



**Disinformation in Tigray:
Manufacturing Consent
For a Secessionist War**

May 2021

SUMMARIZED VERSION

The conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray state, one of Ethiopia's ten regional states, is an irredentist, ethnic secessionist war led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) against the multiethnic federal government. Although the conflict officially started on November 4, 2020 after TPLF attacked the federal government's Northern Command based in Tigray, this showdown had been brewing for many years – decades, actually.

Since the start of the conflict until the present moment, the majority of coverage on Tigray has been marked by massive levels of disinformation.

This report shows in detail why and how the disinformation is propagated – via print and social media – by predominantly Western sources.

Ultimately, the disinformation serves to manufacture consent for an unpopular irredentist, ethnic secessionist war that could not be justified in the eyes of the international public through honest reporting.

This publication shows how a “communications blackout” is used as a justification by the media to accept and forward information of poor integrity.

This report looks beyond the gaudy headlines and provides sober, evidence-based analysis of the major allegations. Significant focus is given to social media as most disinformation about Tigray originates there.

Additionally, this report assesses the nature of, and problems with, Western media's overall coverage of the Tigray conflict.

Lastly, the report provides analysis of the actions by Western governments and likely consequences of those actions to encourage better policy decisions in the Horn of Africa moving forward.

Historical Context

Following in the footsteps of revolutionary Eritrean liberation movements that had been at war with Ethiopia's government since 1961, various oppressed ethnic nationalities organized armed liberation movements in their respective territories inside Ethiopia. Drawing inspiration, training, and material support from EPLF,¹ a small group of Tigrayans formed the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF, known locally as *Weyane*). **Like EPLF, TPLF sought independence for its "nation." Unlike Eritrea, however, Tigray was not an independent nation or colony during either the medieval Abyssinian era or the European colonialization of Africa as it was instead a central piece of the empire's feudal aristocracy.** In 1976, TPLF published in its founding manifesto plans to create an independent Tigrinya-speaking "Republic of Greater Tigray" by expanding "its" territory in northern Ethiopia to include the lands of neighboring ethnic groups, acquiring coastal lands within Eritrea and seceding from Ethiopia to form a new republic.²

The *Dergue* regime was toppled in 1991 by a coalition of liberation forces led primarily by EPLF and TPLF.³ Eritrea went on to become an independent country in 1993. Ascending to power in Ethiopia, **TPLF steadily worked towards achieving the goals laid out in its manifesto by establishing Ethiopia's system of "ethnic federalism" mandated by a constitution ratified in 1994 that – through the controversial Article 39 – allowed for secession of ethnic states in the federation through unconditional self-determination.**⁴ Governing through repression in a newly created ethnicity-based ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), TPLF was able to maintain a dominant position in the coalition, expand its territorial boundaries and enrich the Tigray region, which comprises only six percent of the national population, to the detriment of other Ethiopian regions.⁵ **Keeping true to its manifesto, Tigray's boundaries expanded in all directions after 1991.** Recent maps show how Tigray grew to include the Amhara regions of Welkait and Raya, the Eritrean town of Badme and other surrounding areas.

"It was clear to the international community decades ago that as TPLF moved forward with its secessionist ethnic agenda as laid out in its 1976 manifesto—changing boundaries, fighting territorial wars and looting state resources—the Ethiopian federal system was becoming increasingly unstable."

In May 1998, the TPLF-led EPRDF government drew Ethiopia into a two-year "border" war with Eritrea, which resulted in multiple offensives to capture coastal cities, which failed to materialize at huge costs to the TPLF, and the occupation of the border town of Badme – internationally recognized as Eritrea's in 2002 by binding arbitration – followed by a 20 year-long unresolved war of attrition.⁶ During the hot stages of the

¹"When Guerrillas Become Government: The Political Tradition in the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front and the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front and Its Connection With the Recent Ethio-Eritrean Conflict", *International Third World Studies Journal and Review*; Sishagne, Shumet; Volume XII, 2001, 53)

² Matthew J. McCracken, Abusing Self-Determination and Democracy: How the TPLF Is Looting Ethiopia, 36 *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.* 183 (2004). ;AregawiBerhe, The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, *African Affairs*, 139: 569-592, 2004, pg. 591.

³ During the war, TPLF did not own a single tanks and relied heavily on EPLF mechanized armies in battle. In the final drive to capture Addis Ababa, EPLF sent EPRDF (i.e. TPLF, OLF and other Ethiopian rebel forces) 8 brigades and a mechanized unit, including tanks, to assist them. Without EPLF's participation – or merely the threat of it – the capture of Addis Ababa and the prior negotiations with the Derg to stand down and surrender would not have been possible.

⁴ McCracken, Abusing Self-Determination, 185. Article

⁵Gedamu, Yohannes, "Ethnic Federalism and Authoritarian Survival in Ethiopia." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2017. Accessed here: http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/political_science_diss/45

⁶Alemseged Tesfai, "The Cause of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Conflict", paper presented at conference organized by Heinrich Boll Foundation, March 15-17, 1999. Accessed here: <http://dehai.org/conflict/articles/alemsgghed.html>

war (1998 - 2000), more than 80,000 ethnic Eritreans were deported to Eritrea from Ethiopia—infamously for “the color of their eyes”—drawing condemnation by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.⁷ **Similar ethnic cleansing policies and wars for territorial expansion and resources were to be carried out by TPLF inside of Ethiopia itself, leading to genocide against Oromos, Annuaks, Somalis, Amharas and other ethnicities, all of which have been well-documented by Genocide Watch, US Congress and the US Justice Department.**⁸

After many years of religious, ethnic and popular protests, namely the Oromo protests, the ruling coalition elected Dr. Abiy Ahmed as the Prime Minister in April 2018, who quickly made peace with Eritrea, released political prisoners, introduced a series of liberal reforms, appointed a progressive cabinet and enacted anti-corruption efforts that led to the arrest of high-profile TPLF officials.⁹

Between late 2019 and mid-2020, Abiy sent multiple delegations to Tigray to encourage dialogue and mediation between TPLF and PP, which failed to bear any fruit.¹⁰ After shunning all routes to dialogue, TPLF attacked the federal government’s Northern Command during the morning of November 4 (or the evening of November 3; exact time is unknown), effectively starting the conflict. TPLF did not hide this fact.

Therefore, **it is clear that TPLF, prior to armed conflict in November 2020, was on a route towards secession to expand its territory into both Ethiopia and Eritrea and sought to make war with those countries inevitable.** By TPLF’s own rationale – faulty as it may have been – such a war was its only option because negotiating away concessions for a more equitable balance of power among all ethnic regions was a perceived impossibility since Tigrayans, an ethnic minority, would forever be marginalized in a majority-rule ethnic federal system that TPLF itself created. Thus, for TPLF an unjust, seemingly unwinnable war was a *fait accompli*.

“TPLF and its supporters must—by logical necessity—create, adopt and disseminate disinformation about the Tigray crisis across all media in order to manufacture consent for an unjust war of aggression and territorial expansion. TPLF and its supporters, by default, rely on a false narrative to support their war effort.”

Lowering Evidentiary Standards

“Communications Blackout”

⁷ “The Uprooted: Case Material on Ethnic Eritrean Deportees from Ethiopia Concerning Human Rights Violations.” Asmarom Legesse, Eritrean Human Rights Task Force (USA), 1998.; Wendy P. Wilson, “The Deportation of Eritreans from Ethiopia: Human Rights Violations Tolerated by the International Community”, 24 *N.C.J. Int’l L. & Com. Reg.* 451 (1998). Available at: <http://scholarship.law.unc.edu/ncilj/vol24/iss2/7>

⁸ “Genocide Alerts: Ethiopia”, Genocide Watch, accessed on February 13, 2021. ; “Democracy Under Threat in Ethiopia”, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations (Committee on Foreign Affairs), March 9, 2017. Transcript accessed here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg24585/html/CHRG-115hhrg24585.htm> ; Armed Conflicts Report, “Ethiopia (2002 – first combat deaths)”, Update: January 2009. Accessed here: <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2014/02/25/Ethiopia.pdf>

⁹ “‘These changes are unprecedented’: how Abiy is upending Ethiopian politics”, Jason Burke, The Guardian, July 8, 2018.; “Ethiopia Military-Linked Group Seeks Asset Sales, Debt Write-Off”, By Nizar Manek, Bloomberg, October 25, 2019.

¹⁰ “Summary of Efforts Reconciliation with TPLF”, Ethiopian News Agency, November 23, 2020.

Although TPLF may depend on disinformation to manufacture consent for war, that disinformation would presumably be rejected by ethical journalists and media. However, information of low quality and integrity is willingly accepted. The media's justification is the presence of an information blackout. According to the Washington Post, the Ethiopian government is at fault: "By blocking communications and access to Tigray, the government helped create conditions where disinformation and misinformation can thrive."¹¹

Rather than exercising patience and waiting for credible evidence to emerge in a cloud of disinformation, the media instead justified the immediate use of highly questionable witness testimony by alleging a deliberate blackout by the government. Though it is true that communications were down in Tigray, as admitted by the government, **it is not true that the federal government was responsible for its shutdown during the conflict.**

"Restricted Humanitarian Access"

Alleged restrictions to humanitarian access to Tigray have also been used as a pretext to lower evidentiary standards since aid workers are capable of assessing the plight of civilians. While there were obvious disruptions at the start of the conflict, humanitarian access has steadily improved since the capture of Tigray's capital city Mekelle on November 28. Between December 14, 2020, and January 25, 2021, Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ICRC, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the Executive Director of the World Food Programme, David Beasley, all shared videos and tweets confirming their humanitarian work in Tigray. **In spite of all the evidence, however, the media continued to report that the government was deliberately blocking humanitarian corridors.**

Assessing the Allegations

Presence of Eritrean Troops

Although not revealed at the time, **Eritrean troops, in response to TPLF attacks on Eritrea, took up exposed trench positions on the Ethiopian side of the border as federal forces left them empty to pursue TPLF, creating a security threat.**

Little fuss was made about Eritrea's actions in November as the US clearly understood that TPLF not only started the war but sought to escalate the conflict. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Assistant Secretary of State of African Affairs Tibor Nagy proceeded to condemn TPLF's actions, calling them an attempt to "internationalize the conflict".¹² Secretary Pompeo even went as far as thanking Eritrea: "We appreciate Eritrea's restraint, which has helped prevent further spreading of the conflict."¹³

After witnessing a federal victory as TPLF retreated from Mekelle on November 28, however, the US began to change its tune on Eritrea. The US position—and the Western media and NGO narrative buttressing it—was certainly influenced by battlefield outcomes in Tigray that saw an unexpected, early retreat from Mekelle by TPLF, which was previously said to have 250,000 "battle-hardened" troops equipped with commandos that would likely take control of the Northern Command's heavy artillery and

¹¹ "In Ethiopia's digital battle over the Tigray region, facts are casualties", Alex Drew and Clair Wilmot, *Washington Post*, February 5, 2021.

¹² Tweet by @AsstSecStateAF posted on November 15, 2020. Access here: <https://twitter.com/AsstSecStateAF/status/1328015362999414786> ; Tweet by @SecPompeo posted on November 17, 2020. Access here: <https://twitter.com/SecPompeo/status/1328721926643195907>

¹³ "The United States Condemns the Attack on Eritrea by the Tigray People's Liberation Front", Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo, Press Statement, US Department of State, November 17, 2020. Access here: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-united-states-condemns-the-attack-on-eritrea-by-the-tigray-peoples-liberation-front/index.html>

personnel and overpower Abiy's untested 140,000-man force. **How could such a swift defeat be rationalized by the US and Western media after their nonstop prognostications of a TPLF victory – or at the minimum, a stalemate – versus PM Abiy's supposedly weak federal forces? What excuse would be given for TPLF's failure?**

As the ensuing days, weeks and months following November 28 would reveal, **Eritrea became the chosen scapegoat. So far, all claims of Eritrean crimes in Tigray are based on hearsay or anecdotal evidence that is impossible to substantiate.** Notably, the Ethiopian government has informed Tigrayan citizens that some of the alleged "Eritrean" crimes that they did indeed witness may be the result of TPLF deception.

“Eritrea’s limited and self-contained actions—restricted to taking up exposed trench positions along the border in coordination with the Ethiopian government—were seen as self-defense, cooperative and falling within the framework of the 2018 Declaration. Following such actions, Eritrea’s government, though cagey on the matter, never officially denied a troop presence in Ethiopia.”

Rape and Sexual Violence

In 2019, TPLF blocked an anti-rape rally in Mekelle.¹⁴ One of the leading activists Meaza Gidey, who has been described as “one of the leading faces of the #StopWarOnTigray, Ethiopia movement”, tweeted in 2019 that “rape culture is ubiquitous in Tigray oftentimes stigmatizing & shaming female rape survivors into marrying their rapist.”¹⁵ Today, Meaza seems to ignore the possibility of endogenous sources of rape in Tigray and instead exclusively points the finger at Eritrean and Ethiopian troops.¹⁶

Widespread Criminality in Tigray

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), led by Daniel Bekele, the former Africa Director at Human Rights Watch and senior adviser at Amnesty International, conducted a two-week human rights investigation of the Tigray region and reported on February 11 that **all prisoners from ten prisons had been released following TPLF's retreat.**¹⁷ All documentation of inmates was destroyed, which “made the task of tracking major offenders nearly impossible and that it is one of the causes for the substantial increase of looting, gender-based violence and other major crimes. **”This alarming news, inexplicably, was not reported in the Western media.**

History shows that EPLF, the name of PFDJ during the liberation war, was renowned worldwide for its discipline and humanity. In 1996, the Christian Science Monitor called EPLF, **“one of the most disciplined and cohesive rebel forces in modern history.”**¹⁸ The research division of the Library of Congress shared

¹⁴ "TPLF bans anti rape protest rally in Tigray Mekele city, Ethiopia's northern region", *Brana Press*, October 18, 2019.

¹⁵ "A women led movement: An introduction to Meaza." OMNA Tigray, February 27, 2021. ; Tweet by @meazaG_ posted on October 19, 2019. Access here: https://twitter.com/meazaG_/status/1185749188715384833

¹⁶ Tweet by @meazaG_ posted on March 8, 2021. Access here: https://twitter.com/meazaG_/status/1368801454941560834

¹⁷ "Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region - Brief Monitoring Report", Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, February 11, 2021. Uploaded to Google Drive. Access here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oqIUj-artYwDyAv4Z0I3Ox7C0ipk3RyG/view>

¹⁸ "Tiny Eritrea Says 'No Thank You' To Foreign Aid That Has Strings", Judith Matloff, *Christian Science Monitor*, April 8, 1996.

similar sentiments in a country study, stating that **“In addition to its highly disciplined combatants, the EPLF benefited from its broad base of popular support and its political organization.”**¹⁹ According to Horn of Africa scholar John Markakis, EPLF **“laid heavy emphasis on political education and internal security, which made the EPLF. the most disciplined and effective movement in the Horn of Africa.”**²⁰ More recently GlobalSecurity.org indicates: **“Eritrea’s Army is well staffed, well trained, and compared to the vast majority of African armies, well-funded. Indeed, during Eritrea’s fight for independence from Ethiopia, the Eritrean military was once widely admired as one of the most effective fighting organizations in the world.”**²¹ Congressman Dan Burton in testimony before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee had this to say about Eritreans: **“The Eritreans have won the love and respect of all who have come to know them. ... Their humility and perseverance are worthy of our awe. And the humane treatment which the Eritreans have meted out to their enemies is unfortunately all too rare in this world.”**²²

The aforementioned descriptions (see many more examples in the full version of this report) run counter to the sensationalized depictions of Eritrean soldiers in Tigray.

The Western media’s unsubstantiated allegations of mass rape, theft and murder by the Eritrean military in Tigray, in spite of the history and data, is a referendum on the Western media’s perception of Eritrean culture, which ultimately sees the Eritrean people as undisciplined savages—as barbarians incapable of resisting carnal desire. This is fundamentally racist.

Mai Kadra Massacre

From November 9 to 10, a TPLF-backed militia known as the “Samri” and Tigrayan special police forces carried out the murder of 600+ ethnic Amhara day laborers in the village of Mai Kadra in retaliation for a recent battlefield defeat against Ethiopian federal forces. According to the Ethiopian government, Samri militia members, made up of young men ideologically aligned with TPLF, fled to Sudanese refugees camps following the massacre and were providing false testimony to reporters there.²³ These claims were corroborated by both private local and international media. **The Western media not only buried this story, which revealed the genocidal criminality of TPLF, but also went as far as providing exposés of other, unrelated alleged war crimes painting the opposite image: TPLF and Tigrayans as *victims* of Amhara militias and federal forces.**

Axum Massacre

¹⁹Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry, editors. Ethiopia: A Country Study. "Eritrea and the Mengistu Regime". Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991.

²⁰Markakis, J. (1988). The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea. The Journal of Modern African Studies, 26(1), 51-70. Retrieved April 16, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/160980>

²¹ GlobalSecurity.org webpage entry for “Eritrea Army”. Access here: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/eritrea/army.htm>

²² *The Political Crisis in Ethiopia and the Role of the United States: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, House of Representatives, One Hundred Second Congress, First Session, June 18, 1991, Volume 4, 15-16.

²³ "The Mai Kadra Genocide: Perpetrators Acting as Victims February 25, 2021", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, February 25, 2021.

On February 26, Amnesty international issued a report investigating an alleged massacre of “hundreds” that they claim took place on November 28 and 29 in the ancient town of Axum, home to the Maryam Tsion Church. The report concluded “that the indiscriminate shelling of Axum by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops may amount to war crimes, and that the mass execution of Axum civilians by Eritrean troops may amount to crimes against humanity.”²⁴ Even in spite of the “communications blackout”, why did it take so long to report the killings? **It is unlikely that a November massacre of this magnitude, which would provide additional diplomatic support for TPLF, would go unmentioned and unnoticed until January, especially when TPLF’s leaders were tweeting and in communication with the international media by text and phone throughout December.**²⁵

A Tigrayan man from Axum, having recognized the growing concerns on the internet about the alleged massacre in his city, conducted an investigation of the matter and released a Facebook video of his findings. In the video, he concluded that the allegations were “totally a lie. Period.”²⁶ A priest from Maryam Tsion also came out and claimed that not one person was killed in the alleged massacre.²⁷ These findings by local Axumites hardly come as a surprise if one reads only a few testimonies from the Amnesty report, which prove so theatrical and absurd that no honest observer could take them seriously.

The Amnesty report was rejected by both the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments.²⁸

Maryam Dengelat Massacre

On February 26, CNN ran its “Massacre in the Mountains” story about the alleged mass killing of 80 - 150 Tigrayan civilians by Eritrean troops on November 30, 2020 at Maryam Dengelat Church and the surrounding town of Dengelat.²⁹ Interestingly, reporting of the event mirrored—almost exactly—the reporting of the “Axum Massacre.” **The CNN Dengelat story, like the Amnesty report on Axum, provided a megaphone and international attention to previously obscure reporting by the same cast of characters on the alleged mass killing.** In fact, both publications of these alleged Eritrean massacres against Christians were published on the exact same day providing maximum impact for Western audiences in the lead up to the US assuming the presidency of the UN Security Council.

Notably, the focus on massacres by Eritreans on Christian communities in Tigray, both taking place on one of Ethiopia’s holiest Christian holidays, **plays into false historical depictions by Western scholars of Eritrea, despite the nation’s almost 50-50 split between Muslim and Christian believers, as an encroaching Muslim threat on Ethiopia, the supposed “island of Christianity in a sea of Islam.”**³⁰

The Shooting of Monalisa Abraha

²⁴ “The Massacre in Axum”, Amnesty International, February 26, 2021. Access here: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR2537302021ENGLISH.PDF>

²⁵ Tweet by @reda_getachew posted on December 22, 2020. Access here: https://twitter.com/reda_getachew/status/1341291511040913408 ; “Fighting flares in Ethiopia’s Tigray as army says closing in on rebellious force”, *Reuters*, December 5, 2020.

²⁶ Facebook video uploaded by user “HadnetKiflemariam” on February 27, 2021. Access here: <https://www.facebook.com/helen.gebreamlak.54/videos/1902655983244043/>

²⁷ Tweet by @NahomAbraham14 posted on March 13, 2021. Access here: <https://twitter.com/NahomAbraham14/status/1370872967970893827>

²⁸ “Amnesty report describes Axum massacre in Ethiopia’s Tigray”, Cara Anna, *Associated Press*, February 27, 2021.

²⁹ “Massacre in the mountains”, Nima Elbagir, Barbara Arvanitidis, Bethlehem Feleke, Eliza Mackintosh, Gianluca Mezzofiore and Katie Polglase, *CNN*, March 22, 2021.

³⁰ Woolbert, R. (1942). *The Future of Ethiopia*. *Foreign Affairs*, 20(3), 535-551.

Assessing Western Media Coverage

How can one justify the Western's media coverage of the Tigray conflict? The repeated use of false information has had the effect of driving a false narrative about the realities of the conflict, which is now driving a dangerously misguided international response in Ethiopia and the broader Horn of Africa region. The Western media has proven itself to be on TPLF's side, emboldening the militant secessionist organization to carry out provocative criminal and genocidal actions in the Horn and engendering the destabilization of the strategically important Horn of Africa and Red Sea basin regions.

TPLF Started and Internationalized the Conflict

Consider the *casus belli* of the conflict. Even months after the attack on the Northern Command, the Western media still failed to acknowledge who started the conflict when TPLF itself admitted to it. **Let the record be set straight: TPLF started the conflict. It even bragged about it.** As mentioned above, TPLF's central committee member Sekoutoure Getachew appeared on TPLF's Dimtsi Weyane TV program on November 13, explaining that TPLF had carried out a "preemptive strike" on the Northern Command, comparing its actions to those taken by Israel against its enemies.³⁷ Similarly, Alula Solomon, a TPLF media activist and CEO of TPLF-mouthpiece Tigray Media House, appeared on a televised program of Kush Media Network on February 14 and bragged, "Whether you call it the Eritrean military or some other entity, none of them started the war by their own will. All forces were dragged into the war by TPLF, who started the war by their own will."³⁸

US Secretary of State Pompeo tweeted on the day of the attacks "We are deeply concerned by reports that the Tigray People's Liberation Front carried out attacks on Ethiopian National Defense Force bases in Ethiopia's Tigray region. We urge immediate action to restore the peace and de-escalate tensions."³⁹

More importantly and above all else, TPLF's actions were illegal on the grounds that it organized and carried out a treasonous insurrection against the sovereign federal government. Legal arguments trump moral arguments of a so called "just war" by TPLF against a supposedly unjust legal system since the legal system in Ethiopia was entirely created, codified and designed by TPLF itself, from drafting the constitution in 1994 to commanding the federal legal system over the following 27 years.

"The inability of the Western media to plainly lay blame on TPLF for the start of the war, seems to be part of the larger agenda to make the belligerent front appear as the victim in this conflict."

TPLF, after obstructing every avenue for mediation and de-escalation with the federal government, opted instead for dangerous brinkmanship and began planning for war many months before the conflict started. **TPLF prepared for the war far in advance of November and used civilians and civilian infrastructure – against the explicitly expressed wishes of local civilians – with the intent of escalating the confrontation with the federal government into internecine war. Civilians appear to be cannon fodder**

³⁷ "TPLF Spokesman Admits to Sparking the Conflict in Ethiopia and Plunging Tigray into Darkness", Teodrose Fikremariam, *Ghion Journal*, November 14, 2020.; Interview with Sekutoure Getachew.

"እይታ፣ የመጀመሪያው ስራ ፍብደል መጠናቀቅ እንደ ሆነ፣ ህዳር 04/2013 ዓ/ም". *DimtsiWeyane Television*. Uploaded to YouTube on November 13, 2020. Access here: <https://youtu.be/H1yThWjhYYo>

³⁸ "የትግራይ የቤት መቀመጫ አድማ እና ጦርነቱ" *KMN*. Uploaded to YouTube on February 14, 2021. Access here: <https://youtu.be/45TvVKMyJiw>

³⁹ Tweet by @SecPompeo posted on November 4, 2020. Access here: <https://twitter.com/SecPompeo/status/1324121664108580875>

to **TPLF**. Rather than deescalate, however, the Western media choose to embolden and intensify conflict to the point of internationalizing it.

Under the cover of relatively silent international media coverage, TPLF began attacking Eritrea in mid-November. TPLF fired two rounds of missile attacks on civilian targets in Eritrea on November 14 and 27 – in violation of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit indiscriminate attacks.⁴⁰ Portrayals of TPLF as “Battle Hardened”

The romantic and fawning portrayal of TPLF as “battle-hardened” was seemingly ubiquitous in the Western media, violating journalistic ethics of neutrality and non-bias and endangering the lives of millions of Ethiopian civilians. Al Jazeera English indicated on November 24 that TPLF had “a generation of battle-hardened tacticians”⁴¹ while Reuters on November 10 held that “Tigrayan forces and militia are battle-hardened, have large stocks of military hardware and number up to 250,000 men, experts say.”⁴² Another Reuters piece, explicitly pointed out, in contrast, that federal forces were only 140,000.⁴³ Herman Cohen, the former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under George H.W. Bush, tweeted, “Ethiopian P.M. Abiy is fooling himself if he believes his inexperienced army can defeat the battle hardened TPLF military, even with Eritrean support.”⁴⁴ Reuters East Africa deputy bureau chief Maggie Fick wrote, “Ethiopia expert Alex de Waal said Abiy may have underestimated the Tigray leaders’ skills at both politics and war.

Despite the Western media’s incessant assuring and reassuring of the international audience that TPLF would come out victorious in the conflict, TPLF instead lost control of Tigray’s capital city Mekelle in a little over three weeks, officially falling to federal forces on November 28.⁴⁵ In fact, Mekelle’s fall would have likely come sooner had PM Abiy not given TPLF a 72-hour ultimatum to “surrender peacefully” in order to prevent harm to civilians.⁴⁶

“Civil War” as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

While the federal government dubbed its efforts in Tigray as a “law enforcement operation” and provided its reasoning for this phrasing,⁴⁷ the Western media opted instead to call it a “war” from the very outset of the conflict. In fact, they initially posed the idea that it was an imminent “civil war.” During the second week of the conflict, the headlines evolved from merely toying with the possibility of civil war to outright declaring it to be one. With the writing on the wall during the twilight days of the operation to

⁴⁰ "Rockets fired at Eritrean capital from Ethiopia, diplomats say", Giulia Paravicini, *Reuters*, November 13, 2020. ; "Fresh rocket attack from Ethiopia's Tigray region targets Eritrea, say diplomats ", Robbie Corey-Boulet, *Agence France-Presse*, November 28, 2020. ; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977. Protection of the civilian population, Article 51:4. Access here: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=4BEBD9920AE0AEAE12563C0051DC9E>

⁴¹ "Ethiopian army castaways may expand TPLF's fight past Mekelle", Zecharias Zelalem, *Al Jazeera English*, November 24, 2020.

⁴² "Battle-hardy Tigray back in spotlight as Ethiopia conflict flares", Maggie Fick, *Reuters*, November 10, 2020.

⁴³ "Factbox: The forces fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict", *Reuters*, November 13, 2020.

⁴⁴ Tweet by @CohenOnAfrica posted on November 5, 2020. Access here:

<https://twitter.com/cohenonafrika/status/1324445096381657093>

⁴⁵ "Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: PM claims capture of regional capital Mekelle", *BBC*, November 29, 2020.

⁴⁶ "Ethiopia PM gives Tigray forces 72 hours to surrender regional capital", *Reuters*, November 22, 2020.

⁴⁷ "The Ongoing Law Enforcement Operations in Tigray: Causes and Objectives", *Ethiopian News Agency*, January 26, 2021.

capture Mekelle and after Mekelle's capture on November 28, the media started to shift the narrative to a "guerilla war" that was "protracted" and "hidden" in nature.

International Crisis Group's Pro-TPLF Bias

The "analysts" that Walsh and Marks referred to were most notably those from ICG. Nairobi-based ICG analyst Rashid Abdi was so bold to go as far as suggesting divine intervention in his analysis: "God gave me the gift of prognosis. I have never gone wrong on Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia. It is in your best self-interest to take me very serious. Again, I say to PM Abiy, the odds are not in your favour in this conflict. You still have time to end it."⁴⁸ **Such a fanatical belief in a TPLF victory, imbued with dangerous levels of hubris, can only serve to cloud judgement and prevent sober analysis.**

Ethiopia-based ICG analyst William Davison proved equally problematic, given his longstanding alignment with TPLF. Davison is on the record in a 2015 tweet openly coaching the then TPLF central committee member and foreign minister Tedros Adhanom – now director-general of the World Health Organization – on how to use the international media to gain "positive publicity" for TPLF.⁴⁹ **Rather than holding TPLF's feet to the fire, Davison has served as their publicist and sycophant.** On November 18, a leaked email revealed that **Davison was forwarding TPLF talking points from Wondimu Asaminew of the "Tigray Friendship Liaison Office" to the international media correspondents on the ground in Addis Ababa.**⁵⁰ Four days later, Davison was deported by the Ethiopian government.⁵¹ Following Davison's expulsion and the capture of Mekelle only a few days later, ICG's president Robert Malley issued an introspective statement on ICG's position on Ethiopia that essentially **admitted the organization's failure to properly calculate events in Tigray and requested that Ethiopian authorities lay blame on ICG rather than Davison.**⁵² Malley also admitted, "the humanitarian catastrophe we feared has not occurred and must acknowledge that we described a potential outcome that thankfully did not materialise." **In spite of failure, miscalculation and bias, however, Davison continues to persist with Western media still eagerly seeking his expert insight.** Is this not interference and taking sides in a conflict?

Also on ICG's staff is Dinesh "Dino" Mahtani, a known advocate of regime change in Eritrea. **Mahtani is vocal in his advocacy for TPLF in the Tigray conflict.** In a November 10 article for The Africa Report, co-authored by his ICG colleague Davison, Mahtani held that "the confrontation is likely to be fierce and prolonged", would draw in Eritrea and Sudan and create a "nightmare scenario" that would be "reminiscent of the scenes of misery during Ethiopia's civil war of the 1980s".⁵³ With the swift defeat of TPLF, no such nightmare has yet materialized.

Ignoring TPLF's Unpopularity in Tigray

⁴⁸ Tweet by @RAbdiAnalyst posted on November 10, 2020. Access here: <https://twitter.com/rabdianalyst/status/1326037476927025152?lang=en>

⁴⁹ Tweet by @wdavison10 posted on February 1, 2015. Access here: <https://twitter.com/wdavison10/status/561778061688188929>

⁵⁰ Tweet by @wdavison10 posted on November 18, 2020. Access here: <https://twitter.com/wdavison10/status/1329198468456456194>

⁵¹ "Ethiopia Expels Crisis Group Senior Analyst", International Crisis Group, Media Release, November 22, 2020. Access here: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/ethiopia-expels-crisis-group-senior-analyst>

⁵² "Why Crisis Group Calls for Inclusive Dialogue in Ethiopia", Robert Malley, International Crisis Group, The President's Take, December 3, 2020. Access here: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/why-crisis-group-calls-inclusive-dialogue-ethiopia>

⁵³ "Ethiopia: Not too late to stop Tigray conflict from unravelling country", Dino Mahtani and William Davison, *The Africa Report*, November 10, 2020.

Rather than presenting one-sided views in support of TPLF, why not instead listen to Tigrayan critiques of TPLF? Talking to Anadolu Agency, TPLF co-founder Aregawi Berhe makes it clear that TPLF failed in the recent conflict because it had no popular support: “They [TPLF] overestimated their military strength and underestimated the federal army,” he said. They also thought that the people of Tigray would support them. The whole assumption went wrong, consequently, resulting in the TPLF to lose the war, Berhe added.”⁵⁴

“Even before the war started, it was well known among Tigrayans that TPLF would not have the support of its population in Tigray.”

How could a geriatric, criminal leadership so detached from the suffering of its largely peasant population be expected to draw popular support when already unpopular in Tigray? An essential feature of any guerilla force that seeks to turn a conflict into a protracted “people’s war” – necessitating it to embed itself within the civilian population – is that guerilla force’s material commitment to “serve the people.”⁵⁵ **Instead of serving or protecting the people, however, TPLF has clearly demonstrated, throughout the conflict, a penchant for deceiving and exploiting Tigrayan civilians and worsening their material conditions.**

Ignoring TPLF’s Assault on Tigrayan Civilians

In a November 8 address aired on DimtsiWeyane TV, TPLF leader Debretsion Gebremichael told Tigrayan civilians that “children will participate in the war.”⁵⁶ He called on all Tigrayans including children to mobilise and join the ‘struggle’.⁵⁷ **TPLF’s use of child soldiers is a violation of international law since Ethiopia is signatory to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.**

As the seemingly inexperienced federal forces somehow managed to close in on TPLF, who ICG said had a battle-hardened army of 250,000 fighters and also had the advantage of pre-planning for its pre-emptive strike, the beleaguered TPLF forces began to retreat from major cities in the final week of the conflict and opted to carry out scorched earth tactics, laying waste to critical infrastructure in their own regional homeland.⁵⁸ **TPLF used civilians as human shields in violation of the Geneva Conventions.**⁵⁹

Coordinated Disinformation Campaign?

⁵⁴ “Ethiopia: Autocracy, ill-conceived war end TPLF journey”, Seleshi Tessema, *Anadolu Agency*, December 21, 2020.

⁵⁵ “Serve the People”, Mao Tse-Tung, September 8, 1944. This speech was delivered at the memorial meeting Chang Szu-teh, held by departments directly under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

⁵⁶ “መግለጻ ላይ ስምምነት አልተገኘም/ርደብረጽጽን/ሚካኤል አብ እዋናዊ ጉዳይ፣ ጥቅምት 26/2013 ዓ/ም” *DimtsiWeyane Television*. Uploaded to YouTube on November 8, 2020. Access here: <https://youtu.be/X2UtcgbMw64>

⁵⁷ “Ethiopia crisis: Tigray leader vows to keep fighting as government advances”, *BBC*, November 18, 2020.

⁵⁸ “Tigray crisis: How the Ethiopian army and TPLF clashed over an airport”, Peter Mwai and Christopher Giles, *BBC*, November 26, 2020.

⁵⁹ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977. Protection of the civilian population, Article 51:4. Access here: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=4BEBD9920AE0AEAE12563CD0051DC9E> ; Commentary of 1987

Protection of the civilian population. Access here: [https://ihl-](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/1a13044f3bbb5b8ec12563fb0066f226/5e5142b6ba102b45c12563cd00434741)

[databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/1a13044f3bbb5b8ec12563fb0066f226/5e5142b6ba102b45c12563cd00434741](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/1a13044f3bbb5b8ec12563fb0066f226/5e5142b6ba102b45c12563cd00434741)

From the outbreak of the conflict to the fall of Mekelle to the ongoing pursuit of TPLF leaders, the Western media has coddled and protected TPLF, taking its side in the conflict and delaying resolution of hostilities. Likewise, Western governments have interfered in Ethiopia's internal affairs, endangering the Ethiopian people – including Tigrayan civilians – and causing them needless suffering. **Why does the US continue to provide such strong support for a greatly weakened – if not largely destroyed – TPLF against its own interests? Why is Washington willing to ignore growing anti-US sentiment and potential widespread hatred in a nation considered a close ally and historic “anchor state” in Africa?**

TPLF Disinformation Network

Unilateral Secession Requires Disinformation

Washington and Western capitals might be the victims of their own Frankenstein's monster developed over the last three decades: a US-supported, pro-TPLF disinformation network comprised of TPLF members, media personnel, academics, NGO personnel and state officials. This network may have served the West well in the past but its continued existence is likely putting long term US and EU interests at risk. Does such a network exist? In reviewing the overall reporting on Tigray since early November, patterns and nodes of disinformation emerge. As the disinformation progresses from its origin supposedly in Tigray – or manufactured in the diaspora – to its endpoint residing in Western state capitals, one can identify six distinct stages with clear signs of coordination between TPLF and Western actors:

Stage 1: Briefing Western Contacts

Stage 2: Developing a Pro-TPLF Narrative

Stage 3: Creating Facts on the Ground

Stage 4: Amplifying Primary Sources

Stage 5: Producing High-Level Reports

Stage 6: Demanding International Action

*For details and evidence on each stage see full version of this report

TPLF Disinformation Network

1. Briefing Western Contacts

- TPLF leadership send their Western contacts updates on battlefield conditions and express their propaganda needs.
- **Example:** Wondimu Asaminew emailing William Davison and Addis-based correspondents talking points through the Tigray Friendship Liaison Office); Mulugeta Gebrehiwot briefing Alex de Waal.

3. Creating Facts on the Ground

- TPLF activists in Tigray and the diaspora use deceptive tactics to create facts on the ground that become “evidence” in primary source reporting in the Western media, thus confirming initial reports and serving as footnotes in future reporting.
- **Example:** Coaching civilians (Maryam Dengelat video for CNN; Sky News witness), providing false testimony (Samri youth masquerading as Mai Kadra survivors for NYT), soliciting false testimony (Alula Solomon soliciting testimony on Twitter for AP’s Cara Anna and AFP’s Maggie Fick), mistranslating civilians (as witnessed by Jemal Countess), doctor photos, etc.

5. Producing High-Level Reports

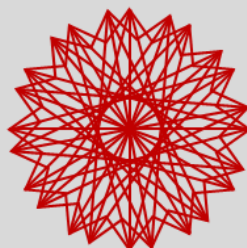
- Conduct an investigation of an alleged crime on the basis of growing reports in the media and publish a high-level report that is impossible to substantiate.
- **Example:** Amnesty report on Axum “massacre”, ICG briefs, Bellingcat investigations, etc.

TPLF Leadership

Western Contacts

TPLF Activists

Media



Human Rights NGOs

Academic Experts

Exclusive Media

International Bodies

2. Developing a Pro-TPLF Narrative

- Western contacts publish TPLF’s version of events in “unconfirmed” reports on their social media accounts and blogs that cite anonymous sources.
- **Example:** Mirjam van Reisen publishing EEPA “Situation Reports”; Martin Plaut posting Eritrea Hub articles; Alex de Waal writing pieces on World Peace Foundation website.

4. Amplifying Primary Sources

- TPLF activists in the diaspora spread primary sources on social media in a coordinated campaign with human rights NGOs and journalists.
- **Example:** Alula Solomon, OMNA Tigray, #StopWarInTigray and TPLF diaspora activists retweeting pro-TPLF primary sources (articles, videos, etc.) with HRW, Amnesty and others.

6. Demanding International Action

- Western governments use high-level reports to guide new policy and force action in support of TPLF.
- **Example:** Pressure on Ethiopia, EU sanctions on Eritrea.

Supporting TPLF At All Costs

Powerful Friends in Washington

On the basis of the latest “credible reports”, Biden’s administration has recently appointed veteran US diplomat Jeffrey Feltman as a special envoy for the Horn of Africa.⁶⁰ **Feltman is well-known to many Ethiopians for his obsequious eulogy of the late TPLF leader Meles Zenawi in 2012.⁶¹ His appointment is unsurprising given Susan Rice’s role in Biden’s administration. The influence of Rice, Obama’s former National Security Adviser, cannot be overstated.** Feltman, likely appointed through Rice’s recent backdoor efforts, has already antagonized Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Horn of Africa even before taking office as he expressed, in a February Zoom call, desires to undermine all possible African initiatives to address the conflict in Tigray. **At a time when Africa seeks “African solutions for African problems”, Feltman seemingly demotes African efforts and instead calls for Gulf powers to intervene on behalf of America on the grounds that Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia are “authoritarian.” The irony is not lost on anyone.** When the Biden administration could send anyone as an emissary to Ethiopia to help address the conflict in Tigray, why would it send a person who has demonstrated partiality for TPLF and is largely seen by Ethiopians as a political hack shilling for TPLF? Was someone neutral, even if only on the surface, not available for this diplomatic initiative?

Negotiations to Rescue TPLF

Western governments had 27 years to rein in TPLF for its crimes and genocidal actions against innocent peoples in Ethiopia and throughout the Horn of Africa. Again, they had the opportunity to call TPLF to account once it retreated to Mekelle in 2018, challenged Abiy’s rule through sedition, belligerence and highly provocative criminal behavior. The West failed to push the rogue entity to negotiate with the federal government and to pursue peaceful dialogue. Instead, the West remained dangerously silent and provided TPLF with diplomatic cover for its belligerence and criminality, leading TPLF’s Wondimu Asaminew to make his comments about PM Abiy being unable to survive in the “jungle.” **After TPLF’s November 4 attacks on the Northern Command, however, the Western media, NGOs and governments finally broke their deafening silence, not to condemn TPLF aggression but rather to condemn the federal government’s defense of its national sovereignty; and when TPLF failed to achieve its aims, they demanded negotiations.** Only when TPLF had its back to the wall – failing to capture most of the Northern Command’s heavy artillery, firing missiles on Gondar, Bahir Dar and Asmara and facing battlefield losses that forced its retreat – did Western governments finally begin calling for negotiations.

Recall that TPLF has already demonstrated a penchant for flouting the terms of negotiated peace deals as was clearly witnessed with TPLF’s 16-year illegal occupation of Badme, Eritrea following a 2002 “final and binding” border delimitation decision that was stipulated in the internationally brokered 2000 Algiers Peace Agreement.⁶² **In light of this history, what makes PM Abiy think TPLF – and the international guarantors that ignored TPLF’s flagrant violations of the peace deal with Eritrea – will not do to Ethiopia what was done to Eritrea?** Therefore, it came as no surprise when PM Abiy’s government rejected TPLF’s November 9 request for negotiations, explaining in a tweet that the time for negotiations had passed and that dialogue

⁶⁰ "Veteran diplomat Jeffrey Feltman named U.S. special envoy for Horn of Africa", Michelle Nichols and Simon Lewis, *Reuters*, April 24, 2021.

⁶¹ "UN Rep. Jeffrey D. Feltman Speaks at Funeral Service for Ethiopian PM Meles Zenawi", *Ethiopian TV*. Uploaded to YouTube on September 3, 2012. Access here:

⁶² "Eritrea-Ethiopia Peace: Seismic Shifts Throughout a Strategic Zone", Carol Pineau, Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 25, 2018.

would only commence after the “the criminal junta is disarmed, legitimate administration in the region restored, and fugitives apprehended & brought to justice - all of them rapidly coming within reach.”⁶³

An AU Envoy visited Ethiopia on November 27, appearing to endorse the federal government position.⁶⁴ **The chairperson of the African Union Commission later declared the federal government’s actions in Tigray as “legitimate” military action as it sought to preserve the country’s unity and stability.**⁶⁵ The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional trade bloc, stated in a communique of a December 10 emergency meeting on the Tigray conflict that it **“reaffirmed the primacy of constitutional order, stability and unity of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.”**⁶⁶ Despite the AU and IGAD siding with the federal government, President Biden’s Secretary of State Anthony Blinken continued to push the AU and “other international partners” to apply pressure on Ethiopia and “work with us to address the crisis in Tigray, including through action at the U.N. and other relevant bodies.”⁶⁷

TPLF: Beyond Accountability

One has to wonder why all the focus and pressure is on the federal government. As Bronwyn Bruton of the Atlantic Council observed in November: “And yet, at no point has any Western or African power called for the TPLF to lay down its arms. At no point have Western powers discussed leveling sanctions on the TPLF officials who authorized the attack. In fact, pointed op-editorials in premier publications have actually blamed the Prime Minister for ‘marginalizing’ the TPLF from power, and held him equally responsible for the escalating tensions.”⁶⁸ By giving the perception that “both” parties in the conflict may be responsible for any given crime or by exclusively highlighting supposed federal crimes that are impossible to substantiate, the West effectively provides TPLF diplomatic cover and hides their crimes. **Instead of blaming TPLF, the West has opted instead to scapegoat Eritrea for the Tigray conflict.**

Failure of US Policy in the Horn

The US and its Western allies’ efforts to force change in Ethiopia and Eritrea on the issue of Tigray has not proven successful thus far, particularly at a time when America is engaged in so-called “great power competition” in an increasingly multipolar world. While Russia, China and other great powers engage Ethiopia and Eritrea under the diplomatic principles of mutual respect and non-interference, the US and EU actively interfere in the Tigray conflict, taking sides with TPLF and failing to condemn the rebel force’s actions in starting and prolonging the conflict. Despite TPLF’s terrorist history, criminality and dangerous ethnic politics in a country comprised of more than 80 ethnic groups, the Biden Administration has opted to back TPLF in its war against the federal government, which is led by a Nobel prize-winning prime minister. **Washington seems to ignore the damaging optics of this problematic position, which is not lost on the Ethiopian people and serious international observers.**

⁶³ Tweet by @AbiyAhmedAli posted on November 10, 2020. Access here:

<https://twitter.com/AbiyAhmedAli/status/1326069599994056705> ; “Tigray crisis: Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed rejects peace talks”, *BBC*, November 11, 2020.

⁶⁴ Communiqué on the Visit of the African Union Envoys To Ethiopia, African Union, November 27, 2020. Access here: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202011280379.html>

⁶⁵ “African Union says Ethiopia acted legitimately in Tigray”, Andrew Meldrum, *Associated Press*, December 21, 2020.

⁶⁶ Communiqué of the 38th Extraordinary Assembly of IGAD Heads of State and Government”, Djibouti, Republic of Djibouti. December 20, 2020. Access here: <https://www.igad.int/communique/2598-communique-of-the-38th-extraordinary-assembly-of-igad-heads-of-state-and-government>

⁶⁷ “U.S. calls on African Union to exert pressure over worsening crisis in Ethiopia’s Tigray”, Phil Stewart, *Reuters*, March 1, 2021.

⁶⁸ “Calls for negotiation are driving Ethiopia deeper into war”, Bronwyn Bruton, Africa Center, Atlantic Council, November 13, 2020.

Conclusion

This report has shown, through ample evidence, how consent for TPLF's war is manufactured in a stepwise fashion.

It has shown in careful detail that TPLF, by its own admission, started the Tigray conflict by attacking the Northern Command on November 4, 2020 with the goal of triggering a irredentist, ethnic secessionist war or returning to power in Addis Ababa through military means. Given the unpopular, immoral, irrational and unjustifiable nature of unilateral secession of an ethnic state in a multiethnic Ethiopia, TPLF requires the use of disinformation to manufacture consent for its secessionist war against the Ethiopian people. **Given TPLF's dependence on disinformation and the presence of a network of Western media and state entities supporting TPLF, there exists a "TPLF disinformation network" that is actively deceiving the international community about the realities of the Tigray conflict in order to sell TPLF's secessionist war rebranded as a defensive war against ethnic genocide by the Ethiopian and Eritrean states.**

“While regional and continental organizations like IGAD and the AU are largely in support of Ethiopia's efforts in the Tigray conflict, the US has sought to take the matter to the UN Security Council to impose its will upon Ethiopia.”

Washington's failure to convince Council members to multilaterally intervene in the conflict, relegated it to pressuring the EU to legislate unilateral sanctions against Eritrea despite no evidence of crimes by Eritrea in Tigray. **The Western media's orchestrated chorus of allegations of crimes by Eritrea's military, without citing any substantive evidence but instead relying on sensationalist colonialist depictions that caricature them as brute savages, are inherently racist in nature and an assault on Eritrean culture.** Pixelated, decontextualized videos of supposed atrocities and hostile witness testimony do not suffice as substantive evidence. Human rights reports without methodology sections or any form of peer-review, similarly, do not suffice as substantive evidence. This report has shown with painstaking detail how the most serious, high-profile allegations of massacres, rape, theft and war crimes by Eritrean and Ethiopian troops do not stand up to any honest, evidence-based analysis. Politicizing and exploiting fictional atrocities, easily debunked by common sense and science, may have the unintended effect in eroding trust in the Western media.

Western political interventions have failed thus far. The Biden administration's team on Horn of Africa policy is composed of holdovers from the Clinton and Obama years who saw limited successes by forcing unsustainable, short-sighted policies upon the region with TPLF at the helm in Ethiopia, ultimately leading to TPLF's fall from power and the failure of US policy in the region. These same entities are now using the same outdated strategies, seeking to resuscitate TPLF in a markedly different Horn expecting the same results. As the saying goes, “generals always fight the last war.” Washington's stubborn commitment to personnel who lack the political imagination to adapt to a new Horn of Africa that has moved on from TPLF will further hurt the interests of the US and its Western partners.

As the US continues to force TPLF and other ethnic extremist entities upon Ethiopia – as the US once forced the Shah upon Iran – the Ethiopian people may explode in an outburst of widespread, irreversible hatred of the US. The US could permanently lose a key state in Africa, limiting its overall influence on the continent.

“The Western media's persistence in pushing obvious TPLF disinformation and forwarding simplistic, racist caricatures of the Ethiopian and Eritrean people has the net effect of pushing the peoples in

the region to lose whatever remains of their faith in the Western media; in the US and EU as friends, role models and moral forces.”

Meanwhile, great powers like China and Russia will capitalize on the US and EU's failure, gaining for themselves one of the most strategic regions in the world. Washington's attempt to destabilize Ethiopia, the only African country that was never colonized and home of the AU, by stoking ethnic warfare – a scorched earth strategy denying regional access to other powers – will likely fail and deliver the *coup de grâce* to American credibility and influence on the African continent. **Therefore, it is in Washington's long term interest to quickly decouple itself from TPLF and ethnic extremism before it is too late.**

Recommendations

1. **Stop spreading disinformation.** Stop uncritically accepting and disseminating disinformation about the Tigray conflict. All claims forwarded in the media should be challenged, questioned and – most importantly – supported by substantive evidence.
2. **Stop supporting TPLF.** TPLF is a terrorist organization with an ethnic secessionist agenda that started the Tigray conflict. Promoting TPLF encourages the destabilization of Ethiopia and Africa. TPLF should be brought to justice for crimes against humanity committed over the last three decades.
3. **Stop scapegoating Eritrea.** PM Abiy has clearly stated that “our national interests are inseparably linked to those of our neighbors.” Attempting to pry Ethiopia away from Eritrea for narrow, short-sighted geopolitical aims will not bode well for Washington, Brussels and the region.
4. **Stop supporting sectarian politics.** Ethiopia, which has more than 80 ethnic groups and many religions, is plagued by sectarian hostilities from 27 years of TPLF’s ethnic federalist system, religious meddling, and divide-and-rule tactics. Western media coverage since 2018 has instigated ethnic and religious conflict. Patience and sensitivity are needed by all actors in order to prevent mass death and suffering. Supporting sectarian politics is supporting destabilization.
5. **Promote peace and reconciliation.** Ethiopia’s primary priority is peace and stability. It requires reconciliation to address historical grievances from 27 years of TPLF rule. The alternative is ethnic violence and destabilization, which could lead to mass migration to Europe, piracy and the spread of terrorism from groups like Al-Shabaab. Africa would be destabilized and the world economy would suffer.