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Eritrea suffers 'heavy losses': Ethiopia militia

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Members of the Ethiopian Federal Police (EFP) patrol a street as they resume operations after federal forces pushed back the rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Mekelle on October 9, 2026. (File photo: AFP)

AFP

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Eritrean troops have suffered “heavy losses” and are retreating toward their border, a spokesperson for an Ethiopian pro-government militia told AFP on Tuesday.

Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of backing the rebel Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which launched a major offensive against government forces on September 23 before being pushed back and losing control of its strongholds.

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Eritrean forces were deployed in Ethiopian territory to support the rebels, raising fears of renewed regional war, but were also forced into an apparent retreat.

“The Eritrean army crossed into Ethiopia and violated its sovereignty, but it has suffered heavy losses and retreated towards the border,” Solomon Hailemariam, spokesperson for the Tigray Peace Force, a pro-government militia, told AFP.

AFP was unable to independently verify this information.

Eritrean Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel told AFP the pro-government militia was “not trustworthy.”

The rebel TPLF once controlled the whole of Ethiopia but lost power with the rise of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who hails from the Oromia region, in 2018.

It remained in control of the northern state of Tigray and fought a brutal civil war against Abiy’s federal government from 2020 to 2022 that was never fully resolved.

With the government counter-offensive over the past fortnight, the TPLF lost control of the Tigrayan capital, Mekelle, and other towns and cities.

“The TPLF is no longer in a position to stand and fight, we have either seized or destroyed its weapons,” the pro-government militia spokesperson said.



He said pro-government forces were now gathered in areas bordering Eritrea.

The International Crisis Group, an NGO, warned on Monday that Ethiopia and Eritrea were “perilously close to all-out war” as clashes drew nearer the border.

It urged the international community to “press both sides to avoid escalation.”

Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993 and they fought a border war from 1998 to 2000.

They briefly mended relations when Abiy came to power, but have again fallen out, and severed relations entirely this month over the Tigrayan conflict.

Eritrea accuses landlocked Ethiopia of planning to use the conflict as a justification to invade its territory and seize control of Assab port on the Red Sea.

A foreign security source told AFP last week that between 5,000-8,000 Eritrean soldiers had entered Tigray.

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