

**WHO STARTED IT?**

# The Tigray War of Genocide



**Security  
& Justice  
For Tigrayans**

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North  
Wollo

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## Acronyms

AU=African Union | EPRDF=Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front | ESAT=Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio | GERD=Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam | INSA=Information Network Security Agency | METEC=Metals and Engineering Corporation | NC-ENDF=Northern Command-Ethiopian National Defense Forces | OLF=Oromo Liberation Front | SJT=Security & Justice for Tigrayans | TDF=Tigray Defense Forces | TPLF=Tigray People’s Liberation Front | TRG=Tigray Regional Government.

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# Executive Summary

**E**ight months have elapsed since the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea poured their entire national armies into Tigray, supported by a large but unknown number of Amhara militia and other forces, UAE's weaponized drones, and a contingent of Somalia's soldiers with an estimated strength of 4,000 personnel.

To date, the war has unleashed horrific, heartbreaking, and extensive damages to civilians and property unseen anywhere in the world. Yet, the international community—seemingly unaware of the immensity of human suffering—remains reluctant to take decisive action to demand an end to the misery. This reluctance likely stems from the effectiveness of the Abiy government to spread lies, misinformation, and intentionally deceive the world about the true causes of the war and its ultimate aims. Mr. Abiy Ahmed, the Ethiopian prime minister, alleged that Tigray forces attacked his powerful army at the Northern Command (NC-ENDF) on 3 November 2020, and argued that this alleged attack caused him to order the massive offensive a few hours later. Unfortunately, some governments, international organizations,

and even news media accepted the narrative at face value. This short paper presents findings of fact about the government's narrative in an effort to bring the truth out to the front and assist the reader in making a more informed conclusion about the true causes, origins, and intent of the war.

The report draws from a variety of reliable sources including the Ethiopian government and independent analyses to reach at the compelling conclusion that the war did not erupt overnight on 4 November 2020, as many were led to believe. Rather, the evidence uncovers that it was not a single or sudden triggering event, but the culmination of many years of deliberate, opportunistic planning by Mr. Abiy, his ally President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, and various other proxy collaborators. The war is not a "law enforcement operation" as Mr. Abiy led many to believe. The evidence points to a well-orchestrated and well-rehearsed plan, rooted in what appears to be a deep-seated aversion and hatred towards the people of Tigray, to consolidate power by removing the Tigray regional government (TRG), destroying the TPLF, and a systematic effort to weaken and ultimately annihilate the entire population of Tigray.

Shortly after Mr. Abiy was handed the power of prime minister in April 2018, he forged alliances with President Isaias and several other collaborators to devise two schemes for the consolidation of power. The first scheme was to systematically weaken the TRG, the TPLF, and the people of Tigray by means of demonization, trickery, fear, intimidation,

execution, imprisoning key leadership, and by dismantling TPLF's political, economic, and security apparatus. The alliance tried to trick the TPLF into self-destruction by dissolving the EPRDF. When this trickery failed, the Abiy government tried to remove the TRG from power illegally (by force) using commandos on a secret mission. This included clandestine efforts to identify, infiltrate, and turn disgruntled Tigrayans into agents of influence to sow violence, disorder, and discontent throughout the Tigray region. Such efforts also included the creation and sponsorship of a violent group of youth dissidents to serve as a proxy force to stir trouble and aid in the forceful removal of the TRG.

When Scheme 1 failed to bring the desired outcome, the alliance invoked Scheme 2 which was an all-out war declared on 4 November 2020. Strong evidence supports that Mr. Abiy and Mr. Isaias secretly put in motion Scheme 2 days if not weeks or months before November 4 by mobilizing their armies to encircle Tigray from all directions. A sudden withdrawal of federal troops from Oromia on 1 November 2020 reported by government-owned news media clearly points to the military buildup days before the alleged attack of the NC-ENDF. The size and scope of the military buildup around Tigray also suggests significant planning and preparations occurred well before and leading up to November 4.

According to a reliable source, the Abiy government sent a secret commando mission to Mekelle just hours before the waiting military was ordered to invade and either assassinate or capture the TRG and TPLF leadership. Then it used the ensuing chaos

to create the smokescreen (i.e., cover up story) it needed for declaring war. The clandestine mission ultimately failed to assassinate any of the TRG leaders, but Mr. Abiy labeled Tigray's attempts at self-defense as an unprovoked attack on his military—subsequently declaring the war within hours.

This report offers strong evidence, including direct excerpts from speeches by government officials, that the war was meticulously planned years prior to 4 November 2020. One Amhara official, for example, stated that the war started the same night they had finalized preparations in collaboration with Mr. Abiy's government. Another government official said Mr. Abiy asked Sudan to seal its borders with Tigray prior to declaring the war, a revelation that leaves no doubt that Mr. Abiy planned this war before the alleged NC-ENDF attack. Similar statements and related evidence presented in this report expose the fallacy of the government's "law-enforcement-operation" narrative. The findings of fact strongly show a pre-planned, conscious, deliberate, and systematic effort to hide the high crimes and atrocities it was about to commit in an effort to consolidate power while avoiding global condemnation. The findings of fact also support that Tigray and its leaders did not launch an unprovoked attack against the NC-ENDF, as many have been led to believe. Rather, they defended themselves against a massive force that surrounded Tigray from all four directions with orders to wreak havoc, assassinate key regional leaders, and annihilate any and all opposition in Tigray.

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# Introduction

## **THE TIGRAY WAR BRIEFLY DESCRIBED**

The most morally reprehensible war in the world today is taking place in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. The war started on 4 November 2020 and is in its eighth month. Civilians in Tigray have been subjected to unimaginable atrocities unseen anywhere in our modern world. The world witnessed the little bodies of toddlers dug out of the rubble of residence buildings hit by heavy artillery, disfigured burn victims of an unknown lethal weapon thrown in villages, and unarmed young men and boys rounded up and summarily executed at close range and their bodies thrown into a cliff. The world heard and read the accounts of widespread massacres of unarmed civilians in the hundreds of thousands and the displacement of millions out of their homes and farmlands. Women and girls in the tens of thousands fell victims of rape too horrific to fully describe. Some women interviewed by international news media described that they were gang-raped by as many as 23 soldiers for weeks. Some described the perpetrators inserted hot metal rods into their bodies in order to sterilize them. The people have been subjected to starvation following the destruction of stored grains, the slaughter of livestock, and the destruction of orchards. Nearly all medical facilities including hospitals and clinics

throughout the state have been decimated. Properties ranging from household utensils to large factory machinery have been looted or completely destroyed. Many religious places and world-renowned cultural heritage sites have been desecrated and reduced to rubble. The damage this war has brought upon the six to eight million people of Tigray cannot be tallied in this single, short report but it suffices to state that its scale is so unprecedented it would take Tigray many generations to recover.

## **THE WAR PARTICIPANTS**

The three major actors in this atrocious war are the entire military of Ethiopia, 91% of the full military power of Eritrea, and Amhara militant forces that included local militias, the liyou hayil or special forces, and the Fanno which is a violent youth group. In the early months, the United Arab Emirates and Somalia also participated in the war. The UAE did not send troops directly into Tigray but provided modern weaponized drones and trained operators that caused extensive aerial damages in the first two or three months. The drones apparently were stationed in the Eritrean port of Assab where the UAE had built a military base for about a decade. Somalia sent an estimated 4,000 soldiers into the war and their presence has been confirmed by UN representatives on the ground to be functioning as part of the Eritrean army. The UN report further stated that the Somalian soldiers participated in the Axum massacre in December 2020. The total number of troops deployed in Tigray has not been determined but is estimated to be as many as 500,000.

## **PURPOSE OF THE WAR**

This war is the work of Mr. Isaias Afwerki, president of Eritrea and Mr. Abiy Ahmed, prime minister of Ethiopia. These two leaders planned this war for one purpose: consolidation of power via the destruction of the Tigray regional government (TRG) and the TPLF and subsequent conversion of Tigray to a weak collection of people without a significant role in their own affairs. Mr. Isaias has repeatedly (and very publicly) blamed the TPLF and the people of Tigray for all of Eritrea's ills including the lack of economic progress. He also exuded a severe grudge from losing the 1998-2000 Ethiopia-Eritrea war which he initiated. As a result, he is intent on punishing the people of Tigray. The intense grudge and or hatred toward the people of Tigray continues to manifest itself today through the many atrocities and destructions carried out by Eritrean soldiers under the command of Mr. Isaias.

Mr. Abiy, on the other hand, wants to concentrate and consolidated power around him to fulfill the kingdom his mother prophesied for him when he was seven years old as he once revealed on TV. To make this dream a reality, he became convinced that he needed to completely destroy the TPLF and weaken the people of Tigray first. But both of these leaders feared that destroying the TPLF was not an easy task. Therefore, they forged an alliance to gather as much military support as they could from the surrounding region. For Mr. Abiy, the easiest source was right under his feet—the Amhara elites. He knew the Amhara elites despised the TPLF and the people of Tigray and would make trusted

partners in the destruction project of the TPLF and the people of Tigray. The Amhara elite's interest and purpose in this war is to wrestle away land from Tigray. They also have been fighting to return the hegemony and privilege they enjoyed for generations but lost to the TPLF 30 years ago. They saw the people of Tigray and the TPLF as the number one impediment to absolute power. They firmly believe their return to and ability to remain in power rests on weakening or destroying the people of Tigray and the TPLF. A recent revelation by the EU envoy to Ethiopia, Mr. Pekka Haavisto, that Ethiopian leaders told him behind closed doors that they want to "...wipe out the Tigrayans for 100 years..." is consistent with the commonly held views among the Amhara elites and with the atrocities they have committed and continue to commit in this war.

The purpose of the UAE and Somalia participation in this war is not clear, but evidence suggests that it is to help their budding allies and favorable leanings in regional politics.

## **THE NARRATIVE BY THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT**

When the prime minister declared the war, he gave "law enforcement" as the reason. He adamantly claimed all his government wanted was to apprehend a few hundred of the leadership because they ordered the alleged attack of the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (NC-ENDF). He already had in captivity—as political prisoners—many TPLF leaders and members that he had easy access to such

as those who lived and worked in parts of Ethiopia outside Tigray.

Mr. Abiy and his government continued to make the same argument until the writing of this report. Official after official including Mr. Abiy, the government-owned news media, and even ordinary citizens from certain segments of Ethiopia argued that this war is taking place to capture “forces that attacked the Northern Command.”

The narrative relentlessly pushed by Mr. Abiy seems to have received wide acceptance by non-Tigrayan Ethiopians inside and outside the country. African and other world governments, international organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the UN, and even news organizations seem to have accepted the government’s narrative at face value and absent any sort of investigation or independent analysis.

This remains deeply damaging to the people of Tigray since the narrative by Mr. Abiy led many organizations to either stand with him or be reluctant to act to end the war.

The AU, for example, chose to stand with Mr. Abiy or at the very least remain silent as the announcement by the African Union Commission Chairperson, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, in November 2020 reveals. Since then, the AU has done little to nothing to help resolve the crisis.

The UN is no different. Apart from some inconsequential statements, the UN has also been reluctant to take strong measures to end—or even acknowledge—the misery of innocent people betrayed by their own government. The narrative the Ethiopian government propagated and continues to propagate likely is the root cause for the UN’s and other international organizations’ non-existent response and



reluctance to condemn the atrocities by the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In order to bring the international community to a more informed, balanced consensus on the war's origins, the facts about the war including when and who started it needs to be clearly known and established.

## **THE PURPOSE OF THIS WHITEPAPER**

The purpose of this whitepaper is to reveal truths, expose deceit, and provide bona fide information and clarification regarding the genesis of the war. For eight months until this report was written, only the carefully scripted Ethiopian government's side has been parroted through its officials and media outlets which it owns and controls. Written reports based on the facts from a variety of sources countering the Ethiopian government's narrative do not seem to exist.

The TRG is not in a position to provide such explanations because it is literally fighting for its life and that of Tigray's. This lack of information to counter the Ethiopian government's accounts has created information asymmetry which likely prevented the UN and the international community from moving fast to take meaningful action and resolve the conflict.

Security & Justice for Tigrayans (SJT), an advocacy organization of diaspora Tigrayans, has taken the initiative to gather the facts surrounding the war and present them in this whitepaper for all audiences with a desire to know the genesis of the war.

We utilized publicly available reliable sources including print and audio-visuals of speeches and interviews by the war participants themselves including President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia, officials of regional governments of Tigray and Amhara, Ethiopian government officials, and other prominent politicians and military leaders.

This effort is not intended to be exhaustive but will provide sufficient evidence to lead many to dispel the narrative propagated by the Ethiopian government. SJT hopes the effort will contribute towards greater international understanding of the war and to ultimately ending the misery of millions and bring a lasting peace to Tigray, Ethiopia, and the entire Horn of Africa region.





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# The Evidence

Review of the facts from the last three years reveals that Mr. Isaias and Mr. Abiy devised two schemes in order to destroy or dismantle the TPLF and bring Tigray to its knees. The first scheme was to weaken and eliminate the TRG and the TPLF using intrigues, trickeries, and secret operations that could involve surgical military strikes if necessary. If this failed, the second scheme they had as a backup plan was a “decisive” all-out war to crush Tigray militarily which is what we are seeing today.

## Scheme 1: Demonize, Dismantle, & Destroy

The Abiy government spent three years attempting to take down the TRG, TPLF, and Tigrayans by means of demonization; dismantlement of TPLF's political, economic, and security apparatus that it built over 27 years; and by killing or jailing its leaders.

## WEAKEN TIGRAY AND THE TPLF USING UGLY CAMPAIGNS

Mr. Abiy Ahmed started the campaign to weaken Tigray as soon as he was handed the mantle. On 23 June 2018, he escaped a grenade attack at a massive rally in which he participated to celebrate his ascension to power. Within minutes of the incident, he left the rally and gave a live speech from his office implicitly blaming the TPLF. Although he did not directly name them, the whole nation understood who he was referring to. He couldn't have known who the perpetrators were within minutes, but the aim was clear. He was exploiting the situation in a deliberate attempt to mobilize the nation against Tigrayans, portraying them as monsters that must be eradicated. Later, after what was deemed an “investigation”, the government announced the perpetrators were actually OLF members.

The deliberate demonization campaign continued throughout the three years Mr. Abiy has been in power. Soon after he took the office, members of the TPLF who served in the federal government prior to 2018 suddenly were without jobs. As a result, they opted to return to Tigray as leaders of the region. Mr. Abiy did not like that they returned and he used his government's media apparatus and social media trolls to accuse and mock the TPLF leaders of “running to and camping in Mekelle”. But this was not a simple mockery. Rather it was part of a well-designed campaign to demonize, weaken, and attack the TPLF with an ultimate goal of “erasing” the TPLF from Ethiopian politics and history.

The irony is that Mr. Abiy did not want any of the veteran TPLF leaders in his government and yet he did not want them to go serve the interests of their people either. That means they had just one choice: to remain in the capital city walking the streets of Addis Ababa jobless like zombies. That would have made Mr. Abiy happy because he would have these leaders on a short leash and, most importantly, that action would have denied Tigray the talent of its veteran leaders who brought Ethiopia up from the abyss to becoming one of the fastest growing economies.

We believe Mr. Abiy wouldn't have ran into confrontation with these leaders had they stayed in Addis Ababa within his reach. The moment they returned to Tigray, he saw them as a threat because he and his lieutenants saw Tigray advancing too fast: Under the "returnees", Tigray became more democratic while the rest of the country became a full-fledged authoritarian regime. Tigray was focused on growth and a development agenda while the economy of the rest of the country was going downhill. Tigray was quiet and peaceful while much of the rest of the country was in turmoil. The advancement in Tigray proved to Mr. Abiy that his effort to weaken the TPLF and Tigray was not working. He and his mentor, Mr. Isaias, had to devise a different scheme to weaken Tigray and dismantle TPLF. Their choice was a massive military offensive.

### **A FOILED COMMANDO MISSION OF 2018**

Rumors were swirling in 2018 that a secret commando mission was sent to Mekelle

to apprehend TRG officials. Apparently, this mission foiled without incident but nobody said anything about it then. In 2020, TRG president Mr. Debretsion revealed that the Tigray police forces disarmed the commando and returned them to Addis Ababa without harming them. The TRG did not say anything at the time so that the situation did not get inflamed. But the mission of this commando was clear—to decapitate the TRG by removing its leaders.

### **DISSOLVE EPRDF TO DISSOLVE THE TPLF**

The simplest but most intricate scheme the Abiy-Afwerki duo tried to weaken and eliminate the TPLF was to make it self-destruct by dissolving the EPRDF and forming a new party. The scheme was executed almost single-handedly by Mr. Abiy

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**Mr. Abiy pushed and rushed into announcing the dissolution of the EPRDF without obtaining a consent from all member parties and the general assembly.**

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himself who openly professed tirelessly about dissolving the EPRDF which was composed of four sister parties of which TPLF was the oldest and most experienced. Each of these parties represented different segments of Ethiopia. The TPLF represented Tigray. Mr. Abiy pushed and rushed into announcing the dissolution of the EPRDF without

obtaining consent from all member parties and the general assembly—a complete disregard for the party’s bylaws. This was done so hastily that Mr. Lemma Megersa, who was his number one ally, opposed the merger and abandoned ship. Many others less powerful than Mr. Lemma opposed the merger but they were ultimately suppressed.

Mr. Lemma and others probably did not understand the scheme but TPLF knew and opposed the merger right from the inception. For TPLF, in addition to problems with principles, there was no need to form a new party at a time Ethiopia needed reforms that would enable it to democratize and continue on its economic miracles. But Mr. Abiy’s aim was not democratization and economic growth. It was, rather, a sophisticated scheme to eliminate powerful parties and persons out of the way and concentrate all of the power into his hands. Mr. Abiy succeeded forming a new party on December 1, 2019 but failed to lead the TPLF into self-destruction, foiling one of the grandest aims of the scheme.

## **KILL, JAIL, AND INTIMIDATE KEY TPLF MEMBERS**

As part of Scheme 1, the Abiy government targeted key Tigrayans and TPLF members and accused them of various crimes in order to eliminate them from the political scene of Tigray and Ethiopia. Brigadier General Kinfe Dagneu, a Tigrayan who led Metals & Engineering Corporation (METEC), a large government-owned enterprise that became a high-profile contractor in the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam (GERD)

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## **The Abiy government targeted key Tigrayans and TPLF members.**

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was arrested in a humiliating fashion on national TV. General Kinfe has been in Mr. Abiy’s jails for nearly three years without trial. General Sa’are Mekonnen, Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian Defense Forces, and his close friend Major General Geza’ee Aberra (both Tigrayans) were assassinated at the Chief of Staff’s residence by a bodyguard assigned to protect the Chief a few weeks earlier. The Abiy government went after Getachew Assefa, a Tigrayan former security head, but was unable to find and apprehend him. But the government used its media outlets to destroy his name and portray him as a monster. Shortly after Mr. Abiy became the prime minister, Engineer Simegnaw Bekele was mysteriously found killed in his car shortly after being interviewed by the BBC. Although not a Tigrayan, the government and its supporters viewed Eng. Simegnaw as an ally of the TPLF. Lt. Col. Biniam Tewolde, a Tigrayan who at one point was Mr. Abiy’s boss at INSA, was jailed for at least two years after Mr. Abiy took the power. Many less known Tigrayans were harassed, purged from the government, jailed, or even killed after Mr. Abiy became the prime minister. Many are in Mr. Abiy’s jails essentially as political prisoners. This is part of Scheme 1 to weaken and eventually destroy the TPLF.

## **WEAKEN THE TPLF BY MOBILIZING THE YOUTH**

Applying tactics characteristic of Machiavellianism, the Abiy-Isaias duo secretly recruited disgruntled and corrupted Tigrayans from all directions and formed a youth group they named *Fenkil*. They elevated these people to the status of celebrities by giving them unlimited air time on national TV to disparage the TPLF and the people of Tigray. Formation of *Fenkil*, which was supposed to be a youth group equivalent to the *Kerro* of the Oromia region that brought Mr. Abiy Ahmed to power, was designed to stir trouble in Tigray and eventually take down the TPLF. Ten months ago, their chairman declared on ETV, a government-owned TV station, that *Fenkil* was formed "...to remove the TPLF by force." But this attempt fizzled and the scheme failed miserably.

## **ECONOMIC BLOCKADE TO CREATE RIFT BETWEEN THE TPLF AND THE PEOPLE OF TIGRAY**

As part of Scheme 1, the Abiy government closed all roads that connected Tigray with the rest of Ethiopia to weaken Tigray economically. This road closure started in the summer of 2018 and continued until the war broke out in November 2020. Any public transportation companies as well as trucking companies en route to Tigray on these roads were attacked and robbed. The purpose was clear to the people of Tigray. It was meant to put a strangle-hold on the economy of the state to frustrate people so that they revolt against their regional

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**People endured the hardship and placed the blame on the primary culprit which was the federal government.**

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government. In particular, the Abiy government and the Amhara chauvinists believed Tigray is too poor to feed itself and closing the roads would cut off the ability

of people to buy what they need from the "richer" Amhara region. Their hope was Tigray would starve and turn against its regional government. That did not happen. Instead, people endured the hardship and placed the blame on the primary culprit which was the federal government.

The Abiy government also made other economic sabotages on Tigray on several occasions during the three years it has been in power. On December 19, 2019, Customs and Immigration officials at the airport, under the direct order of the Prime Minister's office, stopped Chinese investors from traveling to Tigray. The officials dragged the investors off their Tigray-bound flight in a humiliating fashion. In protest, the Chinese investors returned to China.

The government of Mr. Abiy also discontinued the construction of a railway planned to connect Tigray with the rest of the country.

When Tigray and the other neighboring regional states were infested by a dangerous desert locust swarm from mid-August 2020 until the war broke out in November, the Abiy government deliberately denied Tigray farmers federal resources in fighting the locust. It supported the Amhara region with aerial sprays, but the crop dusters turned away when they reached the Tigray border. The request of two private aircraft owners to fly into Tigray to spray chemicals and help poor farmers were denied permits. A drone purchased by diaspora Tigrayans to help fight the locust infestation was withheld at customs and eventually confiscated by the government.

These are just a few obvious examples of a deliberate economic warfare campaign, orchestrated by the Abiy government, with the sole purpose and intent to make the people of Tigray suffer and cave to the whims of the Abiy government. Such efforts were unsuccessful.

All of the efforts that the Abiy-Isaias duo tried under Scheme 1 did not weaken or eliminate the TPLF. To the contrary, the TPLF which had lost substantial support in Tigray during the previous 27 years, regained support and became the party of choice in Tigray. The Abiy-Isaias duo were not happy because their scheme fell on its face and they abandoned it altogether. On 4 November 2020, they invoked Scheme 2: An all-out war with all the military hardware and armies they had already assembled from the region including the UAE and Somalia.

How do we know there were preparations prior to the eruption of the war on November 4? Let's look at the facts.

## Scheme 2: All-Out War

The Abiy-Isaias duo developed Scheme 1 and Scheme 2 simultaneously so that they resort to a full-scale war in case Scheme 1 failed. Of course, they did not come out and announce that they were preparing for war. But many speeches Mr. Abiy, Mr. Isaias, and their officials gave throughout the three years overwhelmingly show that, unless the TPLF falls somehow, they were going to resort to war to punish and weaken the Tigray people and destroy the TPLF. This was also a prescription they received from other political forces and entities currently committing atrocities in Tigray. One of these entities is the Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT) which spent years thrashing the people of Tigray and the TPLF. On 4 November 2016<sup>i</sup>, peculiarly exactly four years before the Tigray invasion, this media went as far as openly calling for genocide on the people of Tigray, making a very specific recommendation to “dry the sea—the people of Tigray—to catch

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**This media went as far as openly calling for genocide on the people of Tigray, making a very specific recommendation to “dry the sea — the people of Tigray — to catch the fish — the TPLF.”**

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the fish—the TPLF”, confident who the winner would be between 5 million versus 95 million. The people of Tigray and the TRG certainly sensed the danger and they said so on many occasions in the last three years.

Below, we present evidence that supports the war did not spontaneously erupt on 4 November 2020. It was planned years before the November 4 offensive.

## **EARLY MEETINGS AND UNDISCLOSED AGREEMENTS**

A hint of war troubles first started to emerge publicly in a speech given by the President of Eritrea on 20 June 2018 just a couple months after Mr. Abiy became the prime minister. In this speech, Mr. Isaias declared “game over”, a hidden reference to his “success” ending TPLF’s role and influence in Ethiopia’s politics. He also spoke about his intentions to expunge the political influence (political history, Tigrigna) of the TPLF from Tigray and the rest of Ethiopia. This instilled fear among the people of Tigray. The TRG also sensed this trouble and tried to reassure the people on many occasions that Tigray is capable of defending itself. The danger of war, however, remained in the minds of the entire Tigray population throughout the subsequent two years until the war exploded in November in front of their eyes. The fear subsided briefly when the Ethiopia-Eritrea border reopened on September 11, 2018 at the Zalambesa and Rama border crossing points. But the high hopes the people had at the moment did not last very long. By December 2018, the border was shut again and the war clouds returned to the minds of the people of Tigray.

The fear of war intensified when Mr. Isaias made comments on February 8, 2020 about his intentions to meddle in Tigray’s affairs. In this interview with the Eritrean TV (Tigrigna language), the Eritrean president said that he would not remain idle and that he would be directly involved in Ethiopia’s politics in any manner and capacity.<sup>ii</sup> Today, he is doing exactly what he promised he would do in Tigray.

One of the most explicit and chilling speeches about the war inevitability was given by Mr. Abiy on national TV on 7 May 2020. In this speech, he warned “...youth will die, mothers will cry, and villages will be set on fire” if politicians continue to oppose the postponement of the elections. In the same speech, he added, “...we are prepared more than ever to take any action”<sup>iii</sup> without specifying what this action would entail, but all who listened to the speech understood that action meant military action. To the people of Tigray, this was a clear warning

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**In his speech he warned “...youth will die, mothers will cry, and villages will be set on fire” if politicians continue to oppose the postponement of the elections.**

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that the prime minister, with enormous powers in his hands as the commander in chief of the ENDF, had war in his mind. The people already in fear from the other speeches by both leaders were terrified to listen to this speech.

In addition to the Abiy-Isaias speeches, the visits these two leaders exchanged to each other's military installations were taken as a prelude to the military aggression we see today. The last one of these visits occurred on 14 October 2020 just less than three weeks before the Tigray invasion. On 19 July 2020, Mr. Abiy Ahmed, accompanied by Mr. Isaias and high military officials from both countries, visited Sawa, Eritrea's Military Training Centre.<sup>iv</sup> This was followed by the Eritrean President's visit on 14 October 2020 to the Ethiopian Air Force Base<sup>v</sup> located in the town of Bishoftu. At the conclusion of this visit, Mr. Abiy tweeted "My visit today confirmed the Ethiopian Air Force is a national pride.... with demonstrable technological capability and readiness...."<sup>vi</sup> Today, one can safely conclude that these visits were not ordinary visits. Rather, they were part of the military preparation in which they were inspecting their military hardware for an all-out war that the leaders had been devising.

Other officials gave more direct evidence that the war was planned before 4 November 2020. On 5 September 2020, in an exclusive interview with ENA, Mr. Adem Farah, speaker of the House of Federation, disclosed the steps to be taken by the federal government to remove the TRG and Tigray's legislature and establish an interim administration

accountable to the federal government. The steps he outlined included the engagement of the Federal Police and the Defense Forces. This interview revealed that, two months before the war broke out, plans were underway to forcefully remove the TRG and replace it with a puppet government. This is the exact same plan that was implemented about three weeks after declaring the war, showing us that events around November 3 did not trigger the war.

Another official from the Amhara regional state gave an even more direct proof that the war was planned well before November 4. Mr. Abere Adamu, Amhara Police Commissioner, explained the war preparation details in his book-launching speech on January 6, 2021.<sup>vii</sup> In the speech, the commissioner admitted they started preparations for the war when Mr. Temesgen Tiruneh was the president, prior to the military offensive. "We knew this was coming," he said referring to the military aggression. He added "...the war started the same night we had finalized our preparations." He described their communications and coordination with members of the ENDF Mechanized Forces stationed near Humera. Convinced they had won the war, the commissioner willingly and happily gave direct evidence that the war was premeditated, planned, and coordinated by the Abiy government and the Amhara regional government.

The planning and coordination of the war was not limited to the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces. Evidence exists that shows foreign countries other than Eritrea also participated.

A recent 17-page UN document revealed the involvement of Somalian soldiers alongside Eritrean troops in the war. This document corroborates the claim by some Somalian officials who claimed that Somalian soldiers were involved in the Tigray war. The TRG also told the world on many occasions that Somalian soldiers were fighting the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) alongside the Eritreans and the ENDF. The UN document also supports the claim by many that the three leaders of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia formed a Horn of Africa alliance to attack and destroy the TPLF and the people of Tigray.

Another country that the Abiy government attempted to enlist in the war was Sudan. This was not known until after the war was three to four months old. On 3 November 2020, AllAfrica (Ethiopia: Al-Burhan Concludes Addis Ababa Visit - allAfrica.com) reported that Lt. General Abdel Fatah Abdelrahman al-Burhan of Sudan concluded a two-day visit to Ethiopia by the invitation of Mr. Abiy Ahmed. The website reported that the two sides discussed regional issues and

ways to develop relations between the two countries. Months after the war broke out a dispute surfaced between Mr. Abiy and the General about what was said and agreed during the visit. On 16 January 2021, General Abdelrahman al-Burhan said Mr. Abiy had agreed and told the General that Sudan could occupy land that Ethiopia occupies but Sudan claims.

This revelation embarrassed the prime minister because his agreement cedes “Amhara claimed land” to Sudan. So, in an attempt to rebuff the claim by the Sudanese General, Mr. Dina Mufti, the spokesperson for the Ethiopian Foreign Affairs Ministry, spilled a secret. In a televised news conference, Mr. Dina Mufti argued “...the prime minister did not tell Lt. General al-Burhan to occupy Ethiopia’s land. What he asked was to seal Sudan’s borders with Tigray...” so that no persons from Tigray escapes into Sudan.

Who is lying about the agreement is not clear from these claims and counter claims. But one thing is not disputed. The Ethiopian government publicly admitted that it was finalizing its war preparations days before November 3, 2020. Sealing the Tigray-Sudan border revealed by the Abiy government was the final step to encircle Tigray and attack it from all directions with troops assembled from the region. The revelation — that Mr. Abiy asked Sudan to seal the border — straight from the horse’s mouth leaves no doubt that Mr. Abiy planned this war before the alleged NC-ENDF attack on November 3. The government fabricated the “law-enforcement-operation” narrative and fed it to the world to hide the crimes and atrocities it was about to

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commit and that the world has witnessed in the last eight months.

## **CORROBORATIONS BY FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF AND DEFENSE MINISTER**

General Tsadkan Gebretensae, Former Chief of Staff of the ENDF: In an interview with DW International on 29 May 2021, General Tsadkan said that he met with Mr. Abiy three times before the killing of Hachalu Hundessa on 29 June 2020, in an attempt to resolve the political impasse between the Abiy government and the TRG. He said he saw the TRG side willing for dialogue but not on Mr. Abiy's side. On his last meeting, he said Mr. Abiy told him that "...there are no people that cannot be defeated by the power of money or guns." Mr. Abiy proceeded to tell the General to not worry about the people of Tigray. "Do not lose sleep over it." The General said, at this point, he understood where Mr. Abiy was going implying that he was planning to resolve the political impasse militarily. He added that he knows both the

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**Mr. Abiy told him that "...there are no people that cannot be defeated by the power of money or guns."**

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Eritrean and Ethiopian leaders believe that the people of Tigray can be brought to their knees with bullets and starvation.

Mr. Mesfin Hagos, veteran politician and former

Defense Minister of Eritrea: Mr. Mesfin Hagos, an authority in the region with many trustworthy informants of the Eritrean government within as well as outside Eritrea, wrote in one of his publications "In the run up to the current conflict [in Tigray], a large number of Ethiopian elite units had slowly trickled into Eritrea as part of a security pact between Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean president Isaias Afwerki" and were based in Gherghera near Asmara. Mr. Mesfin stated that, according to the plan, the Ethiopian units at Gherghera "...were expected to be the hammer and the Northern Command [in Tigray] the anvil to strike out of existence the TPLF." (Source: African Arguments; 4 December 2020).

## **ACTIVITIES WEEKS BEFORE 3 NOVEMBER 2020**

Troop movements around the country, reports from news media and eye witnesses, and other observations show that many military activities were taking place prior to the alleged November 3 NC-ENDF attack.

On 1 November 2020 just three days before the Tigray invasion, civilians in Oromia Region's Wollega Zone were massacred following the withdrawal of federal troops from the area around noon the same day. This was reported by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and Ethiopian national news media on November 2 (<http://aigaforum.com/current-issue//ehrc-wollega-zone-civilian-massacre.htm>). The mystery at the time was why did the federal troops suddenly withdraw leaving civilians exposed to harm? The civilians begged and pleaded

with the troops not to leave. Was there an emergency elsewhere in the country? Now we know the troops vacated Wollega and headed to Tigray for the planned offensive on November 4 as part of the grand scheme planned for years. This soldier movement is consistent with what Mr. Debretsion said on November 2 that the ENDF was ordered to stand ready.

On 1 November 2020, Kinfu A. Gebreyesus, as an eye witness claimed that a friend who was a military officer in the Southern Command of the ENDF told him that there was a military plan to attack the Tigray region. The officer also told the witness that commandos had been sent to Eritrea to prepare for an attack on Tigray Region, an account consistent with that of Mesfin Hagos, former Defense Minister of Eritrea. The commandos were flown to Gondar on 31 October and bussed from there to Kirakir and other towns bordering Tigray in preparation for the offensive. On 2 November, a different Southern Command officer told the witness that he had attended a meeting that day discussing plans for a military attack against the TPLF. On 3 November, the witness observed heavy military troop movements that he interpreted as being related to the plans for an attack.<sup>viii</sup>

On 2 November 2020 in a press conference, Mr. Debretsion, the president of TRG, warned Tigrayans, Ethiopians, and the world that the federal government was preparing to attack Tigray (<http://aigaforum.com/Archive/ArchiveNov2020.htm>). He said that he was informed that “the entire ENDF was ordered

to stand ready to attack Tigray” and that Eritrean forces were also ready to support the ENDF. He added “all we want is peace. We don’t want war. Yet, the [Abiy] government rejected all of our efforts to resolve the crisis by dialogue. Instead, it wants to use force to settle our political differences. We can’t accept the plan to destroy us. We will defend ourselves.” He concluded by warning the world about the impending danger and that, if fighting starts, the two leaders who are working in close collaboration will be responsible.

## EVENTS ON OR AFTER

### 4 NOVEMBER 2020

A cursory look at the characteristics of the war and events that took place on or after November 4 show us that the argument the war started because the NC-ENDF was attacked a few hours prior to the offensive defies all logic.

*Size of personnel and hardware too big to have been assembled impulsively.* The Abiy government persistently argued for eight months that, on November 4, it sent its entire army and military hardware along with troops from Eritrea and Somalia plus drones from the UAE because it was angered by the alleged attack of the NC-ENDF. Mr. Abiy Ahmed came on the Ethiopian TV screens on November 4 at 2:00 AM and announced that he ordered the military offensive. The offensive started from all directions of tiny Tigray: the ENDF and Amhara militia advanced from the West, East, and South; the Eritreans came from the North. If Mr. Abiy launched this massive offensive in response

to the alleged NC-ENDF attack on November 3, how did he transport all the personnel and hardware in less than six hours? The answer is he did not; he already had the forces ready at the border for days if not for weeks. The planning likely took months if not years.

General Tadesse Werede, a retired ENDF General, provided specific military mobilization to the Tigray borders as part of the encirclement before the invasion on November 4. In an interview broadcast on 18 June 2021 on Voice of Weyane, General Tadesse said the claim that the Tigray government started the war is a joke. The war started after Mr. Abiy, Mr. Isaias, and their allies completed their preparations. Ethiopia mobilized almost all of its military divisions from all corners to Tigray. These included Divisions 12 and 24 from West (Wellela), Divisions 13 and 25 from East (Harar),

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Division 21 from the South, Division 33 from Northwest (Amhara), the 6th mechanized division from Semera (Afar), and Division 17 from Addis Ababa. Regional special forces from Afar, Southern Region, Oromia, and others were also mobilized to complete the encirclement of Tigray before November 4.

***Eritrea started bombing Humera on November 4 showing it was ready.*** The Eritrean forces were ready weeks before Mr. Abiy declared war on Tigray. There are credible reports that Eritrean divisions were amassing at the Zalambessa border in Eritrea. Forces in OmHajer, bordering Humera were on war footing and started bombing Humera town the same day the war was declared. OmHajer, an Eritrean town, is across the river from Humera, a Tigray town. These facts point to the argument that the war was a preplanned undertaking. President Isaias after months of denial admitted that his forces were in Ethiopia because TDF fired rockets into Asmara. However, Tigray fired those rockets to defend itself after enduring 10 days of shelling and bombardment by Eritrea.

***Enrolling UAE and Somalia to participate could not have been done spontaneously on November 4.*** Persuading these countries to send troops and participate in the war takes more time than six hours—the difference between the alleged NC-ENDF attack and the declaration of the war. Then transporting troops from as far as Somalia to Tigray could not have been done in less than one day. The devastating role of the UAE drones and the 4000 soldiers from Somalia did not happen suddenly. It likely took years to plan and

coordinate. This is just another indication the war was planned for years. It did not happen overnight on November 3.

*The Northern Command is too powerful to be defeated by Tigray regional police.*

The Northern Command is the largest army division in Ethiopia and has the most sophisticated military hardware. This was admitted by Mr. Abiy himself. His argument that the 9K regional police with just light arms attacked and defeated the highly-trained, well-armed professional army of more than 50K without fighting defies logic. The truth is the commanders of the NC-ENDF worked with the TRG and decided to surrender after observing the unfair military buildup in neighboring states of Amhara and Afar to attack Tigray. This was acknowledged by President Debretsion shortly after the war began.

## **THE ALLEGED ATTACK ON THE NORTHERN COMMAND**

The government of Abiy Ahmed did not specify where and how the attack took place, deliberately leaving the details vague so that it is convenient to bend the truth. On 4 November 2020, Reuters reported that the Prime Minister launched the military offensive against the Tigray region on the same day "...in response to what he said was an attack on federal troops." (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-idUSKBN27K0D1>). Reuters did not elaborate on the nature of the attack likely because the government did not provide details.

The details remain still murky today. But we have gathered some clues from different

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## **The Abiy government sent a secret mission of commandos and other elite forces to Mekelle on Nov. 3 to assassinate or capture TRG officials.**

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commandos and other elite forces to Mekelle on November 3 to assassinate or capture TRG officials. These forces arrived in Mekelle in military transport planes and helicopters. At this point, the military buildup surrounding Tigray has been finalized. Forces from the ENDF and Amhara militia and special forces had amassed in western, southern, and eastern Tigray. Eritrean forces were ready from the north. Eritrea Hub stated the commando mission failed, because the mission was operating on a faulty intelligence. Eritrea Hub did not say whether there were shots fired, but some residents of Mekelle city said they heard gunfire the same day suggesting there was a fight. Considering the anger Mr. Abiy exhibited and the swiftness of the military offensive following the commando mission, some level of fighting must have occurred. Regardless of whether there was fighting upon the arrival of the commandos, to the TRG, this aggression by

sources. Eritrea Hub, a website managed by Martin Plaut, a veteran BBC journalist, shed some light on the circumstances around November 4. Eritrea Hub wrote that the Abiy government sent a secret mission of

the Abiy government plus the apparent military encirclement of Tigray should be considered the first shot of the war. Whatever the TRG did after this aggression and encirclement simply is self-defense. But, once the secret commando mission failed, the forces waiting for orders all around Tigray attacked within hours in the morning of Wednesday November 4.

The Abiy government did not utter a word about this mission and, yet, it accused the TRG for defending itself. But, the Abiy government had no choice. It had to hide this secret mission because it knows it would be condemned for triggering the war. Further, the mission is not consistent with the narrative it propagates to this day that it declared the war for law enforcement purposes. So, it had to lie to hide the war it unleashed after preparing for years.

The kind of aggression the world is witnessing unleashed by the Abiy government in Tigray today is not new in Ethiopia. Mr. Abiy had done it before to other regional governments with the same kind of narrative. In 2018, soon after Mr. Abiy was handed the power, he wanted to change the leadership of all regional governments that he did not trust or like. So, he went around and unconstitutionally changed most of the elected leadership but faced a stiff resistance from the Somali regional government. Without hesitating, Mr. Abiy sent his military to remove the elected Somali regional government by force. This military mission created havoc in the region causing death and displacement of civilians. Within weeks, the military captured the leadership

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## Whatever the TRG did after this aggression and encirclement simply is self-defense.

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of the Somali region including the elected president accusing the officials of breaking the law. Then, as usual, Mr. Abiy proceeded with installing an illegal puppet regional government.

Tigray was the last regional state that did not fall to Mr. Abiy's installment of puppet governments illegally. The war we see today in Tigray was waged for the same purpose as the one waged in the Somali region in 2018. In fact, he has temporarily succeeded. He has appointed his own people as his puppet in Tigray. But the TRG and the people of Tigray have not accepted this illegal practice. They are fighting to defend themselves and their rights to choose their leaders according to the constitution of the country. Regardless, the war Mr. Abiy declared on Tigray was not triggered by the alleged attack of the NC-ENDF. Rather, it was part of Mr. Abiy's illegal practice of crushing and removing regional governments and installing his henchmen and concentrating power around himself.

### **COULD THE TRG HAVE REASONS OTHER THAN DEFENDING ITSELF?**

Throughout the eight months of the offensive, nothing has been said or written accusing the TRG or TPLF of aggression or having a hidden agenda. Tigray or the TRG did not threaten anybody at any point. Tigray did not have land claims of any sort from any regional state at

any point. The people of Tigray did not want anything from anyone outside respect for their constitutional rights. So, there is no reason for Tigray or its government to be the aggressor in this conflict. Tigray was and is just defending itself against the aggression masterminded by Mr. Abiy and Mr. Isaias. Tigray did not attack the NC-ENDF. It had no reason to do so. The TRG worked very well with the NC-ENDF to even contemplate attacking it.

In his press conference on 2 November 2020, President Debretsion spoke about the NC-ENDF commending its role defending the border with Eritrea and its participation in the fight against the locust storm. He even said, "...if Eritrea invades, the Northern Command will defend the border along with the people of Tigray." This shows, two days before the war started, there was no issue with the NC-ENDF. In fact, the TRG and the NC-ENDF were working collaboratively up to this point. And yet, Mr. Debretsion spoke about Mr. Abiy's military preparation two days before the invasion. The war began when Mr. Abiy militarily encircled Tigray and sent a commando mission the next day on November 3 to assassinate or capture the leaders of the TRG.

***Take what the Abiy government says with a grain of salt.*** In the last eight months, the world has caught the Abiy government lying and trying to deceive. The most obvious and biggest lie the world knows about is the involvement of Eritrean troops in the Tigray war. For nearly five months, official after official in the Abiy government including Mr.

Abiy himself came out on TV and denied and lied about the presence of Eritrean soldiers in Tigray. One Ethiopian official told a German reporter "...I assure you 1000% that there are no Eritrean soldiers in Tigray." The Prime Minister himself lied to the UN Secretary General about the presence of Eritrean troops in Tigray. Mr. Abiy also told his parliament on a televised speech that the Ethiopian forces "...did not kill a single civilian in Tigray." Mr. Abiy said this logic-defying lie because he kept Tigray in the dark and thought nobody would know about all the atrocities his soldiers and their allies were committing. We could continue listing the endless lies from this government, but these two examples are sufficient to show that information that comes from the Abiy government should not be trusted. There is no question about that.

The question is should the world believe the Abiy government's narrative about the war's triggers? The answer is a solid no. If the Abiy government is willing to deny and lie about matters as big as the existence of 90% of Eritrea's military killing, raping, looting, and ravaging Tigray, it wouldn't hesitate to lie about events where there were no international witnesses. Fortunately, their speeches, activities, interactions with other governments, and many other facts that we have presented lead to the conclusion that the Abiy government lied again. The evidence clearly shows that Mr. Abiy Ahmed and Mr. Isaias Afwerki meticulously planned the war for at least two years prior to the offensive. That means the "law-enforcement-operation" narrative was a fabricated veil in order to avoid blame and condemnation.



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# Conclusion

## **It is hard to ignore the facts**

unless the intent is to hide the truth. This war is not about the Northern Command. It is all about the people of Tigray, its leaders, its political parties, its history and its prospects for the future. Northern Command was merely a smokescreen to deceive the world. The forces in this war were intent on annihilating the TRG, the TPLF, and the people of Tigray. The criminal tripartite alliance consisting of Mr. Abiy Ahmed, Mr. Isaias Afwerki, and the Amhara elites secretly conspired in a three-year effort to dismantle the leadership of Tigray. When these wicked initial efforts failed, they invoked their backup scheme—an all-out war. They planned, assembled, prepared, and mobilized all that was

needed to execute this scheme. By 3 November 2020 before the alleged Northern Command attack, they had amassed all the forces they needed around Tigray. They surrounded Tigray with soldiers from three countries and with militant forces from a neighboring Amhara region. On 4 November 2020, they declared the war and deceived the world with the Northern Command attack narrative as a convenient smokescreen. Their soldiers opened fire on Tigray from all directions including from the sky. They shelled, bombed, burned, and destroyed indiscriminately. They killed, raped, starved, and displaced the people. And they lied, and continue to lie, about it extensively. That is the truth, and truth demands accountability.

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