



The Tigray War in Context: A Report by the Horn of Africa Pan Africans for Liberation and Solidarity

June 24, 2021

The Ongoing War in Tigray, Ethiopia

Our stance

Horn of Africa Pan Africans for Liberation and Solidarity condemn all military violence and killings perpetrated on civilians in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, as well as the sexual violence, displacement, theft, discrimination, harassment, and intimidation of all Tigrayans who have been adversely impacted by the ongoing conflict and crises. We also reject the sweeping violence and killings targeting non-Tigrayans in Ethiopia, including Amharas, Oromos, Eritrean refugees in Tigray, as well as Eritreans in Eritrea. We are against any and all animosity, violence and hostility rooted in ethnic, religious, gender, political, regional or national identity, namely between Tigrayans, Amharas and Oromos. We unequivocally support and uplift mutual cooperation, solidarity, and peace among all parties and people in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the broader Horn of Africa region.

We have identified the following, nonexhaustive contradictions in the ongoing crisis that are of note:

- Primary:
 - Global capitalist hegemony and western imperialism maintaining its stronghold in the region [by way of its proxy actor, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front, and/or Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed via western admonition], and the fight for the right of self-determination of Horn of Africa/Global South states, including the right to shift geopolitical alliances
- Secondary:
 - The Northern Ethiopian regions and their ruling classes, [comprised of ethnic Tigrayans and Amharas] who have historically reaped the benefits of concentrated state power and the state-sanctioned exploitation and subjugation of ethnic groups in the Southern Ethiopia regions [Oromia and Ogaden, among others]
 - Poor and working-class peoples of Ethiopia [largely residing in rural areas] and elite/ruling class party leaders and regional factions [largely residing in urban cities and centers] contending for state political power

Central to the ongoing war in Tigray, Ethiopia between the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and other internal and external actors, is the competition for social, political, and economic control of Ethiopia and the broader Horn of Africa region. Our aim in providing historical context to the events leading up to the conflict is to illuminate what is grounding our assessment of the primary and secondary contradictions at play, the global hegemonic economic interests at stake, and how to remain steadfast in our commitment against exacerbating the conflict via foreign “humanitarian” intervention.

Background

The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front fought alongside the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) against Ethiopia's oppressive [Derg Regime](#) until 1991, then went on to rule Ethiopia until 2018 through the creation of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Despite the EPRDF being an alliance of the Oromo Democratic Party, the Amhara Democratic Party, the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement and the TPLF, the latter remained the dominant political force, as it was the ideological parent of the party. The OLF had initially agreed to join the EPRDF but was undermined by EPRDF's attempts to limit its power and influence, and instead was pushed out.¹ Upon entering office, the TPLF-led EPRDF disbanded the Ethiopian national army and other security apparatuses, creating a new national army, federal police force and intelligence agency, all of which were dominated by members of the TPLF.²

This political dominance gave way to the TPLF's economic dominance in Ethiopia. While in power, the TPLF-dominated EPRDF established several economic programs and diverted much of Ethiopia's state resources and foreign development aid to the benefit of the Tigray region,³ the development of the capital city of Addis Ababa, and TPLF members and affiliated corporate entities and organizations.⁴ Existing state-owned corporations and private businesses either stagnated or weakened. Criticism by rights organizations began to mount during the TPLF's reign as Ethiopia's poverty worsened despite billions of dollars in aid being poured into the country each year.⁵ According to the UN's 2015 report on Illicit Financial Outflows, the TPLF-led Ethiopian government had stolen upwards of 30 billion dollars since taking power - an amount roughly equaling Ethiopia's foreign aid and investment over the same period.⁶

The entire governing structure of the TPLF-led EPRDF was characterized by widespread corruption, expansionist land-grabbing in the name of investment, fraudulent elections, systemic discrimination in politics and business, and wanton killing of political leaders and activists.⁷ During its rule the TPLF undermined Ethiopia's Constitution through violence and intimidation to prevent regional governments from exercising their self-determination rights under Article 39 of the constitution, which gives Ethiopia's ethnic states the legal right to secede.⁸ Expansionist land grabbing and massacres in both the Amhara and Oromo regions, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Ogaden region, and ethnic cleansing of Oromos in response to their struggle for self determination left huge and irreversible stains on the TPLF-ruled EPRDF

¹ https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/51/5120964_interview-with-chairman-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-.html

² <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/2/10/were-750-christians-really-massacred-the-truth-about-ethiopias-recent-crisis>

³ McCracken, Matthew J., Abusing Self-Determination and Democracy: How the TPLF Is Looting Ethiopia, 36 Case W. Res. J. Int'l L. 183 (2004). Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol36/iss1/8>

⁴ Hassan, Seid Y., The State Capture Onset in Ethiopia: Humanitarian Aid and Corruption (June 23, 2013). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2303692> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2303692>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/03/03/ethiopias-cruel-con-game/?sh=c202d0c29d00>

⁷ Hassan, Seid Y., Corruption, State Capture and the Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Agency in Post-Communist Ethiopia (January 26, 2018). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3110993>

⁸ Matthew J. McCracken, Abusing Self-Determination and Democracy: How the TPLF Is Looting Ethiopia, 36 Case W. Res. J. Int'l L. 183 (2004). Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol36/iss1/8>

administration. Furthermore, at the behest of the United States, the TPLF became a destabilizing proxy actor in US military involvement in Eritrea and Somalia, evidenced in their expansionist war with Eritrea in 1998 (capturing nearly ¼ of the country before suffering defeat)⁹ and subsequent continued illegal occupation of the Eritrea border town Badme¹⁰ and its military invasion, killings and atrocities in Somalia.¹¹ Throughout TPLF's rule Ethiopia had received sustained political, financial, and military support from the US government.¹² Following the decades-long subjugation of Ethiopia's oppressed nationalities, as well as US-backed attempts at destabilizing Eritrea and Somalia, by 2016 frustration began to boil with the TPLF's widespread corruption, violence and killings of protesters, leading to broad-based social unrest aimed at uprooting the TPLF from power. The national protests catalyzed by Oromo youth and then spreading to Amhara and other Ethiopian regions, coupled with internal political crises, led to the ousting of the TPLF from power in 2018. Prime Minister Haile-Mariam Desalegn, who led the party at the time, resigned from his position and played a major role in having Abiy Ahmed appointed as his successor.

Power Transfer and Political Disintegration

Despite TPLF leaders opposing Abiy Ahmed's election initially, the swift power transfer appeared to quell boiling tensions in the country. Ahmed initiated the reversal of politically-motivated death sentences for a number of individuals and signed onto a peace agreement with neighboring Eritrea.¹³ Despite earning Ahmed the Nobel Peace Prize, the latter move angered TPLF leadership, for which Eritrea has been a long foe.¹⁴ The change that likely stoked the most tension was Ahmed successfully persuading the parties within the EPRDF to accept a re-shifting and consolidation of power away from the TPLF. This move ultimately led to the breakdown of the relationship between the federal government and the former ruling party.¹⁵

Historically, calls for decentralization and self-administration have been important to hegemonized groups in Ethiopia. With the removal of the Derg, multinational federalism in Ethiopia was adopted as a means to push back against the unitary nation building that created economic, political and cultural marginalization among oppressed groups. Demands have included the setting up of a varied political approach for the diverse nationalities as a solution to insurgencies against the settler state that was violently imposed during Ethiopia's inception as a dependent European colony. Since the late 1800s, Abyssinian rulers, specifically Emperor Menelik II, had annexed western Oromo, Sidama, Gurage, Wolayta, and Dizi¹⁶ with European support. During TPLF's rule, although regions attained a level of cultural autonomy, multinational federalism was hardly implemented due to the EPRDF maintaining its power by

⁹ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-may-22-mn-32740-story.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.rulac.org/browse/conflicts/military-occupation-of-ethiopia-by-eritrea#collapse1accord>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/27/warcrimes> and

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/06/world/africa/06iht-somalia.1.12610349.html>

¹² <https://www.usaid.gov/ethiopia/history-usaid-ethiopia>

¹³ <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/2/10/were-750-christians-really-massacred-the-truth-about-ethiopias-recent-crisis>

¹⁴ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2019/press-release/>

¹⁵ <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/2/10/were-750-christians-really-massacred-the-truth-about-ethiopias-recent-crisis>

¹⁶ <https://www.docdroid.net/LTiVtxU/102307-at-615390-pdf#page=2>

appointing every region's government officials, thereby controlling the non-elected leadership with the centralized state.¹⁷ Despite no existence of real regional shared rule, the disbanding of the EPRDF by Abiy in December of 2019 was seen as a first step towards a re-centralization of power, by incorporating representatives from all regions into the Prosperity Party, (PP).¹⁸ This was contested by those who perceived it to be eliminating the possibility of regional autonomy and self determination.

As tensions began to mount between the newly formed PP and TPLF, a number of mediation attempts made by religious and traditional leaders were rejected by the TPLF leadership, and Ahmed purportedly faced assassination attempts.¹⁹ Meanwhile, ethnically and religiously motivated killings and displacements were taking place in different regions. TPLF elements, along with ethno-nationalist movements such as the former military arm of the OLF and anti-government militias in Benshangul-Gumuz region, were said to be behind most of the attacks.²⁰ The federal government was also unable to exercise any of its powers within the region of Tigray, including not being able to hold former officials accused of serious crimes accountable who had retreated to the Tigray region.²¹ At the same time, the TPLF was strengthening its military force, which was estimated to be over 300,000 people strong despite only being constitutionally allowed to develop a police force, and launching a media campaign against the federal government informing citizens that the Ethiopian government had been planning to attack them.²²

In 2020, TPLF rejected the postponement of the national elections due to the COVID-19 pandemic,²³ and went ahead with its own regional election in September 2020.²⁴ These elections were declared unconstitutional and illegal by the Federal Parliament and House of Federation.²⁵ In response, in October 2020 the TPLF declared Ahmed's government illegal and unconstitutional and ordered its members to exit their parliamentary seats and ministerial positions at the federal level.²⁶

The Politics of Abiy and the Prosperity Party

Ahmed's formation of the Prosperity Party (PP), was a signal towards a neoliberal ideological direction that was in opposition to the self-determination of the oppressed nationalities. Since 2018, Abiy has built an elaborate image of himself that has helped to popularize aggressive reforms, including his swift embrace of neoliberal privatization²⁷ which was enough to get him

¹⁷ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/ethiopia-ethnic-federalism-and-its-discontents>

¹⁸ <https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7599/The-EPRDF-Officially-Ends-The-Prosperity-Party-Begins>

¹⁹ <https://apnews.com/article/78009a119bbc487babf28a5984635c1c>

²⁰ <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/2/10/were-750-christians-really-massacred-the-truth-about-ethiopias-recent-crisis>

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/31/ethiopia-postpones-august-elections-due-to-coronavirus>

²⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/11/governing-party-in-ethiopias-tigray-sweeps-regional-polls>

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/2/10/were-750-christians-really-massacred-the-truth-about-ethiopias-recent-crisis>

²⁷ <https://africasacountry.com/2019/03/ethiopias-capitalist-turn>

praise from the west.²⁸ He wrote a book called *Medemer* in which he challenged Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong's leftist ideologies with a vague mixture of Abyssinian mythology & Protestantism. The text illustrated his bias for the development of a centralized Ethiopian state without the resolution of its historical contradictions, including the social, political and economic inequality amongst Ethiopia's nationalities.²⁹ Ahmed's embrace of neoliberalism was evident when he spoke at the World Economic Forum in 2019; discussing the doctrine of the free-market, the importance of the private sector, and highlighting Ethiopia's commitment to advancing accession to the World Trade Organization.³⁰ Examples of his adherence to neoliberalism are visible in his privatizing of Ethiopia's telecom sector,³¹ opening Ethiopian airlines to foreign investors,³² and permitting Germany's Volkswagen to develop the automobile industry in Ethiopia.³³ Since there are no minimum wage requirements in Ethiopia, these policies have hurt workers because as labor, raw material, and tax costs rise in Asian factories, Ethiopia offers a cheaper alternative, luring big brands such as U.S. chain Gap and Sweden's H&M.³⁴

Despite coming into power in 2018 as a result of the Oromo protests, Ahmed maintained the historic marginalization of the Oromia Region by implementing a command center, military occupation and jailing of political prisoners.³⁵ Ahmed, carrying on the TPLF's legacy of undermining Oromos seeking self-determination, declared the OLF-Shane a terrorist group six months after the conflict in Tigray began while excluding the Amhara militia, FANO, from this terrorist declaration.³⁶ In effect, Ahmed's politics appear to revolve around maintaining the Ethiopian state by normalizing its violent historic mythology, by not fully addressing the historical grievances of the oppressed nationalities.

While Ahmed's pursuit of neoliberal economic policies and political repression have negatively impacted his reputation among several of Ethiopia's oppressed nationalities, his commitment to extinguishing the TPLF, warmed relations with Eritrea and Somalia and defiance towards the US's foreign policies in the region have soured Ethiopia's relations with the West.

The Current Conflict

On November 3 and 4, 2020, the TPLF launched a number of pre-planned attacks on the Ethiopian National Defense Forces' most heavily equipped military bases in the Northern

²⁸ <https://www.ft.com/content/433dfa88-36d0-11e9-bb0c-42459962a812>

²⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50690548>

³⁰ <https://africasacountry.com/2019/03/ethiopias-capitalist-turn>

³¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-privatisation-idUSKCN1J12JJ>

³² <https://newbusinessethiopia.com/hospitality/ethiopian-airlines-ventures-with-u-s-companies/>

³³ <https://www.automotiveworld.com/news-releases/volkswagen-develops-automotive-industry-in-ethiopia/>

³⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-labour-abuse-idUSKCN1RS1U9>

³⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/2/20/ethiopia-mass-protests-rooted-in-countrys-history>

³⁶ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-06/ethiopia-declares-tigray-oromia-groups-terrorist-or-ganizations>

Command³⁷ including Adigrat³⁸, Dansha³⁹, Agula⁴⁰, Sero⁴¹ and Mekelle.⁴² During the attacks they took much of the Command's military equipment,⁴³ detained its forces, and killed hundreds of soldiers.⁴⁴ Sekuture Getachew, a senior TPLF official, publicly admitted that their forces executed this attack preemptively.⁴⁵ On November 4, 2020, Ahmed officially declared war on the TPLF and a six month state of emergency in the state of Tigray, calling the response a "law enforcement operation" in response to treason and in defense of the State of Ethiopia.⁴⁶ Ahmed rejected calls for dialogue by the African Union (AU) and stated there will be no negotiations until "junta fugitives" are brought to justice.⁴⁷

On November 9, 2020, hundreds of mostly Amhara civilians in the town of Mai Kadra were attacked and killed, with witnesses reporting that the attacks were committed by forces loyal to the TPLF and members of the Tigray Special Police Force.⁴⁸ Revenge attacks by Amhara militia on ethnic Tigrayans ensued later that same day.⁴⁹ From November 9-11, 2020, the Ethiopian National Defense Force and Amhara militia initiated gun fire with local Tigrayan militia resulting in the battle of Humera and the indiscriminate shelling and killing of approximately 83 civilians.⁵⁰ On November 14, 2020, TPLF forces admitting to striking targets in the towns of Bahir Dar and Gondar in the Amhara region of Ethiopia,⁵¹ drawing in thousands of Amhara militia to join the fighting alongside federal forces⁵² and reigniting existing tensions between ethnic Tigrayans and Amharas over long-held land disputes. From November 17-19, Ethiopian National Defense Forces captured the cities of Shire, Raya, Adwa, Axum and Alamata.^{53,54} Between November 14-29, 2020, the TPLF launched missile strikes on Asmara and other towns in Eritrea, internationalizing the conflict and drawing western criticism,⁵⁵ with former US

³⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55215431>

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201127-the-midnight-confrontation-that-helped-unleash-ethiopia-s-conflict>

⁴⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55215431>

⁴¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-attack-idUSKBN28R1IE>

⁴² <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/ethiopia-says-northern-command-is-counterattacking-tigray-rebels>

⁴³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-attack-idUSKBN28R1IE>

⁴⁴ <https://www.africanews.com/2020/11/27/the-midnight-attack-on-an-army-camp-that-plunged-ethiopia-into-war/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55215431>

⁴⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/4/ethiopia-declares-state-of-emergency-in-opposition-tigray-region>

⁴⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54900769>

⁴⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions/>

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201123-inside-a-tigray-town-scarred-by-ethiopian-conflict>

⁵¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/14/ethiopia-says-tigray-region-forces-fired-into-neighbouring-amhara>

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ <https://borkena.com/2020/11/18/latest-update-on-the-war-in-ethiopia-chief-of-staff-of-the-defense-force-s-peaks/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54984056>

⁵⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-usa/u-s-condemns-tigray-forces-attacks-on-eritrea-idUSKBN27V0KT?il=0>

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemning the Tigray forces' attacks on Eritrea.⁵⁶ TPLF President, Debretsion Gebremichael, went on record to say that Eritrea had sent troops over the border in support of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's forces prior to the missiles being launched, but failed to provide evidence.⁵⁷

In March, Abiy Ahmed disclosed that Eritrean Defense Forces had entered Tigray⁵⁸ in November to secure the border, taking over trenches abandoned by Ethiopian soldiers who had been fighting the TPLF's surprise attacks on the Northern Command.⁵⁹ The Eritrean Defense Forces' entrance into the conflict in November can be understood as a continuation of the war between Eritrea and the TPLF that began in 1998. The TPLF continued to occupy sovereign Eritrean territory while sponsoring Eritrean opposition militias,⁶⁰ attacking defence forces and fomenting destabilization in the border areas.⁶¹ The Eritrean Defense Force had maintained a defensive posture towards the TPLF, up until the November attack.⁶²

After the start of the conflict, reports began to come out of Tigray about a "communications black out" limiting internet and phone access in the Tigray region, with conflicting accounts as to whether communication lines were initially destroyed by the Ethiopian Federal Government or TPLF forces.⁶³ Citizens in Mekelle were also ordered to dissociate themselves from TPLF fighters who had been shielding themselves within the public in order to be spared from any artillery attacks. As a result, the conflict has caused thousands of Ethiopians to flee the region as internally displaced persons or refugees in Sudan.⁶⁴ Prior to the ENDF attacks on Mekelle, Ahmed gave TPLF 72 hours to surrender, after which there would be no mercy for the forces, but they refused.⁶⁵ By the end of November, the Ethiopian Federal Government had reported that the war had ended, that TPLF forces had been defeated in a matter of three weeks after ENDF retained control of capital city Mekelle, and that, purportedly, no civilians had been killed during the conflict.⁶⁶

From the formal declaration of the end of the conflict until now, there have been scores of media reports and personal testimonies coming out of the Tigray region that the Eritrean Defense Forces, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, and the Amhara FANO militia have perpetrated massacres, atrocities, mass rape, rampant looting, and ethnic cleansing of the Tigrayan people.

⁵⁶<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict/rockets-fired-at-eritrean-capital-from-ethiopia-diplomats-say-idUSKBN27U074>

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56497168>

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2020/may/down-with-issayas!-down-with-abiy!>

⁶¹ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/a-frightening-flare-up-on-the-ethiopia-eritrea-border-and-another-resounding-silence-from-washington/>

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ <https://www.facebook.com/EthiopianCTZN/videos/cctv-footage-shows-tplf-men-disconnecting-ethio-telecom-network-causing-communic/220370899493942/> and <https://netblocks.org/reports/internet-disrupted-in-ethiopia-as-conflict-breaks-out-in-tigray-region-eBOQYV8Z>

⁶⁴ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092992>

⁶⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict/ethiopia-pm-gives-tigray-forces-72-hours-to-surrender-regional-capital-idUSKBN28206X>

⁶⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-leader/ethiopias-pm-savours-victory-tigrayan-leader-says-war-not-finished-idUSKBN28A0PV>

Other narratives include reports of invading forces participating in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention of journalists, and systematic forced famine resulting from Eritrean and Ethiopian troops intentionally impeding access to humanitarian and food aid.⁶⁷

Lesser known crimes and atrocities occurring simultaneously in Ethiopia include the many killings, rape, theft, and forced starvation of Eritrean refugees in Tigray refugee camps by militarized Eritrean opposition groups comprised of refugees sympathetic to TPLF and pro-TPLF militia,⁶⁸ raiding of refugee camp offices in Tigray by TPLF militia⁶⁹ atrocities committed on Amhara civilians by Oromo regional forces,⁷⁰ brutality inflicted on Kimant civilians by Amhara militia⁷¹ as well as killings of Oromo activists and militarized government opposition by Ethiopian troops.⁷²

With regard to accusations of forced famine, killings of civilians, and rampant crime and sexual violence perpetrated, official statements from the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments have attempted to provide an alternative narrative of the situation on the ground. They have attributed the rise in crime in Tigray in part due to the intentional release of 10,000 prisoners, who were handed Eritrean Defense Force-like army fatigue in November by the TPLF army before their retreat.⁷³ In a June press conference from the Office of the Prime Minister Press Secretary in Ethiopia, it was stated that humanitarian aid had been restricted in certain areas due to safety concerns over continued insurgencies and violence.⁷⁴ The Ethiopia Government has also claimed that several aid organizations were caught defying security checkpoints in Tigray⁷⁵ and smuggling weapons and individuals for the TPLF,⁷⁶ that TPLF forces had been fighting in civilian plain clothing⁷⁷ and intentionally destroying and blocking infrastructure like roads and bridges⁷⁸ and that the TPLF were using child soldiers and human shields in battle.⁷⁹ In April, the Ethiopian Government declared the TPLF as a terrorist group,⁸⁰ and has consistently rebuked the international community for its “biased” reporting on the conflict, calling it a “campaign against

⁶⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/12/africa/tigray-axum-aid-blockade-cmd-intl/index.html>

⁶⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2021/2/1/in-pictures-eritrean-refugees-caught-in-crossfire-in-ethiopia>

⁶⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/tplf-clique-looted-destroyed-office-refugee-camps-shire-arra>

⁷⁰ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/ethiopias-war-the-administration-will-not-mention>

⁷¹ <https://addisstandard.com/analysis-many-feared-dead-in-renewed-violence-in-central-gonder-authorities-blame-kimant-rebels-witnesses-blame-regional-security/>

⁷² <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/29/ethiopias-security-forces-accused-of-torture-evictions-and-killings-report>

⁷³ <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/ethiopia-seizes-town-in-tigray-says-10-000-prisoners-missing-20201116>

⁷⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeggSODFSLw&t=80s>

⁷⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-conflict/ethiopia-says-u-n-team-shot-at-in-tigray-after-defying-checkpoints-idUSKBN2811LT>

⁷⁶ <https://soundcloud.com/pacificanetwork/ethiopian-officials-check-aid-convoys-to-make-sure-they-carry-food-not-weapons>

⁷⁷ <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2021/6/4/22519094/lost-limbs-rising-anger-as-town-caught-up-tigray-war>

⁷⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-bridges/ethiopia-accuses-tigray-forces-of-destroying-bridges-leading-to-regional-capital-idUSKBN27X2QO>

⁷⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict/ethiopian-troops-push-for-regional-capital-rebels-promise-hell-idUSKBN27Y0SB>

⁸⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/1/ethiopia-to-designate-tplf-olf-shene-as-terror-groups>

Ethiopia⁸¹ and Eritrea for its support of the TPLF, and repudiation of Eritrea and Ethiopia for rightfully quelling a national and regional security threat.

After months of unsuccessful attempts on the part of the United States and other Western governments to urge the United Nations Security Council to come up with a joint resolution to act on the unfolding crisis, on May 20, 2021 the US Senate passed Senate Resolution 97 "calling on the Government of Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, and other belligerents in the conflict in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia to cease all hostilities, protect human rights, allow unfettered humanitarian access, and cooperate with independent investigations of credible atrocity allegations."⁸² According to Von-Batten-Montague-York,⁸³ a DC lobbying group, the success⁸⁴ of the bill is attributed to the Tigray Center for Information and Communication, an organization that successfully raised funds⁸⁵ through a crowdfunding campaign in April of 2021 to hire⁸⁶ Von-Batten-Montague-York to secure the passage of S.Res.97. On May 23, 2021, United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced sanctions and visa restrictions would be placed on Ethiopian and Eritrean officials. This is in addition to sanctions imposed by the European Union on Eritrea on March 22, 2021 for human rights abuses in Eritrea including torture, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and killings.⁸⁷ The G7 has expressed concern over the crisis in Tigray,⁸⁸ while China,⁸⁹ Russia,⁹⁰ the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and other states have maintained the position of non-interference in the interest of an internal resolution to the conflict. As of June 2021, United Nations aid chief Mark Lowcock officially declared that there was forced famine in Tigray.⁹¹

The Geopolitical Climate and the West's Pivot to Africa

Abiy Ahmed's quick and apparent fall from grace in the eyes of the West can be understood by a number of factors. First, the TPLF's reduced monopoly over Ethiopia's political apparatus is alarming to the Democratic Party faction of the ruling class, who historically have been deeply connected to the TPLF. From 1993 until 2001, Susan Rice served on the staff of the National Security Council and later as assistant secretary of state for African affairs, under the Clinton administration.⁹² During the Obama administration, Rice was a vocal proponent of a seamless and long-term renewal of AGOA (Africa Growth and Opportunity Act)⁹³ which lowered US

⁸¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/ethiopia-g7-tigray-demeke-mekonnen/>

⁸² <https://blackagenda.com/us-moves-against-ethiopia-and-eritrea-atrocities-alleged-sanctions-imposed>

⁸³ <https://www.montagueyork.com/>

⁸⁴ https://twitter.com/batten_von/status/1395245446256336901?s=21

⁸⁵ <https://www.gofundme.com/f/tigray-center-for-information-and-communications>

⁸⁶ <https://projects.propublica.org/represent/lobbying/301031552>

⁸⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/eu-imposes-further-sanctions-over-serious-violations-of-human-rights-around-the-world/>

⁸⁸ <https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/g7-calls-for-immediate-cessation-of-hostilities-in-tigray-region>

⁸⁹ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-06-11/China-opposes-foreign-interference-in-Ethiopia-s-internal-affairs-10ZT2lcYfPa/index.html>

⁹⁰ <https://www.fanabc.com/english/russia-will-continue-to-be-reliable-and-loyal-partner-of-ethiopia-amb-evgeny-terekhin/>

⁹¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/10/africa/famine-tigray-amhara-afar-intl/index.html>

⁹² <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/12/14/the-real-susan-rice/>

⁹³ <https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/07/national-security-advisor-rice-vows-long-term-ties-africa>

trade barriers to sub-saharan Africa. Contrary to flowery rhetoric about AGOA boosting economic development in Africa, the agreement does not specify⁹⁴ that exporting countries have to be African; thus, most of them are American, Chinese, and Indian, which sustains underdevelopment in African countries and creates more wealth for multinational corporations. Furthermore, Rice teamed up with Meles Zenawi in 2009 to create stand-alone Eritrea sanctions, separate from the existing Somalia sanctions, under which Eritreans can be designated for threatening the peace and stability in Somalia.⁹⁵ Rice had maintained a personal relationship with the former Ethiopian Prime Minister up until his death, paying tribute to him at his funeral in 2012.⁹⁶ The Biden camp has maintained the Democratic Party's deep ties to TPLF, established during Clinton and Obama's presidencies, and despite Rice's current Director of Domestic Policy Council position in the Biden administration, her legacy in foreign policy still lives on through Biden appointees like Samantha Power (current head of USAID) and Gayle Smith, who share the same sentiments as Rice regarding humanitarian intervention in the Global South.⁹⁷

Second, NATO has begun to pivot its focus from the Middle East to Africa as it has become, "the new jihadist battleground."⁹⁸ Just as intervention in the Middle East is primarily driven by a desire to control its oil reserves, so too is the focus on Africa driven by a desire to control its natural resources. This time, the struggle is for minerals for the looming Fourth Industrial Revolution⁹⁹ and the "internet of things" that will require massive amounts of precious metals¹⁰⁰ that are in abundance in Africa. Ethiopia is quickly becoming a destination of choice for international mining investors and developers because it's untapped, diverse, and vast mineral resources offer huge potential opportunities for exploration and development.¹⁰¹ In late February 2021, President Biden passed an executive order pertaining to supply chain security in relation to national security. In the executive order, it states as a key objective "addressing the threat to the domestic supply chain from reliance on critical mining from foreign adversaries and supporting the domestic mining and processing industries."¹⁰²

Third, the new, more aggressive approach toward Ethiopia, has also been to counter the influence of China in the region. China has repeatedly opposed international involvement in Ethiopia's domestic affairs.¹⁰³ In addition, China has supported Ethiopia through mutually beneficial cooperation rather than through the zero-sum approach of the West, which has led those powers to "discover" their moral center and undo the "moral indifference the Trump administration had toward Africa" by openly raising allegations of human rights abuses in Ethiopia.¹⁰⁴

Finally, Egypt is also implicated in playing a role in the recent destabilization of Ethiopia. In June 2020, Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sameh Shoukry, deemed the Grand Ethiopian

⁹⁴ <https://therules.org/whats-agoa-bad-for-africa/>

⁹⁵ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09USUNNEWYORK857_a.html

⁹⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-19454803>

⁹⁷ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/28/the-women-who-shaped-obamas-foreign-policy/>

⁹⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55147863>

⁹⁹ <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Policy-Briefing181harvey.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.weforum.org/communities/mining-and-metals>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.mom.gov.et/index.php/mining/learn-more-about-ethiopias-mining-sector/>

¹⁰² <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-03-01/pdf/2021-04280.pdf>

¹⁰³ <http://za.china-embassy.org/eng/zgxw/t1883093.htm>

¹⁰⁴ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/24/biden-united-states-returns-to-africa/>

Renaissance Dam (GERD) an existential threat and warned of conflict if the UN did not intervene.¹⁰⁵ Egypt is a close ally of NATO, and just recently the Biden administration requested \$1.3 billion in military aid for Egypt for the 2022 fiscal year.¹⁰⁶ The money would not come with any human rights conditions, even though there have been reports of extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, torture, and prolonged pretrial detentions.¹⁰⁷ Egypt's remarks and stance on the GERD are not to be overlooked when discussing the current events transpiring in the Horn of Africa, including its recent attempts to leverage the Arab League to press the UN Security Council to intervene in its dispute with Ethiopia's filling of the dam.¹⁰⁸ Biden called President Al Sisi last month to discuss US/Egypt relations and the GERD¹⁰⁹ though he has not extended that same courtesy to Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia.¹¹⁰

It is of note that under the Biden Administration, the region has seen a sharp return to the Obama-era "hands on" and "interventionist" political posture towards the Horn, during which officials worked closely with the TPLF to destabilize the region with its "global war on terror." This approach differs from that of the Trump administration, which welcomed the 2018 Peace Deal and condemned TPLF attacks on Eritrea in November 2020. Much to the chagrin of the US, Abiy Ahmed has continued to assert Ethiopia's right to national sovereignty with statements like "threatening Ethiopia for coins will not work" when the EU threatened to cut off roughly \$100 million in aid if Ethiopia didn't commit to a ceasefire in the conflict.¹¹¹ Ahmed's insistence on peace with neighboring countries Eritrea and Somalia, claiming that "...our 'New Ethiopia' will act in a way that recognizes that our national interests are inseparably linked to those of our neighbors,"¹¹² is antithetical to the divide-and-conquer and crisis manufacturing posture of the US and its proxy actor, the TPLF, over the last three decades.

Our Conclusion

As anti-imperialists, we vehemently oppose any and all United States, United Kingdom and European Union-led interventionist politics in the region working to further Western hegemonic geopolitical interests. Further, we decry all forces weaponizing misinformation, disinformation, and sensationalism, by way of falsifying facts, images, videos, and figures, particularly by Western media and rights organizations, sowing discord, tension, and hostilities amongst all parties to the conflict. Again, we reject and condemn all state-sanctioned violence against non-combatants in Tigray and call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties involved. We wholly reject the intentional incrimination of Eritrea and its defense forces as a party to this conflict that

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/6/30/egypt-warns-of-existential-threat-from-ethiopia-dam>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.pri.org/stories/2021-06-08/activists-look-congress-after-biden-requests-military-aid-egypt-without-human>

¹⁰⁷ <https://pomed.org/statement-bidens-budget-request-continues-blank-check-for-egypt/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/16/ethiopia-rejects-arab-league-resolution-on-renaissance-dam>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/24/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-abdel-fattah-al-sisi-of-egypt-2/>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/moustafa-kassem-abdel-fattah-el-sisi-trump-egypt-us-prisoner-a9288401.html>

¹¹¹ <https://blackagendareport.com/us-moves-against-ethiopia-and-eritrea-atrocities-alleged-sanctions-imposed>

¹¹² <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ethiopia-removal-of-tigray-tplf-will-benefit-region-by-abiy-ahmed-2021-02?fbclid=IwAR35UKjNj5A6oRO61io9PABbQzkaKLrTONwqVhDghGmYWcN-plwDFV2AwNk&barrier=accesspaylog>

is purportedly committing a disproportionate amount of harm, atrocities, and sexual violence, which seem to stem, in part, from the reality that it is the only African state in which AFRICOM does not operate. We call for increased accountability to be levied on the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front as a fighting force and party to this conflict. We stand against all neo-colonial aims in the region masquerading as humanitarian intervention and conflict resolution, particularly the role of the NGO/Human Rights industrial complexes in exacerbating tensions, harm, and violence on the ground. We stand firmly against all calls and moves for US-backed sanctions, "Responsibility to Protect" doctrines, and US/Western military intervention in the conflict.

We implore all to consider the ongoing conflicts in Ethiopia and Eritrea as they are *driven* and *fortified* by the functions of neo-colonialism, imperialism, and its proxy actors, that are fueling the growing material contradictions in the region.

Finally, we support African-owned, localized conflict resolution - not tied to advancing imperialism, neo-colonialism, and other nefarious Western agendas - as we believe in the inherent agency and ability of Africans on the continent to reach a resolution to the conflict peacefully and independent of Western aggression, destabilization, and extractive and exploitative economic interests.