

"Disarming TPLF Combatants": Agreement on what does not exist

Kalayu Abrha

The elusive 'Pretoria Agreement' refers to the TDF as "TPLF combatants". How convenient! Armed people known as TPLF combatants don't exist. Did it occur to the TPLF delegation in Pretoria that the signed agreement to disarm and demobilize "TPLF combatants" is in practice the disarmament and demobilization of phantom army in a visual illusion? I cannot speculate that the Tigray delegation in Pretoria had the wrong impression that TDF is a de facto TPLF army because I believe that members of the Tigray delegation are too intelligent to fall into the trap of political tricks woven by the Ethiopian delegation backed by a lot of unknowns behind them.

The political card is quite familiar. It is the unmistakable extension of the barrage of propaganda by the genocidal war mongers in Ethiopia and Eritrea to bury the truth that they are fighting against the people of Tigray. Advertently or inadvertently, the world community is led into believing that the two-year war in Tigray is against a rebel group known as TPLF. Even if it were true that they are fighting only the TPLF they are aiming at the wrong target. By referring to TPLF as a terrorist organization they are trying to get the approval of the world community which jumps at the mention of the word 'terrorist'.

The governments of rascals worldwide know the weaknesses of people in the global decision making offices. When the latter receive requests from particular governments seeking aid to fight domestic terrorism, without second thought they feel they got friends in their fight against what they call terrorists in their own backyards. As emotions tend to overwhelm people by the thought of terrorists operating in some part of the globe they tend to rush into cursing them without taking sometime to investigate the facts on the ground. TPLF is not a bunch of terrorists as it is being portrayed to the world public.

Drawing parallel with Al Shabab and Al Queda is unfair in the sense that this group was founded fifty years ago to liberate the People of Tigray from age-old subjugation by the brutal central rule at Arat-Kilo. It protects non-combatants, treats POWs as human beings; it does not kill women and children and destroy their livelihoods as is customary among Terrorists. In fact, the war in Tigray has shown clearly who the real terrorist is. Was it TPLF which has been bombing women and children, raping thousands, destroying civilian infrastructure, and looting articles from industrial machinery to spoons and forks? It is easy for a political force with a subservient parliament, judiciary, army/security apparatus, and hate blinded millions to dare brand even the angels as terrorists. The tragedy is that the world finds it more convenient to believe governments in power rather than take the pains to go behind them and verify the issue objectively.

TPLF was the most successful government in Ethiopia for three decades presiding over an unprecedented economic boom, improved standards of living, and ensured peace and security

that was taken for granted. Mention the name of a terrorist that has been as benevolent as TPLF in the political power in Ethiopia was. It was its own EPRDF partners, out of sheer jealousy, who gave it a bad name and are trying to kill it; as the proverb about the killers of their loyal dog goes. Most Tegaruu embrace TPLF as their own and it is wild to say the least to refer to the TPLF as terrorist. This would be tantamount to referring to millions of Tegaruu as terrorists by extension.

The world knows who is who; but it turns a blind eye to the allegations against TPLF as a terrorist party just for the sake of callous diplomatic correctness, the often insensitive prioritization of 'national interest', and the skeletons in the cupboards of some powerful states as regards to the embarrassing genocides in their dark histories. The point I am trying to hammer home here is not to prove the fact that TPLF is a party of the people. This is well known to the whole world, even to the toxic Ethiopian and Eritrean politicians, but they deny it to realize their ambitions in the Horn of Africa. To tarnish the bright color of TPLF and Tigray a huge quantity of pitch dark paint is needed. That is why falsehoods ornamented as truth have overwhelmed the Ethiopian and Eritrean media at home and abroad. I am not saying that TPLF and TDF have nothing to do with one another. This would be a gross simplification and even denial of the truth on the ground. The evolution of the TDF should be traced from the founding of the TPLF half a century ago.

The top TDF commanders were former TPLF combatants during the 17 years of armed struggle against military dictatorship in Ethiopia. They lost their TPLF party membership after they were assigned as officers in the newly established Federal Ethiopian Defense Force. So, neither the army chief of TDF, General Tadesse Werede nor the senior member of the Central Command, General Tsadkan Gebretensay are members of the TPLF. No one was required to be member of the TPLF to enlist in the TDF as a commander or as a rank and file member. Although many of the former commanders of the TPLF joined the Ethiopian Defense Force and were physically out from the TPLF, their hearts were understandably with their former mentor. Later on, following the Ethio-Eritrean war, many of the former Tigrayan commanders and civilian leaders turned against the TPLF accusing it of its bad decisions with regard to the border ruling. Some were jailed, many others were fired, and still others joined opposition parties.

Some of the most notable of the victims of the TPLF-purge were General Tsadkan (former chief of staff), General Abebe (former air force commander), Seye Abrha (former defense minister), and Dr. Mulugeta Geberhiwot (founder of the Peace and Security Institute, AAU). Since the war is a people's war, the former Tigrayan dignitaries in the military and civilian administration joined in the defense of Tigray against the allied perpetrators of genocide: General Abebe and Seye Abrha are doing their best from outside and General Tsadkan and Dr. Mulugeta are sharing the misery on the side of their fellow Tegaruu. Like the 'Trinity' the TDF, the TPLF, and the Government of Tigray are one and three at the same time. What unites them as one is the Tigray Nation; and what differentiates them is their roles in the defense of that Nation: something the

evil spirited politicians in Ethiopia and Eritrea do not want to admit. This is how the trinity is woven into one.

The ancestral enemies of Tigray don't come from far away. They are uncomfortably lodged in its armpits. The people of Tigray got respite for three decades from the century old torment they were subject to by the 'toxic siblings' of theirs. This required the sacrifices of hundreds of thousands of the sons and daughters of the people of Tigray in the struggle led by TPLF. This has permanently glued TPLF with the people of Tigray. After the fall of the military regime in the hands of the TPLF fighting force in 1991 TPLF has lost its army and has been limited to a civilian membership ever since. What makes TPLF so significant in the Tigrayan political arena is its positive pervasiveness in the political, economic, and social affairs of Tigray. You will never move a yard in Tigray without hitting a TPLF tree.

When TPLF was removed from Federal positions by the political machinations of its EPRDF partners, its leaders settled in the Capital of their home state: Tigray. The people of Tigray hosted them with love as sons and daughters swallowing their anger about the neglect of Tigray when TPLF held Federal power for decades at Arat-Kilo. "Where else can we go" said the brilliant veteran politician Abay Tsehay. He meant to say: "Do we leaders like himself, Seyoum, Tsadkan, Debrezion, Getachew, Mulugeta, Wendimu, Kindeya, and hundreds of others have to abandon the people of Tigray and live comfortably overseas when we know perfectly well that there is a clear and imminent danger on the very existence of the People of Tigray?". He did not live to see that his words were so prophetic. Tigray is a wonderland; this tiny bit of land accommodates so many heroes and geniuses disproportionate to its physical capacity.

The bond between TPLF and the people of Tigray does not end there. During the political and election crisis in the Federal Capital, the flames of which were reaching Tigray, the latter did not fall into the intrigues of the new rulers which were aimed at tactically ending self-rule in Tigray by drawing TPLF into the Prosperity Party's whirlpool. TPLF's half a century old political experiences, its adequate knowledge of how the complex political knot in Ethiopia is tied, made PP's call for re-integration fall on TPLF's deaf ears. There were unmistakable signs that the Constitution was being violated and a potential existed for much greater and more dangerous violations in the near future.

Tigray was horrified by how self-rule was ended violently in the Somali Region. It was dismayed by the political machinations employed to get rid of self-determination in all other regional states of Ethiopia. Political forces, who had nothing else in common other than the deadly hate on TPLF and Tegraru, were bonded in an unholy alliance against TPLF and Tigray. They painted their political, social, economic, and military campaign against Tigray an irresistible color of Ethiopian patriotism. Ethiopian politicians know perfectly well that they can send every Ethiopian soul into hell just by the very mention of "Ethiopian Unity".

Hundreds of thousands flock to fight in Tigray without having the slightest idea what is going on. They listen only to government and government-friendly media and are too brainwashed to hear the truth from other more independent sources. It is hard to know how long it will take, how

many will die, and how far down the Ethiopian economy will descend before people realize that the source of the whole problem lies squarely at the palaces in Arat-Kilo and Adi Halo, not in Mekelle or Shire. Turning autonomous regional states into provinces of the prospective unitary Ethiopia is in full swing all over Ethiopia except the rebellious region of Tigray. As the protector of the Constitution and founder of the Federal system in Ethiopia Tigray is the biggest prize for the reactionaries at Arat-Kilo to facilitate the reversal of the federal system into a centralized monarchy-styled polity.

TPLF and all other Tigrayans, except for those whose bellies and brains changed positions, were absolutely certain that Tigray was next. While the noise of war songs against TPLF/Tigray was echoing all over Ethiopia and multitudes of excuses were fabricated to justify the attack on Tigray neither did TPLF acquire an army nor was TDF formed. Like any other regional state in Ethiopia Tigray had a special police force few thousands strong, armed with light weaponry. When the heavens came tumbling down on Tigray beginning from November 4, 2020, the few thousand security forces of Tigray were no match to the allied army of hundreds of thousands from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Amhara, equipped with the state-of-the-art military technology. It was a doomsday scenario for the people of Tigray who never deserved this in view of their significant historic contribution to the continuity of the Ethiopian state spanning for centuries.

Was mobilization comparable in size to a world war necessary to apprehend a few top leaders of the TPLF? Wouldn't it be analogous to firing a nuclear-warhead to kill a flea? Yes, the blitzkrieg would be absolutely ridiculous if the only goal of the attack were to catch TPLF leaders in Mekelle. By now the world has known that the mammoth operation which lasted for two years and has continued to intensify, is more than a law enforcement operation on TPLF leadership. Under normal circumstances, law enforcement on few law breakers, is undertaken by a police force and only by the national army if the police is unable to withstand. Assistance from a foreign state (Eritrea) is called for only when another foreign state attacks Ethiopia and the latter is unable to defend itself.

What Ethiopia did, in the name of apprehending finger counted TPLF leaders, is a gross violation of international norm of handling own citizens and an act of treason as far as the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia is concerned. US citizens, for instance, may not know what and where Tigray is; but they will realize what happened in the Tigray war when they come face to face with a US attack on one of its fifty states in collaboration with one of the neighboring countries.

When a goat gives birth to six-legged kid the Guinness Book of Records wastes no time to record it as a natural wonder. When millions are on fire in the Tigray war of irrationality the world seems to go its own usual ways. Generations of humanity will not be informed, and so, such impunities are often repeated. On the eve of the invasion the people of Tigray knew perfectly well that they, not only TPLF leaders, were the main targets of the colossal and multi-pronged military operation.

The motive was far bigger than bringing TPLF's top brass to 'justice'. Expansionists from the Amhara Region were craving for the fertile lands of western and southern Tigray and they were also claiming the patent of the ancient treasures of Tigray; Eritrean Isaias Afeworki and his septuagenarian henchmen vowed for revenge on TPLF/Tigray for allegedly "obstructing economic progress in Eritrea", and the PP-government in Ethiopia accusing TPLF/Tigray for holding "illegal elections and threatening the unity of Ethiopia".

The three forces thought they had sufficiently convincing reasons to invade Tigray, destroy and partition it. Of course, they have succeeded to madden their respective constituencies as the Nazis were able to create thousands of lunatics enough to murder six million Jews. As time passed after WWII Germans realized sorrowfully that their leaders had systematically lied to them and brainwashed them into committing such heinous crimes. This may happen soon in Ethiopia and Eritrea; but too much harm is done already to allow healing soon enough. This will pass on to generations to the disgrace of the grand children of the criminals.

The people of Tigray elected TPLF to the Regional government based on Constitutional provisions defying the stern warnings of the PP leader. This marked the beginning of the preparation for the defense of Tigray against the invasion which was imminent. Regardless of what the rest of Ethiopia and Eritrea thought the people of Tigray elected TPLF to lead them in the difficult time ahead. This installed TPLF as a war-time ruling party of Tigray. For the PP-government in Addis Ababa the new government, led by TPLF, was illegitimate. This is where the standpoints of the PP-government and the people of Tigray parted their ways.

The PP-government does not recognize the TPLF-led Regional State government as representative of the people of Tigray because it was elected in an "illegal" election. This led to PP-government rigidly held opinion that the people of Tigray and TPLF are different and even belligerent. The PP-government goes even much further down into the political abyss and claims that it wants to 'liberate' the people of Tigray from TPLF rule. Mind you! This is not a silly political statement as it may appear to be; it is a tactical maneuver to conceal the core mission of the war as if it is only targeted against TPLF: a party which they accuse to be not only the enemy of Ethiopia but also the enemy of the people of Tigray.

As regards to the latter the ammunition for such kinds of poisonous propaganda comes from none other than the traitors of Tigrayan origin who hold key federal government positions to make it look like this is not a people's war. The Tigrayan-traitors hold some grudges against TPLF for their own personal reasons; but they failed to know in what contexts their revenge is to be taken against their former mother party. They provide a lot of moral boost to the killings and destruction in Tigray.

After the Government of Tigray left the cities, in the face of an overwhelming allied onslaught, and mixed with the rural populace to wedge a protracted war against the occupying forces, thousands of Tegar from all walks of economic, social, and political life joined it. Convinced that the PP-government was doing the right thing for the people of Tigray it installed a PP-transitional government in the Capital of Tigray. Concurrently, Eritrean, Amhara, and Ethiopian

troops were wreaking havoc to the social and economic life of ordinary people and murdering thousands in cold blood. As the corrupt and inept members of the transitional government were restricted only to Mekelle and squabbled over control of the teeny-weeny political power handed out to them, the resistance of the people of Tigray was taking shape in the hills and dales of Tigray. Now we have come to the critical point in this article where the seemingly complex relationship between TPLF, TDF and the Government of Tigray is unraveled. TPLF was elected in a landslide of over 98 percent and in practice the Government of Tigray is a mirror image of TPLF as a political party. However this does not mean that the TPLF as a party can replace the Government of Tigray. The party leadership represents its members; while the executive branch of the Government of Tigray represents all the people of Tigray regardless of their party affiliations.

This implies that TPLF is literally ‘bipolar’ in the sense that it is a government and at the same time a party; roles which should never be mixed up. When the TDF was organized in the “bush” it was organized as a military wing of the Government of Tigray not as TPLF combatants. Hence, the membership of TDF is not restricted to TPLF membership. It is believed that there are more non-members of TPLF in the ranks of the TDF than there are members of the TPLF. There are even hundreds if not thousands in the TDF who are in political opposition to TPLF. The leadership of the TDF is the prerogative of the Government of Tigray. However, since the Government is an overwhelming TPLF majority it may imply a de facto TPLF leadership of TDF to the dissatisfaction of the non-TPLF members.

The rocky semantics must have been resolved for best effect on the fighting morale of the TDF combatants. TDF fighters should not be made to feel that they are fighting to save a party. They are there to save the People of Tigray. Of course, saving the people of Tigray is done more effectively by saving TPLF because TPLF is elected by the people to form a government. Tigray cannot afford to be without a government in the middle of its resistance against invaders. The Government is leading the people’s resistance; and TPLF is leading the Government. It is to avoid such a game of words, which may have harmful political meanings and consequences that the Government of Tigray on behalf of people of Tigray set up a semi-autonomous ‘Central Command’ to lead the TDF. This may help understand how the three entities-TPLF, Government, and TDF-are one and three at the same time.

It does not harm a bit whether TDF is referred to as a TPLF Force as long as the reference does not take a legal meaning and serve the enemies of Tigray to convince the world public that their mission in Tigray is justified as solely against TPLF. It has to be clear to the whole world that TDF is a spontaneous people’s movement of men and women volunteers drawn from high schools, universities, medical centers, opposition parties, and a vast array of urban and rural communities.

TDF is not a hired army; there are no payrolls for its members. Many of them were living lives of luxury. Now they are getting used to sharing food with the people or going hungry for days and drinking turbid water from streams. They never dreamt of finding themselves in this grave

situation. They were forced into it to save their people from the planned extinction. When the war is over quite substantial numbers will leave to their schools, universities, health centers, lucrative businesses and farms which they are forced out from due to the invasion and destruction of Tigray. The Pretoria agreement should be legally correct in the sense that the war in Tigray is not a law enforcement campaign against TPLF. It is an all-out war to wipe out Tigray from the map. This is not a fairy tale. Key advisors and policy makers in the PP-government have been preaching genocide in Tigray and going away with it.

If Daniel Kibret can say “We have to delete the people (Tegaru) from history” and still retain his position as the social affairs advisor of the Prime Minister; If a business tycoon could say “We have to eat this people (Tegaru) like fried mutton” and go on with his profits in peace; If a close confidant of the PM can encourage people to be very cruel against Tegaru and can walk happily under the Ethiopian sun; how is it possible that the war in Tigray is only about TPLF leadership? If the PP-government is to settle the problem in Tigray it has to admit that it was wedging war against the people and must negotiate with the people represented by their government. Removing the reference to TPLF as terrorist is fine because calling TPLF a terrorist sounds like saying the people of Tigray have elected a terrorist group.

The PP-government must also endorse the pre-war election of Tigray because TPLF is leading the Government of Tigray elected before the war. It is illogical to recognize TPLF as a party but criminalize the election. It must be left to the people of Tigray to or not to change the government as per Constitutional provisions for self-rule. By doing so the PP-government will put the noose around its neck for invading and destroying Tigray for conducting election as per the dictates of the Constitution. However, it will leave no stone unturned to justify the war regardless.

The Pretoria agreement is loaded with lots of Made-in-PP political intrigues which are designed to delegitimize the referendum in Tigray, to deny it justice for the victims of genocide and gang rape, to weaken potential relations of Tigray with the outside world, to make it vulnerable to arbitrary treatment in the future without a means to defend itself, and to compromise its territorial integrity at the will and whim of the Eritrean tyrants, the dictators at Arat-Kilo, and the unscrupulous land-grabbers in the Amhara Region. The PP-government is also trying to sneak through the agreement into the regional administration of Tigray by using the carrot trick. If it succeeds to persuade politicians of Tigray to form an ‘inclusive’ provisional government and go for a postwar election next, this will be a recipe for political disaster in Tigray.

The renegade Aregawi’s party and PP-Tigray will rub shoulders in the transitional government with TPLF, Baitona, TIP, and Salsay Woyane. This will be followed by installing PP-Tigray in the regional government through the customary election fraud led by the National Election Board. After all, the office is notorious for such irregularities. Helpless and defenseless Tigray will watch its right to self-determination washed away in broad daylight and its future rendered uncertain.

Am I not thinking about the starving and dying millions of Tegarù to dwell so much in the political future of Tigray? I have lost a lot of weight and my health is compromised more often than not every time I see victims of air strike and the cruel long siege on TV screen for the last two years. We are stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea. I will not blame God for all this because I know He has his ways. However, I am ambivalent about risking the future of Tigray for short-term relief from the predicament we find ourselves in. There must be a different way out of this that does not compromise the future of Tigray as a Nation of brave and diligent people. I don't propose a panacea; the safe exit strategy has to be done as a joint-construction of realities by all Tegarù. In the end, allow me to be too personal about the TDF.

When I heard the terrible news about the agreement to disband the TDF I was unable to go to sleep the whole night. I did not mean to be irrational and fail to think of a compromise to end the suffering of the people in Tigray. I just am too weak to bear the idea. Call me unreasonable I will take it with grace; but I will continue considering the TDF as my saint and build a magnificent church for it; in my heart of course!