

# Eritrean Sacrifice for Ethiopian Stability: A Legacy of Unreciprocated Cost

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The historical narrative of the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia is frequently dominated by conflict, but beneath the surface lies a profound and often tragic truth: the Eritrean people have, at critical junctures, paid an enormous price for the stability and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. This legacy of sacrifice, both in the 1991 transition and, more recently, in the Tigray War, stands in stark and painful contrast to the current aggressive rhetoric from Addis Ababa.

## **The 1991 Transition: Eritrea's Cost for Ethiopia's Liberation**



The 1991 overthrow of the Derg regime, led by Mengistu Haile Mariam, was a pivotal moment for Ethiopia. It marked the end of a brutal, seventeen-year military dictatorship and paved the way for the establishment of the current federal system. This victory was largely achieved through the combined efforts of various rebel groups, chief among them the Eritrean People's Liberation Front

(EPLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which formed the core of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

- **Eritrean Leadership in the Struggle:** The EPLF, having waged a thirty-year war for independence, was arguably the most militarily seasoned and effective liberation movement in the region. Their sustained pressure on the Derg forces, culminating in the decisive Battle of Massawa in 1990 and the final push, significantly weakened the regime and created the conditions for its collapse.
- **A Strategic Choice for Ethiopian Stability:** Crucially, the EPLF, upon entering Addis Ababa in May 1991 alongside the TPLF, did not immediately declare full independence. Instead, they participated in the transitional arrangements for Ethiopia, facilitating a peaceful transfer of power. They could have chosen a more disruptive, unilateral path, but their cooperation helped prevent further chaos and fragmentation within Ethiopia itself.
- **The Price of Independence:** Eritrea's eventual independence, overwhelmingly endorsed in a 1993 referendum, was the culmination of decades of war, resulting in hundreds of thousands of lives lost, widespread destruction, and a deeply traumatized population. This independence, while a triumph for Eritreans,

simultaneously removed a long-standing internal conflict from Ethiopia's burden, allowing Ethiopia to embark on its new federal journey with greater stability. The Eritrean struggle, in essence, cleared the ground for a new Ethiopia to emerge.

### **The Tigray War: A Costly Intervention<sup>1</sup> for the Federal Government's Survival**

Fast forward three decades, and the Eritrean people once again found themselves playing a critical, albeit controversial, role in securing the stability of the Ethiopian federal government. When the conflict erupted in Tigray in November 2020 between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF, the Eritrean military intervened significantly on the side of Abiy Ahmed's forces.

- **Strategic Alliance of Necessity:** From Ethiopia's perspective, Eritrea's intervention provided crucial military support at a time when the federal government faced a formidable challenge from the TPLF. Eritrean forces were instrumental in offensive operations, securing key territories, and reportedly preventing a TPLF advance that could have severely jeopardized the federal government's control and the unity of the Ethiopian state.
- **The Eritrean Cost:** This intervention, however, came at a tremendous cost to the Eritrean people.
  - ❖ **Human Lives:** Eritrean soldiers suffered significant casualties, their lives expended in a conflict that was fundamentally internal to Ethiopia.
  - ❖ **Economic Strain:** A nation already facing economic challenges diverted resources to military engagement.
  - ❖ **International Condemnation:** Eritrea faced widespread international condemnation and accusations of human rights abuses during the conflict, leading to further isolation and sanctions. This global censure directly resulted from its role in shoring up the Ethiopian government.
  - ❖ **Domestic Impact:** The war led to a prolonged mobilization of Eritrean youth, exacerbating internal pressures and concerns about the future of the nation's human capital.

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<sup>1</sup> I vehemently opposed this intervention. Read this article and watch the videos:

<https://www.snitna.com/articles/%E1%89%A0%E1%89%B5%E1%88%AA-%E1%88%93%E1%89%82-%E1%88%B8%E1%88%8D%E1%8C%8A-%E1%89%83%E1%88%8D%E1%88%B2-%E1%88%85%E1%8B%9D%E1%89%A2-%E1%8A%A4%E1%88%AD%E1%89%B5%E1%88%AB-%E1%88%95%E1%8C%82%E1%8A%B8-%E1%8A%93%E1%89%A0%E1%8B%AD.php>  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo6tmVVjJ8P5l3ts2GQ-6X-p8RCYp5MFv>

## **The Bitter Irony: A Legacy of Betrayal and Disrespect**

Given this history of profound sacrifice for Ethiopia's stability, the current rhetoric from Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, with its alleged insults, disregard for sovereignty, and irredentist claims, is not merely politically unwise; it is a deeply offensive act of betrayal.

- **Unreciprocated Gratitude:** Instead of acknowledging the immense sacrifices that, arguably, helped secure his own government and the continuity of the Ethiopian state, Abiy's administration has chosen a path of aggressive territorial demands and disrespect. This suggests a profound lack of gratitude and dangerous historical amnesia.
- **Rewarding Sacrifice with Hostility:** To demand sovereign territory and insult the very people whose blood and treasure contributed to Ethiopia's well-being is to reward past sacrifice with hostility. It creates a narrative where aiding a neighbor leads not to enduring friendship but to renewed threats.
- **Poisoning Future Relations:** Such actions actively poison any prospects for genuine, long-term peace and cooperation between the two nations. It tells Eritreans that their contributions are not valued, and their sovereignty is negotiable, even after helping Ethiopia in its darkest hours.

In summary, the Eritrean people's enduring, often unreciprocated, sacrifices for the stability of Ethiopia are an undeniable historical fact. From paving the way for Ethiopia's post-Derg transition to intervening in the recent Tigray War to safeguard the federal government, Eritrean blood and resources have been repeatedly expended. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's current rhetoric, combining alleged insults with aggressive territorial claims, therefore transcends mere "political rudeness." It represents a profound act of historical revisionism, a severe diplomatic breach, and a deep moral betrayal that risks plunging the Horn of Africa back into conflict, all while disrespecting the heavy price paid by the Eritrean people for regional stability.