

Background on the Tigray Conflict

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Ethiopia is a diverse country of 110 million people made up of 80+ ethnic groups and languages. It's also the lone African country to successfully repel European colonization in the late 19th century.

In the 20th century the country went through some of the most dramatic political upheavals anywhere in the world. One of these was in 1991, when a rebel group from Tigray, the TPLF, fighting alongside Eritrean freedom fighters overthrew the government.

Eritrea became an independent country and the TPLF took over power in Ethiopia.

The new TPLF-led government dramatically reshaped Ethiopia by rejecting a single national Ethiopian identity and centering Ethiopian political life along ethnic and tribal lines. This was formalized in a new constitution introduced in 1995 where 9 ethnic states were created. This was a radically new concept in Ethiopia.

Under the new framework, each territorial region belonged to a single ethnic group. One of these ethnic regions is Tigray where the conflict is centered today and the home-base of the TPLF.

As an illustration, what happened in 1995 would be like a new US President or Congress deciding with a stroke of a pen that: Georgia would belong *only* to black people; California only to Asians; Arizona only to whites, Texas for only Mexicans etc ...



Example of ethnic-federalism

Since the TPLF represented only 6% of the country, in order to gain nationwide legitimacy, it invited (some say created) three more compliant ethnic political parties and formed an umbrella organization called the EPRDF through which it dominated Ethiopia for 3 decades.

The TPLF had sweeping control of the Ethiopian state, controlling more than 70% of top positions in the military and security forces and dominating the economy through a handful of state-owned companies which funneled billions of dollars into the TPLF's own coffers.

In 2018 following nearly three years of nationwide protests against the EPRDF and TPLF's minority rule in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian people demanded reforms & democratization. After internal deliberations within the EPRDF, a man named Abiy Ahmed was selected to lead the reforms.

Immediately the new leader introduced radical reforms by welcoming back exiled politicians; cracking down on corruption; filling half of his cabinet with women and making peace with Eritrea, a bitter enemy of the former TPLF-led government.

Abiy won the Noble prize for the peace deal with Eritrea. The Prime Minister's new relationship with Eritrea deeply angered the TPLF and made them suspicious of his motives.

Under the peace agreement Ethiopia would cede a small part of the disputed territory in Tigray which the TPLF's leaders laid claim to and which the Ethiopian military had been protecting for close to two decades following a bitter border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The straw that broke the camel's back between the TPLF and the new Prime Minister occurred in late 2019 when the new PM disavowed the ethnic makeup of the EPRDF and created a single non-ethnic political party to replace it.

The TPLF refused to join the new party and finalized its retreat back to its home-base of Tigray to govern the region with as little interference as possible from the new PM based in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa.

As the PM cracked down on the previous regime's corruption, the TPLF promptly began accusing him of ethnic-profiling and shielded their members from arrest in their home region of Tigray. (They had a sizable armed regional militia).

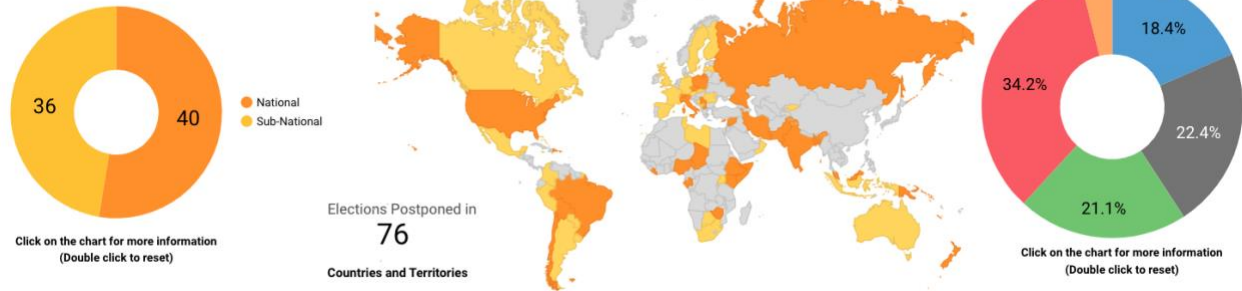
Their accusation was certainly ridiculous given that they themselves were the ones which constructed Ethiopia along ethnic lines and made themselves vulnerable by ensuring that their party representing 6% of the country controlled every lever of state power.

In mid-2020 Ethiopia postponed its upcoming elections due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Ethiopia's election postponement was one of 76 elections globally that was postponed due to COVID and certainly wasn't an eyebrow raising move.



National and Subnational Elections Postponed

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Elections postponed during COVID

The TPLF however charged that the PM didn't have the constitutional authority to postpone elections and that they would go ahead and pursue their regional elections as scheduled in September 2020 in Tigray.

The TPLF was itching for a confrontation with the Prime Minister and declared that after October 5 2020 (when the PM's term 'expired') they would not accept the federal government's legitimacy and all rules & regulations coming from the PM would not be accepted in Tigray.

The PM on the other hand declared that the elections conducted in Tigray in which the TPLF won more than "99%" of seats were invalid and stopped federal funding for the region. In the mean time, the TPLF refused all bilateral peaceful dialogue with the Prime Minister insisting on banal demands such as freeing political prisoners & having other parties participate in a dialogue in order to presumably share power until the new elections.

When the PM appointed a new commander to lead the country's Northern Command military branch stationed in Tigray, the TPLF poisoned the man and sent him packing back declaring that the PM is illegitimate and does not have authority to appoint military leaders.

Then on Nov 3, election eve in the United States, in what it called a "pre-emptive" attack the TPLF ambushed and massacred hundreds of Ethiopia's non-Tigrayan national military soldiers in their sleep.

The following day, the Prime Minister made an address to the country saying that he has begun a law and order operation and military offensive to respond to this unprecedented and treasonous attack and bring the TPLF's leaders to justice.

After about three weeks Ethiopian and allied regional forces had captured all the major towns in Tigray and the TPLF's leaders went into hiding. A few weeks later some of the major architects of the party were captured and/or killed when they refused to surrender.

On social media, since the first day of the conflict, TPLF's supporters began constructing a narrative that a war had been declared "on the people Tigray" instead of the TPLF. That's like saying a war has been declared on California because people are trying to recall governor Gavin Newsom.

TPLF supporters completely disregarded the fact that it was the TPLF that had goaded the PM into a military offensive and that the operation was intended to remove the party from power (not the people) and bring them to justice for their massacre of Ethiopian soldiers.

Soon thereafter, "the war on Tigray" narrative morphed into what activists began calling #TigrayGenocide again to give the false impression that there is some bloodthirsty African dictator that is out to kill the Tigrayan people that they knew the western media would eat up.

The Ethiopian government on the other hand had been hesitant to allow western media or humanitarian agencies because it presumably feared these organizations would be exploited by the TPLF (this was not unfounded as the TPLF used aid orgs to smuggle weapons in the 80s).

As Joe Biden's administration came to power on Jan 20, it set an aggressive tone against the Prime Minister's government which was fulfilling its obligations in trying to restore law and order after an insurrection had occurred just like the minor one that occurred in the US. The US government along with international aid agencies began to demand "unfettered" and "unrestricted access" to Tigray along with media access. Journalists began to clamor daily on news articles and on Twitter and started singularly assigning blame to the Ethiopian government.

Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch began to publish what they claimed are unassailable evidence of massacres in a city called Axum using nothing but phone calls to a few dozen people with no evidence of dead bodies or bullet holes.

Slowly but surely the "genocide" narrative started by TPLF supporters as a cynical ploy to draw attention *away* from the TPLF's atrocious crimes and intransigence which led to the conflict began to gain support in western media. The tide of western public opinion decisively turned against the Ethiopian government.

Nonetheless, there is NO genocide in Tigray. Genocide is the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular ethnic group with the aim of destroying that group.

There is no force that is trying to destroy Tigrayans, they are peace-loving Ethiopians, but there certainly are forces that will not sleep until the remaining members of the TPLF are brought to justice.

That is not to say that there is no suffering in Tigray. The humanitarian situation is real. People need food. Medical facilities and other critical infrastructure are badly damaged. The Ethiopian government has reported massive destruction of infrastructure by the TPLF as it was fleeing the major towns. And the government has opened up full access to humanitarian aid and it reports that it is providing 70% of the aid itself.

There is a PR campaign going on by western governments to see which one of them can look most concerned about the situation in Tigray. Every day or so a western politician releases a statement saying "I have deep concerns about what's going on in Tigray" but the Ethiopian government has reported they are coming empty handed and their concerns don't match their action on the ground.

Supporters of the TPLF have one major goal: that is to revive the TPLF from its sorry condition and bring it back to power somehow somehow by hook or by crook. They are using the real humanitarian challenges & abusing the word genocide to paint a sensationalized picture that evokes memories of gas chambers and machetes in the casual mind.

The US government has also used terms like "ethnic cleansing" to describe what appears to be displacement of people. These charged and sensationalized headlines have made the propagators of the false genocide narrative feel vindicated.

As with all conflicts, the conflict in Tigray is ugly and has incurred collateral damage and casualties. The party responsible for the suffering of Tigrayans is the TPLF which started an unprovoked conflict because it was suffering from withdrawal symptoms from losing power.

There is a legitimate humanitarian crisis in Tigray and the Ethiopian government along with some international partners like the World Food Program are addressing it. There are also

some civilian casualties of the conflict. But there is NO GENOCIDE in Tigray & it's deeply insulting to real victims of genocide throughout history to use this term to advance a political objective.

The Tigrayan people are suffering because their region was run by deranged leaders of the TPLF who willingly decided to burn the house down and chose self-destruction over peaceful co-existence with the rest of the Ethiopian polity.