

Grandmasters' Mercenaries and their War on Tigray

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The current war on Tigray is sometimes viewed as a war between the usurper Abiy regime and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), but this perspective distorts the real nature and objective of the war that was declared and unleashed on November 4, 2020 by Abiy and his cohorts. The war, though conducted by Abiy and his Prosperity Party treasonous officials, some Western powers and Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) actually have been behind the curtain of the orchestrated overall conflict that has been gradually but surely undermining the Ethiopian nation-state in the last three years; the foreign actors, in the context of this essay, are the grandmasters or the movers and shakers behind the Ethiopian crisis, but their mission and objectives could not be fulfilled without the local mercenaries. By local mercenaries, I mean the Abiy-led government, his entire apparatus, and his advisers; some of his advisers are former Derg (the military government, 1974-1991), who, by declaring Red Terror, consumed Ethiopian intellectuals and youth; these criminal elements have returned from their asylum in the United State and they have been beating the drum of war against Tigray and even argued the extermination (genocide) of the people of Tigray; on top of this advisors, the Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT), headquartered in Washington, anchor self-appointed journalists have also been inciting war against Tigray and advocating genocide against Tigrayan Ethiopian citizens whether they reside in Tigray or the rest of Ethiopia. It is unfortunate and a shame that the United States, bastion of democracy, harbored such warmonger criminals.

The involvement of the West, including the US, Britain, France etc. and Arab countries in Ethiopian affairs is not new. For instance, the US has been involved not only in the Ethiopian affairs but also in all-African affairs due to the Cold War with the old Soviet Union. In this brief article, however, my interest and focus is on US involvement beginning the post-WWII era, when the Allied Forces defeated the Axis Powers in 1941, the British entered Addis Ababa along the exiled Emperor Haile Selassie and kicked out the Italians from both Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the latter country fell under British administration from 1941 to 1951; soon after, in 1943 the US established an army radio station installation known as Kagnew Station at Asmara by taking over the Italian naval radio station known as Radio Marina.

In 1950, when the fate of Eritrea was being decided by the United Nations, the US position was to unite Eritrea with Ethiopia via a federal arrangement, and the then US Secretary of State, Foster Dulles, was in favor of Ethiopia incorporating Eritrea. Ultimately, Eritrea, following the federation period, was united with Ethiopia in 1962.

However, Eritreans who oppose the unification of Eritrea with Ethiopia initiated guerrilla warfare in 1961, and during the entire struggle for Eritrean independence, Arabs, in particular Iraq and Syria (and one African country, Libya) were heavily involved by supporting Eritrean guerrillas in materiel, finance, and diplomacy; by 1991, when the military government or the Derg was defeated by the TPLF and its allies (now turned enemies), the US was again involved in favor of Eritrea, and as a result Eritrea became officially independent in 1993. Soon after, however, the newly independent Eritrean nation waged series of wars against all its neighbors, including Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen, and Ethiopia. Apparently, the policy of Isaias-led Eritrea was to destabilize the Horn of Africa, and it is the same regime that has now allied itself with the Abiy-led Ethiopian government against Tigray, a new war aimed, again, at destabilizing the entire Horn of Africa region.

Interestingly, behind the war in Tigray, the grandmasters are more or less the same, except that Syria and Iraq, that were devastated during the wars in their respective regions, are now replaced by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE); both countries have handsomely rewarded Isaias for his participation and cooperation in the Yemen war and also for facilitating the Eritrean port of Assab to the Arab forces. Both Isaias and Abiy were also rewarded with money and fanciful medals that perhaps symbolically signify their regional alliance (the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea zone). Ahead of this fanfare, the UAE had rewarded Abiy with more than three hundred million dollars, which is

unaccounted for; in a similar fashion, the US gave Abiy \$39.00 million for elections alone (an election that never materialized), not to mention the additional millions of dollars in financial aid that was rewarded by the US Gov't or the World Bank. The grandmasters are good at taking care of their local or regional partners; while this kind of quid pro quo political conduct or behavior is normal in real politic, given the consequences of war, including a huge toll on the war front and the untold miserable condition of the refugees that are now fleeing the war zone, the latter effect outweighs the interest of the grandmasters and the ambition of their local allies. Incidentally, there is no moral imperative in the grandmasters and local leaders' partnership, especially when it comes to promoting their interests; their real politic is raw and insensitive.

The above narrative, by and large, reflects the incredible unholy alliance between the grandmasters and the local mercenaries, devoid of ethical values and moral integrity; they have, in fact, become humans without soul as in Schwarzenegger movie *The Terminator*, and this kind of empty-headed and heartless mercenaries, however, are dangerous and merciless at murdering their own people. They have the courage at killing their own citizens, but 'courage' does not require moral value, and as Susan Sontag once told us "vicious scoundrels, murderers, and terrorists could be brave." The local mercenaries are also cunningly deceptive, very much like pathological liars who are artfully skillful at misleading people. Therefore, it would not be surprising if their psychological makeup is devoid of compunction, contrition, and remorse. Quite frightening and alarming indeed!

Tigray is now going to be a testing ground for both the local mercenaries and their nurturing grandmasters. It is abundantly clear that these forces are working hand-in-glove, because the US undersecretary for African affairs and the German government officials, by way of condemning the missile attacks by the TPLF, have shown their solidarity to both Abiy and Isaias. The question, however, remains: Why can't the US and Germany condemn the bombardment of Tigray in the same fashion? Why is the West silent on the aerial bombardment of Tigray? How about the UN Security Council? What inhibits the Security Council from not taking its obligation and send an observatory mission, if not a UN peacekeeping force to Ethiopia?

Now, to another important and relevant question: Have the mercenaries singled out Tigray in their war mongering? Is their war on Tigray an isolated incident? There is no doubt that the mercenaries have been strategizing to encircle and attack Tigray, but more so their objective was to destroy the TPLF. Why have Abiy and Isaias conspired against the TPLF and why have they viewed the Tigrayan political organization as their common enemy and/or nemesis, when in fact the TPLF rescued Isaias from his demise during the Red Star Campaign of the Derg, and brought Abiy to power in 2018? Some observers entertain the idea that the TPLF/EPRDF routed the Isaias forces during the heyday of the Badme war (1998-2000) and now Isaias is retaliating; and Abiy, on the other hand, has resorted to vindictiveness because the TPLF refused to join the Prosperity Party, challenged him for not observing the constitutional order, and for postponing the election. Moreover, the TPLF conducted its own election, and all these decisive measures of the Tigrayan organization were frustrating and offensive to Abiy.

All of the above points have grain of truth, but they are superficial in terms of capturing the complexity and nuances surrounding the mission and objectives of the powers that be in the Horn of Africa. Therefore, a more in-depth analysis is sine qua non to fathoming the essence of Abiy-Isaias war on Tigray.

There is no doubt that the TPLF and/or Tigray have become nightmarish to the Abiy-Isaias scarified and scared alliance, and the West in general and the grandmasters in particular have had reservations on the TPLF/EPRDF when it marshalled an independent foreign policy that favorably encouraged Chinese investors to come en masse to Ethiopia. The TPLF/EPRDF, at one point, was also viewed by the grandmasters, particularly the United States, as the best ally in the fight against terrorism, but since it did not follow the neo-liberal economic policy through to the end, and also did not become a lackey tout court, it was reviewed as an enemy in the final analysis. But the Western perception of the EPRDF development perspective was wrong; the EPRDF actually adopted what is known as mixed economy, state-managed enterprises and private-owned market economy

However, even the above rational analysis is not going to be adequate enough if we perceive the present conflict as a war between Abiy and Tigray only, and here is why: Abiy is not just the enemy of Tigray only; he is actually the enemy of the Ethiopian people, and more specifically of the federal forces who want to realize self-determination that was already granted to them by the 1995 constitution. The federalist forces also demand basic democratic rights, but their highest priority is the progress of Ethiopia led by a patriotic and committed government, not a wishy-washy leadership that prioritize foreign interest at the expense of Ethiopian interest. In this context, 'foreign interest' implies to Eritrea and Araba countries.

From day one when he came to power, Abiy has been doing his homework to dismantling the constitution and thereby enjoying endorsements from opportunist rubber stamp members of parliament (MPs), whose term of office has expired and no longer represent the Ethiopian people. Additionally, the present Ethiopian parliament does not reflect the diversity of Ethiopia anymore because the twenty-nine MPs from Tigray have withdrawn from the legislature and have left behind acquiescent and opportunist MPs.

But the most egregious crime that has been committed by the present regime is the indifference and silence it exhibited when the Ethiopian people were internally displaced and attacked by "unknown gunmen"; these "unknown" armed forces wantonly destroyed the property of peasants, farmers, and herdsmen in the rural areas, and in some instances terrorize residents in urban areas.

The Abiy agenda of deliberately turning Ethiopia into a chaotic 'state of nature' ala Thomas Hobbes, actually is a window dressing and long thought out preparation against war that he has now declared on Tigray, but he made a huge mistake; he miscalculated. Why have I said, Abiy has miscalculated? Like many Ethiopians, I had high hope when Abiy first assumed the premiership because his voice was so sweet and full of promises that could benefit Ethiopians and Ethiopia; some elderly intellectuals like the late Professor Mesfin Woldemariam have even entertained the idea that 'Abiy Ahmed and Yilma Megersa were God's messengers from heaven'; on my part, though hopeful, I did not want to rush to judgment and I convinced myself to give the new leadership more time to prove itself to the Ethiopian people. And couple of months after Abiy assumed power, sometime in July 2018 he came to the US to address Ethiopian community members, and couple of days before his arrival to Washington DC, I had an interview with the Tigray Media House (TMH), and one of the questions forwarded to me was "what is your advice to PM Abiy Ahmed?" and my response was "in order to consolidate power, PM Abiy should respect the constitution, maintain the federal structure, and continue his allegiance to the EPRDF; otherwise his government may not enjoy stability and endurance". None of my advice permeated into the corpus of the Abiy regime, and although his government is now eroding from beneath his very state apparatus, whether he is going to falter and crumble remains to be seen. But the man does not listen, let alone accept advices; he rejected all peace mediation initiatives from the UN, AU, and African leaders; he even seems to ignore advices that come from such astute diplomats like Herman Cohen, who twitted recently and conveyed a message to him, telling him on his face: "PM Abiy is fooling himself if he believes his inexperienced army can defeat the battle hardened TPLF even with Eritrean support."

As of November 22, the war in Tigray (see maps below) has intensified on the northern front and the southern front; on the northern front, the overwhelming fighting forces are those of the Eritrean government forces, aiding the relatively few forces of the Ethiopian Defense Forces (EDF); on the southern front, the forces that are fighting the TPLF special forces are local militia and EDF, but they were apparently destroyed. However, during these two days, the EDF that came via Afar Regional State made gains in occupying the town of Edaga Hamus, 97 kilometers from Mekelle, and one colonel of these occupying forces warned Mekelle residents that they must dissociate themselves from the TPLF leadership, otherwise they will be surrounded by tanks and heavy guns and will pay the price", a self-incriminating war crime, as Susan Rice aptly put it in her recent twit.

The EDF may occupy Mekelle and the Government may install its handpicked administrative staff, but the war will continue and the TPLF and the people of Tigray will resort to guerrilla warfare and an all-out peoples' war (the militia in the Adigrat area of Eastern Tigray has begun attacking EDF forces as of

November 23, 2020) and there is no way the Abiy regime could pacify and stabilize Tigray, let alone govern it. As I have already stated above, Abiy has miscalculated, not only by declaring war on Tigray but also by mobilizing all EDF forces to the war front in northern Ethiopia, leaving the rest of Ethiopia insecure. The latter reality has now brought unforeseen bonus to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) who were engaged in fighting with Abiy forces; now they have occupied most of western Oromia zone, known as Wellega.

Given the above analysis of the reality on the ground, it looks the Abiy government is heading toward a vanishing point, but if he listens to the United Arab Emirate new initiative in settling the dispute peacefully by negotiating with the TPLF, he could perhaps survive the ordeal. What I found quite ironic, however, is the US silence with respect to the atrocities being committed by the joint forces of Eritrean troops and the so-called EDF against the people of Tigray.

In a recent Briefing (November 19, 2020) of Tibor Nagy, the Assistant Secretary of African Affairs and US Ambassador to Ethiopia, Michael A. Raynor, to various media outlets, followed by a Q & A session, I found many inconsistent and contradictory statements in the Briefing panelists. For instance, Secretary Nagy believes that the TPLF missile attacks are unacceptable, makes the situation more dangerous, but he did not say a word in regards to the bombardment of Tigray by the EDF and Eritrean forces. By the same token, Ambassador Raynor, though he resides in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, he was unable or unwilling to tell the truth about the Ethiopian peace and security. This is what he said: "...the rest of the country actually remains quite calm at present, not indications of any one taking up comparable actions elsewhere, and in fact the opposite...". Unless the US embassy in Ethiopia is suffering from intelligence deficiency, intense fighting is going on between the OLF and the Ethiopian Federal Police forces in western Ethiopia, and the revived Qero ("youth" in Afan Oromo) movement, now armed, has just attacked a prison station in Shashmene and liberated the political prisoners.

I am of the opinion that the United States, without siding with any party, should broker peace and pressurize the Abiy government to declare truce and come to a round table for negotiation. America's clout world-wide is not limited to the elite; the grassroots is also aware of it, and the US must utilize it before the war in Tigray engulfs the entire Horn of Africa. In order to realize peace and order in the region, thus, the US government must endorse the initiative of Senator Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and Senator Van Hollen (D-Md.) joined by fourteen other senators, including Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Chris Coons (D-Del.), Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Tim Kaine (D-Va.), Bernie Sanders (D-Vt.), Ed Markey (D-Mass), Mark Warner (D-Va.), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Jackey Rosen (D-Nev.), Bob Casey (D-Pa.), Jeff Markley (D-Ore.), Michael Bennet (D-Colo.), and Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio).

Finally, I am hoping that our president-elect, soon to become the 46th president of the United States, will take immediate action to quell the situation in the Horn of Africa, and I have confidence the war unleashed against Tigray will be a priority agenda in his foreign policy with respect to Africa, and the future assistant secretary for Africa will urgently deal with the conflict in Ethiopia. That will be the day! Interestingly, while I was about to post this article, at long last, The UN Security Council has finally decided on 11/24/20 to have video-conferencing with the leadership of the TPLF in order to investigate the war in Tigray. I personally have dispatched a letter to the Security Council on November 9, 2020; the title of the letter is 'Bombardment of Tigray' and it can be read in its entirety by clicking on this link: www.Africanidea.org/Bombardment_of_Tigray.html

This Space is deliberately left empty. Please view the two maps below and read them in conjunction with the article above.

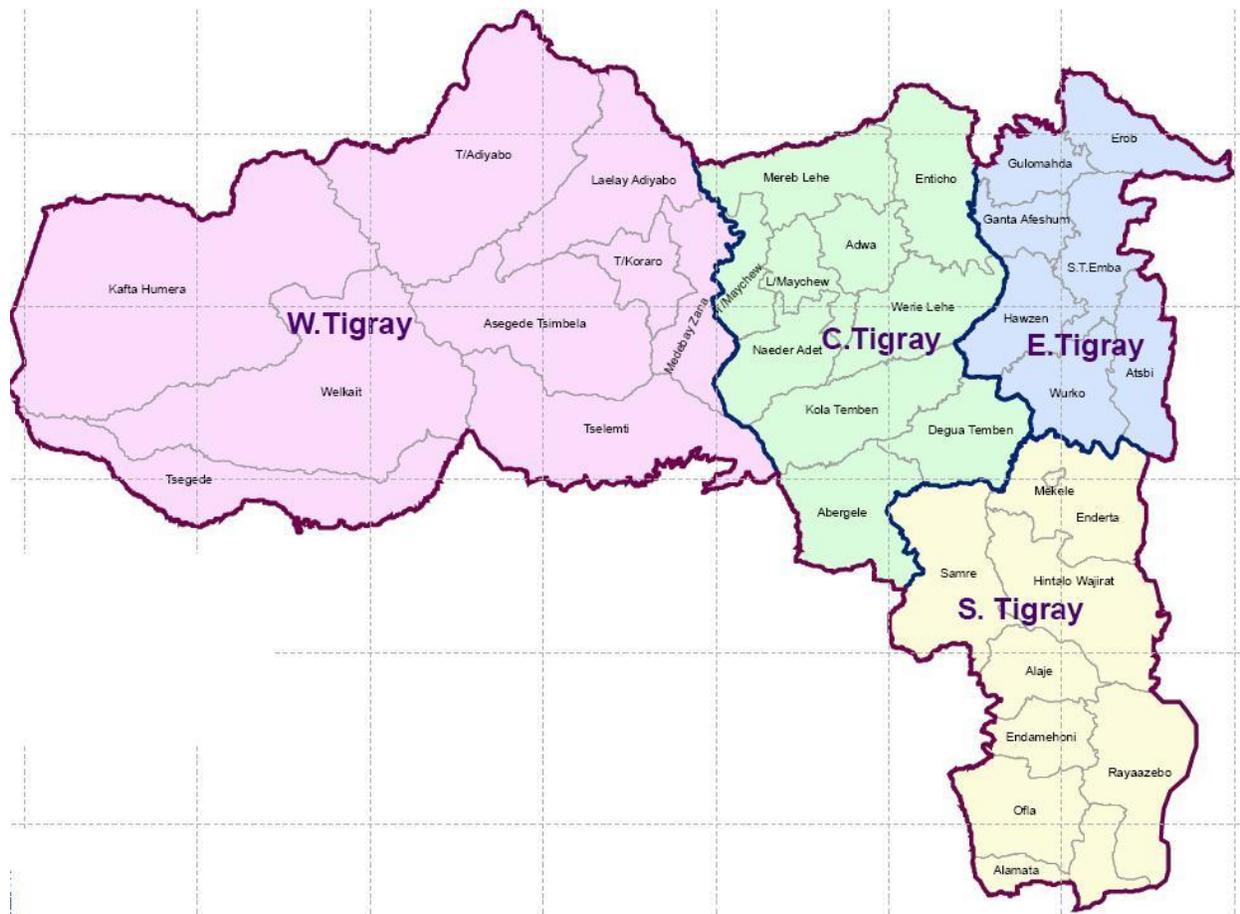
The two maps provided below are furnished here to help the reader locate Tigray and Ethiopia as a whole; the Tigray map can help readers understand the administrative zones of Tigray and heavy fighting is going on four fronts between the TPLF and the joint forces of Eritrean troops and EDF.

Map of the Regional States of Ethiopia



There is intense fighting going on between the OLF forces and the Ethiopian Federal Police forces in the Oromia Regional State, mostly in the western part adjacent to Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambela; there are also sporadic infighting in Benishangul-Gumuz between the Benishangul and Amhara militia

Map of the Regional State of Tigray



Intense wars were conducted and are being conducted between the TPLF forces and the EDF and Amhara Militia on the pink area of Western Tigray (Tsegede) and the yellow area of Southern Tigray (Alamata); the TPLF and Eritrean forces confrontations took place on the northern most of the pink area of western Tigray, green area of Central Tigray, and the blue area of Western Tigray

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