



POLICY BRIEF



In a Widespread War of All against All, Can Ethiopia Survive the Storm?

Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe



THE UNIVERSITY
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PeaceRep
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World Peace
Foundation

Author: Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform
School of Law, Old College, The University of Edinburgh
South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL

Tel. +44 (0)131 651 4566

Fax. +44 (0)131 650 2005

E-mail: peacerep@ed.ac.uk

PeaceRep.org

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/peacerep/>

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About the Author: Mulugeta Gebrehiwot is a researcher at the World Peace Foundation, Tufts University. He served as the director of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) of Addis Ababa University from 2009 to 2013. He holds a PhD from the University of Victoria, British Columbia, an MA in Public administration from Harvard Kennedy School, an MBA from the Open University of London, a BA degree in International Management from the Amsterdam School of Business. As an expert in Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution with a focus on East Africa he has consulted with different international organizations including AU, DFID, DANIDA, ECOWAS, GIZ, IGAD, UNMIS, UNAMID, and UNDP. He advised the AU and UN on mediation strategies and led the WPF program on African peace missions, 2015 to 2017.

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Introduction

Ethiopia is currently engulfed in a war of all against all. It now faces an existential threat to its survival as a "nation of nations." Most regions in Ethiopia are facing widespread war where at times it is not even known who is fighting against whom, creating complete anarchy. The government has deployed all kinds of federal and regional formal security actors, secretive security actors like [Koree Nageenyaa](#)¹, and is suspected to be behind gangster groups in the Amhara region that prey on the people. The rebellion in most regions is scattered, with no proper organization and discipline, with groups sometimes cooperating and at other times fighting against each other. This kind of war is a manifestation of the political decay in the country, which is resulting in complete ungovernability. It now appears that the tide of decay, ungovernability, lawlessness and chronic conflict have created an existential threat to the country.

The euphoria of change at the ascent of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali in 2018 did not last long. Combatants from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) who returned from exile soon went back to war, as they felt that the promised package of reintegration into the power hierarchies and security agencies was reneged upon by Abiy Ahmed. Soon after, the Federal Government, in cooperation with Eritrea and Somalia, initiated a new war on Tigrai which continued for two years, killing over 600,000 citizens and displacing millions of Tigrains from their places of origin. As the Pretoria Agreement seemed to end the Tigrai war, a new war in Amhara emerged which continues to date, devastating life in the Amhara. The Federal Government's sphere of control seems to be limited to the city of Addis Ababa and its environs, given the fact that the two biggest regions of the nation are at war.

The call for all-inclusive national dialogue, which has been on the table since 2020, was to create a national consensus on defining the problems of Ethiopia and charting the way forward through a peaceful process. The Federal Government's response to this call came too late and was too incomplete to meet the demands. Its call for a national dialogue was actually designed as a process to validate the Prosperity Party (PP) in government and exclude armed opposition groups.

Ethiopia has now reached a stage where everything is combustible, leading to a scenario where the regime could unravel. With this understanding, political actors in Ethiopia have little time to prevent the state's collapse by agreeing to some form of transition that gives them the space to create a consensus in defining its problems and a way forward towards resolution.

With an Interim Administration in place in Tigray, the Tigrayians could work towards further legitimizing an interim arrangement through running an all-Tigrayan inclusive conference. This would help them arrive at a consensus in defining the problems of Tigray and their resolution, and ultimately create a standing body that takes responsibility for overseeing the interim period. This would not only provide Tigray with the kind of leadership it needs for the interim period and beyond, but would also have a positive influence on the rest of the country.

This brief provides a narrative of Abiy's ascent to power and his anti-establishment rhetoric, which has led the country into the current chaos and war with itself. The brief also provides background to the various wars in the country, discussing the overall alignment of forces both at regional and federal levels. The brief will also summarize the opening of the National Commission for National Dialogue and its achievements thus far. It concludes by highlighting some key recommendations and steps forward to end the wars in Ethiopia.

Abiy's Ascent to Power

Ethiopia has seen a dramatic transformation over the past half a century. Two of the biggest changes were the 1991 victory of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which remained the dominant party for approximately three decades; and more recently, the accession to power of Abiy Ahmed Ali as Prime Minister, the subsequent elimination of the EPRDF, and the advent of the Prosperity Party as the ruling party.

On its ascent to power, the EPRDF set up a new federal structure that replaced the unitary form of government, which was instrumental in asserting the rights of cultural minorities and set a course for reconstituting the country into [a nation of nations](#).² Under the EPRDF's leadership, some remarkable successes in economic and social development were achieved. For example, their objectives of ensuring economic growth and reducing poverty were largely successful. [Over a period of 15 years from 2000 to 2016, the IMF listed Ethiopia](#)³ as the fastest growing economy in the sub-Saharan region. In addition, life expectancy was raised from [47 years in 1991 to 65 years in 2018](#).⁴ The country also enjoyed its longest-ever period of internal peace, lasting 25 years.

However, over time the coalition moved away from its revolutionary and progressive political objectives. [The inclusive nature of nationalism](#)⁵ was increasingly derailed, instead moving towards the exclusive and reactionary aspects of nationalism. Loyalty to leaders of the coalition—and not competency in accomplishing tasks—became the key criteria for filling the ranks of the party and the state. Furthermore, the party gradually became fused to the state with the objective of controlling the state, [resulting in the loss of its autonomous identity and impeding the building of democracy](#).⁶ The establishment failed to effectively manage the trade-offs between maintaining rapid growth and addressing the negative impacts on welfare and equity for the people. It also failed to meet or manage the rising expectations of Ethiopia's fast-expanding [population of educated young people](#).⁷

The incomplete transformation of [its wartime leadership style and organizational culture](#)⁸ manifested in the EPRDF retaining an inheritance from the armed struggle, including a binary categorization of enemy versus friend, a strong emphasis on secrecy over transparency, and a highly centralized form of leadership. These critical failures generated numerous shortcomings. The inflexible adherence to ideologies undermined efforts to build partnerships with opposing political elites, while the comfort of functioning as a dominant party became a significant obstacle to fostering pluralist democracy.

These were the seeds for later chaos,⁹ exacerbated by the death of the EPRDF's long-serving chairperson, Meles Zenawi. Meles's successor, Hailemariam Desalegne, had neither the vision nor the skill to maintain the status quo.¹⁰ Continuous public demands for change and reform fell on deaf ears, and the establishment that was once considered the saviour of Ethiopia began to draw widespread resentment. Eventually, the country drifted towards chaos, forcing Hailemariam to resign and hand over his chairpersonship of the party and premiership of the government to Abiy Ahmed.

The public's key issues leading to the collapse of the EPRDF were the following:

- ▶ Massive unemployment of the educated youth and increasing cost of living in urban centres.
- ▶ The growing inequitable distribution of wealth, particularly as related to the dislocation of farmers for commercial farms and fulfilling the continuously expanding needs of urban areas.
- ▶ Democratic rights, including the rights of self-expression, organization, and demands of nations and nationalities for self-rule.
- ▶ Demands for good governance: The lack of good governance, reflected in widespread rent-seeking practices, the erosion of meritocracy in bureaucratic positions, and associated embezzlement, and repression by an extortionist rural bureaucracy loyal only to EPRDF rule, was a key driver of continued protests across Oromia, the Amhara region, and many parts of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR).

Abiy Ahmed and his group's ascent was not based on providing sufficient answers and/or plans to address these political demands, but a result of a manipulative move employing populist rhetoric that hijacked the popular movement, in particular the Oromo youth's Qeerroo movement. In their bid for power, Abiy and his group reinvented themselves as champions for change¹¹ despite having served the EPRDF at its highest levels of leadership. They rode on the backs of the youth movement for change with this 'new identity' to stay in power. They fuelled the youth rebellion against the EPRDF by directly financing it and sabotaging the EPRDF's measures designed to curb the rebellion. Following the resignation of Hailemariam, they defied the tradition of the EPRDF which does not accept factional conspiracies¹² and conspired to manipulate the elections so that Abiy would win. Once in power, and with no clear agenda with the exception of the determination to stay in power, he continued to create and administer chaos.

A Reign of Confusion and Delusion

Abiy initially garnered huge popularity by promising everything to everyone. He promised to tear up the Ethiopian constitution when he met with proponents of the [Ethiopian great tradition](#),¹³ while at the same time promising to die for the constitution when he talked to those Ethiopians who ascribed to [counter histories](#).¹⁴

Abiy released journalists and appeared to be standing for press freedom. But the honeymoon did not last long. In Abiy's Ethiopia, [200 journalists have been arrested](#).¹⁵ In the [Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#), Ethiopia was ranked 110 out of 180 countries in 2019, falling to position 141 in 2024.¹⁶ Immediately following his ascent, Abiy released political prisoners and declared a total amnesty for opposition figures while also making peace with Eritrea. This did not last long. Soon he began [incarcerating high-profile political figures](#),¹⁷ including his former allies. His early months as premier were accompanied by the internal displacement of over a million people from the Oromia and Somali regional administrations. The displacement increased to [a total of 4.56 million](#)¹⁸ people by the end of 2022.

In his first year, Abiy took a number of steps that alienated key players in the EPRDF coalition. With the objective of undermining the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its legacy, he sponsored the production of 'documentary' films about corruption and massive human rights abuses [implicating Tigrayans](#)¹⁹ for all the evils that happened during the EPRDF's reign. Without due process of law, he imprisoned a number of security officials with Tigrayan origin. He also [forged a partnership with extremist Amhara elites](#)²⁰ who, in the name of restoring a greater, unitary Ethiopia, forged an ethno-nationalist coalition. He further moved towards [dissolving the EPRDF, violating the party law](#)²¹ and the EPRDF's internal by-laws, and created his own party called the Prosperity Party.

A Move to Consolidate Power: A War on Oromia

With the objective of consolidating his power, Abiy strengthened his grip over his mother party, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), by removing all potential contenders to power, including Lemma Megersa, an instrumental figure in bringing Abiy to the fore of the OPDO and the EPRDF. He removed Lemma from the Oromia presidency in April 2019 and replaced him with Shimelis Abdisa the same day. This move was further consolidated by his continued expulsion of individuals²² he suspected of being "hardcore" Oromo nationalists (often those who might not yield to his will) from federal, regional, and local government levels. By the end of 2019, Abiy had already filled key posts in his federal and Oromia governments with those who could act as "yes men."

He further moved to consolidate his hold in Oromia through a double pronged campaign. On the one hand, he began cracking down on the key leaders of the Qeerroo movement in all corners of Oromia while also launching a full-fledged military campaign to rid Oromia of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)'s insurgent forces. He branded the Oromia youth movement a "mob gathering," aiming to extort money and resources from society with no political objective. He categorically rejected the Qeerroo movement as a project of extortion preying on the people's resources. This propaganda was followed by the large-scale arrest and killing of youth leaders.

This massive crackdown on rebelling Oromia youth intensified after mass street protests in October 2019, sparked by allegations that Abiy Ahmed's government had plotted to assassinate Jawar Mohamed²³—a popular figure and leader in the Qeerroo's anti-government movement. During this time, hundreds of Oromia youth leaders were killed or disappeared, and thousands were arrested. The regime admitted the killing of 74 protesting youngsters at the time. These acts of repression only encouraged the Oromo youth to raise arms and join the OLA. This flow of the Oromo youth to the OLA was further exacerbated by the government's acts following the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa, a popular Oromo singer known for his songs that symbolized the youth resistance.

The killing of Hachalu in June 2020 sparked massive communal riots throughout Oromia. The government response to the riots left 178 people dead and a further 9,000 detained without due process of law.²⁴ Curfews were imposed and a complete shutdown of the internet was enforced. Over 1,700 local officials were purged from government,²⁵ including Defence Minister Lemma Megersa, a politician considered pivotal in prime minister's rise to power.²⁶

No independent inquiry was set up to investigate the killing of Hachalu. Instead, the regime simply accused the Tigrains initially, and later the OLA, of the crime, and used it as a pretext to crackdown on the remaining Oromo opposition leaders and supporters in Oromia. Key Oromo leaders,²⁷ including Jawar Mohamed, Bekele Gerba, and Dejene Tafa of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), and Abdi Regassa, Gemechu Ayana, and Mikael Boran of the OLA, as well as over 5,000 additional civilians were arrested as a result. OLF leader Dawud Ibsa was put under house arrest²⁸ and Abiy consolidated his power in Oromia by using coercion and at times co-option.

The war in Oromia continues unabated, while Oromo elites remain divided in both defining the problem of the Oromo people and finding a resolution. The Oromo elites fall into three schools of thought (unitarist, secessionist, and federalist).²⁹ Those around Abiy with a unitarist school of thought claim that the long-awaited turn of the Oromo³⁰ has arrived under Abiy Ahmed's leadership. Others, mostly in and around the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), have a federalist perspective and believe in Ethiopia's existing constitution, with some amendments. Oromo elites in and around the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) generally fall into the secessionist school of thought. One can therefore see the need for Oromo elites to negotiate and reach a consensus among themselves so that they can have a fruitful dialogue with their compatriots from other Ethiopian nations and nationalities.

As this process unfolded, Abiy began working to create a regional anti-TPLF alliance, and began eying an Eritrean coalition with President Isaias Afewerki for this purpose.

The Tigrai War

Abiy realized that resistance to his authoritarian rule would continue to come from major protagonists of multinational federations in general and the TPLF in particular, and began working towards an anti-TPLF alliance. He consolidated his relationships with political forces that advocate for the Great Ethiopian Tradition and call for a unitarist form of government. He travelled to the Eritrean capital, Asmara, signed an agreement with President Isaias Afwerki, and [later travelled to Saudi Arabia](#)³¹ and the UAE with Isaias where he received the highest medal of the kingdom. The African Union (AU), which was the custodian of the Algiers Agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea that ended the fighting between the two in 2000, was not invited to these meetings and was not tasked with any role in implementing or overseeing the agreement. The signing of the agreement brought Abiy the Nobel Peace Prize, which he used as a [shield for his genocidal war on Tigrai](#).³²

A year on from Abiy's ascent to power, mass arrest and displacement of Tigraians from several parts of the Amhara region (at times apparently state-sponsored) began to take place. The massive displacement was compounded by job losses, business closures, mass arrests and the disappearance of Tigraians in several parts of the Amhara region, and to some extent, in the Oromia region. Abiy began undermining the power of the coalition members by directly interfering in the affairs of [regional states](#).³³ For example, he deployed his army to the Somali Regional State, imprisoned the President of the region without due process of law, and directly assigned an interim administrator. These were models of arbitrary and unconstitutional action that he would later attempt in Tigrai.

Abiy Ahmed later used the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to indefinitely postpone the [scheduled national elections](#),³⁴ a move that was opposed by various opposition forces including the OLF, OFC, and the TPLF. Key members of the Oromo opposition were put in prison, but the TPLF, which was the ruling party in the Tigrai region, [decided to hold the regional elections on schedule](#).³⁵ This brought the crisis to a head. Evidence exposed later indicates that a key element of the [Abiy-Isaias pact was the planning and execution of the Tigrai war](#).³⁶ This was later confirmed by a tweet from no other than President Isaias Afwerki's spokesperson, Yemane Gebremeskel.

The two-year war in Tigrai is said [to have killed 600,000 people](#),³⁷ led to the loss of [\\$28 billion](#)³⁸ to the national economy, and caused the displacement of over 2.4 million people. Credible reports show that [ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity that amount to genocide](#)³⁹ have been committed in the war. Two years on from the signing of the Pretoria Agreement, Tigrai still looks forward to the full implementation of the agreement.

Over 30% of its territory is still under the occupation of irregular (non-Ethiopian National Defence Forces) forces and foreign forces, and over a million people are still in IDP camps, including over 60,000 refugees in Sudan. The issues of transitional justice and the redress and retribution that should follow are yet to come.

Some of the key issues that Tigrains continue to demand include:

- ▶ The return of the status quo in maintaining its administrative boundary.
- ▶ Retributive justice and reparation for the crimes committed, livelihoods destroyed and opportunities missed.
- ▶ A demand for self-determination which (in line with the constitution) includes the right to secede and create one's own independent state.
- ▶ Fair representation at federal level institutions including the house of representatives, house of federation, the council of ministers, key security institutions and the rest of the federal bureaucracy, etc.

Currently, the TPLF itself is now divided. The divisions arose following the signing of the Pretoria Agreement in November 2022, which ended the fighting between the Tigray Defence Force (TDF) and the Federal forces, with Eritrea also observing some key elements of the ceasefire. The division is essentially a result of a power struggle between the group led by Debretsion Gebremichael (Chairperson of the TPLF) and Getachew Reda (Vice Chairperson of the TPLF and the President of the Interim Administration of Tigray). There are no articulated substantive differences on any policy preference and/or strategies and tactics related to pursuing the interests of the Tigrains. Each group attempts to disguise its key motivation for the fight. However, it has become clear that it is all about who gets what in the power hierarchies within the TPLF and the Interim Administration. It is the politics of the belly. There are also other political organizations in Tigray with varying perspectives on the region's challenges and their solutions. It is therefore crucial that Tigrayan elites work towards increasing the legitimacy of the Interim Administration of Tigray (IAT), sort out the differences among them, and build a consensus on defining Tigray's problems and its priorities. This would enable them to competently engage in a genuine dialogue with compatriots from other Ethiopian nations and nationalities about the country's future.

The Birth of the Amhara War

The Pretoria Agreement silenced the guns in most parts of Tigray, but gave birth to a new war between the Federal Government and the Amhara irregular forces generally known as Fano. Abiy Ahmed's decision to disarm the Amhara security forces (both formal Amhara Special Police and the informal Fano militias) was the trigger for the Amhara war. The disarmament decision prompted a significant portion of the Amhara security forces to rebel and raise their arms against the government, initiating a conflict that quickly developed into a full-fledged war.

The war continues, and is taking the lives of tens of thousands of civilians and destroying the social and economic structure of the region. [A recent report by the association of higher education institutions of the Amhara region](#)⁴⁰ indicates that over the past 5 years, over 3.3 million Amharas have been displaced from their places of origin within and outside the Amhara region. The report further indicates that to date, the conflict has destroyed 40 of the 100 hospitals and 457 of the 917 health centres in the region. It indicates that an estimated 15,000 civilians have been killed by air raids and other forms of direct violence by the regime.

The war in the Amhara has made the region ungovernable and there is no military solution to this crisis. There is no option other than to seek an inclusive peaceful resolution.

Currently, Amhara elites are divided on the Amhara's problems and the direction for their resolution. Some believe that Ethiopia's current multinational federal arrangement has marginalized Amhara interests. They argue that the solution lies in dismantling the existing constitution and replacing it with one that establishes a unitary Ethiopian state. By contrast, others define the problem of the Amhara as related to the current multinational federal arrangement, but with a slightly different perspective. They accept the Amhara's definition as a distinct national group, as defined by the constitution, but believe that the region's boundaries are too small due to the national identity-based approach to the demarcation of regional boundaries. This is a contradiction in terms. They reject the idea of creating administrative boundaries based on the settlement of cultural identities, but accept the definition of the Amhara based on that very premise.

Few Amhara intellectuals define the Amhara people's problems in the same way as the rest of Ethiopians. Instead, they only focus on the rights of the Amhara people living outside the Amhara region, who add up to over 20% of the total population of the Amhara. They believe that the rights of the Amhara living as minorities in different regions are not respected by the constitution, including their right to teach their children in their mother tongue and their right to compete for elected government positions. They argue that these people have been subject to continuous displacements as they continue to be seen as intruders by the indigenous populations and their administrations. They believe that the constitution needs to be amended to address this problem.

A good number of Amhara elites organized under the former Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), a member of the EPRDF coalition, the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), and currently the Amhara branch of the Prosperity Party are happy to maintain the status quo. These groups joined Abiy Ahmed's campaign against Tigray and mobilized the Amhara security forces and the Amhara youth under irregular armed formations to fight in the Tigray war. With the objective of co-opting the populist movement of the Amhara youth, the campaign echoed the irredentist slogan that claimed parts of Tigray as parts of the Amara region and participated in perpetrating massive atrocities that amounted to genocide in the Tigray war.

One can therefore see the need for an all-Amhara inclusive dialogue aiming to create a shared definition of the problem of the Amhara and its resolution, not only as an important step in enhancing the internal legitimacy of the Amhara resistance, but also as an important step in preparing the Amhara for a productive Ethiopia-wide inclusive national dialogue.

Crisis in the Peripheral Regions of Ethiopia

The Benishangul-Gumuz region has been at war for the last five years. The conflict in this region involves an array of actors – Gumuz militias, the Benishangul People's Liberation Army (BPLA), the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), regional and federal forces and Amhara militias, and reached new heights following the ascent of Abiy Ahmed to power. In the first half of 2022, fighting between local armed groups and [regional and federal forces and allied militias escalated](#).⁴¹ This included the targeting of civilian populations particularly focused on non-indigenous communities – mainly Amhara and Oromo – by the BPLA and Gumuz militias, and indigenous populations (mostly Gumuz, Berta and Shinasha) by the OLA and Amhara Fano militias.

The root cause for the rebellion by the indigenous peoples is related to the threat they feel from Amhara and Oromo incomers to the region. It is related to their political rights under the ethnic-federal system and the Amhara's widespread belief that the Metekel zone was misallocated to Benishangul-Gumuz when the regional state was created in the 1990s. The region is now directly administered by the Federal Government under a military command post. Nothing has been done to address the root cause of the problem. Furthermore, there is the risk that Benishangul-Gumuz may be drawn into a proxy-conflict between the more powerful neighbouring regions – Amhara and Oromia – for irredentist objectives.

The Gambela region is also at war with itself. [The Gambela region has been witnessing conflict](#)⁴² among the local Anuak communities and the Nuer since the beginning of the first Sudanese civil war. There were also incidents of ethnic conflicts with other South Sudanese communities over competition for resources. The EPRDF was managing these conflicts with the exception of sporadic incidents. More recently, [conflict has once again erupted in the region](#),⁴³ resulting in death, destruction and displacement, and the region is now administered more or less as a military command post.

Nor is the SNNPR at peace with itself. Abiy Ahmed's regime has been attempting to address conflicts in the SNNPR by [reconfiguring regional and local administrations](#).⁴⁴ After facing a fierce violent conflict from the Sidama demanding statehood, the government was forced to approve it as one of the regional states of Ethiopia. This appeared to have calmed the Sidama conflict. However, it triggered similar demands for autonomous regional administration statuses in 12 other SNNPR zones, highlighting the need to resolve chronic border disputes and recognize the identities of groups in those areas.

From Bad to Worse

Six years on, the key problems that ousted Hailemariam Desalegne from office have gone from bad to worse. Popular demands are unanswered. Democratic rights including the right to freedom of expression are not respected, unemployment and cost of living in urban centres is continuously increasing, and demands for good governance are louder than ever.

Freedom of expression in Ethiopia has gone from bad to worse, reflecting that the country is at war with itself. [A report by the Committee to Protect Journalists indicated that Ethiopia⁴⁵](#) has entrenched a pattern of arbitrarily detaining journalists for five consecutive years beginning in 2019. The climax was during the two years of the Tigray war when security personnel took at least 63 journalists into custody, often accusing them of having links to rebel forces or justifying their detention with state of emergency laws. Ethiopia was ranked among the top three worst jailers of journalists for each consecutive year since 2020.

The public's hard-earned economic welfare has been derailed since the ascent of Abiy Ahmed. Poverty rates in Addis Ababa increased to 24% in 2022 from a rate of 17.8% in 2016. The poverty rate in Tigray shot up to 45% in 2022 from 24% in 2016. According to the data from the [Federal Government](#),⁴⁶ the war in Tigray alone has caused \$22.7 billion worth of damage to infrastructure and a further \$6 billion of productivity losses – a loss equivalent to 26% of GDP.

The launch of what Abiy Ahmed called the 'Homegrown Economic Reform Agenda' in 2024, a reform designed and financed by international financial institutions, has effectively killed any of the remaining policy framework of the developmental state. As a result of this reform, the [floating of exchange rate of the Birr⁴⁷](#) has led to a 170% depreciation of the currency and increased the cost of living exponentially. This has subsequently increased the [Multidimensional Poverty Index \(MPI\)⁴⁸](#) of Ethiopia from 68% in 2019 to 72% in 2024, with an additional 18% of the population susceptible to multidimensional poverty. This means that 86 million out of the 120 million Ethiopians are in poverty, making it the highest poverty rate in the world.

Unemployment of youth has increased.⁴⁹ The total number of unemployed reported in 2018 was 1.41 million, which has grown to an estimated 2.4 million in 2024. Furthermore, rising inflation and the government's failure to mitigate its impacts has made life unbearable even for people with regular income, turning them into an employed poor. The Addis Ababa city administration, for example, has begun a teachers' school feeding program⁵⁰ providing free lunches to 3,707 teachers in 256 schools. This measure makes a statement: Teachers are going hungry despite receiving regular salaries.

The number of displaced people as a result of conflict has increased. A report by the IOM indicates that an estimated 664,500 households comprising 3.3 million citizens are identified as displaced persons in over 2,700 accessible IDP centres in Ethiopia as of May 2024.⁵¹ This number is a huge increase from the total of 700,000 recorded at the beginning of 2017.⁵²

A November 2024 World Bank report that includes an assessment of poverty and equity⁵³ articulates the following key findings:

- ▶ GDP per capita growth has decelerated to 4.6% during the 2016 to 2022 period compared to nearly 7.4% during the 2010 to 2016 period.
- ▶ The annual growth rate of industry decelerated from an average of 26.8% during the years of 2010 to 2016 to an average of 10.5% during the 2016 to 2022 period.
- ▶ Unemployment nearly doubled in the years 2016 to 2022 to 9% when compared to the 5% unemployment rate during the 2010 to 2016 period. The female unemployment rate also increased to 13% in 2021 compared to 7% in 2013. Job creation in the industry sector not only stalled after 2016, but also led to the loss of around half a million jobs.
- ▶ The single most important reason for the lack of growth is armed conflict: 'each day of an active conflict exposure directly contributed to a 3.3% decline in consumption among households.'

A UNICEF report released on 2 January 2025⁵⁴ states that currently over 10,000 schools are damaged and over 6,000 schools are closed, meaning over 9 million Ethiopian children are out of school. The report also details over 9 million malaria cases as of October 2024, including 1,267 deaths, a record in the last two decades. The number of reported cases of malaria in 2019 was less than one million.

Abiy Ahmed has failed in everything except for instituting the 'politics of the belly' and dividing and ruling the Ethiopian polity as a strategy for his survival in power. By implementing this strategy, he has created anarchy where everyone else seems to be busy fighting one another, thereby enabling Abiy Ahmed to comfortably rule in the short-term. The downside of this success is that it eventually gave birth to the current chaotic, ungovernable situation that could crush the regime to a point of no return.

The Tigrains have a long way to go to trust each other and begin working together towards a shared goal. They are not clear on whether they should look for a new partnership with their northern neighbours rather than their southern ones. They have started questioning whether the price paid by their forefathers to maintain the sovereignty of Ethiopia was worth paying. They are not sure whether they should be looking forward to the reconfiguration of the region and to Ethiopia building a new set of national arrangements. It has also affected their relationship with the Amharas and the Oromos.

The Amhara are also divided. The former ADP is now an Amhara branch of the Prosperity Party. With the exception of a few individuals who opted for exile and/or rebellion against the regime, most of them continue to be part of Abiy Ahmed's criminal project. A large majority of exiled Amhara elites are now in a state of confusion and have become bystanders while the war continues devastating the region.

Oromo elites are also divided and confused. Close associates of Abiy Ahmed think that it is their turn to rule and every Oromo should protect them from 'others'. Others reject Abiy Ahmed for his crimes against the people of Ethiopia, including the Oromos, but are caught in a dilemma over whether they should coordinate with other Ethiopians to oust him. Relationships among other Ethiopian nations and nationalities are also similarly affected.

The range of division in defining the crisis varies among Ethiopians. On one hand, Ethiopian elites define the crisis as created by the 'problems of Ethiopia', while others define it as 'problems of Ethiopians and not Ethiopia', with several mixed definitions in-between.

National Dialogue as a Way Forward

National dialogue is a mechanism that brings major national stakeholders together in times of deep political crisis to reach a consensus in defining the problem of a nation and the general direction towards a resolution. National dialogue doesn't replace negotiation to a ceasefire, but follows a ceasefire, leading to a complete political settlement.

A call for an all-inclusive national dialogue with the objective of addressing controversial national issues has been in place in Ethiopia since Abiy Ahmed's ascent to power. [This call became particularly strong in 2020](#)⁵⁵ at the climax of the disagreements following the government's decision to postpone general elections due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Several opposition parties including the TPLF rejected the decision and called for a national dialogue, which was supported by regional and international organizations concerned with Ethiopia's stability.

Abiy Ahmed turned a deaf ear to the call for a national dialogue up until the height of the Tigray war. In response to pressure from the international community to peacefully resolve the war in Tigray, he declared a National Commission for National Dialogue on 15 January 2022 through [proclamation No. 1265-2021](#).⁵⁶ The foundational document articulated the purpose of the commission as creating a national consensus and common grounds on contentious national issues, with the objective of paving the way for a stable Ethiopia.

The commission's mandate was controversial. It was tasked with focusing on the resolution of difference of opinions and disagreements among Ethiopians. However, the commission was not inclusive enough. It was declared that the national dialogue would not have any engagement with the Tigrayan Defence Forces (TDF) or the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). Nor was any peace process in place with the goal of ending both wars. Isolating armed political actors from a national dialogue therefore is not a starter for a genuine political process that paves the way out from a deep political crisis.

The nomination and appointment of the commissioners was not considered inclusive. Several opposition parties initially questioned [the neutrality of the process forming the commission](#).⁵⁷ Furthermore, they demanded that [the selection and appointment of the commissioners](#)⁵⁸ should be transparent and inclusive. Furthermore, the commissioners were nominated by the Prime Minister's office, contrary to the declared process of being nominated and appointed through a process controlled by the House of Representatives.

A caucus consisting of the main opposition parties in the country including⁵⁹ the Wolaita National Party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, the Oromo Federalist Party, Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party, and the Medhin Party criticized the government's national dialogue initiative, labelling it a hoax and rejecting it in totality. The Interim Administration of Tigray (IAT) has also declined to participate in the process,⁶⁰ expressing its priorities and rejecting the process due its lack of neutrality and credibility.

The Prosperity Party (PP) and its government have proven incapable of leading Ethiopia to stability through an all-inclusive and genuine national dialogue process. For the PP, the National Dialogue was, at best, a slogan designed to give it the appearance engaging in peaceful resolution of the country's conflicts. When and if it worked as the PP intended, it aimed to amend the constitution with the goal of crowning Abiy Ahmed President of Ethiopia. The process has now collapsed and become outdated, as Ethiopia's problems have gone beyond the scope of national dialogue.

The top priority in Ethiopia now is to stop the ongoing wars. The government is incapable of engaging in meaningful negotiations to resolve armed conflicts and Ethiopia seems to be at the brink of state collapse, despite its history of survival and resilience. It is now clear that the government is unable to collect taxes, enforce laws, maintain security, or exert territorial control.⁶¹ Tigray is not under the control of the Federal Government. The Amhara and Oromia regions are ungovernable and the control of some of the peripheral regions is also contested.

The current crisis can only be halted by forming an all-inclusive transitional government that provides a space for a national dialogue. Such a transitional period could give enough time for sub-national dialogue in preparation for an all-inclusive national dialogue for a comprehensive resolution.

Recommendations on the Way Forward

To the International Community

1. The international community should understand that Ethiopia is now standing on a slippery slope towards statelessness and the Prosperity Party has proven incapable of stopping the slide. As it stands, the Federal Government is willing to accept any reforms demanded by international actors, as long as it can leverage financial resources and/or political leverage to suppress the ongoing resistance of Ethiopians against the regime. Such a condition of the Federal Government should not be mistaken for openness to reforms demanded by any of the international actors. The most recent 'home grown economic policy' sponsored by the IMF and the World Bank only demonstrates the regime's desperation to leverage resources, and not its motivation to reform.
2. The international community should understand that 'national dialogue' as a priority mechanism to pull the country out of this deep crisis is preceded by the priority of silencing the guns for a peaceful transitional process. International actors should therefore encourage the government to end the conflicts through negotiations with the rebel forces without any precondition.
3. The international community should encourage Ethiopians to engage in informal dialogue and create partnerships towards creating an all-inclusive transitional process in Ethiopia.

To Ethiopians

1. Currently, Ethiopians are divided across their ethnic communities and there is no consensus, even among elites of each and every nation and nationality in Ethiopia, on the definition of their problems and potential resolutions. This is the Achilles' heel of the resistance movement that has prevented it from forcing the regime to relent to the public's demands. Ethiopians therefore should try to bridge their differences and work together towards saving the state through a peaceful transitional process.

2. Politics in Ethiopia, particularly in Oromia and the Amhara regions, is dominated by those who raised arms. Meanwhile, a massive resignation of civilian elites from politics is observed. Ethiopian elites should wake up now and begin organizing themselves. Otherwise, the future of Ethiopia will be determined solely by those who took up arms.
3. As a first step in their awakening, elites from the Ethiopian nations and nationalities should begin designing an agenda towards reaching a consensus in defining the problems of their respective nationalities and charting the way forward.
4. The Tigraians could possibly set an example by holding a sub-national dialogue, preparing every nation and nationality for an all-inclusive national dialogue.

Could the Tigraians take the Lead?

The Tigraians, despite their political differences, came together and fought against the genocidal war waged upon them. A few months before the start of the war, the TPLF had come up with a comprehensive evaluation of its governance system, concluding that it had rotted internally, expressed through all forms of decadence, and it required a fundamental overhaul to remain relevant in the politics of Tigrai. Several newly created political organizations including Arena, Salsay-Weyane, Baitona, the Independence Party of Tigrai, and Assimba, as well as the Arena party for sovereignty and democracy, an opposition party with over a decade existence, were working to oust the TPLF from power.

Despite this, Tigraians from all walks of life came together to put the TPLF at the centre of the resistance, as it was the ruling party in the region. They hoped this would provide an opportunity for the TPLF to redeem itself by aligning with the interests of the people of Tigrai—something it admitted to betraying. They were capable of bracketing their differences to form the Tigrai Defence Forces (TDF) and work together to combat the existential threat they faced.

However, old habits die hard, and in the middle of the struggle the TPLF began infighting to control power in the region. This became clear after the signing of the Pretoria Agreement. Right now, the TPLF is [divided into two groups](#)⁶² led by the former President of the Tigrai regional administration, Debretsion Gebremichael, and the current President of the Interim Administration of Tigrai (IAT), Getachew Reda. Each side considers the other an illegal entity. Thus far the divide has complicated the already complex situation in the region further. The two factions of the TPLF are occupied in undermining each other, leading the region towards being completely ungovernable.

The faction led by Debretsion Gebremichael has called on its followers to undermine the administration by disobeying all orders. It shamelessly states that it will make Tigrai ungovernable unless it is back in power. To this end, it began appointing district governors and city mayors in parallel to appointments made by the Interim Administration. Thus far, the only thing preventing the crisis from sliding into violence is the TDF's neutrality regarding both TPLF factions. The hope is that the TDF's neutrality as an institution continues.

If the current situation of the TPLF and its factions continues unabated, the statehood of Tigray could be completely undermined to the point of no return. It will not matter who prevails in this fight if statehood in Tigray is fractured. It is therefore important for both factions not to lose the state and to cooperate in protecting it. The factions should also understand that the TPLF's monopoly of power in Tigray has ended with no likelihood of its restoration. The youth of Tigray are demanding a radical change in politics.

Tigraian political elites, including the newly-formed political parties, are divided among themselves both in defining the problems of Tigray and their resolution. Some in the TPLF define Tigray's problems as emanating from the collapse of the EPRDF's Ethiopian project and believe the way forward is to reboot the Federal constitution with some amendments. Others, such as the Independence Party of Tigray and Salsay Woyane, define the problems of Tigray as emanating from being part of Ethiopian empire and not having an independent state. Others, like the Baitona party, believe that the problems emanate from totally abandoning the indigenous Tigraian administrative mechanisms. There is therefore a need for Tigrayians to create a political process that enables them reach a consensus in defining the problems of Tigray; charting the way forward, and identifying the key strategies and milestones in its resolution.

Currently, the only region that is not governed directly by the Prosperity Party and the only region that has an Interim Administration is the Tigray region. The key priority of Tigrayians is enhancing the internal legitimacy of the Interim Administration among its Tigraian constituency by calling an all-inclusive Tigraian conference to discuss the key questions of contention among Tigrayians. These include:

- ▶ What does the experience of the last three decades reveal in terms of the security and wellbeing of the Tigrayians and the quality of leadership they have had?
- ▶ What are the key priorities of Tigrayians and what key aspirations do they share? What tactics and strategies should be followed so that the Tigrayians can work together to achieve their aspirations?
- ▶ How should they be governed during the interim period until an elected government takes over?
- ▶ Through this conference, how can one establish a council to assume legislative oversight responsibilities in the absence of an elected legislative body during the interim period?

Such a conference would not only enhance the legitimacy of the Interim Administration, but would also prepare the people of Tigray for a constructive dialogue to engage with their fellow Ethiopians to determine a way forward for the country. It can also serve as an example to the other nations and nationalities of Ethiopia, encouraging them to undertake a similar exercise among themselves.

The Interim Administration of Tigray (IAT) should take this initiative. Some may question whether the IAT has the mandate to do so and reduce the idea to a question of legal semantics. But if one agrees that Tigrayans should engage in this initiative, then what matters is the task itself and not who initiates it. No one gave the TPLF the mandate to launch the Tigrayan liberation movement, but it was considered appropriate by Tigrayans, evidenced by them supporting and joining the movement. Currently, the most representative institution in Tigray is the IAT as it is composed of the TPLF's two factions, the TDF, The Global Society Tigrayan Scholars, and the Baitona party from the opposition. Therefore, this makes it the most appropriate body to initiate this process. It should therefore:

1. Decide to initiate the process.
2. Create an as-inclusive-as-possible plan to run the process, with full autonomy to shape the agenda and determine Tigrayan representatives from all corners of life.

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University of Edinburgh, School of Law, Old College,
South Bridge, EH8 9YL

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