time.

CoHA implementation limitations and contested issues

Disarmament and security guarantees

While Tigray's leadership did hand in heavy weapons, they have been reluctant to demobilize their fighters without firmer guarantees of Tigray's security, particularly given Eritrea's proximity and Western Tigray's occupation. The Pretoria deal's tight timeline for complete disarmament proved unrealistic given these realities. This led to delays that the federal side viewed as demonstrating bad faith. For instance, six months after COHA, TPLF had retained armed units, which Field Marshal Birhanu criticized, even accusing TPLF of concealing weapons. TPLF counters that Eritrean withdrawal and protection of Tigrayan civilians were preconditions to surrendering arms, as spelled out in the Nairobi declaration.

This lack of trust has made disarmament protracted and contested. The result is an ambiguous security situation. Both ENDF and TSF share security responsibility per CoHA, but coordination is minimal and suspicion runs high. A joint disarmament committee exists on paper, but its workings are opaque. The verification of disarmament has been contentious, with Amhara regional leaders and Eritrea complaining there was no independent verification mechanism. The ongoing dispute over what level of armaments, if any, Tigray can retain impacts Pretoria's goal of Ethiopia possessing 'one national defence force'. Until resolved, it therefore undermines full implementation.

Non-ENDF forces and contested territories

The CoHA's failure to explicitly name Amhara forces and Eritrea as parties has complicated implementation. Eritrea was not a signatory and so Isaias's regime feels no obligation to comply. Eritrean troops withdrawing from most of Tigray but digging in at the border illustrates this gap. Likewise, the federal leadership—reliant on Amhara political support—has been unwilling or unable to

95 Abiy Ahmed, 'Law Enforcement Operation to Be Continued', @AbiyAhmedAli on X, 10 November 2020. Accessed 9 March 2026, <https://x.com/AbiyAhmedAli/status/132606959994056705>.

96 *Woyen Media*, 'Brig. Gen. Haileselassie Girmay, Commander of the Central Front'.

evict Amhara forces from Western Tigray. Tigrayans view this as a betrayal of the CoHA, which stated that all external forces leave the region. The federal response is that Western Tigray's status must be resolved peacefully, and meanwhile it has integrated some Amhara units into the ENDF to claim there are no 'outside forces' in Tigray.

The contested territories have thus become a frozen conflict, a source of anger and a rallying cry for both Tigray and Amhara. The IDPs' plight—with more than 60,000 Tigrayans in limbo, as highlighted by the crisis in Hitsats—is a manifestation of this unresolved issue. International observers have noted that excluding Eritrea and Amhara from the peace deal was a flaw, as their buy-in is essential for a lasting solution. This remains one of the most intractable disputes, which threatens to unravel progress in other areas if not addressed.

Political inclusion and electoral legitimacy

The dispute over TPLF's legal status is arguably the most politically charged implementation gap. From TPLF's perspective, the CoHA conferred legitimacy on it as the governing party of Tigray—after all, the agreement's text refers to TPLF, which was also the signatory. The party therefore argues that reinstating its legal status was an inherent part of returning to constitutional order. The federal view, articulated through NEBE, is that legal procedures must be followed. This view says that Pretoria did not explicitly void domestic law, and a banned party must apply and meet conditions to be re-registered. The resulting impasse saw NEBE impose conditions—such as oversight of TPLF's internal elections—that the party saw as a violation of CoHA's principle of non-interference. When NEBE cancelled TPLF's registration, it triggered a political crisis for Tigray. A key question is whether the region can hold elections if its main party is barred. TPLF's November 2025 declaration that it would boycott any election under those circumstances raises the spectre of Tigray refusing to participate in the 2026 polls.

The impasse stems from disagreement over whether Pretoria's political arrangements or Ethiopia's electoral laws take precedence. The CoHA intended an inclusive interim process leading to elections, but there is a real risk that Tigray will again be left out of national politics altogether. This unresolved matter is undermining the credibility of the peace process, since a core promise of ensuring Tigray's political reintegration into the federation remains unfulfilled.

Justice and accountability

Another shortfall is in transitional justice. The CoHA clause on addressing atrocities gave hope to victims that justice would be served. Yet three years on, not a single high-profile accountability measure has been completed for crimes at Axum, Mahbere Dego, Mai Kadra, Chenna or other documented massacres. The federal government did produce a policy framework for transitional justice, but it is viewed as a general roadmap without concrete actions.⁹⁷ The international commission investigating atrocities related to the Tigray war was effectively terminated in late 2023, thereby ending an independent international investigative mechanism.⁹⁸ The Inter-Ministerial Task Force that Ethiopia set up has yet to result in trials or reconciliatory processes that involve victims in Tigray.⁹⁹

This lack of progress is a serious shortfall. It not only betrays victims' expectations but also fails the CoHA's intention to heal wounds. It feeds into Tigrayan scepticism about the peace with many seeing the promises of justice as having been empty. In practical terms, this issue has not derailed other aspects of implementation, but it poisons the atmosphere. Provisions for justice were meant to build trust; their non-fulfilment leaves bitterness and could fuel extremist narratives.

97 FDRE Ministry of Justice, 'Transitional Justice Policy', Addis Ababa, March 2024. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://lawethiopiacomment.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/ethiopias-transitional-justice-policy-.pdf>.

98 Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 'Ethiopia: Premature End of UN Human Rights Commission Obstructs Justice and Elevates Risk of Further Atrocities', 4 October 2023. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/ethiopia-premature-end-of-un-human-rights-commission-obstructs-justice-and-elevates-risk-of-further-atrocities/>.

99 'Government Establishes Inter-Ministerial Task Force to Oversee Human Rights Violations in Northern Ethiopia', *Ethiopian News Agency*, 29 November 2021. Accessed 19 March 2026, https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en_31020.

Actor analysis: Stakeholders' roles and interests post-CoHA

The post-2022 Tigray scenario involves a constellation of stakeholders, each with distinct roles, interests and degrees of influence in the evolving peace and conflict dynamics. The post-CoHA actor landscape is multi-layered. The federal government and TPLF remain the heavyweights, locked in a complex dance of cooperation and competition. The interim administration is the formal authority but is torn between these poles. New challengers like TPF have emerged, and external players Amhara and Eritrea have their own stakes that can destabilize or reinforce the peace. International actors act as referees and resource providers, while the local civil society and opposition try to widen the space for a sustainable, inclusive peace.

Each actor's role can shift. For example, if TPLF and Eritrea's alliance deepens, Eritrea might become a guarantor of Tigray's security rather than a threat; if federal-Amhara tensions continue, the federal government might align more with TPLF again to counter Amhara hardliners. Such shifting alliances were hinted at in 2025 and developed in 2026. Therefore, actor interests must be monitored continually. But broadly, stakeholder alignment or misalignment on Pretoria's implementation will decide whether the peace holds. For instance, if the federal government, TPLF and Amhara could all agree on a formula for Western Tigray/Wolkait, that would remove a major sticking point. If not, that issue could take them into conflict again.

Understanding these actors' shifting motivations is key to anticipating their next moves and so the conflict's trajectory. Below is an analysis of the primary stakeholders in Tigray after the Pretoria Agreement, focusing on their roles and interests.

Federal government

The federal government is a principal actor and aims to reassert and maintain its authority over Tigray after a two-year insurrection. Its core interest lies in centralization of power, which translates into dismantling TPLF's military and political dominance and preventing any resurgence of armed separatism in Tigray. It seeks a compliant Tigray integrated into the federation, with the TPLF either co-opted or sidelined.

Post-CoHA, the federal government's role has been to oversee implementation of the peace deal, coordinating humanitarian aid, restoring services and supervising the disarmament and interim governance processes. Abiy's government has sought to bring Tigray back into the fold on its terms. This means enforcing the concept of one national defence force and ensuring the region is run by an administration amenable to Addis Ababa. At the same time, the federal centre has had to manage delicate relations with other regions, especially Amhara, that view the Tigray peace sceptically. In practice, Addis Ababa has alternated between conciliatory and hardline tactics. On one hand, funding Tigray's recovery and removing TPLF's terrorist label. On the other, backing NEBE's strictures on TPLF and even applying fuel and finance blockades when it felt the IRA was defying federal authority.

Abiy also seeks to bolster the credibility of the peace process internationally, as his government's reformist image and aid relationships depend in part on successfully managing it. That said, the federal government is wary of appearing weak; it will not countenance Tigray retaining heavy weaponry or conducting unilateral political manoeuvres, like separate elections, that challenge state authority. Addis Ababa post-CoHA thus plays the role of both a peace implementer and enforcer, keen to stabilize Tigray but on terms that reinforce federal primacy.

TPLF and associated elites

TPLF remains a central, albeit embattled, actor. Its overarching goal is to safeguard Tigray's interests and its own political survival in the aftermath of Pretoria. Publicly, TPLF has accepted the CoHA terms, including Ethiopian sovereignty and the idea of reintegration. It is nevertheless also determined to maintain as much autonomy and influence for Tigray as possible. The party advocates for ethnic federalism, the system it helped design, and seeks a future where it can at least dominate Tigray's regional politics, if not regain some national role.

Post-CoHA, TPLF's role has been paradoxical. It officially dissolved its wartime government to make way for the interim administration, yet it has worked behind the scenes to dominate the political process. TPLF cadres and loyalists populate many interim institutions and the security forces, ensuring the party retains de facto leverage. TPLF's interests can be summarized as pursuing:

1. **Political rehabilitation:** Regaining legal status and legitimacy, avoiding being sidelined or dissolved in the new order.
2. **Tigray's integrity:** Ensuring contested lands are returned to Tigray via constitutional means.
3. **Security:** Including keeping an armed capability until threats are removed, and protecting Tigrayan civilians from any repeat of the suffering during the war.

TPLF was initially divided post-CoHA between a faction around chairman Debretsion that was more sceptical of Abiy and a faction allied with figures like Getachew who were more open to compromise with Addis Ababa. But all factions share the fundamental interest of avoiding marginalization. This explains TPLF's bold stance that no election can happen in Tigray without it; the party is asserting itself as the indispensable representative of the Tigrayan people.

In its relations with others, particularly Eritrea and Fano, TPLF has shown pragmatism, making a strategic move to break isolation and strengthen its hand against Abiy. Ultimately though, while it faces the challenge of adapting to a reduced status, TPLF's role is that of the primary Tigrayan nationalist actor championing Tigray's rights. Its interest lies in implementing Pretoria in a way that restores Tigray's pre-war status quo ante as much as possible, while resisting aspects of Pretoria that threaten its power.

Tigray Interim Regional Administration

The IRA's role has been to govern Tigray during the transition, restore stability and prepare for elections. Yet it has been trapped between TPLF and federal government's interests. The IRA includes TPLF members, military figures and a few independents, so it is not monolithic. Its primary institutional interest is to deliver basic services, pay salaries, rebuild infrastructure and keep aid flowing, showing the population the dividends of peace. It also aims to prevent a relapse into conflict and extend its authority throughout Tigray, hence its friction with TPLF over controlling local administrations and the TSF.

The IRA must balance two masters, as it is legally accountable to Addis Ababa and simultaneously needs buy-in from Tigray's populace, which requires cooperation with TPLF and other local elites. Under Getachew, the IRA often acted as a mediator, trying to fulfil CoHA obligations but also nudging the federal side on issues like restoring Tigray's constitutional status and returning IDPs. Under Tadesse, the IRA has taken a more technocratic and security-focused approach.

This means the IRA is hampered by a lack of autonomy and legitimacy. Many Tigrayans see it as either an extension of TPLF or a puppet of Addis Ababa. In reality, it oscillates: At times it aligns with TPLF, such as jointly petitioning for lifting terrorist designation; at others it tries to stand apart, for example disciplining TPLF-affiliated officials in 2024.

In summary, the IRA's interest is in navigating Tigray out of isolation and conflict towards normalcy, which means it supports the peace deal's implementation. Yet it also fights for its own relevance between the stronger forces of TPLF and the federal government. In essence, the IRA wants to midwife a stable Tigray in possession of its constitutional territories that can eventually hold inclusive elections.

Tigray Security Forces

TSF (formerly TDF) are a key stakeholder in their own right. TSF's interests are rooted in protecting the security and dignity of Tigray and ensuring its leaders and fighters are not left vulnerable. Post-CoHA, TSF is supposed to maintain law and order in Tigray, but in reality it has often acted in the political

sphere, for instance intervening to support one faction over another. Many TSF commanders are long-time TPLF comrades and trust Debretsion's circle more than the federal government. Thus, a strong interest of TSF is preserving its autonomy and avoiding integration into ENDF or dissolution, at least until it is confident that Tigray's security is assured and its personnel are protected.

TSF members fear scenarios such as Ethiopia in 1991, when defeated forces were purged or marginalized. This self-preservation interest partly explains why TSF leaders have resisted coming under IRA control. At the same time, TSF has an interest in preventing chaos in Tigray—they do not want internal fighting or collapse of order. They have generally supported the ceasefire, as it saved depleted ranks from further fighting. Their role in disarming of heavy weapons and withdrawing from front lines was pivotal. In 2024 and 2025, splits emerged within TSF with some younger officers chafing under older commanders aligned with TPLF. But as a whole, it remains a heavyweight actor whose buy-in is needed for any peaceful progress.

TSF walks a thin line. It cooperates with peace implementation insofar as it does not compromise Tigray's core security, but pushes back when it perceives moves such as rapid DDR that might weaken Tigray's defence. TSF can act as a spoiler if it sees Tigray's rights compromised, or as a stabilizer if concerns are addressed. Essentially, TSF's interest is to ensure Tigray is not left at the mercy of historical enemies, and to maintain influence on Tigray's future by being the guarantor of security.

Tigray Peace Force and affiliated dissidents

TPF's stated cause is to reform Tigray's politics by ousting the 'old guard' TPLF, which it blames for war and misrule. It brands itself as a movement for peace and democracy, claiming TPLF's authoritarianism is an obstacle to both. In reality, TPF also serves as a vehicle for Tigrayan elites who lost out in the post-war power shuffle. TPF's interests are somewhat aligned with the federal government, at least in the short term, as both wish to weaken TPLF's monopoly. Indeed, the federal side's tolerance, or perhaps covert support, of TPF bases in Afar implies an overlapping interest in pressuring TPLF.

TPF hopes to either force TPLF to share power or replace it. Yet TPF also positions itself as protector of Tigrayans from a TPLF that it accuses of corruption and heavy-handedness. This stance is meant to win local hearts and minds, especially in areas like Southern Tigray where resentment of TPLF was brewing.

For the peace process, TPF is a wild card. Its existence underscores internal Tigrayan pluralism, but its means—taking up arms—risk sparking intra-Tigray violence. TPF also likely seeks recognition and a seat at any future negotiating table about Tigray's political dispensation. It could be bargaining to secure inclusion of *Simret* or other new actors in the interim government or in elections.

As long as TPLF remains banned and unwilling to share power with opponents, TPF is incentivized to continue its armed stance. Yet it faces challenges, including the risk of being seen as traitors collaborating with Tigray's historical enemies. Recently, internal splits—such as the arrest and desertion of spokesman Shewit Bitew—suggest the TPF is struggling with cohesion and divisions among sub-regional factions.

TPF is an emergent spoiler with an interest in changing Tigray's internal power dynamics, even if that means aligning with federal forces. Its presence complicates the post-COHA stability but also signals the depth of local discontent with TPLF rule.

Amhara actors

Amhara region and associated actors are critical external stakeholders. Amhara's leadership both in government and the opposition have a vested interest in the status of Western and Southern Tigray, which they refer to as Wolkait and Raya respectively. For many Amhara nationalists, reclaiming these lands, which they consider historically Amhara, was a prime motivator in supporting the war against TPLF.

Post-CoHA, Amhara region's stance has been one of scepticism and resentment. It was excluded from the Pretoria talks, and thus views the agreement as flawed or even detrimental to its interests. Amhara

forces did withdraw from much of Tigray, but crucially they held onto Wolkait, signalling Amhara's intent not to concede it. This is driven by both strategic reasons, such as the value of the fertile land and the importance of a security buffer, and emotional ones, including avenging perceived TPLF annexation of these territories in 1991 and protecting Amhara people.

Additionally, Amhara elites are interested in diminishing the TPLF's power to both prevent a future threat and reshape the federal system. They see TPLF as the architect of ethnic federalism that reduced Amhara influence and as a perpetrator of past repression of Amharas, so many from the region want TPLF politically sidelined. They therefore welcomed NEBE's cancellation of TPLF registration.¹⁰⁰ Since 2022, however, Amhara's relationship with the federal government has been strained. Some Amharas feel Abiy betrayed them by not pressing their claims robustly in the peace deal. This contributed to armed unrest in Amhara region since mid-2023. Thus, one interest of Amhara actors is to be included in any future negotiations that directly affect them. The Amhara government also wants to protect Amhara civilians who were living in Tigray or displaced by the conflict. They have raised concerns about returning Amhara settlers or officials in those contested zones facing reprisals if Tigray regains control.

Amhara stakeholders thus complicate the territorial aspect of the Pretoria Agreement and broader political questions about Ethiopia's federation. While those interests remain, Amhara armed elements will be a latent threat to peace in Tigray.

Eritrean government

Eritrea's longstanding interest in Tigray is shaped by decades of bitter conflict and rivalry, for decades with TPLF and now with Abiy also. Isaias's objectives have been to neutralize TPLF as a threat, assert Eritrean regional influence, de-ethnicize Ethiopia's federal system and physically reclaim disputed border territories like Badme awarded to Eritrea in 2002.¹⁰¹

During the Tigray war, Eritrea allied with Abiy to try and crush TPLF, seeing an opportunity to eliminate an old foe. Eritrea was notably absent from the Pretoria Agreement, which allowed Isaias greater freedom of action. Eritrea was reluctant to fully withdraw, holding border areas as a security buffer and leverage.

As Abiy's rapprochement with TPLF progressed in 2023, Isaias grew wary, hence his move to engage TPLF in the Tsimdo alliance. This reveals Eritrea's flexible, opportunistic strategy. Isaias's short-term interest is aligning with Tigray to counterbalance Abiy, because he distrusts the Ethiopian central government's intentions, fearing a strong Ethiopia might again become hostile. By bonding with TPLF, Eritrea secures a non-hostile neighbour and splits the united front that briefly existed against it. Eritrea also benefits economically through reopened trade routes.

Still, Eritrea's long-term interest remains minimizing the chances of a well-armed hostile Tigray on its border. In essence, Eritrea plays both arsonist and firefighter: It can spoil the peace if it perceives its interests threatened, or it can support the peace if it leads to a weakened TPLF that relies on Eritrea. By late 2025, Eritrea had largely achieved a key interest: TPLF is out of power federally and militarily weakened. Now Isaias seems keen to prevent an Abiy-TPLF reconciliation that could box Eritrea out. Thus, Eritrea's interest is to keep Ethiopia divided and Tigray somewhat dependent on Eritrea, thereby ensuring no united Ethiopian threat emerges to his regime.

Eritrea will likely push for any final political settlement to include Tigray's acceptance of the Eritrea border, confirming Badme and other disputed areas as Eritrean. Isaias might even seek an alliance where an autonomous Tigray and Eritrea collaborate against pan-Ethiopian centralism. Its influence among Tigrayans has grown via Tsimdo; many in Tigray now see Eritrea less as an enemy and more as a partner. This is a significant shift, orchestrated by Isaias to flip the script on decades of hostility.

¹⁰⁰ Belete Molla Getahun, 'Post on Decision of the NEBE and HoF'; Amhara Identity Restoration Committee, 'Support for the Decision of the NEBE and HoF'.

¹⁰¹ Haki Fitewu, 'Interview with the Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki', *YouTube*, 15 January 2018. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS3Qge-k4xo>.

Eritrea's role thus remains pivotal. It can either be a peace guarantor, or a spoiler if it encourages Tigray to defy Addis militarily.

Tigrayan civil society, diaspora and opposition parties

Other political parties (for example, Tigray Independence Party, *Salsay Woyane*, *Baytona*) and civil society actors (youth groups, elders, religious institutions) have historically had limited power under TPLF, but the war and aftermath gave them a slightly louder voice. Their interests vary.

Tigray Independence Party and *Salsay Woyane* are ethno-nationalist parties that advocate for either outright independence or at least a radical rethinking of Tigray's place in Ethiopia. They opposed the CoHA initially on grounds that disarmament endangered Tigray and that it did not guarantee Western Tigray's return. Their interest is to ensure Tigray's right to self-determination is preserved, though some would push for a referendum on independence if they had their way. *Baytona* has argued for a looser confederal Ethiopia, which aligns with neither Abiy's unitary leanings nor TPLF's approach.

These opposition groups want inclusion in interim governance and a fair chance in elections, which is why they have been so vocal against TPLF hegemony. They tried to organize public rallies in September 2023 to demand transparency and youth participation. Their capacity is, however, limited; many leaders are young and lack resources. Still, their interest is opening political space in Tigray and they represent war-weary segments that desire democratic change.

The Tigrayan diaspora, which was very active during the war in advocacy and fundraising, remains influential in shaping narrative and funding local initiatives. Yet it is divided: Some hardliners criticize any compromise with Addis, leaning towards independence rhetoric; others support TPLF's negotiated path. Diaspora interest is often in justice for atrocities with campaigns for international accountability, and humanitarian support for families back home. They also want a say in Tigray's future.

Tigrayan civil society focus most on reconstruction and healing, including gender and inclusivity concerns. For instance, they advocate for addressing the needs of rape survivors and for minority groups like the Irob and Kunama to have representation. While these actors lack hard power, they contribute to the discourse and can mobilize protests. Their role is thus to hold primary actors accountable to the public's needs. Their interest in a stable peace with genuine self-rule often aligns with the broader population's interest in a normal life. They are essentially pushing for the peace dividends to reach people and for Tigray's political future to not be monopolized by one group again.

Conflict drivers: Post-CoHA sources of instability

Tigray's instability is rooted in a confluence of structural factors and more immediate triggers that led to the war in 2020. Even after the Pretoria Agreement, several of those drivers continue to threaten stability. This section delineates the post-CoHA sources of instability that are undermining the peace process.

Unresolved territorial issues

The fate of Western Tigray/Wolkait and Southern Tigray/Raya remains the most potent destabilizers. As noted, tens of thousands of Tigrayan IDPs from these areas are in limbo, and Amhara forces still occupy Western Tigray. Neither side is willing to compromise. Tigray insists on restoration of constitutional borders, while Amhara says they are historically Amhara lands. It is a classic irredentist conflict buried within the peace. The continued displacement and human suffering add urgency and moral weight to Tigray's claim, potentially pushing Tigray's leaders to consider renewed military action if political avenues fail. On the other hand, Amhara nationalists have said giving up Wolkait is a red line. Thus, this unresolved dispute fuels mistrust and military preparations on both sides. It keeps communities on edge and occasionally flares up into skirmishes or abusive treatment of minorities.

Legitimacy crisis in Tigray

The banning of TPLF as a political party and the stalemate over Tigray's representation in Ethiopia's federation is a current source of instability and sets up a dangerous scenario for 2026: If the federal government tries to impose elections in Tigray without TPLF, there could be armed resistance reminiscent of 2020—an election dispute triggered the last war; a repeat could trigger conflict again. TPLF has essentially threatened to delegitimize any election that it is not part of. This creates an impasse that jeopardizes the peace: Even before elections, the legitimacy gap—created by an interim administration ruling without broad popular mandate and with TPLF in the shadows—fosters instability. It has led to groups like Simret and TPF forming, claiming to represent disenfranchised voices. That introduces an internal security challenge, while the intra-Tigrayan rifts add volatility, as does the prospect of parts of the security forces siding with one faction over another.¹⁰² Simply put, the absence of a political settlement in Tigray—either through consensual interim power-sharing or credible elections—is a serious source of instability.

Economic hardship and humanitarian strains

Tigray's economy remains shattered. Massive youth unemployment, the collapse of livelihoods, continued food insecurity and financial and fuel restrictions could fuel unrest. Desperate populations, TSF members or IDPs might protest or even riot. Disgruntled demobilized fighters, without jobs or support, can turn to crime or insurgency. The gold mining conflicts earlier in 2024 illustrate how resource competition and corruption in a ruined economy can spark violence. If aid does not flow adequately, hunger will persist in pockets, which is not only a tragedy but a destabilizer. The Hitsats crisis, for instance, is a humanitarian disaster and a propaganda flashpoint, as it can be used by hardliners to argue the peace is not delivering. The lack of reconstruction—many rural areas still have destroyed health clinics, schools and no adequate electricity—might erode public patience and lead to disillusionment or even support for those advocating a return to armed struggle if peace yields only misery. In essence, if people do not see a peace dividend, the war narrative can return.

Additionally, as Tigray's economy is so dependent on federal support that gives the centre leverage, as seen when Addis Ababa cut off fuel to pressure the TPLF and IRA.¹⁰³ Such moves themselves are destabilizing and they caused protests in Tigray's army ranks over unpaid salaries in October and December 2025, which led to briefly taking over IRA President's office.¹⁰⁴ All these economic and humanitarian pressures can either be a powder keg or, if alleviated, a peace ballast. Currently, many remain pressing, thus leaning toward fostering instability.

Armed spoilers and security dilemmas

The continued existence of multiple armed groups is itself a source of instability. The TSF is in the process of reorganizing and currently operates with limited oversight. The TPF insurgency has already led to firefights with TSF. If unresolved, that conflict could escalate and invite more federal intervention. If TPF openly aligns with Addis, for example, Mekelle might see it as a proxy invasion and respond forcefully, as seen in the November 2025 and February 2026 clashes on the Tigray–Afar border.¹⁰⁵ In mid-2025, fears on both sides of a renewed war show that a security dilemma persists. Each side suspects the other might restart hostilities given the unresolved issues. This leads to continuous military preparedness. For instance, Tigray reportedly maintained clandestine capacities and ENDF has not fully drawn down its presence surrounding Tigray.

102 *Rara Media*, 'Breaking: Heavy Firing in Mekoni/Youth Anger/Protest Demanding "Army Leave Us"', *YouTube*, 18 August 2025, 8:38. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5HyT6wqFE4>.

103 TPLF, 'Statement on Federal Economic Measures Affecting Tigray Region and COHA Implementation', TPLF Official Facebook Page, 17 December 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/tplf.official/posts/pfbid032M7gzEyQ7TERYmVniWEDRxsUmWVcj1nfvyRovdhroWnuww6rre16Laww27cujDwSl>.

104 *Landa Report*, 'Report on Army 31 Encirclement of the IRA Office', *YouTube*, 4 December 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLp8Tkw77oQ>.

105 Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau, 'IRA's Statement on Tigray–Afar Border Incident', Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau Facebook Page, 7 November 2025. Accessed 19 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/TigrayCAO/posts/pfbid02WtqMkhpeyFUhaTqSf8JRs9wfwqdfedHPMaNVoZ64YlWirNDh1omq8YyBu9HmXVBl>.

The lack of a comprehensive DDR and security guarantee arrangement means mistrust runs high and any spark could be misinterpreted and escalate. In addition, Amhara paramilitary forces, although demobilized after a federal 2023 crackdown, could remobilize if Wolkait is threatened, leading to conflict with TSF. The heavily armed environment with multiple factions and no neutral peacekeeping force is inherently unstable.

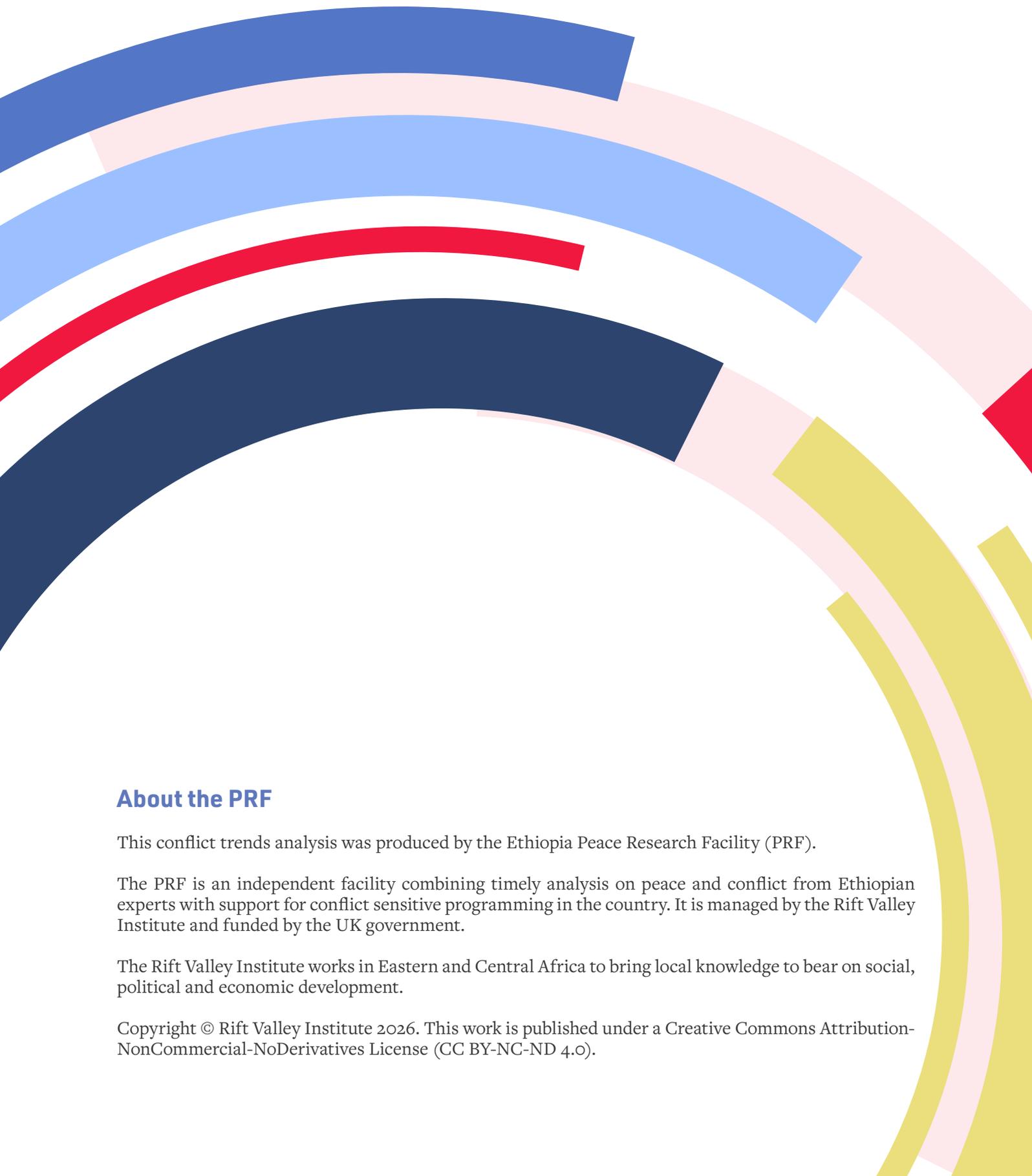
Peace process gaps

Another factor is the perceived faltering of the peace process in delivering justice and inclusion. The failure to stand up a transitional justice mechanism or hold perpetrators accountable is sowing cynicism. Victims in Tigray feel justice is sacrificed for expediency, which can fester into anger or support for more extreme positions. On the flip side, many in Amhara feel the CoHA betrayed them, fuelling resentment that already exploded once with the 2023 Amhara revolt and subsequent Fano insurgency. If a significant constituency views the peace as illegitimate, they may act to undermine it.

The lack of effective international monitoring means violations or re-arming can occur under the radar until they manifest in crisis. Also, external meddling remains a risk. Should Eritrea or others support certain factions, that could inject new instability.

Implementation deadlock

The post-CoHA instability drivers are tightly linked to the conflict's root causes: Unresolved identity and territorial issues, incomplete political integration and mutual mistrust. They have been compounded by the war's aftermath, involving a traumatized, destitute population and fragmented authority. There is a deadlock in implementation on issues like territory, DDR, IDPs and representation, which, if left unaddressed, mean that large-scale conflict is probably more paused than resolved.



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