

War in Tigray: Summary of Main Events

Special Briefing No. 4, 10 March 2021

To accompany Situation Report 100 - EEPA HORN

1. Introduction

EEPA started the publication of the Situation Reports on 17 November 2020. Prior to this, EEPA had published internal daily updates. Realising that, due to the total media and communication black-out, there was a need for information, the Situation Reports were started. These were published on an (almost) daily basis. Today, 10 March 2021, EEPA publishes the 100th edition of the Situation Report and the team offers an analysis of what has been reported so far. We thank everyone who has helped in collecting and verifying information and in distributing it. The report below is based on the Situation Reports published so far. The full list of Situation Reports can be found [here](#). Information and corrections can be sent to info@eepa.be.

2. Start of the Operations

Fighting erupted first on 3 November 2020, when Eritrean troops entered the Tigray region from the North, prior to the declaration of a Law and Order Operation. Simultaneously, on 3 November 2020, the Ethiopian Federal Government sent a cargo plane with special forces to the capital of the regional state, Mekelle, under the pretext of transporting bank notes.

According to the newly elected Tigray regional government, it had intelligence that the special forces had been instructed to arrest the leaders of the Tigray regional government, who were assembled for a meeting in Mekelle.

The Ethiopian federal government had argued that the elections held in Tigray were illegal, whilst the Tigray government maintained the view that the mandate of the Federal Government was only that of a caretaker government, as federal elections had been postponed due to COVID-19. The tensions ran high as the federal government sought to redeploy the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), stationed in Tigray; a move the regional government opposed. A General, sent by Addis to Mekelle in the days prior to the conflict, was sent back.

The Tigray regional state government argued that the redeployment of the Northern Command was not within the constitutional power of Prime Minister Abiy, which had ended on 5 October 2020. The arrest of the members of the Tigray government assembled in the Planet Hotel by the federal special forces failed. Now under threat, the Tigray regional government sought to gain control over the Northern Command.

Tigray regional forces swiftly carried out attacks on ENDF bases in Tigray. Following these attacks, the Ethiopian federal government declared a swift law-and-order operation and started invading Tigray on November the 4th. Some divisions went over to the side of the Tigray regional forces; in some cases, ENDF elements surrendered only after a 10-day siege.

Evidence emerged from Sudan that agreements had been made between Ethiopia and Sudan prior to the start of the Law and Order Operation. The agreement was that troops would be deployed by Sudan to stop the movement of persons on the Tigray/Ethiopian border with Sudan.

3. Different Narratives on the Start of the War

Different narratives have since emerged regarding the start of the conflict. The manner in which the conflict started and different actors became involved is unclear. As can be expected, the different belligerents have different stories to explain the outbreak of the conflict on November 4th. On the one side, the Ethiopian federal government claims that the Tigray regional government was illegally elected and that the government party, the TPLF, “and their supporters”, carried out unprovoked attacks against the Ethiopian National Defence Forces’ Northern Command. This command, which is tasked with protecting the Northern border against Eritrea, was one of the best supplied, trained and armed commands in Ethiopia. As a consequence of these attacks on the Northern Command, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Ethiopian federal government declared a law-and-order operation and started operations in Tigray.

On the other side the Tigrayans claim that they had evidence that the Ethiopian federal government was preparing an attack to remove the elected regional government, and that Tigrayan forces attacked the Northern Command bases pre-emptively to foil this “plot”. The elected President of the Tigray region, Debretsion Gebremichael, said that his “*forces had foiled a plan by the federal troops to use artillery and arms stationed there to attack the region.*” With tensions growing between the TPLF and the federal government, and a feeling that they were being systematically persecuted, the TPLF wished to retain control over the powerful ENDF Northern Command stationed on its territory. When they learned that the federal government wanted to send in the Ethiopian army, they decided to strike first to gain full control over the heavy equipment and to not be destroyed by it, in the event that it would be deployed by the Ethiopian federal government against its own citizens in the Tigray region.

4. Eritrean Involvement

The presence of Eritrean troops in Tigray has been reported by a multitude of different sources. The United States, foreign diplomats, and UN security teams have all independently said that Eritrean troops are active in Tigray. Moreover, different news sources such as the Flemish public broadcaster VRT, the Daily Telegraph, the New York Times, and our own sources have confirmed this. An increasing number of pictures are emerging of Eritrean soldiers in Tigray. Some have even been identified in Ethiopian news footage, announcing the arrest of Tigrayan leaders. Eritrean vehicles have been identified by their number plates. Eritrean soldiers were identified by their uniforms and by the dialects they spoke; some Eritrean soldiers were identified as wearing Ethiopian uniforms but could be recognised by their typical footwear – which allows Eritrean troops to move fast (the light plastic sandals, or ‘congos’).

Eritrea has played an important role in the conflict with Tigray. It has provided both logistical and direct military support. Although the number of troops deployed by Eritrea is unclear, there are many indications that this contingent was large. Several reports were received from people inside Eritrea that the government was actively conscripting more people into the armed forces to supplement a shortage of troops. Estimating the number of Eritrean troops in Ethiopia is difficult as it is unknown how many soldiers Eritrea has exactly. The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates the Eritrean force to be approximately 200,000. This includes soldiers conscripted for indefinite National Service, a form of conscription the UN has described as slavery. On 22 November, EEPA reported that up to 20 Eritrean battalions were involved in fighting on various fronts. Simultaneously, the former Eritrean Defence minister Mesfin Hagos said that 17 divisions had participated in operations against the TPLF. At the beginning of the conflict, the President of Tigray said that they were fighting 16 divisions.

While the size of their military contribution cannot be reliably assessed, it is clear that the Eritrean army has provided significant support to the ENDF. Much of western Tigray fell through Eritrean support. Many refugees and witnesses have stated that Humera, an Ethiopian town on the border with Tigray, was shelled by artillery coming from Eritrea. Eritrean presence was also reported in fights near most major towns in Tigray. Eritrean troops have been sighted in Humera, Shire, Aksum, Adwa, Adigrat, and Mekelle, among other places. According to some analysts, it is possible that the Eritrean army is doing the brunt of the fighting in Tigray and that the ENDF has collapsed under the intensity of the fighting. As a result, the ENDF only controls a narrow corridor around Mekelle and southern areas. The rest of Tigray remains in control of Tigray-aligned forces, or Eritrean, and Amhara militias.

Eritrea also helped with the deployment of Ethiopian soldiers. Many were airlifted into Eritrea to allow for the creation of additional fronts against Tigray. Some reports have indicated that this airlift was taking place even before the conflict began. Pictures have emerged of long lines of Ethiopian soldiers boarding planes, presumably headed for Eritrea. Moreover, it is also possible that Prime Minister Abiy and President Isaias met before the conflict began to strategize the operation, and President Isaias was given access to inspect the key military capacity of Ethiopia. While this has not been substantiated, recent comments by the Amhara Police Commissioner suggest that troops were in position along the Tigrayan border before the conflict started, adding weight to this theory. At a conference for the release of his new book, the Amhara Police Commissioner said that the Amhara militias and special forces had led ENDF forces to the Tigray border in preparation for an invasion. Moreover, the Head of the Sudanese Sovereign Council, Al-Burhan, revealed that:

"I visited Ethiopia shortly before the events, and we agreed with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia that the Sudanese armed forces would close the Sudanese borders to prevent border infiltration to and from Sudan by an armed party. (...) Actually, this is what the (Sudanese) armed forces have done to secure the international borders and have stopped there," (SudanTribune, 17-02-2021)

This provides further indication that the preparations for war were extended to neighbouring countries. A rapid offensive was undertaken from Eritrea into Tigray in the days following the start of the conflict. At the start of the conflict, the President of the Tigray regional state claimed that Ethiopian federal troops had been ordered to retreat into Eritrea. An ENDF General thanked Eritrea for its support and assistance during these initial operations.

In addition, Ethiopia and its federal forces have relied heavily on Eritrean facilities for their operation. Eritrea played an important role in helping the Ethiopian army to evacuate wounded soldiers from the battlefield. Hundreds of ENDF soldiers were brought to Eritrean hospitals for initial treatment. These soldiers were subsequently transported to Addis Ababa. In statements to the Ethiopian Parliament, Prime Minister Abiy admitted that Eritrea had played a "limited" role by feeding and clothing retreating soldiers before sending them back to fight in Tigray. Recent reports have also suggested that with the increasing tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia, Eritrea has started playing a more important role in the region. According to some witnesses, the ENDF has been retreating from northern Tigray and has handed control over to Eritrea soldiers. Eritrean Telecommunication services have started operating in these areas.

Ethiopia has denied the presence of Eritrean troops until very recently. This week (early March 2021) has seen the first comments by federal spokespersons acknowledging the possibility of Eritrean troops in Tigray. Despite this, the government has shifted its official stance to stating that due to the early Tigrayan attacks on the ENDF Northern Command, the military was unable to stop Eritrean troops from entering. As a result of this weakened border force, Eritrean soldiers were able to cross over.

According to a source close to the TPLF the reality was different:

"The federal government, in close collaboration with the Eritrean government, had been making military preparations to launch an attack on Tigray. Already a number of divisions had been mobilized by the federal government towards Gondar, Afar, and Raya to attack Tigray, respectively from the West, East, and Southern

parts of Tigray. (...) The Tigray government received information on a pending attack in the last week of October. Apart from that, the Federal government had been secretly organizing the Northern Command to launch sudden secret operations and kill leaders in Mekelle in times when they gather for meetings or other purposes. The regional government had this intelligence information.” (Situation Report 100, 9 March 2021)

It is further reported that Eritrean troops already entered Tigray prior to the declaration of a Law and Order Operation and prior to the attack by Tigray regional forces on the Northern Command. Despite this alleged invasion, the Ethiopian government maintains that the conflict remains an internal affair and to date it has not, to our best knowledge, publicly demanded that Eritrean troops leave Tigray.

5. UAE drones in the conflict

There are early claims that the UAE was flying drones performing strikes from its base in Assab, Eritrea. There has never been solid evidence that drone strikes were carried out. After looking at satellite imagery, Bellingcat concluded that it was “possible” that UAE drones had been used in the conflict. In a leaked Zoom meeting video, an Ethiopian general also talked about the use of armed drones in the war in Tigray:

“While the war was happening in front we were attacking/bombing them behind the frontlines with drones and we don’t know who is dead and alive”, said the general. (Situation Report 52, 12 January 2021)

It was reported that the base was being closed by the Emirates at the end of January. Researcher Alex de Waal says that since then, no drones have been heard over Tigray. EEPA has also not reported any drone strikes after the United Arab Emirates left the port of Assab.

The Emirates have been looking for increased access to the Horn for a while, as its agreement with Djibouti had derailed in 2015. As soon as the United Arab Emirates was evicted from the port of Djibouti, Eritrean President Isaias met with Saudi Arabia, concluding a Security and Military Partnership Agreement with the Gulf States, which would allow them basing rights in Eritrea, and Eritrea flipped alliance in the Yemen war. The geopolitical relevance of Eritrea was of interest to the United Arab Emirates, as new lucrative raw materials were being found, including potash and potentially oil and gas, while global competition for infrastructural access to the Africa continent was increasing, notably with the Chinese Road and Belt project.

As the central power of the TPLF at the federal level in Addis Ababa waned, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was inaugurated, and a deal was brokered by the United Arab Emirates, which awarded both Eritrea and Ethiopia USD 3 billion each in loans and investments. The United Arab Emirates signed a lease for the use of the port of Assab for 30 years, where it has established a military base, including a base for drones, expanding its influence across Northern Africa, including Ethiopia, the Sudan and Libya. It acquired land from Ethiopia in Addis Ababa for business purposes, and therefore the infrastructure by land to connect Assab and Addis Ababa became a priority. However, despite the lease agreement, it appears that the United Arab Emirates have now vacated the port.

6. Human Rights Violations

Exact figures about the number of people killed and displaced by fighting in Tigray are hard to come by. A media blackout and no internet access have made it difficult to contact anyone in the region to verify claims. As a result, estimations vary on the number of casualties and people in need of emergency aid. OCHA estimates that 950 thousand people needed aid in the region before the conflict. A hundred thousand of those were Eritrean refugees located in four camps. According to OCHA the number of people in need of aid has risen by at least 1.3 million since the start of the conflict. **The provisional interim administration of Tigray, which has replaced the Tigray regional government, estimates that there are over 2.2 million Internally Displaced Persons in Tigray, according to Tigray opposition parties, and an estimated 2.5 million people were displaced in total. It is estimated that 4.5 million people are in need of emergency food aid. Over 62 thousand refugees have arrived in Sudan.**

“Human rights violations that may amount to war crimes”

The number of people that have been killed in the conflict is also hard to estimate. There have been many reports of massacres in the region, some widely reported on, while many in smaller villages attracted less attention. In Mai-Kadra 600 people were killed on the night of November 9th, 2020. In Axum over 800 people, but potentially over a thousand, were killed on November 28th and 29th. Further massacres took place in Humera, Edaga Hamus, Mariam Dengelat, and Adigrat. Many others are known to have been carried out in villages and towns in the countryside. Due to the scattered nature of these killings, there are no exact numbers. **A joint report by three opposition parties in Tigray shows that more than 52,000 people were killed in the region.**

Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have published highly detailed reports, interviewing 61 and 28 people respectively about the massacre that took place in Axum. They both provide a similar timeline for the events unfolding between November 19th and 29th. It started with the shelling of Axum by Eritrean and Ethiopian troops after Tigrayan forces vacated the city. This caused casualties. Subsequently Eritrean troops entered the city and looted the city for a week. On the morning of the 28th, TPLF fighters attacked an Eritrean outpost on a hill near the city. They were joined by many young people, angry at the events of the preceding week. The attack was resisted, and Eritrean soldiers started shooting and killing people on the streets, including women, children, and people seeking refuge in the church. They also carried out house searches, looking for young men to summarily execute. Amnesty International has said that the massacre may amount to a crime against humanity.

All the parties in the conflict have been accused of carrying out atrocities. It is important to note that many of the massacres are still taking place. Fighting is ongoing between the Tigrayan forces and Eritrean, Amhara, and Ethiopian forces. A recent report alleged that Eritrean troops threatened to kill and cut off the hands of locals if the Tigray regional forces returned and received support.

“Systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing in Tigray”

Simultaneously there have been claims of ethnic cleansing taking place in Western Tigray. These started to appear in early January. Amhara militias are forcing Tigrayans out of the region, deporting them to central Tigray. Anyone that does not identify as ethnic Amharic is sent away. In some cases, those that refuse are killed to set an example. At the same time, Amhara officials are urging Amhara farmers to move to Western Tigray to take over the empty farms. These claims were corroborated by a US government report which the New York Times reported on. A new administrative zone has also been created for Tigray; this has come under the control of the Amhara regional government.

The UN Human Rights Chief, Michelle Bachelet, has said that they have received, and keep receiving, credible reports that “serious violations of international law, possibly amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, may have been committed by multiple actors in the conflict.” Consequently, she has asked Ethiopia to allow access to the UN and other organisations to conduct independent investigations of these reports.

7. Twenty Thousand Refugees Missing

The situation of the hundred thousand Eritrean refugees that were in Tigray prior to the conflict is also a point of concern. At the beginning of the conflict, they were living in four camps. However, since then, many have gone unaccounted for. The media blackout stops information from coming out and organisations cannot access these camps. The camps were repeatedly attacked during the conflict. Eritrean soldiers are reported to have visited Adi Harush and Hitsats refugee camps. In both cases they killed several people and forced other refugees on trucks back to Eritrea. The UN has said that it had received credible reports confirming the forced returns of these refugees and that it was extremely concerned about the situation. Since then, the Ethiopian government has closed Hitsats and Shimelba camps. The UN has said that it had yet to locate 20 thousand refugees that were

housed in those two camps. Many are scattered across Tigray, while others have attempted to reach other areas. Those that arrived in Addis Ababa were, however, forced by Ethiopian authorities to return to the refugee camps.

Lastly, there has been extensive looting in Tigray. Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Amhara troops have been accused of looting in many places. Eritreans especially have been aggressively looting factories, hospitals, universities, and private houses. A lot of heavy and industrial machinery was removed from Tigray and transported to Eritrea. Laboratories, medical equipment, and supplies, and cultural artifacts have all been looted and removed from Tigray. Additionally, there has been widespread looting of private property. Soldiers have reportedly taken everything that was moveable. Mattresses, furniture, but also pans and cutlery have all been taken.

8. Ten Thousand Women: This is the Conservative Estimate of the Number of Victims of Rape in Tigray.

The extent and cruelty of the assaults, sexual violence and rape of women and girls that EEPA has received information about is simply chilling. Much of it goes unreported. There is still no internet, and journalists were prevented from reaching the region for three months. There is only one inventory of confirmed cases from just a handful of health clinics in Tigray, which found 138 women who had been raped. This is far from the whole picture. In Adigrat alone, the public hospital received over 174 rape survivors since the beginning of the war (Deutsche Welle, 2021).¹ According to Dedebit media, 750 women were raped and admitted to Ayder hospital in Mekelle alone (Dedebit, 29 January 2021).² There have been multiple reports of gang rape. One documented incident involved more than ten soldiers raping a single victim. Victims include girls as young as ten years old as well as grandmothers.

Many incidents go unreported, with women often speaking for multiple women raped in the same place as they are from. Many other factors such as communication blockages, taboos, and fear have reduced the numbers being reported further. Only the most severe cases tend to be reported when victims come to seek urgent medical help. However, 90% of clinics and hospitals have been destroyed and are no longer in use, with health workers having fled. When the testimonies are reported, they tell harrowing stories. From grandfathers being forced to rape their grandchildren, to weeklong gang rapes, the stories keep coming in.

9. Ethiopian heritage under attack

Around December 15th, although some sources put it near November 30th, the mosque near al-Negash was shelled and, as a result, heavily damaged. It was not until several weeks later that the first pictures of the damaged mosque appeared online. The site, which according to local stories is the oldest mosque in Africa and was established in the 7th century, has a particularly important significance to the people of the area and it had been recently renovated with Turkish government funding.

The shelling of al-Negash highlighted what was already going on. Namely, that religious sites and people were not being spared in the brutal new conflict in Tigray. The destruction of religious sites and the looting of cultural artefacts were actively being perpetrated. Already before the shelling of Negash was reported, there had been reports that thirteen priests had been killed in Tembien and Zalambessa on December 17 and 19. The circumstances around their execution remain unclear. The same time, December 19, saw the first reports of a massacre in Mariam Dengelat. Over 80 people seeking refuge in the monastery were killed. Eritrean soldiers accused of carrying out the massacre also looted important cultural artifacts and records from the site. In January, the massacre in Axum was reported. Axum is one of Tigray's holy cities, where they claim to hold the Ark of the Covenant.

10. Media and press Freedom

Media access to Tigray has remained difficult. Due to a blackout in the region, and until recently a total ban on media in Tigray, reporting on unfolding events has been difficult. As a consequence, getting accurate information on the conflict has been difficult. It is not only journalists that have had a difficulty accessing the region, but also aid workers. Those that were in Tigray before the conflict started to report that they face additional checks to see whether they are journalists or not and have been intimidated by soldiers.

Within the first 10 days of the conflict, RSF reported that 6 journalists had been arrested. Subsequently a Reuters cameraman was arrested at the end of January and held for 10 days. Lastly, shortly after Ethiopia allowed access to 7 major news organisations, one BBC journalists and three other media workers were arrested.

Journalists have also reported an increase in intimidation and threats. They report being visited by men not wearing uniforms telling them to stop writing about issues relating to the war in Tigray. If they do not stop, they risk being killed. The government has also threatened to imprison anyone that “provides false information to international media”. These various forms of intimidation have led several journalists and aids to stop reporting on the situation in Tigray. It has also silenced international organisations, who fear that if they criticise the government too much, they will be kicked out, and unable to help anyone.

11. Conclusion

The evidence of the presence of Eritrean and other troops in the Tigray war is no longer in dispute. There is also an increasing amount of evidence of other regional actors involved in the war. The drone attacks allegedly committed by the United Arab Emirates from the Eritrean base in Assab have stopped since the UAE left.

The perspective that the war was prepared in advanced is further supported by comments made by Amhara officials that they had been preparing to invade Tigray prior to November 4th. Eritrean troops invaded the regional state prior to the declaration of a Law and Order Operation. Sudan has confirmed it was involved in military planning prior to the 4th of November.

Whilst the Ethiopian federal government has maintained that the Law and Order operation was purely a domestic and an internal matter, by analysing the chain of events, a perspective is emerging that the facts point to a different conclusion: namely that the war is regional, has been so from the start and that it had been planned as such.

The results of the war are devastating and the figures speak of the impact of the war on the civilian population in Tigray:

- 20 thousand Eritrean refugees have ‘disappeared’
- Over 62 thousand refugees have arrived in Sudan
- 10 thousand women have been victims of rape or gender-based violence
- 52 thousand people have been killed
- 2.5 million people have been displaced
- 4.5 million people are in need of emergency food aid

Continued escalation of the war will further jeopardise civilian lives. The protection of civilian lives and the dignity of all should be central to the way forward out of the war.

Previously reported by the Situation Report of EEPA

Briefing EEPA Horn of Africa No 2: Ethiopia PM Abiy claims that the regional government of Tigray state is undermining the central authority of Addis Ababa, by carrying out elections in September 2020, which were not recognised by Addis Ababa. National elections had been postponed due to the COVID-situation. Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) won a new mandate, it claims, through the elections it held. It claims that PM Abiy was in cohort with Eritrean Pres Isayas to undermine Tigray. PM Abiy ordered a reorganisation of the Northern command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). This constitutes an important part of the ENDF, stationed in Tigray region due to the earlier conflict with Eritrea. This conflict ended with an agreement between Abiy and Afwerki in July 2018. Abiy ordered the split of the Northern command. After PM Abiy sent a general to carry out the division of the Northern command, the TPLF sent him back to Addis Ababa. In a next move, PM Abiy sent troops in a cargo plane on 3 November to the Tigray capital Mekelle. The TPLF ordered the arrest of the troops. Details on what happened with them are missing and contradictory. Shooting from the main camp of the Northern Command in Qwiha/Mekelle was reported starting from ca. 10 pm. Different sources claim that some members of the ENDF had sided with Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) and other parts of the ENDF resisted, which led to bloodshed. Similar events are reported from other military posts in Tigray around the same time. Sources from inside the TPLF, claimed that it was a pre-emptive strike due to preparations for an immediate attack by the federal government. PM Abiy called a law and order operation with the aim to restore his authority over the region. PM Abiy instated a temporary provisional government in Tigray to replace the elected TPLF regional government. He declared a six-month state of emergency in Tigray. Operations to get control over the Tigray capital Mekelle started 28th of November. The TPLF withdrew from the capital and the ENDF took control of the capital. Eritrea participates in the war, by providing support to Ethiopian troops within Eritrea and by sending troops into Tigray. The latter is denied by both PM Abiy and Eritrea President Afewerki. However, the evidence from Tigray and Ethiopia is overwhelming. The US State Department declared Eritrea was engaged in the war after studying evidence. The report is available [here](#). (31 December 2020)

Situation Report No. 04: Bellingcat reports that the use of UAE drones from United Arab Emirates (UAE) from the harbour Assab (Eritrea) for attacks on Tigray is possible, based on research of the drones and their origin. The TPLF-leadership has made repeated claims of drone-attacks in the Tigray region. The report is available [here](#). (20 November 2020)

Situation Report No. 31: A report based on testimonials of three Egyptian officials and one European diplomat indicates that the UAE used its base in Assab (Eritrea) to launch drones strikes against Tigray. The investigative platform Bellingcat confirmed the presence of Chinese-produced drones at the UAE's military base in Assab, Eritrea. The report is available [here](#). (31 December 2020)

Situation Report No. 52: In the leaked zoom meeting video the Ethiopian general also talked about the use of armed drones in the war in Tigray. "While the war was happening in front we were attacking/bombing them behind the frontlines with drones and we don't know who is dead and alive", said the general. The report is available [here](#). (11 January 2021)

Situation Report No. 59: Sudan Tribune reported, the head of the Sudanese Sovereign Council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, disclosed that Sudanese troops were deployed on the border as per an agreement with the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, arranged prior to the beginning of the war. Al-Burhan told a gathering about the arrangements that were made in the planning of the military actions: "I visited Ethiopia shortly before the events, and we agreed with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia that the Sudanese armed forces would close the Sudanese borders to prevent border infiltration to and from Sudan by an armed party." Al-Burhan stated: "Actually, this is what the (Sudanese) armed forces have done to secure the international borders and have stopped there." His statement suggests that Abiy Ahmed spoke with him about the military plans before launching the military operation in Tigray. The report is available [here](#). (18 January 2021)

Situation Report No. 64: Report that Chinese Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), drones, were used in the war in Tigray, by the UAE deployed in Eritrea. The article reads (in translation): "According to a report by TASS on

December 3, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) deployed UAVs in Eritrea recently and had a big success.” Youuav states: “Under the continuous bombing of drones the Tigray People’s Army kept retreating. And there was no way to deal with it. The rebels couldn’t support it and began to surrender. On December 1, the Ethiopian government states that senior officials of the Tigray People’s Army had surrendered to the Ethiopia army. The official who surrendered was Kriya Ibrahim.” The report states that “In the civil war in Ethiopia, the pterosaur drones undertook a 24-hour non-stop bombing mission and destroyed the rebels alive.” The article explains that the deployment of the UAV’s made a critical difference to Ethiopia winning the war: “Although the Ethiopian army is equipped with advanced weapons including AR-2 rockets, the battle remained a stalemate because the advantages of those weapons were not fully utilized. But when the pterosaur drones joined, the situation changed quickly. Death was hovering above the heads of the rebels for 24 hours (..). The drones made the rebels feel powerless, and the destruction in this period was terrible.” The article confirms earlier reports published in the Situation Report EEPA. On 17 November, the Spokesperson for the Tigray government, Getachew Reda, claimed that the UAE was involved in attacks in Tigray through drones sent from Assab port in Eritrea. Africa Intelligence published earlier that: “Rebel forces in Tigray province claim that they have been bombed by Emirati combat drones, while Addis Ababa has been releasing images of its own drones, which are observation devices made by China’s Zerotech.” On 18 Nov Tigray President Debretsion wrote a letter to alert that “non-African actors” had provided UAVs to Eritrean and Ethiopian forces, while sources on the ground reported that UAE UAVs were carrying out attacks on Mekelle, Shire and Aksum. On 20/12 it was reported that Bellingcat confirmed the presence of “Chinese-produced drones” at the UAE’s military base in Assab, Eritrea. Further drone attacks were reported on in Workeamba in which 85 people died (4/12 2020); Abi Adi where civilians were attacked indiscriminately (8/12); Central fronts in Tigray (13/12 2020); in Wukro and Tembien where hundreds of civilians died among others with bombardments carried out with drones ((15/12 2020); two journalists were killed by a drone attack reported 10/1 2021 and on 21/1 2021 it is reported that the son of Sebhat Nega is killed by a drone attack, driving in his car. A General of the Ethiopian army stated in a leaked zoom meeting video about the use of armed drones in the war in Tigray. “While the war was happening in front we were attacking/bombing them behind the frontlines with drones and we don’t know who is dead and alive”, said the general. Youuav explains that “the cost of a Chinese-made Pterosaur drone is only about US\$1 million”. The report is available [here](#). (23 January 2021)

Situation Report. No 67: Aid workers report sadistic violence used against civilians, including rape: a young woman separated from relatives was given a choice to be killed or to be raped. Reuters reports that aid workers report multiple of such stories perpetrated allegedly by militia fighters from Ethiopia’s Amhara region and Eritrean soldiers, both allied with Abiy’s troops. There have been many such reports of soldiers forcing themselves on civilians or demanding sex in exchange for basic supplies. Eritrean refugees are high at risk. According to Reuters, medical centers in the area are under high pressure for emergency contraception and tests for sexually-transmitted diseases. The report is available [here](#). (26 January 2021)

Situation Report. No 69: The United States has made clear its position that all Eritrean troops need to leave Tigray immediately citing “Credible reports” had emerged of their involvement in human rights abuses, assaults in refugee camp, sexual violence and looting. The statement says there is “evidence of Eritrean soldiers forcibly returning Eritrean refugees from Tigray to Eritrea.” The report is available [here](#). (28 January 2021)

Situation Report No 89: A witness has reported that on 4 November 2020 Eritrean soldiers already entered into the town of Gerhu-ternay, near the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, where it started killing civilians. The attack by Eritrean troops happened in the night. Therefore, it would appear to have been part of a pre-planned attack. The official reading by the Ethiopian Government is that it started a law and order operation after Tigray regional troops attacked the Northern Command on 4 November 2020. A spokesperson close to the Tigray regional government said that the war in Tigray effectively started on November 3, 2020. That day, Addis Ababa sent a cargo plane with special forces to Mekelle, under the pretext of transporting bank notes. According to the Tigray regional government, they had intelligence that the special forces were instructed to arrest the Tigray state government leaders while having a meeting in Mekelle. The tensions reportedly occurred in the context of the federal government seeking to redeploy the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), stationed in Tigray. The Tigray regional state government opposed redeployment of the Northern Command because the constitutional power of PM Abiy had ended on October

5 2020 and, as elections had been postponed, due to the Covid-19 crisis, the Prime Minister was heading a care-taker government. The report is available [here](#). (22 February 2021)

Situation Report No. 91: According to a witness who was an Eritrean refugee in the Shemelba camp in Tigray Eritrean troops entered the camp on 17 November at 14:00 hours. In the previous days, from 15/11 to 17/11 people from the Hitsats refugee camp came to the Shemelba refugee camp. The witness says that the Eritrean fighters collected all the young refugees. They took us for a meeting and told us “we control 80% of Tigray. We fight to control Mekelle. Now we control this area.” The Eritrean troops that entered Shemelba stated on the 21th of November that “The Government of Eritrea forgives all of you and you can go back to your country.” They also told us not to leave the camp, because we would be shot, killed, says the witness: “anyone who goes outside will be our enemy and you must inform us if someone leaves the camp. Otherwise hard punishment will follow.” According to the report, refugees “remained silent” when asked if they would return to Eritrea. The Eritrean soldiers then went from house to house to ask each of the refugees. We told them “We do not want to go, if we are to go then the Red Cross can take us, not the Eritrean Government.” The members of the Shemelba Refugee Committee gave them this message, so they were blamed. The witness says that the chairman of the youth club was arrested; the chairman of the youth club disappeared or escaped. They arrested four women and their children: “We do not know why. In the evening seven children were arrested, and again we did not know why. They disappeared. “During this time from 28/11 - 17/12 nine children died. Six persons near zone 1 in Shemelba were killed and 5 refugees who had come from Hitsats were killed and one Tigrayan who was in the camp. “The six people that were killed were put in front of us”, says the witness, “They were together in one hole and they shot them from the back of their head. You could not recognize their faces. They had been kicked in their faces.” “On 17 December we were collected, the last group to leave Shemelba” the witness states, “we were more than 300, the last group to be arrested. They took us to Shiraro. We were there until 25 December. Then they took us to Badme, to take us to Eritrea. We were arrested before they told us, we will take you to Eritrea. The guards were very tough.” The report can be entered [here](#). (24 February 2021)

Situation Report No 100: A source close to the elected Regional Government of Tigray reports that preparations for war were ongoing prior to the 4th of Nov, as “Tigray was already surrounded by different forces including Eritrea which had been unusually moving close to Tigray, way before the election took place in Tigray. The conflict had been evolving since Abiy came to power and continually attacked Tigrayans and the TPLF. When differences widened, TPLF withdrew from the coalitions of EPRDF which was renamed as PP.” The source states: “The Tigray regional government officially took the position that postponement of national elections was unconstitutional and the Ethiopian federal government was a care-taking government after October 5. The regional government decided that it cannot continue ruling its own region without mandate from the people and accordingly conducted the regional election.” The source close to the Tigray regional government states that “The federal government, in close collaboration with the Eritrean government, has been making military preparations to launch an attack on Tigray. Already a number of divisions had been mobilized by the federal government towards Gondar, Afar, and Raya to attack Tigray, respectively from the West, East, and Southern parts of Tigray.” The source states: “The Tigray government received information on a pending attack in the last week of October. Apart from that, the Federal government had been secretly organizing the Northern Command to launch sudden secret operations and kill leaders in Mekelle in times when they gather for meetings or other purposes. The regional government had this intelligence information.” The source states that “using its special forces in Northern Command, Abiy had planned to suddenly round and kill leaders off the TPLF ruling party leaders when they gather for meetings.” The source states that “Serious preparations had been taking place for more than two years and that Tigray was militarily surrounded prior to the start of the war.” He adds “the ruling party had a meeting four days before the clash with the Northern command, and the preparations of the Abiy and Eritrea were openly discussed.” A source from Mekelle University stated that he had received a confidential briefing on the tensions arising prior to the 4th of November. The report is available [here](#). (9 March 2021)

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¹ Deutsche Welle, Anger and collective trauma scar Ethiopia's Tigray region, 6 March 2021.

<https://www.dw.com/en/anger-and-collective-trauma-scar-ethiopias-tigray-region/a-56794452>

² Dede-bit is a broadcasting and production company, and it broadcasted and produced in three languages: Tigrigna, Amharic & English. It works in Science and Technology, Art and Tourism, History and Heritage Management, News and Politics. It is based on NSW, Australia. (info from their Facebook-page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Dede-bitMedia/videos/4013987365280643/>).