

# **National Council of Eritrean Americans**



**Response to The Sentry's Report:**  
*"Power and Plunder: The Eritrean Defense Forces Intervention in Tigray"*

## Executive Summary

The National Council of Eritrean Americans categorically rejects The Sentry's June 2025 report entitled "*Power and Plunder: The Eritrean Defense Forces Intervention in Tigray.*"

This report is deeply flawed, politically motivated, and built upon recycled accusations and unsubstantiated claims masquerading as human rights advocacy. Lacking credible evidence, a transparent methodology, or impartial investigation, the report fails to meet even the most basic standards of objectivity and neutrality expected of serious investigative research. Its sensational allegations are largely based on anonymous testimonies, recycled propaganda, and partisan sources. It completely disregards Eritrea's established legal, ethical, and operational standards that underpin its defense doctrine and military conduct.

This official response refutes the report's central claims through detailed factual analysis, exposing its methodological weaknesses, deliberate omissions, and politically skewed framing. It highlights Eritrea's lawful right to self-defense in response to overt aggression and exposes The Sentry's appalling narrative to whitewash the origins and dynamics of TPLF's premeditated war of choice that also targeted Eritrea as part and parcel of its wider objective.

The report further distorts Eritrea's proven track record of regional peace building efforts in Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia. It falsely portrays a nation grounded in the principles of non-interference and respect for sovereignty as a "destabilizing actor" – a narrative that flies in the face of objective facts and stems solely from malicious political bias.

At a time when many political forces in the region as well as the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia, including those in Tigray, are working to rebuild trust through grassroots reconciliation and social healing, the publication of such a report is both cynical and dangerous. It risks undermining fragile peace efforts underway, emboldening spoilers, and derailing genuine progress toward healing and stability.

By ignoring Ethiopia's unfortunate and open threats in the past two years to violate Eritrean sovereignty under the guise of gaining "sovereign access to the Red Sea," and by failing to scrutinize internal gold smuggling scandals acknowledged by both the Ethiopian Federal Government authorities and TPLF officials, The Sentry further exposes its partisan agenda.

We call on international partners, policy institutions, and responsible media organizations to reject such politicized and one-sided narratives. Instead, we urge them to uphold truth, evidence, and balance as the pillars of meaningful dialogue and diplomacy.

Eritrea remains fully committed to regional stability, lawful conduct, and cooperation grounded in mutual respect and sovereignty. Guided by these principles, Eritrea unequivocally challenges the distortions contained in The Sentry's report and reaffirms its readiness to engage constructively with all actors who value peace, truth, and a stable Horn of Africa.

## **I. Peace Efforts and the Need to Reject Divisive Narratives**

In the past three decades, Eritrea has been acting as a force of peace in the Horn of Africa. This stand has not, naturally, changed in the aftermath of the unfortunate Tigray conflict.

In his interview, on February 2023, President Isaias Afwerki stated that, *“The people of Tigray, without any doubt, have at this time learned a very valuable and critical lesson. They know, more than any other people, what has transpired. The central message is: it is not only the people of Tigray but we have all gleaned an important lesson. The people of Tigray must extricate themselves from this quagmire. There is no reason for a conflict with Eritrea or with other nationalities within Ethiopia.*

*This is a time for introspection; a time to look back and draw appropriate lessons, both for the people of Tigray and other peoples in Ethiopia . . .”*

In this spirit, and as a complement to institutional efforts to promote lasting regional peace, several political forces in the region and the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia are today demonstrating remarkable goodwill and resolve. They are engaging in genuine, grassroots, people-to-people relations aimed at healing the wounds of the devastating – and unnecessary – 2020 Tigray conflict. This movement reflects a growing awareness of the enduring lessons from that unnecessary war – not only in terms of its human and material toll, but also in regard to its implications for the broader Horn of Africa region.

The legacy of the Tigray conflict, compounded by ongoing unrest in Ethiopia's Amhara and Oromia regions, and rising tensions across the region, underscores the urgent need to confront the divisive and destabilizing policies being pursued within Ethiopia. These internal dynamics – fueled by narrow political agendas – are

increasingly spilling beyond borders, threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring states and jeopardizing regional peace.

Against this troubling backdrop, there is now real progress on the ground. Fresh, grassroots anti-war and peace building initiatives are emerging along the Eritrean-Ethiopia border areas of Tigray, Amhara, and Afar. These efforts are forging new “peace forces” determined to resist and expose continued attempts to stoke conflict and division. Local communities are choosing dialogue, reconciliation, and healing over the politics of fomenting hate and militarization by the incumbent Ethiopian regime, signaling a hopeful path towards a more stable Horn of Africa.

In this context, the timing and intentions of The Sentry’s latest report must be questioned and challenged. Far from supporting reconciliation, the report appears designed to inflame old grievances and sow distrust precisely when real progress towards peace is being achieved. It risks undoing the fragile trust being rebuilt between peoples and governments who have learned, through painful experience, that conflict serves only to weaken them and empower those who profit from instability.

For this reason, we must resolutely challenge and expose all efforts that threaten to derail ongoing peace and reconciliation processes. The international community should reject politically motivated reports that obstruct healing and instead support all courageous stakeholder initiatives underway.

## **II. Eritrea’s Involvement: Act of Self-Defense under International Law**

The devastating war that engulfed Ethiopia’s Tigray Region for about two years was both avoidable and unjustified. The origins of the war, and the grave danger to regional peace and security that it posed, were never ambiguous by any stretch of imagination. The fact is the TPLF launched a premeditated, massive and coordinated attacks on all the positions of Ethiopia’s Northern Command on the night of November 3, 2020. The TPLF wrongly believed that it could neutralize the Northern Command, and seize all its heavy weaponry which constituted around 80 per cent of Ethiopia’s total arsenal in its blitzkrieg assault.

Emboldened by the element of surprise, TPLF leaders openly celebrated their actions. In a televised interview the following day, senior TPLF official, Sekouture Getachew, proudly proclaimed:

*“.. this was a preemptive and blitz operation that took only 45 minutes. It was similar to Israel’s surprise attack against the Arabs in 1967. There is no force called Northern Command in Tigray Region anymore.”*

Mind-boggling as it was, there were preoccupying signals of TPLF’s massive preparations for its War of Insurrection and Choice as early as 2019. It must be borne in mind here that the TPLF had amassed an army of over 250,000 troops and was equipped with heavy armaments, including long range missiles, in preparation for its long-planned war agenda.

Amid growing concerns, President Isaias Afwerki personally confronted the TPLF Chairman and the then Tigray Regional Administration (TRA) President, Debretsion Gebremichael, during a meeting at the Omhager border crossing in southwestern Eritrea. When asked directly why the TPLF was preparing for war against both the Ethiopian Federal Government and Eritrea, he offered a vague and evasive reply: “It won’t happen.” President Isaias pressed further, noting the visible military preparations, but the TRA President merely repeated his initial response – offering no clarification or assurance.

In hindsight, it is clear that these verbal assurances were hollow. Around the second quarter of 2020, and as a pretext for their future actions, TPLF leaders and media outlets aggressively pushed the narrative of “an imminent war” to rally support for confrontation. They repeatedly propagated the fabricated specter of Tigray’s “*encirclement by enemies*”. Such rhetoric was broadcasted widely on TPLF-controlled Dimtsi Weyane TV in the weeks immediately before November 4, 2020, priming the Tigrayan population for war by claiming that *Eritrea was part of the plan to destroy Tigray* and insisting that “*we will not wait to be attacked.*”

These statements, threats, and admissions demonstrate that the TPLF deliberately cultivated a narrative of “imminent aggression” by Ethiopian Federal and Eritrean forces to justify its own preparations for war. Rather than seeking peace, the TPLF leadership systematically planned, threatened, and ultimately launched attacks under the cover of supposed self-defense.

In launching its war of choice, the TPLF’s twin objectives were to seize power in Ethiopia and to advance its irredentist ambitions against Eritrea. Indeed, and in spite of the 2018 Peace and Friendship Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia which was predicated on Ethiopia’s unequivocal, although belated, acceptance and full implementation of the EEBC border ruling, the TPLF continued to impede the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from the occupied sovereign Eritrean territories in

flagrant breach of international law as well as the Eritrea-Ethiopia Peace Agreement. The TPLF continued to act in bad-faith and persisted in its aggressive agendas of territorial irredentism against Eritrea even as the latter took tangible confidence-building gestures towards normalization of bilateral ties by opening its borders for trade prior to the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from occupied Eritrean territories and the signing of comprehensive trade agreements.

When the TPLF launched its War of Insurrection inflicting huge damage to the Northern Command, Eritrea gave sanctuary to the remnant Ethiopian soldiers who crossed the border and took appropriate measures of self-defense to contain the TPLF's wider war plans.

Soon after, the TPLF launched coordinated missile attacks on multiple Eritrean cities in November 2020. The TPLF's spokespeople were explicit and provocative in this regard. Getachew Reda and Sekoutore Getachew both openly threatened missile attacks on Eritrean cities. In mid-November 2020, the TPLF Central Command publicly declared its intent to conduct missile attacks pretending to foil military movements in Massawa and Asmara. Getachew Reda boasted that any legitimate military target in Eritrea was a fair game. As subsequently divulged, the TPLF had in fact prepared detailed blueprints for massive missile attacks against 100 or so infrastructural and strategic sectors in Eritrea.

These attacks drew international condemnation. A U.S. State Department Press Release of November 17, 2020, stated:

*"We are deeply concerned by this blatant attempt by the TPLF to cause regional instability by expanding its conflict with Ethiopian authorities to neighboring countries... We appreciate Eritrea's restraint, which can help prevent further spreading of the conflict."*

Likewise, Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a press release dated November 13, 2021, affirmed Eritrea's right to defend itself, citing Article 51 of the UN Charter:

*"It is the sovereign right of the Eritrean Government to respond to imminent danger to its territorial integrity and security."*

Despite this clear chain of events, The Sentry report distorts the facts to construct a misleading narrative that falsely accuses Eritrea of initiating the war. It even manipulates Ethiopian Airlines flight schedules in a deliberate attempt to fabricate

claims that troops and weaponry were transported to Eritrea before November 4, 2020.

Such blatant misrepresentation reveals the partisan motives of the report and utterly undermines its credibility. This act alone demonstrates plainly that The Sentry's foundation rests on distortions and falsehoods – that its whole edifice is indeed built on quicksand.

### **III. Unfounded and Biased Accusations**

#### **1. Massacre Claims in Aksum**

One of the report's linchpins is the alleged Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) massacre in Aksum. In the first version of the story, some of the notorious TPLF apologists had claimed that Eritrean troops massacred around 800 civilians who had assembled at St. Mary of Zion for the annual holiday because they wanted to steal the "historical Arc of Covenant". The story soon lost traction and vanished in thin air since the religious festival, which was publicly celebrated, was broadcast on Ethiopian television. This disinformation debacle subsequently led to several, incoherent, and mutually contradictory versions.

Indeed, what was peculiar was how the narrative about the claimed massacre continued to mutate over time, with the alleged number of victims and supposed circumstances constantly changing. Thus, the account of the massacre shifted from being an incident driven by an attempt to steal the "historic Arc of the Covenant" on St. Mary's Day (Nov. 30th) to being portrayed as a "cruel retaliatory attack" a couple of days earlier after skirmishes, to later involving "house-to-house" killing of civilians.

Likewise, it was declared that bodies were gathered and buried in mass graves. One "investigative group" produced "satellite images" to corroborate the false narrative. Later, as serious doubts on the veracity of these accounts persisted, the much-touted "evidence-based existence of mass graves" was abandoned altogether and supplanted with a new narration. This time round, the new story was "there were no graves since hyenas had actually devoured the corpses". Similarly, the number of reported victims fluctuated significantly from a high of 800 to around 90 or so.

In one video posting online for instance, a Tigrayan who lives in Boston described the "incident", in very gruesome terms by posing as a survivor of the "massacre".

In the video clip, he introduced himself as Priest Weldemariam – which was in fact a false impersonation - and claimed he was immersed in deep prayer with others in attendance at St. Mary of Zion church when the “massacre” occurred on November 2020, although he does not mention a specific date in this particular version. He described how all the prayers had to stop because of the sounds of screams and gunshots, causing all the priests to go outside and plead with the Eritrean and Amhara Forces to stop shooting. After pleading, nothing worked; “...they shot us all, replying... Your God is not our God”, he claimed.

In a subsequent interview however, the same person revealed that he had no reason to be a witness for Amnesty International because, “I wasn’t even in Axum at the time and had no personal or first-hand knowledge of what transpired there”. He grimly confessed that the original video was some “creative production”, conceived with 12 other collaborators in Boston, to depict what they had heard for maximum media coverage and impact. The group was evidently involved in production of similar media fake products for purposes of political agitation.

The “Aksum Massacre” was in fact a distortion of a battle that took place on 28 November. TPLF units, including militias in civilian attire, attacked EDF units resulting in casualties on both sides. In the event, the allegation that Eritrean forces deliberately targeted civilians in Aksum or elsewhere is unfounded and not supported by verifiable evidence.

Furthermore, the Ethiopian Federal Attorney General’s Office conducted a formal investigation incorporating 95 witness statements. Their findings cite evidence of civilian armament, irregular militias, and TPLF defensive positions deliberately embedded among civilian sites; evidence that The Sentry omits entirely.

While any loss of innocent life is deeply regrettable, the complexities of urban warfare – particularly when opposing forces embed themselves among civilian populations – must be acknowledged. Civilian harm in such contexts, while tragic, cannot be equated with deliberate or systematic massacres, and certainly not used as political fodder. Indeed, accountability, where warranted, must be based on verified, independently corroborated facts—not on theatrical fabrications or advocacy-driven reports with dubious sources and motivations.

## 2. Sexual Violence Allegations

Allegations of sexual violence are grave and warrant serious, impartial investigation. However, The Sentry’s approach undermines the gravity of these claims by relying almost exclusively on anonymous, unverified testimonies or unauthentic medical documentation. Reliable investigations require corroborated evidence meeting legal standards. Without this, such claims remain speculative and risk being weaponized for political goals. In the absence of cross-validated evidence, the claims remain speculative and unverified.

One frequently cited case is that of Monalisa Abraha, an 18-year-old girl from Tembien in Ethiopia’s Tigray region. According to her widely circulated account, four Eritrean soldiers entered her village in Tembien and attempted to sexually assault her. She claims she resisted and was subsequently shot in the hand, leading to the amputation of her arm. This story was graphically reported by Al Jazeera on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 and widely recycled by other outlets at the time.

But the New York Times (Declan Walsh) later published another version on 5 April 2021; one month later. The story runs: “Mona Lisa lay on a hospital bed in Mekelle ... In early December, Mona said, an Ethiopian soldier burst into the house she shares with her grandfather in Abiy Addi, a town in central Tigray, and ordered them to have sex...her grandfather, an Orthodox Christian, refused telling the soldier that this is abnormal and against our religious beliefs... the soldier shot him in the leg and locked him into the kitchen... Then he pinned Mona into the sofa and tried to rape her”. When she resisted, the soldier “fired a volley of bullets that cut through her arm and right leg... before raping her. An uncle at the bedside in the hospital corroborated her account of the assault”.

Monalisa is now living in Melbourne with her father and has reportedly apologised to members of the Eritrean community for her initial false allegations of rape by Eritrean soldiers (LinkedIn story). There is also a third version which establishes that she was actually hospitalized in Mekelle on 4 November 2020 when she was wounded in the initial TPLF assault against Ethiopia’s Northern Command as a militia member.

On a broader level, the preposterous allegations of sexual violence by Eritrean soldiers go beyond anecdotal or isolated cases to imply systemic and policy-directed acts of cruelty, often involving gang-rape”, so as to “infect Tigrayan women with HIV to reduce their fertility”.

In the first place, HIV prevalence in Eritrea has been reduced significantly in the past decades as a result of comprehensive and aggressive government health policy, intensive community-based public awareness campaigns, sensitization programs in schools and youth clubs, and interventions by religious groups, as well as the uninhibited use of condoms. These integrated programs have reduced HIV infection prevalence to 0.26%, while new infection rates stand at 0.2%. In stark contrast, the comparative current figure in urban areas in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia is approximately 4.2; i.e. almost 18 times higher. It is also worth keeping in mind that HIV prevalence is higher in women than men. Within this overall context, the claims about perpetrating sexual violence with the express purpose of “spreading HIV and curbing the fertility of Tigrayan women” are simply ludicrous.

It must also be emphasized that these narratives are incongruent with Eritrea’s cultural, legal, and historical record. The EPLF, as early as 1978, abolished forced marriage, child marriage, and gender-based coercion in liberated zones. Modern laws, in Eritrea, prohibit rape, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation in all forms.

Furthermore, and for context and comparison, it is instructive to refer to a 2020 study conducted by Mekelle University titled *“Factors Associated with Sexual Violence Among Female Administrative Staff of Mekelle University, North Ethiopia.”* The study documents high rates of sexual violence in the region, consistent with broader trends in Sub-Saharan Africa. Key findings include:

- 59% of ever-partnered women surveyed in Ethiopia had experienced sexual violence.
- Research at Adigrat Hospital found that 60.2% of rape cases involved children and adolescents.
- Among surveyed university staff, 50.2% reported experiencing sexual violence.
- 14.9% of cases were committed by supervisors, while colleagues and students were also frequently identified as perpetrators.

These data reveal that sexual violence in Ethiopia, including in Tigray, is a pre-existing and pervasive issue. To claim, without substantive evidence, that such violence was systematically committed by Eritrean forces – while ignoring endemic patterns within TPLF-controlled areas – is both irresponsible and misleading.

Allegations of sexual violence must never be dismissed, but neither should they be manipulated for political effect. True accountability demands that all claims be subjected to objective, transparent, and evidence-based investigations. Advocacy that relies on sensationalism and selective narratives serves only to obscure the truth and politicize victims' suffering.

### **3. Alleged Looting**

The Sentry's report alleges that the Eritrean Defense Forces engaged in "industrial-scale looting" during the conflict in Northern Ethiopia, including unsubstantiated claims of gold trafficking and large-scale theft of machinery and civilian property. These accusations are not only fallacious but also reflect a dangerous pattern of politicized narratives that ignore verifiable facts, lack credible sourcing, and appear intended to malign Eritrea's national institutions rather than inform public understanding.

There is no forensic audit, customs data, or third-party documentation that supports the report's sensational claims. Assertions of large convoys transporting looted equipment or cranes are pure conjecture, not substantiated by independent monitors or international organizations. Attempts to shift blame through foreign reports lacking evidentiary rigor are both misleading and harmful to peace and reconciliation efforts underway in the region.

The accusation of widespread looting stands in stark contradiction to the deeply rooted values and discipline of the Eritrean army. Historically, the EDF has upheld strict codes of conduct prohibiting the seizure, looting, or misuse of civilian property, even during some of the most difficult periods of armed struggle. From the time of Eritrea's independence war to the present day, military discipline and respect for civilian property have been a cornerstone of national defense doctrine - ethos instilled in the rank and file as well as higher echelons of the army. The EPLF's exemplary treatment of POWs during the liberation war – almost 100,000 POWs, including several senior Generals who were released and transported to Ethiopia after the end of the war in 1991 – speaks volumes on the fundamental doctrine and strict adherence of the EPLF and its successor, the EDF, to the humanitarian rules of war.

In this respect, isolated incidents of wartime damage that may have occurred during operations must be understood within the broader, unfortunate, reality that conflict anywhere in the world often results in collateral damage to civilian and commercial

infrastructure. This, however, is categorically different from deliberate looting or state-sanctioned theft, which we reject in the strongest possible terms.

In conclusion, The Sentry's accusations lack substance, verification, and credibility. They serve only to undermine ongoing peace efforts and stoke division. Eritrea categorically rejects any claim of organized looting, and we call upon the international community to demand that investigative standards be based on facts; not on conjecture and politically motivated distortion.

While any accusations of unlawful seizure of civilian property remain unproven and largely based on politicized narratives, the EDF does not operate through improvised or rogue behavior but through structured command and legal frameworks that guide its engagements. The cultural values of the Eritrean people also play a decisive role. Eritrean society, shaped by decades of sacrifice for independence and peace, prioritizes respect for civilians, social cohesion, and national dignity. Accusations of systemic atrocities are fundamentally at odds with this ethos.

#### **IV. Political Bias and Echo Chamber Reporting**

Eritrea's Minister of Information, Yemane Ghebremeskel, denounced on his X (formerly Twitter) Account, on 3 July last month, The Sentry's report as "a libelous and defamatory accusation against Eritrea that warrants robust rebuttal, if not legal action". He emphasized that prominent Board members and individuals associated with The Sentry were "principal culprits who exacerbated the 1998-2000 border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia by jettisoning the facilitation/honest broker role they were entrusted with to take a partisan position in support of the EPRDF regime". Later they "leveraged their status and influence in the US State Department to ram through the illicit UNSC sanctions against Eritrea in 2009 and 2011 respectively".

Far from being an impartial investigative body, The Sentry has a well-documented record of advocacy journalism. Its funding sources, strategic partnerships, and media messaging are closely aligned with organizations and individuals known for their hostility toward Eritrea's independent policy orientation and sovereign stance.

As indicated above, many of the report's principal contributors have longstanding entanglements in the region's political landscape, particularly during and after the 1998–2000 border conflict. Their involvement in lobbying for sanctions against Eritrea, and continued propagation of politicized narratives, raises legitimate concerns about conflicts of interest and the integrity of their reporting.

In light of this context, The Sentry's current report cannot be viewed as an objective or good-faith effort to promote accountability. Rather, it appears to be part of a sustained campaign aimed at delegitimizing Eritrea's regional role and undermining its sovereignty through biased and ideologically driven claims.

## **V. Baseless Accusations of Eritrean “Gold Trafficking” from Tigray**

The Sentry's recent report levels an extraordinary but wholly unsubstantiated claim that Eritrean forces trafficked gold out of Ethiopia's Tigray region. This allegation is both factually unsupported and politically motivated; designed as it is to tarnish Eritrea's image rather than illuminate the truth. Assertions of organized looting convoys moving gold are presented as fact without a shred of independent, verifiable proof.

Worse still, The Sentry cynically ignores well-documented and publicly acknowledged gold smuggling scandals that have nothing, whatsoever, to do with Eritrea. For years before and during the conflict, Ethiopia's Federal authorities and Tigray's regional government repeatedly blamed each other for rampant illegal gold trade. The Ethiopian Ministry of Mines, Federal Police, and even parliamentary committees have investigated large-scale gold smuggling from Tigray into Sudan; routes controlled at different times by TPLF-aligned actors and local networks. TPLF leaders themselves have publicly accused Federal authorities of weaponizing anti-smuggling campaigns to punish Tigray's economy. These disputes are part of Ethiopia's internal struggle, and nowhere in these official accusations and counteraccusations does Eritrea appear as a participant, much less an orchestrator.

Equally damning to The Sentry's narrative is the simple fact of Eritrea's own natural resource wealth. Eritrea is endowed with substantial proven gold and other mineral deposits. The Bisha Mine and other major sites have been operating for years under monitored contracts with global mining firms. Far from needing to loot foreign gold, Eritrea has reserves still under-exploited precisely because the Government is focused on responsible, regulated development. Suggesting that a nation with huge gold and other mineral wealth would risk international condemnation by organizing primitive smuggling operations in wartime Ethiopia defies logic and betrays a willful disregard for context.

By ignoring Ethiopia's well-documented internal gold smuggling crisis while manufacturing an evidence-free narrative about Eritrean involvement, The Sentry's report reveals itself as biased, careless, and deliberately inflammatory. Such baseless

accusations do nothing to advance peace or accountability in the Horn of Africa. Instead, they spread suspicion and hostility. NCEA categorically rejects these groundless allegations and calls on all observers and readers to demand real evidence, balanced analysis, and respect for the truth over sensationalism.

## **VI. Eritrea's Right to Self-Defense in the Face of Threats to Sovereignty and Regional Stability**

The State of Eritrea, like all sovereign nations, has an inherent right to self-defense under international law. This right is not only enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations (Article 51) but also affirmed by customary international norms that protect States against external aggression and territorial violations. In recent months, the Government of Ethiopia under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has engaged in increasingly belligerent rhetoric and strategic military posturing aimed at destabilizing Eritrea and the broader Red Sea region. This includes open declarations by senior Ethiopian officials about the need to “secure sovereign access to the Red Sea,” a pretext under which they have openly threatened to invade Eritrea and seize the port city of Assab.

It is important to emphasize that no country in the Red Sea region, including Eritrea, has ever denied Ethiopia access to the sea for normative commercial and economic purposes through peaceful, negotiated, bilateral commercial agreements. It must be recalled here that Eritrea went an extra mile to allow USAID and other relief bodies to use the port of Assab for the importation and delivery of humanitarian food assistance to Ethiopia even at the height of the 1998-2000 border war. Eritrea's gesture was rejected, at that time, by the myopic and callous Ethiopian regime.

In a nutshell, Eritrea recognizes, and respects established international legal norms that guarantee landlocked states the right of transit and access to the sea on the basis of mutual agreements and sovereignty. Such arrangements exist throughout the world and can serve as models for cooperation, making clear that Ethiopia's access to the sea has never required threats, coercion, or violation of its neighbors' territorial integrity.

The Ethiopian regime's bellicose statements represent a dangerous escalation, not only against Eritrea's sovereignty, but also against regional peace and the security of all coastal states, including Somalia and Djibouti. These threats are a direct violation of international legal principles concerning the territorial integrity of

nations and constitute incitement to regional conflict. The blatant silence of The Sentry on this issue, particularly in its recent report, reveals a deeply troubling bias. While the report devotes pages to unfounded allegations against Eritrea, it completely omits the Ethiopian Federal Government's open preparations for war, its massive procurement of military equipment largely subsidized by fungible external development assistance and IMF financial bailouts, and its provocative behavior towards Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, and its own citizens, including the Tigray, Amhara, and Oromo peoples.

The Ethiopian government's increasingly militant posture, paired with ongoing internal repression and ethnic targeting, poses a clear and present danger to the Horn of Africa. If The Sentry were genuinely committed to peace in the region, it would use its platform to call out PM Abiy Ahmed's war-driven agenda, condemn his inflammatory speeches, and demand an end to efforts aimed at destabilizing neighboring states under the guise of economic necessity. The lack of international accountability for this rhetoric not only emboldens unlawful behavior, but also erodes the norms of peaceful coexistence and non-aggression that underpin global stability.

Eritrea will continue to stand firm in defense of its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity. Any attempt to violate its borders or undermine its independence will be met with the full exercise of its lawful right to self-defense. We call upon the international community to recognize the serious danger posed by Ethiopia's current trajectory and to reject any narrative, such as that advanced by The Sentry, that ignores the true sources of instability in the region. Peace in the Horn of Africa cannot be achieved by distorting reality or appeasing aggressors, but only by upholding the fundamental principles of state sovereignty, mutual respect, and non-interference.

## **VII. Eritrea's Commitment to Regional Peace and Stability**

Eritrea has long maintained clear, principled, policies rooted in the conviction that true national security is inseparable from building a peaceful, stable, and cooperative neighborhood. As a nation situated in the strategically vital Red Sea corridor, Eritrea understands that this region, rich in history, culture, and natural resources, should be blessed rather than cursed: a region whose people must thrive together, not fall victim to endless cycles of conflict and foreign meddling. This vision of mutual respect and shared prosperity lies at the heart of Eritrea's foreign policy and its sustained efforts to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and stability in the Horn of Africa.

Contrary to The Sentry's deeply flawed and politically motivated portrayal of Eritrea as a so-called "destabilizing force," the reality is that Eritrea today is playing a modest but crucial role in peacebuilding across the region. In Somalia, Eritrea has supported security sector reforms and the rebuilding of Somali national institutions, based on a commitment to Somali sovereignty free from foreign interference. In Sudan, Eritrea has worked quietly but effectively to facilitate dialogue among opposing factions, mindful of the humanitarian and security consequences of a protracted civil conflict. Even with Ethiopia, despite a difficult and complex history, Eritrea has consistently demonstrated willingness to pursue dialogue, support people-to-people reconciliation, and reject externally imposed divisions that harm both nations.

Eritrea's approach is guided by the principle of non-interference and respect for sovereignty; values too often dismissed or undermined by advocacy groups that substitute ideological bias for balanced analysis. The Sentry's report, rather than recognizing these efforts, chooses to perpetuate a harmful, one-sided narrative that does nothing to support the region's genuine peace processes. By ignoring Eritrea's constructive partnerships with forces of peace and stability across the Horn of Africa, the report fails both the truth and the people of the region. Worse, its inflammatory accusations risk undermining fragile local initiatives, sowing mistrust, and emboldening those who profit from conflict.

It is time for the international community and fair-minded observers and readers of this rebuttal to reject simplistic, divisive, portrayals and instead support the growing momentum for peace, reconciliation, healing, and cooperation in the Horn of Africa. Eritrea remains committed to doing its part, working with its true partners, and beyond to build the long overdue common good which is a secure, prosperous, and peaceful region that its people deserve.

## **VIII. Flawed Methodology and Absence of Credible Evidence**

The Sentry's recent report is an example of deeply flawed, unscientific, and politically motivated advocacy masquerading as investigative work. The report fails to demonstrate even the most basic standards of credible research, relying instead on anonymous testimony, anecdotal accounts, and recycled, partisan allegations drawn from old, contested sources. Its central accusations; massacres, widespread looting, sexual violence, and gold smuggling, are not supported by forensic evidence, independent verification, or credible documentation. This uncritical acceptance of unverified claims undermines any pretense of rigorous analysis and highlights the

report's failure to apply a serious, methodical, and unbiased approach in its purported investigation.

The Sentry's credibility is further compromised by its pronounced focus on agendas that have repeatedly drawn critique for selective sourcing, ambiguous methodologies, and narrative framing that lacks transparency and independent corroboration. Instead of conducting impartial and balanced investigations, The Sentry has allowed itself to become a vehicle for politicized narratives, prioritizing sensational claims over the pursuit of truth. Such behavior not only damages its own reputation but also fuels dangerous misinformation with real-world consequences for fragile regions already struggling to rebuild trust and stability.

For these reasons, the National Council of Eritrean Americans calls on all responsible policymakers, researchers, and institutions to critically assess the limitations, biases, and questionable methodologies of reports like The Sentry's. We urge the international community to reject politically motivated narratives built on weak, anonymous, and unverified claims and instead support objective, fact-based, analysis that can genuinely inform constructive dialogue and sustainable peace building across our region.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The National Council of Eritrean Americans categorically rejects The Sentry's recent report as a deeply flawed, politically motivated document that masquerades as investigative research. Built more on conjecture than fact, it represents not a search for truth, but a polemical effort aimed at misleading international audiences and stoking regional tensions.

At its core, the report ignores Eritrea's well-established record of lawful conduct, disciplined military principles, and a foreign policy rooted in non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and regional partnership. It turns a blind eye to Eritrea's consistent and modest but crucial role in supporting peace and stability across the Horn of Africa, from facilitating security reforms in Somalia to promoting dialogue in Sudan and encouraging people-to-people reconciliation with Ethiopia. Instead of recognizing these principled efforts, The Sentry chooses to vilify Eritrea without acknowledging the complex realities on the ground, including the Ethiopian Federal Government's own well-documented internal disputes over looting and smuggling, its threats to invade Eritrea under the pretext of seizing "access to the Red Sea," and its repeated provocations that violate international norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

By omitting these essential contexts and failing to conduct a balanced, fact-based investigation, The Sentry has produced a report that misinforms rather than enlightens, polarizes rather than reconciles, and undermines rather than supports the fragile progress being made in the region. Such publications do not promote peace—they imperil it, by empowering hardline agendas and derailing local, organic efforts for dialogue and healing, particularly along the Eritrea-Ethiopia border.

In the event, the National Council of Eritrean Americans asserts – unequivocally – that politically motivated and unsubstantiated reports such as this must not be allowed to shape international policy or public perception.

We challenge The Sentry and its sponsors to adhere to the principles of fair reporting, objective evidence, and intellectual honesty. We urge policymakers, institutions, and media outlets to reject narratives that deepen conflict and distort the truth. Eritrea remains steadfast in its commitment to working with all international partners in pursuit of lasting peace, mutual respect, and a stable, cooperative Horn of Africa – built not on slander and division, but on truth, sovereignty, and shared prosperity.

National Council of Eritrean Americans  
Washington, D.C.  
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