

Interview of President Isaias Afwerki
With local media on the occasion of the New Year
January 8, 2022



**The following interview was conducted with President Isaias Afwerki
on 8, January 2022, on the occasion of the New Year**

- **Your Excellency, in your interview last year, you elaborated extensively on the regional turmoil instigated by the TPLF and its Enablers that was juxtaposed to the global pandemic of COVID-19. In your message of good wishes for New Year (2022), you stated that the few remnants of the forces of destruction will be eradicated through the process of justice and our region will be tranquil which will lead to prosperity and development.**
- **We will start our interview on regional issues. As mentioned above, the war ignited in Tigray region by the TPLF and its Enablers has continued to rage since it was unleashed in November 2020. Indeed, later in recent past, the war expanded to the middle of Ethiopia causing a lot of destruction. In this regard, what can you tell us about the new developments in Ethiopia, and what would be its influence or impact at the regional level?**

A. It is important to keep in mind the bigger picture when analyzing important events. We cannot speak of what has transpired since November 4, 2020, in a vacuum. The public euphoria and optimism engendered by the changes that took place in Ethiopia, coupled with the signing of the Peace Agreement is of course natural and understandable. Indeed, compared to the past 18 years, the Peace Agreement constituted a monumental achievement. Nevertheless, it was also natural for us to be cautious due to some concerns even as we remained committed to a constructive engagement.

Our concerns were not allayed as we continued to observe heightened apprehension by TPLF and its sponsors. And this was not a passing phenomenon. In the event, we could not gauge the developments by their superficial appearances alone. History has taught us a lot. We had to profoundly consider all possible scenarios within a long-term perspective. Indeed, in tandem with the overall positive changes, the preoccupying trend was the intensive military preparations by the TPLF. One cannot gloss over this fact and simply embrace the positive developments alone.

While this was happening, Prime Minister Abiy was prodding me, out of goodwill, to meet with the TPLF. I was reluctant to do so preferring to wait for a more opportune moment, especially because as the TPLF persisted in ramping up its military preparations.

Finally, I met Debretsetzion on the margins of the Om-Hager Border Opening ceremony. This was not on my agenda; it was in fact a last-minute decision. Nevertheless, I thought that perhaps some words of advice could lead to the curbing of unnecessary military preparations on their part. The conversation lasted a few minutes, if not seconds. My message was short – I asked him: “why are you preparing for war?” He replied: “it will not happen”. I asked him again what he meant by “it will not happen”. It is one thing to say we are not preparing and another thing to say “it will not happen”. There was no room for us to continue talking.

Like I said, my only aim was to curb the TPLF’s war preparations and to try and dissuade them from disastrous miscalculations. I did not ask the question expecting an honest answer as to why they are preparing for war. My only aim

was to hammer the point that war is unnecessary, for all sides. Unfortunately, the advice fell on deaf ears.

The result was the assault unleashed on November 4, 2020. This was sudden and unpredictable by all standards; even taking into account all the intelligence information we had collated. As a soldier, your role is to study scenarios, gather intelligence and counter intelligence, and in turn prepare for any eventualities. Nonetheless, the events of November 4 stunned everyone. I am certain that there is not one person that can say they expected that to happen in the way it did.

18 years had elapsed since the border decision of 2002. This is a very long time for our sovereign lands to remain forcefully occupied. Still, we waited with patience preferring to focus on the larger picture and presuming that it will ultimately be resolved with time. We did not opt for defensive measures. We realized that they wanted to keep us hostage. We preferred to focus on other overarching matters.

Unfortunately, when the events of November 4 are examined in retrospect and considering the missiles that were aimed at us, it is not hard to now understand that the bulk of the attack was geared towards us.

There are specific details, that I will elaborate later, indicating that the attack was mainly aimed at us. Over 100 sites in Eritrea were targeted for missile attacks. We never contemplated this scenario especially in view of the range and scope of envisaged targets. The missiles that were launched are a fraction of what was planned. What was planned is truly hard to fathom. Why would they prepare for this? Why would they want a war like this? This will come to light in due time. Suffice it to say, we were attacked and immediately forced into a position of self-defence. As history is our witness, since the time of WWII, our position has always been one of self-defence. We have never initiated and unleashed any type of war. We do not have an appetite for war.

We waited patiently for 18 years. Unfortunately, we were taken aback by an event that left us with no other choice but to defend our sovereignty. This is our prerogative; it is not a matter that we seek permission from any party. It is our right of self-defence to protect our sovereignty and national security.

One can try and make sense of the TPLF's unprecedented military assaults – its timing, place etc. And this will prompt us to examine the situation in Ethiopia in the past thirty years and more specifically the situation of the Northern Command which was a primary target, besides the missile attacks against us.

The Northern Command of Ethiopia consisted of 30,000 up to 32,000 soldiers. Out of these, over 1/3rd were TPLF loyalists. The TPLF initiated the massive attacks” because, in its myopic perception, there was no “Federal Army”.

The 32,000 strong Northern Command cannot be deemed, due to its peculiar composition, as a veritable contingent for the defence of the sovereignty and national security of the country as a whole. The fact is the TPLF had diluted the national attributes of the defence and security institutions in the country in thirty years of its rule. And it is this state of affairs that emboldened TPLF military commanders to unleash the massive and coordinated assaults – in what I call huge miscalculation. The objective was to attack and paralyse the Northern Command, capture all its weapons and then proceed to implement the larger aim of rolling back the reform process.

The TPLF managed to take many soldiers prisoner and captured substantial weapons in its initial attacks. However, some 6,000 soldiers refused to surrender and managed to hold their ground. Subsequently, they took positions close to our border. Without going into extensive details, it was clear that the developments were very grave; as it was indeed corroborated by some POWs and other material evidences. This grave threat was not only aimed at us but the overall scheme was aimed at reversing the reform process in Ethiopia with its ramifications to our national security.

All of this begs the question, what were the results of this war of insurrection? Often, anyone who rushes into war is committing a miscalculation based on rapacious and subjective whims. The resulting deaths, destruction, and complications cannot be easily rectified. All of this leads to dangerous military measures.

At the time the massive assault was unleashed, we did not have detailed intelligence or the requisite data. Be that as it may, we were left with no other

option but to defend ourselves, even if spontaneously, responding to events as they unfolded. It took time. Eventually, however, the situation was reversed; the initial plan of TPLF's leadership and Military Commanders checked and almost foiled.

Another essential point here is that this matter was not confined to the TPLF alone. The actors include external forces whose interests further complicated the situation on the ground. This is obviously not new to us. The history of the past 80 years is replete with external interferences, adding fuel to fire, and unnecessarily complicating the scenarios. Similarly, (as it relates to the events since November 4, 2020), the list detailing external interference, pressure and manipulation is long, including psychological, diplomatic as well as media warfare. The bulk of the attack was aimed squarely at us. Eritrea has done this! Eritrea has done that! etc. From "genocide" to "rape" – things that you absolutely cannot wrap your head around. In retrospect, the agenda was clear

As the game plan of the TPLF and its sponsors began to wane, it gave way to anxiety. With this came a massive campaign of pressure and threats. We were not intimidated by this. We remained committed to self-defence as we had no other option. We were also committed to seeing through the positive reform within Ethiopia, which in our view had positive implications not only for the country itself but for our region at large. At this juncture, the abrupt withdrawal of the Federal Forces from Mekele took place. I do not wish to go into the details but we did not expect it

The only explanation we have for that decision is that it was a temporary, tactical setback. Having said that, it did not shake us from our commitment and we remained focused on foiling the TPLF's reckless military campaign. A misadventure such as this, if left to time, would be too costly to rectify and we simply could not afford that. We embarked on a new stage, firmly believing that a lasting solution must be reached. The exact details of this phase can perhaps be a subject of many books. What was accomplished? Where and how? What challenges were faced? In any event, our main focus should not be diverted or delayed by the tactical setback that occurred.

What transpired after the withdrawal of the Federal Forces?

It induced a second military adventure to supplant TPLF's first reckless military moves. It is difficult to presume that TPLF's military commanders were fully beholden to this scenario. One factor complicating and tangling the events further was countless external pressures. In any case, this new misadventure banked on the "window of opportunity" gained from the withdrawal of Federal Forces from Mekele. The TPLF reignited the war with the aim of heading to Addis Ababa. In retrospect, it may be possible to say that this sort of short-sighted and dangerous misadventure was not well thought-out by TPLF's leadership. As the march to Kombolcha and Dessie intensified, one was left to wonder if they had truly examined all scenarios and possibilities. You cannot imagine a sane person actually making such a decision.

The second misadventure, as the first one preceding it, was equally astounding to us. We did not expect it. But while TPLF's miscalculations in the first instance stemming from the perception of a weak defence and security structures is palpable, the second one is hard to comprehend in those terms. In view of the ethnic based structures of the Regions, to venture out from one's region and move into another region and expect same outcome is unrealistic

In retrospect, one can imagine TPLF's handlers being prematurely elated by the pipedreams the short-lived advances may have temporarily created in them. On the one hand, they preached the need for dialogue while at the same time they pushed the TPLF to march onwards to Addis Ababa. The fanfare was limitless, driven as it was by their desire to resuscitate the TPLF; to see it back in power in Addis Ababa as this would secure their perceived interests. This march to Addis Ababa did not correspond to TPLF's actual strengths or abilities; it was rather the clear desire of certain external forces.

Any sane soldier or anyone who has an understanding of basic military tactics would not have taken such measures: stretching yourself beyond your capacity, marching into areas you are not familiar with, leaves you exposed to political reactions that are not in your favour. The costs, too, are very high as they would entail myriad challenges in terms of arsenal and logistics. This sort of misadventure is something that no sane mind can imagine let alone enact. In view of the concerns emanating from the balance of forces on the ground, the

only option was to remain steadfast and bolster a defensive posture. And once the defence strategy was secured, it would be possible to contemplate subsequent measures to put a lasting stop to these misadventures. Eventually, the misadventure was thwarted and reversed within a relatively short period. The details are long. Suffice it to say such miscalculations can only be the result of a perturbed mind. It is either that or someone with an avaricious mind set.

What is most heart wrenching in all these misadventures is the resultant loss of lives. History will eventually bring all details to light. The aftermath was simply atrocious. So much so that for the TPLF, moving on was impossible, and in the end, a decision to “withdraw” was made.

While these are the facts, this is TPLF’s current chicanery: “we have withdrawn by choice; we have pulled out; we are returning to our region; we are leaving the Amhara and Afar regions”. This is duplicitous and an utter lie. In any event, this is none of our concern. The paramount objective must be the foiling of the misadventure.

TPLF’s “withdrawals” is in place now. But, the full outcome of all of this remains to be seen. At what stage is it? Where will it lead? It is perhaps premature to predict what may unfold in the period ahead. In the end, one wonders if the carpetbaggers who made these decisions would rectify their wrongdoings? How about those who sponsored and endorsed their actions; would they be mollified by the current outcome? There will be no let up. It is a game of cat and mouse. What new tactics will be hatched; what new pressures will be exerted; in an attempt to create a new situation. What is the objective of this constant push for “dialogue? Their real agenda is quite different from the seemingly direct one that they flaunt. We are quite familiar with the details of this agenda; unmasking it will not be a challenge to us.

Our primary commitment is to foil the TPLF’s misadventure in order to secure a more conducive climate. Because this is interlinked with enduring regional stability as well as Eritrea’s national security. The measures we have to take to safeguard our sovereignty and national security are evident. These are not up for debate. The question is how developments in Ethiopia will unfold. While internal issues are obviously matters that regard Ethiopia alone, we must at the

same time be cognizant of the factors that have led to almost 80 years, spanning three generations, of endless conflict and crisis between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Obviously, this has to do with external agendas. It is not to the benefit of the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia. And in comparison to the ordeals suffered during the Haileselassie and Mengistu regimes, the situation in Ethiopia over the past 30 years under TPLF is by far the most alarming and dangerous.

If one is to analyse the current situation in Ethiopia, one must look back at the past 30 years – at the political, security, economic, cultural and social developments of these years. What has transpired in the past thirty years was completely unexpected. As such, it is important to search for answers in TPLF's own history – not the version of the TPLF that flip-flops every hour, with each new development. One must understand TPLF's historical origins and background in order to understand the current situation. This can also help us understand possible future developments.

I would say that the situation in Ethiopia, prior to the recent steps taken towards reform, was a deliberate construct and imposed by design. It constituted a deliberate scheme. I say this because it closely relates to the way in which the TPLF leaders viewed Ethiopia, Ethiopianness, and Ethiopian unity. This view was long established, throughout TPLF's history and development. It never changed. Their manifesto, drafted in the 70s, was anchored on and it clearly advocated for Tigray's sovereignty and independence. It did not speak of Ethiopia – it spoke only of Tigray and its sovereignty. For more than three years, this was a serious point of contention between us. The current boundaries (in Africa as a whole) are inherited from colonialism. But they are accepted as sacrosanct borders. The people of the region were not involved in drawing up these borders. When we speak of Eritrea, we are not referring to thousands or hundreds of years ago. Indeed, for Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Yemen, etc. these were all borders that were drawn up during colonial times, which must be accepted and adhered to. As such, independence and sovereignty do not directly correlate with the notion of self-determination. In the end, this was supposedly remedied and their programme accordingly changed; but their mentality remained unaltered. Nonetheless, the primary objective at that time was the struggle against the Dergue regime. As such, we chose to leave the

contentious political issue to time and focus on the principal objective. Indeed, the objective was eventually met and a new era was ushered in. Still, TPLF's blinkered mentality remained unchanged. I would link this to the 1994 creation of the Democratic Federal Republic.

Our relationship with TPLF at that time was not without its hurdles. But it was characterized with full engagement – even though their position (on Ethiopia) was wrong and our perspectives were drastically different. We still believed it could be solved over time, through dialogue. When in 1991, a national conference was held in Addis Ababa, we remained cautious. At a time when discussions were held about the future of Ethiopia, we were disquieted by the increased schisms along ethnic lines, formation of ethnic parties, and ethnic based forces. We believed that a transition period of 10 years was necessary to allow for a smoother cohesion and nation building. A nation cannot be built on the foundations of ethnic divisions and clear animosity. Irrespective of historical trajectories – as societies progress from primitive to modern phases, the trend is normally for greater cohesion and unity between the diverse peoples. This cannot be achieved through sheer goodwill or mere programmatic declaration. It is a process – a process that requires a clear roadmap and a strong commitment to enact that roadmap. Unfortunately, this was all lost on the TPLF and this worried us. Its mentality exposed ambivalence and duality – schizophrenia; instead of working together with others who were part of the struggle, you go on creating your own organization. EPRDF came in to play – fully controlled by TPLF but with a semblance of inclusivity, linking other groups, and having the pretence that the umbrella organization was fully representative of all areas. In reality, this was a sham. The real affair was brewing in the background. We flagged our concerns and attempted to calmly discuss this during the 1991 conference. It did not bear fruit.

In 1994, prior to the 1995 elections, owing to the cordial relationship of the time, I was lucky enough to review the first draft of the constitution. This was a weighty task, not an easy one. I reviewed it thoroughly, line by line, at least 4 times. My trepidation was intensified. This was not confined to Article 39 alone. The entire spirit of the document did not correspond well with the true sense of nation building that we cherished. In my view, this constitution was not

appropriate to the Ethiopian population. In fact, no people deserve such a constitution, especially in Africa. Considering our historical development, you would hope for a long process that brings us together, that would harmonize our differences and that leads us towards cooperation and unity. Instead, this constitution, which in the end would have to be adopted as a Bible or a Quran, widened gaps and institutionalized ethnic differences. This creates an extremely dangerous precedent, and as such does not befit the Ethiopian population.

(Melle's Response to my reservations were): "This is the only way we can control Ethiopia. Otherwise we cannot control Ethiopia. We will lay a time bomb here... another time-bomb there, and another time-bomb here, and so on. If the situation goes according to how we see fit, then we can continue living. Otherwise, we would set off the time-bombs. Yes, your rationale was not lost to me"

I told him: "I thank you for valuing my opinion enough to share this draft with me, but this remains my opinion."

Everything we are witnessing in Ethiopia today is the result of a deliberate policy, spanning 30 years, in which ethnic antagonism and friction was deliberately stoked, and in turn ethnic division was institutionalized. The Ethiopian constitution played a major role in codifying this for close to 30 years. This begs the question, why was this sort of polarization envisaged and how can one remedy it? Can it even be remedied? When and how, and who will take on the task of remedying it? These are all mammoth questions. And for obvious reasons of proximity and wider ramifications, it would not be appropriate for us to refrain from expressing our concerns simply because it is their internal sovereign matter.

As emphasized earlier, the situation in Ethiopia is by design. It is the result of a deliberate scheme: to elevate one dominant, narrow group, the TPLF, and use it to manage and manipulate other groups. This, over time, led to a very dangerous culture. Is this unique to Ethiopia? I would say, no. For example, look at Somalia. The Somalia that is considered a "failed state" at this time is a Somalia of one people, one language, one tribe. Somalis have a unique African trait. The aspirations of the 1960s, immediately after Somalia's independence, was

noticeably high. It was unique in Africa. In the end, however, the clan-based policies resulted in a “failed state”. This proves that the dangers lurking along the path of nation building are not unique to Ethiopia. Somalia is one example, so is Sudan, with its unique historical traits; similarly, the situation in Libya, or Iraq; as well as in various other places in Africa. Instead of a nation building process that is constructive; instead of bringing people closer to each other and aiming for unity; instead of making it about the process of inclusive citizenship; you base it on ethnic nations and ethnic institutions. There is absolutely nothing that is more destructive and dangerous. Underdevelopment is one thing. Economic underdevelopment has its own dynamics and explanations. This ethnic-based politics however, is a malaise that takes a very long time to remedy. It affects a country’s security, economy, culture. If you deliberately design a system based on division and antagonism, you cannot then wave a magic wand and fix it after it has affected everything. Even a miracle cannot remedy its destructive effects.

So how do we now read the current situation in Ethiopia? How do we augment our engagement in the reform underway and ensure that it reaches full fruition? We do not have any magic tricks. We cannot wish for miracles and predict the course of events. But our misgivings are still in place. In the circumstances, what we can do is pursue our own policy of engagement that is predicated on our concerns. Our engagement in the past two to three years was directed towards that end. This cannot change. Unless there is stability in Ethiopia, and unless government structure is designed to advance this objective; will it be feasible for us to indulge in spontaneous and reactive policies that flip-flop with different developments in Ethiopia? Our option is to marshal efforts that enhance stability.

The biggest risk of ethnic polarization is that it induces external meddling. If a sovereign country is rife with internal schisms, external meddling becomes incredibly easy. If you look at our region or any other region, the one common denominator creating a conducive environment for external meddling is weak internal dynamics. This in turn can never lead to regional stability or regional peace. This is why one cannot view developments in Ethiopia from the prism of

the recent events; from what has unfolded since November 4, i.e. the past 14 months, alone.

We must now ask, what does the future hold for Ethiopia? It may not be easy to make predictions at this time, but one can postulate different scenarios which may be amenable to different interpretations. But for us, what is crucial and relevant are the historical events that have spanned three (Eritrean) generations. We have lost considerable time. We have paid countless lives; first, during the armed struggle for liberation, and later during the war waged on us by TPLF. There is nothing we want more than stability – and stability materializes within a balanced situation. Furthermore, stability requires credible and effective enforcement institutions. And above all, it requires a highly conscious and cohesive population.

When we examine the recent military developments, the inference we draw is that those who underrate our capabilities are those who have not read history. Miscalculations abound in any war. With the hindsight of 80 years, we can assert that any power – big or small – that walks into a situation like this can only do so based on miscalculation. If we ponder on the underlying impetus for the sudden misadventures of yesterday, it is evident that it was miscalculation by the forces, especially those that give precedence to external agendas, that pushed the TPLF to the precipice. They do not read the reality or weigh all their options accurately.

Their mind-set is tuned to hatred, retribution, and hostility and use these tools to achieve their objectives. I would hope that the events of yesterday have taught them a lot because the strength of this people was not created in a vacuum. It is the embodiment of a history spanning for three eras. You cannot arbitrarily misconstrue and distort the goodwill of this population. This country has no room for deceit. In any event, the developments of the past 14 months cannot be viewed separately from what transpired in the preceding period. As such, we must not lose focus of our main objectives – we want stability; we want peace; we want respect above anything else. Furthermore, for the sovereignty of all nations to be respected, such events should not occur again.

As far as the current situation in Ethiopia is concerned, how will things pan out? Can the current antagonistic atmosphere continue? Can nation- building proceed within the perverted culture nurtured in the past 30 years? Whom do mistrust, apprehension, hatred, baseless animosity serve?

The first and foremost losers would be the Ethiopian people. This would also have dire consequents to the region as a whole. As such, and this our our longstanding principle, we will continue our engagement that is based on long-term strategies that advance the collective benefits of the region; and that does not give priority to our interests only. This is obviously not something that can simply be wished for. It requires hard work, which we are committed to. We will, indeed, continue working on all fronts as we have done so far. The process is far from over. We have, however, learned two key facts – the first and the second misadventures. We cannot rule out further misadventures and scenarios. The fact remains that we are still dealing with an unstable, covetous mentality – one that does not take pleasure in others’ stability and peace. An envious force like this would never rest, making it the perfect tool for external agendas. This necessitates our usual focus on our basic principles, careful not to lose sight of our bearing.

What are the attributes of the tactical military condition in November 2020? Where is it now after 14 months? And where will it head from here onwards? We are following these developments closely. This is a clear case of hallucination; constantly pushing towards disastrous mistakes. Apparently, the situation is neither in favour of the external sponsors nor of the actors inside the country. Nonetheless, serious work remains to be done to bring about a balanced equation. This is not something that will transpire in the short term, but it will eventually happen. As far as we are concerned, we will continue to monitor and assess the trends in Ethiopia closely, with all our concerns. At the same time, we will persevere in our constructive engagement. Indeed, we can conclude that our engagement is continuous and forward-looking.

We cannot predict what will happen tomorrow or thereafter. When you are on the receiving end, war is not something that goes according to your plans. It goes according to the plans of the instigator. You do not really have any other

choice than self-defence. You are forced into it. It is never something you choose to enter. We may be able to guess their options in the end, however, their actions determine our counter measures.

Mr. President, the United States and its partners have openly defended the TPLF clique and put pressure on the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea. The United Nation's Security Council alone has had ten meetings on the matter. And sanctions have been imposed. What is it that worries and concerns the United States and its partners?

Mr. President, some in the West also see the alliance among Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia as dangerous? What is the danger?



Understanding the unwarranted levels of adversity and constant hostility exhibited towards Eritrea requires a comprehensive grasp of determinant parameters and a particular understanding of the developments of the past 30 years. Firstly, we must distinguish between the United States of America and Special Interest Groups within that country. Indeed, it would not be proper to put the entire people of America in this label. The analogy is also applicable to Europe. The mayhem around the world is the work of the Special Interest Groups. Some people say they make up 1% but I

would argue that it is smaller than that, perhaps 0.01%. These groups have specific agendas that serve narrow interests and that are based on hegemony, ensuring constant disruption, and hostility.

History shows us that in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Eritrea was entitled to its independence like other sovereign countries. Nonetheless, two Americans, John Foster Dulles and his brother who was leading the CIA at that time, determined that Eritrea does not serve the interests of the United States. You cannot say that the American population at large had any say in this. This was the decision of a narrow, Special Interest Group within the American administration. It determined our fate – a fate that was hard to accept but was nonetheless implemented in accordance with the global modus operandi of the time.

Was the Eritrean population consulted? No. It was a decision forced on it. In such circumstances, the Eritrean population had no option but to wage a political struggle, eventually transitioning into an armed struggle. It was a long road to freedom and independence, in which two generations had to bear the burden.

That period coincided with the advent of the Cold War with all its intricacies. To understand how the Cold War developed, and how it affected us, and how the global situation of that time affected our internal situation, how it affected our region and the African continent at large, one must refer to history. It certainly had an effect on our lives and this region at large.

The Cold War came to an end in the same year of Eritrea's independence. How the Cold War, that pitted the bloc led by the Soviet Union against the bloc led by the United States came to an end, can be explained separately? Was the breakup of the Soviet Union an organic event owing to its own internal dynamics or did it have to do with external forces?

The end of the Cold War prompted the Special Interest Group in the United States to pursue reckless policies. Several thinkers of the time, whether Huntington or Fukuyama, posited a unipolar world in which the US would have full control for at least the subsequent 50 years. If you refer to their policies of the time, for the world to be effectively under their control, it must be divided

into zones of influence, and within each zone of influence you would have an anchor state that would control that zone. As far as our region was concerned, i.e. the whole of the Horn of Africa including the Red Sea, they chose Ethiopia and Kenya to act as their anchor States. All other countries would be appendages. Everything was determined from outside and the anchor States would first and foremost act as the caretakers of external agendas. As such, when examining the regional developments in the past 30 years, this must be seen in the context of the larger, global, picture. In their perspective, the primary threat that could pose a danger to the unipolar world stemmed from the former Soviet Union or Russian Federation. To that end, a policy of containment was put in place. The aim of this policy was to push on various pressure points – Ukraine, Crimea, new configuration/expansion of NATO into former Warsaw Pact turf etc. – around the Soviet Union. The overarching objective of their unipolar world was to prevent any force from rivalling them militarily, economically as well as technologically, or having any influence that competes with theirs. All of this is detailed in numerous documents and books. The current friction on Ukraine is indeed part and parcel of the three decades old policy of containment of the Russian Federation. Ironically, an important development that they paid no attention to over the past 30 years was the rise of China.

As far as their methodology of global economic hegemony or influence is concerned, the strategy revolves on dividing the world into areas of control based on resources. Does a country have natural resources? Does it have an industrial or economic potential? Does a country have oil or any other resources? If so how to control that. Does the country have an exploitable manpower? That too must be controlled. Special Interest Groups came into play, which included multinationals and pharmaceuticals – those same pharmaceuticals siphoning off trillions of dollars off of the current COVID 19 pandemic. These are the companies that drive policies of global economic hegemony.

In the case of China, it possessed, in their perspective, three key advantages; notably its energy cost and its labor cost, both of which are substantially lower than global competitors; and its consumption rate, considering its population of

1.4 billion people. In short, China is a powerhouse. This was not lost on the multinationals that migrated to the country over the past three decades, thinking that they would be able to dominate global markets from there. Instead of setting up a factory in the US, these multinationals migrated in droves, wanting to take advantage of the cheap energy and labor costs. This short-sighted view was also driven by the presumption that China cannot produce anything; it can only copy and imitate.

Fast forward to the current time, would one find more products made in China or made in the USA? Obviously one would be hard-pressed to find much that is made in the USA these days. All in all, since the 19th century, American or Western special interest groups have pursued several misguided policies and made terrible mistakes based on basic misconceptions. I would argue that today's America is virtually powerless. It is not even the largest economy in the world. If you look at its industrial output, China stands at 27%, compared to America's 24%. Indeed, the most potent instrument they have is the latitude of printing the US dollar at will. As far as US aggregate debt is concerned, this year alone, it rose from 20 to over 30 trillion – meaning each American citizen owes 10 thousand US dollars. And, this continues to rise, notwithstanding the ceiling put in place by the US Congress in its proceedings yesterday. One quarter US debt, which stood at 20 trillion dollars prior to the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, is owed to China; meaning America owed China 5 trillion US dollars. Therefore, anyone arguing that the US is the number one global economy is not reading the figures properly.

All of these trends clash with the notion and presumption of creating a unipolar world. That argument was obviously based on their narrow and subjective aspirations; not on objective global realities. China is now at the forefront – it has even reached Mars. Chinese innovation; Chinese quality products, are getting better and better with time.

How about Europe? Based on 2018 figures, the bulk of its industrial output stood at or below 23%. Germany may have its own advantages; and other countries, too. But when looked at the whole economic bloc, it is nowhere (in terms of top rankings).

As far as spheres of influence are concerned, their model within the framework of the unipolar global order, consisted of dividing the world into zones of influence, each with its own Anchor States tasked with safeguarding their interests and agendas. This policy might still be in place, but, the world is trying to move in a different direction.

Take our region, for instance. Over the past 30 years, instead of leaving us alone, they chose to enact misguided policies.

For our part, we understood, immediately after independence, that we cannot live in an economic island. So we charted out a plan to work collectively in our neighborhood: with Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti. We aimed to create a regional organization; that is why IGAD was bolstered and revitalized. We wanted to create synergy among countries of the region. We also wanted to work collectively on regional stability. None of this was allowed to happen and it was sabotaged through different means. IGADD has been incapacitated in real terms. The Horn of Africa Initiative or Greater Horn that they floated at one point in time is non-existent today. The AU's effectiveness remains dubious too. All new institutions formed from time to time remain unable to work without intrusive hindrances. In brief, one cannot contemplate a worse approach in this region than their misguided policy of propping up the TPLF in the past thirty years.

Until very recently, the TPLF even tried to use this misguided support to bamboozle the people of Tigray – claiming “America is with us”. The events and developments in our wider region is the result of misguided US policies: Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Iraq, Yemen. The tribulations that have ensued are a result of this misguided perspective. Therefore, when we speak of external agendas, this must be analyzed and corroborated with tangible facts and directly linked to what happened at specific times.

What do we make of the relentless hostility towards us? The excuse in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, during the time of Foster Dulles, may have been linked to the Cold War. But what about the decades after that? What explains the incessant animosity? This can only be linked to the mentality of the people making up the Special Interest Groups. Those people, with specific

interests, have a very narrow-minded view; one doused in greed; clearly coveting what is not theirs and using whatever ploys to achieve their objective. This is the political culture that defines them. But they have failed miserably. China has outmaneuvered them. So has Russia. Whatever fanfare you read on the news – for example, most recently, on Kazakhstan – you must read between the lines. All of this is an indication of their failure. They tried to contain Russia, now they are trying to contain China. They form alliances that serve them – India, Australia, Japan, South Korea; they manufacture turmoil in the Asian Pacific; they keep flagging different none issues; Hong Kong, Taiwan. Do they never learn? These sort of hostile policies are clearly rooted in their culture, their psyche. Fundamentally, it is rooted in preserving their own interests. The turmoil they had caused in our region over the past 30 years is endless.

We made an effort to remedy this during the Trump Administration. We compiled and sent a solid file documenting all of the hostility towards Eritrea over the past 80 years. We did not expect drastic change but hoped that perhaps, with the benefit of hindsight and the failed strategy of a unipolar world spanning thirty years, would give impetus to reduce and make adjustments to their adversarial policies towards us. From the issue of Hanish, to Badme, to the border with Djibouti, do they not have a conscience? Is there not one person that can reason objectively?

The response from the Trump Administration, during the first year of his Presidency, was rather positive; broadly indicating concurrence but insisting on moving forward. For our part, we opted for broader engagement that went beyond their negative stance on matters of our sovereignty so as to address the overall track record and policy of hostility.

Unfortunately, we now find ourselves in a more precarious situation. Their current outlook towards us reeks of a blind and subjective mentality, that is devoid of balance and arguments; that ignores potential costs. Why? Well, there may be different explanations and arguments; but none of it is based on logic.

We are a relatively small country; why would they need to antagonize us? Can they not learn from the developments in other parts of the world; Europe, the Americas, Asia? Will they ever come to terms with the fact that the creation of a

unipolar world, dividing the world into regions, each with an anchor State, has failed miserably? Obviously, this failure is giving rise to their growing frustration. The Special Interest Groups are growing more and more restless and this is giving rise to a reactive way of reasoning. This reactive way of reasoning encompasses retaliatory measures; manufacturing chaos, imposition of baseless sanctions. It defies reason, but this is not something that is only directed at us.

This is the current global situation. But this is not to say that it will continue this way after 10 or 20 years. The fact of the matter is they will not be able to contain Russia. They certainly will not be able to curb China's growth. Similarly, the cracks in Europe will continue growing. They also will never be able to restrain Africa's growth. We must keep all of this in perspective and also understand the fact that their frustrations will probably grow with time. Having said that, we must continue our commitment to working harder and we must remain resilient, and we must do so in solidarity with others in our region. We must create a conducive environment for cooperation.

This relates to an earlier point that I underlined about the stability in Ethiopia. We must actively create an environment that allows us to join forces and work towards shared advantages. This may not happen overnight and will take time. This is also not something that will be accomplished through political goodwill alone. It requires commitment and hard work. Funny enough, this is somewhat of a taboo and the approach is suppressed in a hash-hash manner. Anyone speaking of this must be silenced. No one is allowed to express their opinion. Reforming ideas are taboo. They make up different reasons to belittle these ideas. We can recall the nine years, between 2009-2018, in which Eritrea was placed under sanctions. What of the recent sanctions placed on us? On what basis? In what court of law? What was the logic used? In a way, none of this is alien to us – not because we are smarter than others but because history has been our greatest instructor. The lessons we gained from history are enormous – and this has only made us more resilient. Our focus is sharper and our resolve remains unaffected. History has taught us patience; it has equipped us with all the tools required to overcome challenges. All of this makes deciphering their ploys relatively easy for us.

Much can be theorized about the relentless hostile policies, much too can be guessed about the way ahead. Will it continue this way? Will they ever have respect for a truly global order? Do the voices and opinions of peoples, of sovereign nations, not count? Will this world always be ruled based on their (special interest groups) whims and diktats? Will they keep fomenting chaos and misadventure? The Cold War provided them with one stage, then came the 30 years that followed; what is next? The key for us is to scrupulously read the developments and trends; both internally within their own countries as well as the global balance. It really is not that difficult to recognize whether their policies have succeeded or failed – you must only refer to history. As far as we are concerned, history and time have been our greatest teachers, and our current policies are squarely based on those lessons. As such, we choose to continue focusing on reading history.

What explains the West's hostility toward the tri-lateral friendship and cooperation agreement signed between Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia?

This is mainly because it threatens its “anchor-states” based policies. These policies depend on states that submit to and serve specific interests and agendas. Cooperation among sovereign states threatens this political culture, a culture that requires “Special Envoys” whose core role is to boss countries around. There is ample historical evidence showing the West's lack of appetite for any sort of organic engagement that does not serve its interests. Not only does it not approve of regional cooperation, it goes even further by interfering with the work of global integration, the United Nations, planting individuals within it and using it to advance only what serves it. It does the same to continental organizations such as the African Union, ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, and so on. It is all about control and hegemony. When Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea choose to engage and cooperate, they would be serving the interests of their own peoples; creating synergies amongst them. As a result, regional peace and stability would be realized and this would have tremendous effects not only regionally but also globally. Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and others choosing to cooperate would obviously be in direct conflict with the modus operandi of hegemony. Let alone developing countries such as these, the desire to thwart constructive cooperation and engagement extends to Europe and Asia as well. This is where demonization, obstruction,

and eventually sanctions come into play. Eritrea has been at the receiving end of this sort of sabotage for decades. Consider the time when they accused us of and falsely sanctioned us for supporting Al Shabab and terrorism. The fact is that we have fought against terrorism for years and they were the ones who created it. These sanctions caused considerable damage on this country; affecting its economy and development. To date, there has been no accounting for this injustice; no one is held responsible for the persecution borne by Eritreans for nine years. We do not expect their methods to change. We have amassed valuable experience from our history. All we can do is ensure our survival and the survival of the region. We pay attention to the way they interfere in different places, dictating whom to elect and micromanaging even the smallest details, but we do not let that affect our direction. We have built a sort of immunity to their ways.

What is the international basis of the recent sanctions and what effects will they have on the country?

The foundation of international law is sovereignty. This law does not discriminate on the basis of wealth, size, strength, etc. Every country and every people are sovereign, and every country deserves to be respected equally. International law ensures stability and order and no power or “special interest groups” should be allowed to disrupt this. If sanctions are in order then by which law can one override due process and act as judge, jury, and executioner all in the same breath? This should only be allowed in a jungle. There is a growing awareness now, and people from all corners are demanding change to this “world order”; demanding UN and Security Council reform; demanding an end to the law of the jungle and the bolstering of international law; presenting various ideas on how to move humanity forward. As is expected, however, these initiatives are crushed almost as soon as they are created, because the fact is that we live in a world where justice only applies to “special interests groups”. As such, the struggle must continue and we must do whatever is in our power to build solidarity and strengthen engagement within our region and beyond. Solidarity is essential because if stability is the requisite for development then stability cannot be achieved from one corner, one people or country, alone. The struggle must be global and must not lose momentum. This is the only way we would be able to overcome these challenges. The recent situation in Ethiopia is closely related to their regional plans, including their plans for Eritrea, which is why the country is constantly harassed and demonized. This calls for the same

strength, resilience, sacrifice, and commitment of the past 80 years. As far as the effects of the sanctions; one cannot assume that they will not have any effects. The aim, of course, is economic strangulation and financial pressures, affecting transactions and development, causing all sorts of challenges in development, and in turn affecting people's well-being. Obviously, this is not a treatment reserved for Eritreans alone. Afghanistan and Sudan provide relevant examples for how pressuring methods work. In Afghanistan's case, sovereign fund worth 8 billion USD was frozen claiming the Taliban as pretext. In Sudan's case, the new administration is held accountable for crimes committed and debt amassed by the previous regime and the people are forced into situations of chaos. The ultimate aim of all of this is to incite "revolutions" and "regime change". The baseless sanctions imposed on us in 2009, ostensibly lifted in 2018, negatively influenced the economy and hindered major development plans. Nonetheless, owing to our resilience, it fostered in us a resolve to overcome these challenges, relying on our own meagre resources and sheer will. We were able to achieved modest progress. As far as these new sanctions are concerned, the ultimate aim is to force "regime change"; targeting remittances, people's movements, development projects, and other key areas. The same sacrifice, willpower, resilience, and strength that got us through the first set of sanctions will surely help us overcome the potential challenges resulting from these new sanctions. Obviously, people want better livelihoods and they want to be able to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Nonetheless, their determination to conquer injustice remains as high as before. This battle will not be easy, but we simply cannot allow the fear of the task ahead to paralyze us.

The past two years have proven to Ethiopians the People's Front's stand on Ethiopian unity. This has resulted in increased appreciation for Eritreans and the avenues for cooperation and friendship. How can this shared understanding be strengthened?

Ironically, some suggest that we should not pay attention to what is happening in Ethiopia. As if we are living in an island, they claim that we can develop and achieve stability separately from our neighbours. The events of the past 6 to 8 decades and the burden carried by three consecutive generations, however, have clearly shown that developments in Ethiopia directly affect us. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by living in peace and solidifying mutual respect and cooperation with Ethiopians. For this to happen, stability within Ethiopia remains a prerequisite and this requires an Ethiopian administration un beholden

to external influences and agendas. Of all the past Ethiopian regimes, we can say for certain, that none has been as destructive to Ethiopia, and by extent to the region, as the TPLF. Never in its history has Ethiopia been as divided as the TPLF's reign. This begs the question, can we coexist in peace in this situation? Remaining oblivious is not an option. In the words of Hassan (Turabi), if a fire takes over your neighbour's house, it is bound to spread to your own. You therefore cannot ignore it. Similarly, when a fire threatens Ethiopia, the shared interests of this region, and securing the future for the coming generations, necessitates our compassion and engagement. Whether Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, or Sudan our goal remains a stable region in which we can all live in peace. These countries will always have sovereign governments and administrations, but true economic growth and development requires a shared and forward-looking path, using history as a reference point to move ahead, not as a stumbling block. All this to say, developments in every country in this region affect Eritrea, but relatively speaking, Ethiopian developments affect us even more directly, which is why we remain committed to its stability and its people's wellbeing.

Tigrayans have borne the brunt of the recent war launched by the TPLF and its sponsors. Add to that, the unimaginable atrocities TPLF committed in the Amhara and Afar regions, which has further isolated Tigrayans by association. What do the people of Tigray have to do to disassociate themselves from these crimes and prove to their countrymen and women, as well as neighbouring nations, i.e. Eritreans, that they want to live in peace?

For a meaningful reform to manifest in Ethiopia, the ills of the past and destructive policies that enabled them – especially those exploiting ethnic differences – have to be identified and unambiguous criteria and conditions formulated allowing for a smooth process of nation building, one that brings peoples closer, highlighting shared interests and creating avenues for collective responsibility and rights. Expedient solutions and a patchwork of interim policies can only push issues out of sight but would never permanently uproot the causes of conflict. There was a missed opportunity during the 1991 Addis Ababa conference to do exactly this – commit to rectifying the ills of past regimes and build a solid foundation on which a strong and united Ethiopia would be established. Instead, the route chosen with the establishment of the EPRDF was to buy time and to create a new stage for exploitation. The fact is that the TPLF had perfected its myopic outlook over 50 years. It then

deliberately used this attitude, through the EPRDF, to antagonize and pit different groups against each other, and instil division throughout the country. It deliberately fomented hate and did so knowingly, with the goal of buying itself time. It achieved all of this by playing on historical grievances, manipulating and taking past atrocities out of context and using them to incite new animosity. For example, it painted the entire Amhara population with the chauvinism of a very small Amhara elite class. Similarly, the TPLF used Eritrea as a boogiemane, and it did so to misdirect the Ethiopian population's attention from its own crimes. In a sense, it was replicating the chauvinism it once claimed to be fighting. This in turn created a conducive atmosphere for economic exploitation as well, giving rise to a small class of thugs and thieves closely related to the regime. The result of these actions, as expected, was that Tigrayans, by virtue of an ethnic association with the TPLF, were singled out as enemies of the entire population. In a vicious cycle, the TPLF held the entire population of Tigray as a hostage – committing crimes in its name and then using the hostility towards it and its isolation for its own benefit, effectively pitting Tigrayans against everyone even further. Therefore, it is correct to conclude that Tigrayans have borne the brunt of TPLF's myopic strategy of destruction and chaos. This population, forced to give up its children for a war it did not plan, was used in TPLF's short-sighted and destructive plot for Ethiopia and the region. In this vein, it is important that whatever reform strategy is devised takes this manipulation into account. The entire population of Tigray cannot in fact be held accountable for the atrocious actions of a small, criminal group. This requires an active commitment to raising people's awareness and creating a conducive environment for reconciliation and understanding amongst the population – carefully dissecting and separating the actual culprits from the population in whose name the vile actions were committed. The coming transitional period requires the enacting of specific constructive measures that can bring about deep-rooted change; political, cultural, and a shared social change.

The political crisis in the Sudan is gaining traction and is increasingly becoming more complicated. What effects does this crisis have on our region?

The current crisis in the Sudan cannot be understood in isolation from the regional and global developments of the past three decades. All exaggerations aside, the country was rightly considered the breadbasket of this region. Its

natural resources compare to none in this area. Similarly, the level of political awareness and culture of its population was one of the highest and most developed. Seeing what is unfolding in the country today is, without a doubt, shocking and disappointing. This is, however, the result of decades of misrule, corruption, and most notably the mismanagement of numerous crises that were left to fester in the background; namely, Darfur, South Sudan and the Abyei region, Eastern Sudan, and other key areas. All of these crises were never truly dealt with and the compounding effects had catastrophic consequences, the result of which was the revolution that uprooted the previous regime. This revolution did not have a leader per se or an outlined political roadmap. It was rather the manifestation of people's dissatisfactions that had reached uncontrollable levels. Sadly, this did not result in the systematic examination of any of the crises mentioned above. Even worse, it paved the way for external interference, which expectedly further complicated the situation and gave rise to even more grievances to boil over, resulting in the current crisis in which the population is expressing its discontentment, and the headlines, disappointingly, are as sensationalist and myopic as they can be, with supposed analysts and political theorists that only serve to add fuel to the fire. As far as its effects on us in particular and the region at large, the documented desires of the peoples of this region to work together proves that any crisis would certainly have negative consequences on our shared development path. As such, the Sudan must find a lasting resolution that is based on the desires of its population, giving no room to external meddling, and constructively solving the numerous crises that have thus far remained unresolved. In the tumultuous situation, the most viable approach is for the military to take responsibility as caretaker to prepare grounds for elections and to quit and return to its barracks once the elections are held in the specified timeline. This has to involve all sectors of the society and each sector must be convinced of and committed to its role in administering the country.

The Chinese Foreign Minister, Mr Wang Yi, visited Eritrea a few weeks ago. What was the result of this visit?

Eritrea and China enjoy a deep bond and a strategic partnership, based on mutual respect and interests, and a healthy space for hashing out differing opinions and working towards common understandings. This friendship goes back to 1965/66 when China, undergoing a Cultural Revolution at the time, welcomed Eritrean Freedom Fighters and was the first foreign country to support the struggle with arms. China's position at the time, even when it was

not yet the powerhouse that it is today, was clear and had a notable appreciation for the Eritrean people's struggle for freedom. It was therefore only natural for this partnership to develop further in the post-Independence era. In practical terms, this resulted in development cooperation and the deepening of mutually held strategic interests. This recent visit by Minister Wang touched upon these salient historical facts and aimed to bolster the important partnership between our two countries. In this spirit, we have agreed on a framework in which all the areas slated for cooperation and engagement are fully outlined. The next step agreed upon is to continue our engagement and further develop an actual roadmap, sector by sector, through which this can be actualized. It is important to keep in mind that this partnership did not develop because of China's current standing in the world or for our own narrow interests. It is rather, as mentioned above, a longstanding relationship based on mutual interest and respect, one which highlights each country's contributions and creates a platform for engagement in all areas deemed strategic.

It is not difficult to guess that the global COVID-19 pandemic as well as the war started by the TPLF have resulted in a number of challenges over the past two years affecting development plans, the economy, trade, as well as regional partnerships. What are the national development plans put in place for 2022 to lessen the effects of these challenges?

In principle, our nation building strategy has not changed. It continues to have two parallel paths – growth and development on the one hand, and national security on the other. It goes without saying that external meddling as well as some internal challenges have hindered our ability to fully achieve our planned growth. As such, we remain committed and must do all we can to make up for lost opportunities and fast-track the implementation of key endeavours outlined in our development blueprint, which includes detailed priorities in 12-13 areas. These priorities range from the provision of clean water, to the building of basic infrastructure (i.e. roads), to the development of the agriculture and energy sectors, and the sustainable exploitation of natural resources, including mining, fishing and so forth. All of this obviously requires time and resources and most importantly requires the development of our human capital. This is a key area that requires serious investment, which we remain committed to through the development of our education sector including technical and vocational training. Equally important is the country's national security. As the past 20-30 years have shown, this is an area that allows no compromise or apathy. The task is

multi-faceted to include security as well as other areas. It requires commitment to and hard work in the areas of diplomacy, media, as well as cooperation and solidarity across regional and global platforms. The ultimate aim of these efforts is to meet our population's needs. As such, in order to ensure accountability we must be able to deliver on all our priorities in practical and measurable terms. As a related point, cooperation and partnership falls squarely within this discussion. Whether it is partnerships with countries in Europe or Asia or anywhere else, as long as these engagements help us deliver on our priorities and are based on mutual respect and interests then we must work to develop and strengthen them.

“Mobilization as a timely imperative” has been a recurring theme over the past few months. What is the expectation for the coming year and what opportunities can we expect to find within the challenges facing us?

Indeed, mobilization remains the requisite ingredient that holds true even today. It very closely relates to the development priorities outlined above and the driving force of this strategy is the Eritrean population. As such, achieving any of the tasks in the national development plan requires the raised awareness, commitment, and broad-based participation of the population, because at the end of the day the plan itself places the population at its core, as ultimate beneficiary.