

Ethiopia's Calculated Gambit: Imprisonment of Brigade Nhamedu Leaders and the Quest for Assab

Dr. Gebre Gebremariam

The Context: The recent imprisonment of three prominent leaders from Brigade Nhamedu's Ethiopia branch – the Chairperson, the Treasurer, and the Head of Security Affairs – signals a deeply concerning escalation in Ethiopia's strategic maneuvers concerning Eritrean sovereignty. Far from an isolated incident or an internal dispute, these arrests appear to be a calculated move by the Ethiopian government, designed to manipulate the Eritrean opposition landscape and advance its long-held, illicit ambition to secure access to Eritrea's sovereign port city of Assab. These detained leaders, suspected of opposing Ethiopia's aggressive posture towards Eritrea, have become direct targets in a dangerous geopolitical game aimed at exploiting internal Eritrean divisions to facilitate territorial claims.



A [Press Release](#)¹ from Eritrean justice seekers on 10 November 2025 highlighted the alarming situation of these three elected leaders, noting its particular significance amidst recent shifts within the Eritrean opposition. A new faction, referring to itself as

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=25587301400876733&set=a.377953965571491>

the "**Front** or ግጥር in Tigrigna" and primarily composed of disgruntled individuals from the global Eritrean diaspora, has emerged. This group has openly aligned itself with Ethiopia's recent aggressive stance against Eritrea and, crucially, has actively sought to usurp the leadership of Brigade Nhamedu's Ethiopia branch.

The established Brigade Nhamedu office in Ethiopia has been suspected by the Abiy regime of having a clear position of non-support for Ethiopia's aggression against Eritrea. It is against this backdrop that the Ethiopian authorities have moved to imprison its elected leaders. Although the leaders of the "Front" group have dirty hands and they are culprit, they cannot do the arrests themselves. Neither can they force the Abiy regime do it on behalf of them. Hence, the official rationale - that the arrests stem from accusations by the "**Front**" group, presenting it as an "inter-Eritrean groups issue" - is demonstrably a convenient pretext. This analysis contends that Ethiopia is deliberately orchestrating these divisions to intimidate and neutralize elements within Brigade Nhamedu that resist its aggressive agenda, while simultaneously promoting and empowering the "**Front**" group, which actively supports it. Thus, the imprisoned Brigade Nhamedu leaders are not merely collateral damage in an internal dispute; they are direct victims of a sinister agenda designed to exploit and amplify internal Eritrean divisions to serve Ethiopia's broader territorial ambitions.

Assab: The Cradle of Eritrean National Identity

The strategic importance of Assab cannot be overstated. As Dr. Gebre Gebremariam eloquently argues, Assab is not merely a port; it is the "[Cradle of Eritrean National](#)



[Identity](#)."² Its historical significance is profound: Italian colonialism in Eritrea commenced with the acquisition of Assab, and the nation's arduous 30-year liberation struggle culminated in the defeat of the last foreign occupiers at Assab in May 1991. Assab therefore embodies the "Foundation Stone of the integrity of Eritrea as a sovereign nation-state" and a powerful symbol of hard-won independence and national unity.

Historically, Ethiopia "has never had access to the sea," and "Assab had never been Ethiopian." Any claims to the contrary are "false and unfounded," constituting a direct violation of international law and the African Union Charter's

² https://eritreahagerey.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Asab_The-Cradle-of-Eritrea-2.pdf

principle of *uti possidetis juris*, which affirms the inviolability of colonial-era boundaries at independence.

Brigade Nhamedu, as a movement of Eritrean justice seekers, has consistently championed Eritrean sovereignty and human rights, vociferously denouncing the repressive regime in Asmara. Their foundational principles inherently reject any external aggression or claims on Eritrean territory. It is precisely this unwavering commitment to Eritrea's territorial integrity, particularly concerning Assab, that renders the current leadership of Brigade Nhamedu in Ethiopia an inconvenient obstacle for Addis Ababa's aspirations.

Ethiopia's Strategy: Manipulation and Scapegoating

The narrative detailed in the press release reveals Ethiopia's alleged attempt to engineer an internal schism within the Eritrean opposition. The newly formed "**Front**" group, primarily composed of diaspora Eritreans supportive of Ethiopia's aggressive stance, is being actively promoted. This "**Front**" group, by aligning with Ethiopia's agenda, is reportedly being used as a pretext to undermine the legitimate Brigade Nhamedu leadership, which is suspected of staunchly opposing any violation of Eritrean sovereignty. The imprisonment of the Chairperson, Treasurer, and Security Chief, under the guise of an "inter-Eritrean groups issue," serves as a chilling illustration of this manipulative strategy.

This approach perfectly aligns with what Dr. Gebremariam describes as Ethiopia's "international scapegoating and weaponization of public ignorance."³ Facing significant internal turmoil, state fragility, and governance crises, the Abiy regime seeks to divert public attention and consolidate power by fabricating external threats. Eritrea, and specifically the perceived need for access to Assab, has become the convenient scapegoat. The regime "relentlessly demonizes Eritrea and its people, portraying it as an existential threat to national security," while simultaneously promoting false historical narratives about Assab and Ethiopia's purported right to the sea.

By imprisoning the key leaders of Brigade Nhamedu's Ethiopia branch, Ethiopia is trying to achieve several strategic objectives:

1. **Silencing Dissent:** It tries to directly neutralize prominent voices within the Eritrean opposition who unequivocally reject Ethiopia's territorial ambitions concerning Assab.

³ <https://eritreahagerey.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Scapegoating-Eritrea-and-Weaponizing-Ignorance2.pdf>

2. **Creating a Compliant Faction:** It is seeking to elevate and legitimize the "**Front**" group, ensuring that any Eritrean opposition voices operating within Ethiopia are those that align with Addis Ababa's strategic interests.
3. **Manufacturing Division:** It tries to exacerbate existing divisions within the Eritrean justice-seeking movement, weakening its overall effectiveness and making it more susceptible to external control.
4. **Advancing the Assab Agenda:** It wants to remove obstacles to promoting the narrative of Ethiopian access to Assab, framing any resistance as an internal Eritrean issue rather than a violation of international law.

This "sinister agenda" is a direct assault on Eritrean national identity and sovereignty. The imprisoned Brigade Nhamedu leaders are not merely caught in a political skirmish; they are victims of a calculated strategy to exploit internal dynamics for an illegal territorial objective. Their refusal to endorse Ethiopia's "illegal ambition - Access to Assab" positions them as martyrs in the ongoing defense of Eritrea's very foundation.

A Call for Vigilance and Unity

It is imperative that Eritrean justice seekers, the international community, and all proponents of international law recognize the gravity of this situation. The arrests are not about "misunderstanding among these groups," but about Ethiopia's deliberate attempt to subvert Eritrean sovereignty and annex a territory that is both historically and existentially central to Eritrea's nationhood. The escalating calls from Ethiopian politicians, leaders, and activists for access to Assab are not just "false and unfounded" but "dangerous," violating international law and threatening regional stability.

The ongoing "[vicious cycle of criminality](#)"⁴ and "mass silence" within Eritrea, exacerbated by the regime of Issaias Afewerki, regrettably creates vulnerabilities that external actors like Ethiopia seek to exploit. However, the principled stand of the Brigade Nhamedu leaders, even from behind prison walls, serves as a powerful reminder that the defense of Assab and Eritrean sovereignty is non-negotiable for true Eritrean patriots. The path to a democratic and just Eritrea, free from both internal tyranny and external aggression, demands unwavering vigilance and unity against such calculated manipulations.

⁴ <https://eritrehagerey.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-Vicious-Cycle-of-Criminality.pdf>