

Duty in The Shadow of Genocide and A Nation Under Siege: A Critical Analysis of Conscription in Tigray

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“Military service is a great equalizer, stripping away privilege and forging a shared national identity among disparate citizens.” — General Charles de Gaulle

“Conscription rests upon the duty of every citizen to defend his country.” — Franklin D. Roosevelt

“A citizen’s finest hour and highest privilege is to confer his whole self to his country.” — John F. Kennedy

“Conscription is the most unpopular and impracticable thing that could be attempted; our people had learnt to consider it as the last of all oppressions.” — Thomas Jefferson

“Compulsory military service is inconsistent with the concept of individual liberty. I can conceive of no more direct and dangerous assault on the freedom of the individual than to compel him to serve in the military forces against his will, under threat of imprisonment” — Barry Goldwater

“Under genocide, military preparedness ceases to be a matter of individual choice and becomes a sacred, collective moral obligation to the dead and to generations unborn. To fail to prepare is to be complicit in the next atrocity.” — M.T.

Abstract

This paper argues that for Tigray - a population of eight million that has experienced and faces credible threats of further genocide within a hostile Ethiopian state - mandatory military and national service is not a policy preference but an existential prerequisite for survival. It frames the question through the interaction of (i) national and human security, (ii) moral and legal theories of civic duty, and (iii) practical design constraints - particularly equity, effectiveness, and safeguards against abuse. The traditional liberal debate between individual liberty and civic duty collapses under the weight of recent history: the 2020–2022 Tigray War (and the ongoing “silent genocide”), documented by multiple international bodies as involving ethnic cleansing, genocide and crimes against humanity, demonstrated both the systematic intent to destroy Tigrayan society and the utter failure of international guarantees to prevent it. Drawing on the historical pattern of conscription among states facing existential threats and demographic asymmetry, the essay establishes that universal service is a proven survival mechanism for nations in Tigray’s strategic position. The core rationale centers on national security, strategic self-reliance and readiness, and the imperative of survival arithmetic - a small population confronting a 16:1 demographic disadvantage in a geographically and geopolitically hostile environment requires full mobilization capacity as deterrence and defense. Beyond military necessity, the essay proposes a dual-tier model: combat-focused conscription during wartime and a broader national service during peacetime encompassing healthcare, infrastructure, agriculture, and cyber defense, thereby transforming defensive necessity into a tool for reconstruction and human capital development. While honestly engaging principled objections - the violation of individual liberty, economic harm, and the specter of state abuse of unequal conscription or indefinite national service - the essay concludes that these concerns, though morally weighty, cannot outweigh the alternative of national extinction. The conditional imperative is not merely to adopt conscription but to construct a system bounded by ironclad democratic safeguards: fixed statutory duration, parliamentary oversight, independent judicial review, protection for conscientious objectors, and ruthlessly egalitarian application. For people who have witnessed industrial-scale mass atrocity crimes, military preparedness ceases to be an individual choice and becomes a collective moral obligation - building the ark before the flood returns.

1. Introduction: A Policy Debate Between National Survival and Individual Choice

The question of whether Tigray should adopt mandatory military service during wartime and a broader system of national service during peacetime is not merely a policy debate; it is a reckoning with the very conditions of existence. For most nations, the arguments for and against conscription remain academic contests between abstract principles of liberty and civic duty, waged in university halls, NGOs circles, and parliamentary chambers far removed from the immediate threat of annihilation. Yet for Tigray, a region of eight million people, precariously situated within an Ethiopian state of over 130 million that many Tigrayans view as genocidal and located in the perennially unstable and hostile geopolitical cauldron of the Horn of Africa, this is a question of immediate and existential survival.

The abstraction is shattered by recent history and an ongoing lived experience. The Tigray War (2020–2022), documented by a chorus of international legal and human rights bodies, transformed theoretical horrors into lived reality. UK Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee Tigray Reports (2021-23), the US State Department Statements (2021-23), the New Lines Institute Report (2023, 2025), the UK Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Report (2023), the UN Human Rights Council's ICHREE Reports (2022, 2023), the Ghent University Tigray Atlas Project (2021-2023), the Yale University Law School Tigray War Reports (2021-24), the findings of the Tigray Genocide Commissions (2021-24), and reports by Genocide Watch (2026), Human Rights Watch (2022) and Amnesty International (2021) collectively paint a picture of horror and systematic destruction. These reports have individually and collectively established that Ethnic Cleansing, Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, and War Crimes have been committed against Tigrayans in Ethiopia. This picture includes the loss of an estimated one million lives, the weaponization of mass rape against hundreds of thousands of women and girls, the deliberate imposition of hunger, starvation, and famine through blockade, and the methodical dismantling of Tigray's economic infrastructure, healthcare system, cultural and religious heritage, and social fabric. In this context, the threat of a second round of genocide is not a rhetorical flourish but a concrete, widely held fear rooted in a failure of international guarantees and a peace agreement - the Pretoria Agreement - whose promises of protection, withdrawal of foreign forces, and accountability remain unfulfilled. For many Tigrayans, the possibility of renewed conflict is not a question of *if* but *when*.

Therefore, the issue of compulsory service must be evaluated through a dual lens: the immediate imperative of survival and security, and the long-term project of state-building and societal resilience. The traditional debate centers on four core areas: existential survival, national security, civic values, and individual rights. We must weigh the validity of arguments against conscription - centered on the sanctity of individual liberty and the potential for state abuse - against the ultimate price of inaction: national extinction. This essay argues that while the concerns are morally weighty, the unique and catastrophic circumstances facing Tigray - the experience of genocide and the continuing threat of a second round of genocidal war - tip the balance decisively.

A crucial distinction must be drawn at the outset between military conscription (combat training, territorial defense, and reserve duties) and the broader concept of national service (which can include healthcare, infrastructure rebuilding, agricultural development, education, disaster response, and cybersecurity). Many who hold principled objections to military conscription may find a compelling and necessary civic duty in a well-structured national service.

In the following sections, the most common arguments for and key concerns against a system of mandatory service, as well as an optimal model of conscription and national service with safeguards, are discussed in light of the stark Tigrayan reality and imperative. Annexed to the essay are: (i) selected testimonies on the genocidal war in Tigray; (ii) bibliographical notes on the Tigray War, (iii) a comparative summary of mass atrocity crimes findings from major reports, and (iv) Lists of and links to reports and studies by the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray genocide.

2. Historical and International Experience: A Pattern of Necessity

Mandatory military service is not a historical relic; it is a living, breathing institution in nearly half the world's states, deployed most often by nations that perceive themselves to be on a knife's edge between survival and subjugation. Historically, total wars have demanded total mobilization; the principal belligerents in both World Wars and the United States during the Vietnam War relied on conscription to generate the sheer mass of forces required for industrial-era warfare. These were moments where the state's claim on the body of its citizen was deemed absolute.

In 2026, approximately 80 countries maintain varying forms of mandatory military or national service, with about 68 enforcing strict military obligations. A brief survey reveals clear strategic logic. In the Americas, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Bolivia, and Venezuela have mandatory military service. In Europe, frontline states facing a resurgent Russia - Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Ukraine - sustain conscription as a tripwire and a generator of deep reserve forces. Traditional neutrals like Switzerland and Austria use it as a guarantor of sovereignty, while Greece and Cyprus maintain it against a perceived historic threat from Turkey. In the Middle East, Israel's model is iconic - a small population in a hostile neighborhood - mirrored by Iran's own need to project power across the Persian Gulf to defend against Western threats. In Asia, South Korea's massive, conscripted army stands guard against North Korea's army. At the same time, Singapore views it as a non-negotiable existential imperative for a city-state with no strategic depth. In Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria maintain large conscript forces for regional influence and internal stability, while Eritrea's national service, notwithstanding the accusation of the draft's indefiniteness and potential abuse, serves to deter Ethiopia's declared irredentist design on Eritrea. A common pattern emerges from these disparate cases, one that reads like a checklist of Tigray's own strategic circumstances. Conscription is most frequently found in countries that:

- 1) **Face real and perceived existential security threats.** (e.g., Israel, Ukraine, Iran, South Korea, and North Korea).
- 2) **Have relatively small populations compared to potential adversaries.** (e.g., the Baltic and Nordic nations facing resurgent Russia, and Eritrea facing irredentist Ethiopia).

- 3) **Exist in volatile geopolitical environments.** (e.g., the entire Middle East, the Horn of Africa, the Korean Peninsula).
- 4) **Seek to maintain large, mobilizable reserve forces.** (e.g., Egypt, Vietnam, Russia, Finland).
- 5) **In contrast, despite frequent clashes and wars, India and Pakistan do not have conscription mainly due to the large size of their populations, which sustains voluntary recruitment.**
- 6) **China legally maintains conscription, and it is enshrined in its constitution, yet the draft is not used. This is due to the availability of voluntary participation from its large population.**
- 7) **Indonesia, having a large population, uses voluntary recruitment even though conscription is enshrined in its constitution.**

For Tigray, encircled by hostile forces and confronting an Ethiopian state with a 16:1 population advantage, this pattern is not a coincidence, but a survival mechanism echoed across continents and centuries.

3. Moral and Legal Foundations: The Social Contract Under the Threat of National Extinction

The intellectual architecture for conscription rests on a powerful, if contestable, interpretation of the social contract theory. Supporters invoke the logic of reciprocity: citizens enjoy rights, protection, and public benefits from the state, and therefore, they possess binding obligations toward the community that secures them. In this Hobbesian frame, the state's first duty is to provide security, and without the collective capacity to defend itself, the entire edifice of rights collapses.

From a legal, doctrinal perspective, the constitutional argument for Tigray rests on the relationship between self-determination, regional autonomy, and collective security. Article 39(1) - (3) of the Ethiopian Federal Constitution affirms the unconditional right of every nation, nationality, and people in Ethiopia to self-determination, including, at its outer limit, the right to secession. If the Constitution recognizes such a far-reaching form of collective political autonomy, it is difficult to deny that a regional state may exercise the lesser institutional authority necessary to organize security forces for the protection of its population and territory. This reading is further supported by Article 52(2)(g), which expressly empowers regional states, including Tigray, to establish and administer state security forces. Article 28, which prohibits genocide, crimes against humanity, summary execution, enforced disappearance, and torture, reinforces the same constitutional logic: where the state itself is implicated in, or fails to prevent, existential violence against protected communities, the constitutional commitment to the survival and protection of nationalities cannot be reduced to a merely declaratory principle. Read together, these provisions provide a plausible legal basis for treating collective self-defense and communal survival as internal, rather than external, to Ethiopia's federal constitutional order.

Comparative constitutional practice points in a similar direction, although through different institutional arrangements. Modern constitutional orders generally reserve to the state a monopoly over the lawful use of force and confer upon public authority the power to organize national defense. In the United States, this authority is grounded in Congress's enumerated powers to declare war and raise and support armies; in the United Kingdom, it has historically been associated with the royal prerogative and parliamentary control over military organization and funding. In many constitutional traditions, the authority to maintain armed forces has been understood to include, in circumstances of grave public necessity, the power to impose compulsory military service. The leading American example is the 1918 *Selective Draft Law Cases*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court upheld conscription as a valid exercise of Congress's war and army-raising powers. The Court rejected the claim that compulsory service violated the Thirteenth Amendment's prohibition on involuntary servitude, distinguishing military obligation owed by citizens to the polity from private domination or chattel slavery. The broader jurisprudential significance of the decision is that constitutional systems may, under conditions of national peril, treat defense service not as an ordinary contractual burden, but as an incident of political membership and collective survival.

However, the legal enforcement of this duty creates profound tensions with political liberty. In most nations with conscription, political opposition and public debate remain protected forms of free speech. Yet, a clear line is drawn at incitement to evasion or outright refusal. Inciting draft evasion is typically a criminal offense. Individual acts of evasion, fraudulent medical claims, providing false information, or willfully ignoring orders are penalized, sometimes severely. For example, in Israel, a country facing perpetual security challenges, draft evasion can lead to imprisonment of up to five years and a hefty financial liability. The boundary between protected dissent and criminal defiance varies. Still, a consistent pattern holds that countries facing acute national security threats or active conflicts enact stricter, harsher penal regimes against those who breach the social contract of shared defense.

4. The Rationale for Mandatory Service in Tigray: A Doctrine of Survival

The arguments for mandatory service, while universal in form, acquire a specific, visceral urgency in the Tigrayan context. They move from the abstract to the acutely concrete. The arguments are:

4.1 National Security, Survival, and Strategic Readiness. The primary argument is not about policy preference but about arithmetic. A volunteer force, no matter how motivated, drawn from a small subset of an already decimated population, cannot match the sheer manpower required for mobilization against a numerically superior, genocidally inclined coalition. As Franklin D. Roosevelt stated in a different time of existential danger, "Conscription rests upon the duty of every citizen to defend his country." For Tigray, this is reframed as the duty of a people to prevent its own extinction. Without a draft, the question is not one of balancing liberty with obligation; it is a choice between freedom in resistance and the utter silence of extinction. The U.S. State Department characterized the war's atrocities as ethnic cleansing, and numerous legal analyses have classified them as genocidal. When a community faces annihilation, a professional, small-scale military is a luxury.

Universal conscription becomes a moral and strategic necessity – a mechanism to transform the entire able-bodied populace into a sleeping army that can awaken and mobilize within weeks, not months.

4.2 Survival in a Hostile Strategic Environment. The sheer demographic asymmetry defines the threat. Ethiopia's population exceeds 130 million; Tigray's is 8 million. This is a David-and-Goliath scenario where David must not only possess a sling but must be prepared to hurl stones with the whole strength of his community. A large, constantly replenished reserve force serves as both a deterrent and a rapid reaction capability, reducing the critical vulnerability of the period immediately following a surprise attack.

4.3 Multi-Front Threat with No Dependable External Guarantors. The war demonstrated Tigray's profound strategic isolation. The Ethiopian National Defense Force's campaign was actively supported by Eritrean troops and Amhara regional forces, creating a multi-front 360-degree encirclement of Tigray. The international community, through the U.N. Security Council, proved paralyzed, and the "humanitarian truce" was repeatedly violated. No binding security guarantee from outside power exists. In this vacuum, the argument for self-reliance is absolute. Mandatory service ensures a trained pool of personnel that can be rapidly deployed to multiple fronts simultaneously, rather than scrambling to recruit and train fighters amid the chaos of a reignited firestorm.

4.4 Asymmetric Threat Environment Demands Mass Mobilization. Tigray's resistance during the 2020- 2022 war was, by many accounts, a near-miraculous feat of arms. A small, minority ethnonational group, making up about 8% of the country's population, withstood the combined might of a national army, a hostile neighbor, and allied militias for two years. Proponents argue this was only possible because of a broad-based, almost organic, mass voluntary mobilization. The war was fought not just by professional soldiers but by farmers, teachers, and students. Formalizing a system of conscription institutionalizes this proven capacity, transforming a desperate, improvised measure into a structured, perpetual guarantee of capability.

4.5 Deterrence Against Future Aggression. The logic of deterrence is brutally simple: a potential aggressor is less likely to attack if it knows the cost will be catastrophic and immediate. A credible deterrent is not a small professional force that can be beheaded in a decapitation strike, but a distributed, cellular network of hundreds of thousands of trained citizens who can turn the entirety of the national territory into a defended zone. This logic parallels that of Switzerland, Israel, or South Korea. Mandatory service signals unambiguously to Addis Ababa and Asmara that any second invasion will not face a vulnerable, unprepared populace but a nation-in-arms. Given the effective collapse of the Pretoria Peace Agreement's security guarantees, the Ethiopian army's recent aerial bombardments of Tigray, and the amassing of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian troops along the entire Tigray boundary, deterrence through demonstrated, institutionalized capacity is the only peace policy that can be trusted.

4.6 "Never Again" After the Experience of 2020–2022. History leaves a moral imperative in its wake. People who have experienced industrial-scale massacres, mass starvation weaponized as a

tool of war, systematic sexual violence on a scale designed to destroy the social fabric, and the complete looting of their economic base cannot ethically or psychologically return to a state of unpreparedness. Under this powerful argument, under the shadow of genocide, military preparedness ceases to be a matter of individual choice and becomes a sacred, collective moral obligation to the dead and to generations unborn. To fail to prepare is to be complicit in the next atrocity.

4.7 Shared Sacrifice and the Forging of Unity. General de Gaulle’s concept of military service as a “great equalizer” takes on profound meaning in a post-genocidal society. The genocide targeted all Tigrayans, regardless of their pre-war status, profession, or location. A universal draft would formalize this brutal equality of victimhood into an institutional equality of defense, forcing all demographics - urban and rural, rich and poor, diaspora returnee and village farmer - to share the burden. This prevents the military from becoming a “class-biased” institution where the poor and rural bear a disproportionate blood price, ensuring collective responsibility for national survival and preventing the resentment that could fracture a recovering polity.

4.8 Fostering National Unity and Social Cohesion. Building shared sacrifice, mandatory service can be a crucible of nation-rebuilding. It can function as a national institution that dismantles the parochial identities and social strata that existed before and were shattered by the war. Shared service forges a common identity based on a common mission: survival. It promotes social integration, teaches reliance on a fellow citizen from a different background, and instills a sense of collective responsibility that is the bedrock of a resilient republic.

4.9 Development of Civil Defense and National Resilience. A modern system of mandatory service must transcend pure combat roles. The most profound vulnerability exposed by the war was not just military, but civilian: the near-total collapse of the healthcare system, the destruction of infrastructure, and the famine caused by the siege. A dual-track national service could create a “civil defense corps” trained in emergency medicine, disaster response, engineering for rapid infrastructure repair, cybersecurity to protect communications, and logistics and transportation to run a wartime economy. This strengthens the entire society’s ability to respond to any crisis, be it war, famine, or natural disaster, making the civilian rear echelon a hardened target.

4.10 Preserving Strategic Self-Reliance. The lesson of 2020-2022 is a bitter, unforgettable one: international law, foreign powers, and humanitarian agencies will not, and perhaps cannot, guarantee Tigray’s protection. The genocide unfolded under the full gaze of the world, and yet the blockade, the massacres, and the systematic rape continued with impunity. Any defense posture that relies on the assumption of external rescue is a blueprint for another genocide. Security must be autochthonous - it must grow from Tigrayan soil, from the will and capacity of Tigrayans themselves. A conscript force is the ultimate expression of this strategic self-reliance.

4.11 Formalisation and Professionalisation of Defence. The Tigray Security/Defense Forces (TSF/TDF) performed a historic feat, but it was an improvised army. A conscription law provides a clear legal and institutional framework, transforming a necessary ad hoc mobilization into a structured state institution. This brings accountability, clarity of command, defined rights and

duties, and a system of military justice. A legal framework reportedly being discussed in Tigray would cover penalties for evasion, rules around operational security, clear conditions for call-up, and, crucially, the rights of the conscript. Formalization is a tool of professionalization and a bulwark against the arbitrary abuse that can occur in informal armed groups.

4.12 Gender-Inclusive Defence. The proposed system's application to all able-bodied citizens, regardless of gender, is both a military necessity and a profound statement of equality. Tigrayan women played a singular and highly visible combat and support role in the war, a reality that shattered traditional gender norms. Codifying universal service for women is a political act that recognizes this contribution as foundational, not auxiliary. Moreover, modern defense is increasingly reliant on domains - intelligence analysis, advanced medicine, cyber operations, logistics, and drone engineering - where physical strength is secondary to technical skill, and where women can and must contribute equally to the nation's defense posture.

4.13 Civic Development and Skills Training. A peacetime national service is an instrument of human capital development. It can be designed as a vast, nationwide skills-training and civic education program. A young conscript could be assigned to a health corps and become a community paramedic, to an engineering corps and learn construction skills vital for rebuilding, or to an agricultural corps to boost food security. Such a system would provide leadership training, work experience, literacy and vocational education, and a shared understanding of civic duties, directly contributing to the long-term reconstruction and economic development of Tigray, turning a defensive necessity into a developmental force multiplier.

5. A Possible Tigrayan Model: Not Permanent Militarization, But Permanent Resilience

Supporters do not advocate for a permanent, North Korea-style garrison state. They propose a nuanced, hybrid model designed for a society that must transition between war and peace fluidly. Such a model would feature:

- 1) **A Dual-Tier Structure:** Military service with combat training during periods of heightened threat and active war, and a broader, civilian-focused national service during peacetime.
- 2) **Time-Limited Obligation:** A clear, fixed term of service (e.g., 18-24 months), with no possibility of indefinite extension.
- 3) **Universal Application:** Equal obligation for men and women.
- 4) **Multi-Track Service:** Options for military, medical, engineering and reconstruction, agricultural and food security, and civil defense/cybersecurity tracks, allowing skills to be matched with national needs.
- 5) **A Reserve System:** A formal, lifetime reserve obligation with periodic, short-term refresher training to maintain mobilization capacity.

The goal is not to militarize society for its own sake but to create a “resilience infrastructure,” a society capable of defending itself while simultaneously contributing its collective labor to reconstruction and development.

6. Arguments and Concerns Against Mandatory Service: The Price of the Shield

The case against conscription is neither frivolous nor unprincipled. It is rooted in the highest liberal values and must be engaged honestly. These are:

6.1 Violation of Civil Liberties. The most fundamental objection is that forced service directly violates the human right to liberty and free will. It compels an individual to risk their life, potentially taking another’s, perhaps for a cause they do not believe in. The challenger asks the devastating question: “What is the meaning of liberty if you must enslave a person to defend it?” The counter, born from the crucible of existential threat, is equally stark: “What is the meaning of liberty in extinction? Is there a right to free will in a mass grave?” The challenge for Tigray is to determine how any liberal values can be preserved and later built upon when collective survival is the daily, consuming question.

6.2 Economic and Educational Harm. Conscription drafts young adults at their peak cognitive and career-building ages, delaying higher education, skill acquisition, and entry into the civilian workforce. It retards economic output and disrupts the life trajectory of an entire generation. The counterpoint is a tragic one: what career, what economy exists to be built upon if national survival is not first guaranteed? A national service model that incorporates intensive vocational training and educational components seeks to partially mitigate, though never eliminate, this harm.

6.3 Reduced Military Effectiveness. Critics argue that modern warfare is a hyper-technical profession of arms. Short-term conscripts, often lacking motivation and specialization, cannot effectively operate advanced weapon systems, conduct complex cyber operations, or match the cohesion and lethality of a long-service, all-volunteer professional force. Yet, the Israeli Defense Forces stand as a persistent rebuttal. It is a conscript force and one of the most operationally effective and technologically sophisticated armed forces in the world. Effectiveness is not a function of enlistment method alone, but of leadership, doctrine, training intensity, and a society’s martial culture. A Tigrayan conscript force forged in the memory of genocide would possess the ultimate combat multiplier: a fiery, non-negotiable will to fight.

6.4 Blind Obedience to the State. A profound political risk is that conscription can institutionalize a culture of blind obedience to state authority, eroding the critical, independent thinking necessary for a healthy democracy. A citizen-army can, in the wrong hands, become a tool of authoritarianism. The question “Does conscription safeguard the state or the nation?” is critical. The answer lies in institutional design: a conscript force must be loyal to a constitution and a nation, not a ruler, with strong democratic oversight and a civic education component that teaches *why* they defend, not just *how*.

6.5 Conscientious Objectors. The right of an individual to refuse to kill, or to participate in war, on grounds of religious, moral, or philosophical belief is a cornerstone of a free conscience. Some may

reasonably choose death or imprisonment rather than raise a weapon. Any just system must provide a clear, non-punitive pathway for recognized conscientious objectors—typically through an alternative, non-combatant national service of equal duration and burden, such as serving in the most dangerous medical or firefighting units on the front lines.

6.6 Inequality of Exemptions. The greatest hypocritical failure of many conscription systems is that service is rarely truly universal in practice. Loopholes and exemptions for the wealthy and well-connected - college deferments, medically dubious exclusions, or the option to “buy your way out” - create a deeply corrupt and classist system where the poor and marginalized bear the blood tax. For Tigray, a nation forged in shared catastrophe, a mandatory system must be ruthlessly, transparently egalitarian, with exemptions few, medically ironclad, and judicially reviewed.

7. Accountability and Addressing Safeguards Against Abuse

The gravest and most legitimate objection is not to the concept of service itself, but to its potential for abuse. Eritrea’s national service, which is criticized by some as an open-ended conscription, is a cautionary tale that offers lessons. Any Tigrayan model must be built with legal and political accountability and safeguards against potential abuse. This requires:

- 1) **Ironclad Democratic Safeguards:** Authorization and renewal of conscription must be vested in an elected legislative body, not a singular executive.
- 2) **Rigorous Parliamentary Oversight:** A permanent parliamentary committee with full investigative powers must constantly review the system’s operation.
- 3) **Fixed, Statutory Service Duration:** The length of service must be a matter of inviolable law, with a zero-tolerance legal framework for any extension without a new, public, legislative declaration of supreme national emergency.
- 4) **Independent Judicial Review:** All citizens must have access to courts to challenge any decisions regarding their service, exemptions, or rights.
- 5) **Robust Protection for Conscientious Objectors:** A legally protected alternative service track must be guaranteed.
- 6) **Absolute Transparency:** Mobilization decisions, service statistics, and exemption rates must be a matter of public record.
- 7) **Equal Application:** A constitutional guarantee that service obligations and the physical risks that accompany them are distributed across all classes and regions without favor.

8. Conclusion: The Conditional Imperative of Survival

The debate over mandatory service is, at its core, a reflection on the agonizing tension between two founding principles of any polity: the autonomy of the individual and the survival of the collective. In a peaceful, secure society, this balance can comfortably tip toward personal freedom, serviced by

a small, professional volunteer force. In a society that stares into the abyss of annihilation, the balance cannot help but tip the other way.

The epigrams that opened this essay illuminate this chasm. John F. Kennedy's vision of conferring one's "whole self to his country" is the poetry of a secure, imperial republic. Thomas Jefferson's condemnation of conscription as "the last of all oppressions" is the philosophy of a political tradition that could afford to prize individual liberty above all else, shielded by two vast oceans. Barry Goldwater's declaration against forcing a young person to risk their lives "for the state" is a noble sentiment from a nation that has never faced dismemberment. These are arguments from a place of profound privilege.

For Tigray, the choice is not a clean one between a draft and no draft. It is a choice between the heavy, painful burden of a just and equitable draft and the absolute certainty of a second, even more catastrophic round of genocide, which would render all debates about individual liberty hollow whispers in an empty land. As the logic might be rephrased for Tigray: A citizen's finest hour is not to confer their whole self to the abstract glory of a country, but to confer their whole self to the stark, desperate, and sacred project of their people's survival.

Therefore, in this specific context, at this specific moment, mandatory military service in times of war and national service in times of peace are not policy options to be debated at leisure. It is a prerequisite for national existence. The central, urgent challenge is no longer *whether* such a system should exist, but *how* it can be designed to be effective enough to deter, equitable enough to unite, professionally managed to be lethal, and so constrained by democratic law that the shield it forges can never be turned into a prison for the people it protects. For Tigray, the question is not one of preference but of architecture: building the ark before the flood returns.

Selected Testimonies on the Tigray Genocide

“It is not the fault of the Tigray people. Many barbarisms have been conducted in Ethiopia, but what is happening in Tigray is of the highest brutality and cruelty. This is genocide of an entire people. They want to wipe out the people of Tigray from the face of the Earth. I have said a lot of things, but no one allows the message to be shared. Rather, it is being stifled and censored. The entire world should know it. The World must act now, including all religious organisations, to make their voice heard to stop the genocide.”

(The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Abune Mathias, 8 May 2021)

“I vividly recall the shocking images back in 1984 of a million emaciated Ethiopian men, women, and children, many of them from Tigray, who had fled the country during a massive famine caused by prolonged drought, widespread food shortages, and discriminatory government policies. Today, the people of Tigray are being subjected to human rights atrocities on an appalling scale, and they are being denied urgently needed humanitarian aid – aid that is being blocked by the Ethiopian and Eritrean militaries as well as other armed groups. The terrible reality today is that famine, crimes against humanity, and genocide are occurring in Tigray, and they are occurring for one reason: the complicity of government officials in Addis and in Asmara. In fact, there are reports that the situation in Tigray could be worse than in Darfur.”

(US Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, Press Statement on Tigray; 6 June 2021)

“Every now and then, East Africa breaks into world consciousness. It happened in the mid-1980s when Ethiopia underwent a terrible famine. Teams of pop stars made two hit “Charity Singles”: “We Are the World” and “Do They Know It's Christmas?”. Today, Ethiopia is again in the news for the war in Tigray, a region in the country's north. What is happening there is worse than war, if such a thing is possible. Tigray is a theatre for war crimes and crimes against humanity. To make it more interesting – if that is the word – Ethiopia's head of state is the 2019 Nobel Peace Laureate, Prime Minister of Ethiopia.”

(Jay Nordlinger, National Review; 22 March 2021)

“For months, the people of Tigray have been largely sealed off from the world, with electricity and telecommunication access severed and mobile phones often seized, leaving little to back up their claims of thousands, even tens of thousands, killed. That has begun to change. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken asserted last month that “ethnic cleansing” has taken place in western Tigray, marking the first time a top official in the international community has openly described the situation as such. The term refers to forcing a population from a region through expulsions and other violence, often including killings and rapes. The spokesman for United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday called the accounts in the AP story “harrowing” and said, “We are very concerned.”

(Cara Anna AP, Miami Herald; 7 April 2021)

“Modern genocides are not done Nazi-style. A cheap, stealthy, smart way to do it is by starving, pillaging, raping, and displacing. World then automatically demands humanitarian aid, which will come but always little & late-allowing ethnic cleansers to finish the job first #Ethiopia #Tigray”

(Professor Mukesh Kapila; @mukeshkapila; 23rd March 2021)

“A Pogrom is happening in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is killing its own citizens wantonly. That is chilling, but true: by attempting to extirpate Ethiopia of Tigrayan ethnicity and heritage, Ethiopia's military and government stand accused of purposeful ethnic cleansing, a precursor to all-out genocide, as outlawed by the UN Convention against Genocide”

(Professor Robert Rotberg, Former President of the World Peace Foundation; 28 January 2021)

Appendices

1. Bibliographical Notes on The Tigray War

2. Comparative Summary of Mass Atrocity Crimes Findings on the Tigray War

3. Reports of the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide (CITG)

1. Bibliographical Notes on The Tigray War

Below is a structured reference list of major reports, investigations, and official statements on the Tigray War (2020–2026), including the publishing organization, title, date, and principal findings.

1. UN Human Rights Council – International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE)

Organization: UNHRC, International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE)

Key Reports: First Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia

Date: September 2022

Main Findings:

- Found reasonable grounds to believe that Ethiopian government forces and allies committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Tigray.
- Documented widespread sexual violence, torture, starvation, arbitrary detention, and attacks on civilians.
- Warned of the continuing risk of further atrocity crimes.

UNHRC Second ICHREE Report

Date: September 2023

Main Findings:

- Found reasonable grounds to believe that the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), and allied forces committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.
 - Found Tigrayan forces also committed war crimes in Afar and Amhara.
 - Concluded that accountability efforts by Ethiopia were inadequate.
 - Warned that atrocity risks remained high after the Pretoria Agreement.
-

2. UK Parliament Reports

Organization: UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee

Reports Title: Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Ethiopia and Tigray Evidence

Dates: 2021–2023 hearings and parliamentary inquiries

Key Findings

- Raised concerns regarding ethnic cleansing allegations in Western Tigray.
 - Criticized restrictions on humanitarian access.
 - Called for independent investigations and accountability.
 - Expressed concern over sexual violence and use of starvation as a weapon of war.
-

3. UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Tigray

Organization: UK Parliament, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Tigray

Report Title: Inquiry into the Conflict and Humanitarian Crisis in Tigray

Date: 2021–2022

Key Findings

- Documented evidence from survivors, experts, and humanitarian organizations.
 - Concluded that large-scale atrocities had occurred against Tigrayan civilians.
 - Highlighted:
 - Mass killings
 - Conflict-related sexual violence
 - Deliberate destruction of healthcare facilities
 - Humanitarian blockade
 - Called for international accountability mechanisms.
-

4. New Lines Institute

Organization: New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy

Report Title: Genocide in Tigray: Serious Breaches of International Law and Paths to Accountability

Date: June 2024

Report Title: Conflict-Related Sexual and Reproductive Violence in the Tigray War

Date: April 2025

Key Findings

- First comprehensive legal analysis explicitly examining the conflict under the Genocide Convention.
- Concluded:
 - All parties committed war crimes.
 - Ethiopian and allied forces committed crimes against humanity.
 - There is substantial evidence supporting allegations of genocide against Tigrayans.
- Identified patterns of:
 - Dehumanizing rhetoric
 - Systematic destruction
 - Starvation
 - Mass atrocities
- Sexual Violence and the rape of Tigrayan women and girls were a key signature of the genocidal war in Tigray. Hundreds of thousands of victims of systematic and widespread sexual violence. The weaponisation of gender-based violence as a strategy of war.
- Called for international legal action and accountability.

5. Yale University Law School, USA

Organization: Yale Law School Lowenstein Human Rights Project

Major Publications: Legal and Policy Analyses on Atrocity Crimes in Tigray

Dates: 2021–2024

Key Findings

- Identified indicators consistent with genocide under the Genocide Convention.
 - Documented:
 - Ethnic targeting of Tigrayans
 - Incitement and hate speech.
 - Humanitarian blockade
 - Weaponisation of hunger and starvation
 - Sexual violence
 - Forced displacement.
 - Argued that states have obligations under the Genocide Convention to prevent further atrocities.
-

6. United States Government

Organization: U.S. Department of State

Key Statements: Atrocities in Ethiopia's Tigray Region

Date: April 2021

Findings

- Condemned killings, forced removals, sexual violence, and other serious human rights abuses.
- Called for independent investigations and accountability.

Secretary Antony Blinken's Determination

Date: March 2023

Findings

- Determined that:
 - All major parties committed war crimes.
 - Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces committed crimes against humanity.
 - Ethnic cleansing occurred in Western Tigray.
 - Called for accountability and transitional justice.
-

7. Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Organization: Human Rights Watch

Major Report: "We Will Erase You From This Land": Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone. Joint report with Amnesty International

Date: April 2022

Key Findings

- Concluded that Amhara authorities and security forces committed:
 - Crimes against humanity

- Ethnic cleansing
 - Forced expulsions
 - Mass detention
 - Sexual violence
 - Denial of humanitarian aid
 - An estimated hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans were forcibly displaced.
-

8. Amnesty International

Organization: Amnesty International

Major Reports: Ethiopia: New Wave of Atrocities in Western Tigray

Date: December 2021

Findings

- Documented mass detentions, killings, torture, and expulsions of Tigrayans.
- Warned of grave risk of further atrocities.

Report Title: “We Will Erase You From This Land”. Joint report with HRW

Date: April 2022

Findings

- Concluded crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing occurred in Western Tigray.
 - Documented sexual violence, killings, forced displacement, and starvation policies.
-

9. Ghent University Tigray Atlas Project

Organization: Ghent University

Reports: Ghent University Tigray Atlas Project

Principal Publications: Tigray Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation

Dates: Ongoing from 2021

Key Findings

- Produced one of the most comprehensive conflict databases on Tigray.
 - Documented:
 - Massacres
 - Civilian casualties
 - Damage to healthcare facilities
 - Damage to schools
 - Humanitarian access restrictions
 - Agricultural and economic destruction
 - Became a major source for researchers, humanitarian agencies, and journalists.
-

10. Tigray Emergency Coordination Centre (TECC) / Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide

Organization: Tigray Emergency Coordination Centre (TECC)

Major Reports: Tigray Genocide Situation Reports

Dates: 2021–2024

Key Findings

- Reported:
 - Large-scale civilian deaths
 - Famine conditions
 - Destruction of health infrastructure
 - Sexual violence
 - Continued occupation of Western and Southern Tigray
 - Argued that the conflict met legal criteria for genocide.
 - Produced regular humanitarian and casualty assessments used by advocacy groups and diaspora organizations.
-

11. Genocide Watch

Organisation: Genocide Watch

Major Report: Country Report – Ethiopia

Date: April 2026

Key Findings

- Genocide committed against the Tigrayan people during the 2020-2022 war.
 - **Stage 10: Denial:** The Ethiopian State denies its complicity and role in the genocidal massacres committed against the ethnic Tigrayans.
 - **Stage 9: Extermination:** Reports document widespread massacres, weaponized starvation, systemic sexual violence, and forced deportations perpetrated by Ethiopian National Defense Forces and allied Eritrean Army and Amhara Militia forces.
 - **Stage 8: Persecution:** Following the 2022 Pretoria Peace Agreement, Tigrayans continue to face discriminatory treatment, arbitrary detentions, restrictions on freedom of movement, and an economic blockade.
 - Current Humanitarian and Regional Risks, including displacement and rising tensions, and the real danger of a second round of war in Tigray.
 - No transitional Justice yet
-

12. Mekete Tigray UK

Organisation: Mekete Tigray UK

Major Report: Tigray Genocide Webinars and Testimonies Report

Date: November 2021

Key Findings

- Experts' determination that mass atrocity crimes, including genocide, were committed against ethnic Tigrayans in Ethiopia
 - A signature of the Tigray Genocide was the systematic weaponisation of rape and sexual violence against Tigrayan women and girls.
 - Testimonies of Tigrayan victims of genocide
-

13. Tigray Regional Education Bureau (TREB)

Report: The impacts of the War on Tigray's Schools

Date: 2022

Key Findings

- 2.4 million school-aged children were out of school for over two years. Only 40% returned to school by 2025. Plummeting enrollment.
 - Severe loss of lives of tens of thousands of students. Psychological trauma of school-age students
 - Widespread Destruction: Over 88% of classrooms and 91% of schools suffered severe damage or destruction
 - Looting and Loss: Studies noted the loss of vital teaching supplies and aid with 96% of students' desks, 97% of blackboards and over 85% of computers and electronic equipment destroyed or stolen
-

14. Studies and Reports on The Tigray War Impact on the Health Sector

14.1 Araya Medhanyie et al. "Genocide through Health care Violence: The Systematic Destruction of Health Facilities in the Tigray War". November 2024. DOI. 10.2307/jj.22021786.17

14.2 Zenawi Hagos Gufue et al. "Damage to the public health system caused by war-related looting or vandalism in the Tigray Region of Northern Ethiopia". Public Health, 05 April 2025.

14.3 Hailay Gesesew et al. "The impact of war on the health system of the Tigray region in Ethiopia: an assessment." BMJ Glob Health, 2021 Nov 23; 6(11)

Findings:

- Infrastructure and Facility Damage. Only 3% to 3.6% of health facilities remained fully operational during the peak of the conflict.
 - Over 80% of health posts and health centres sustained damage or looting. In nearly 70% to 83% of regional hospitals.
 - Over 50% of the regional workforce was unable to report to work
 - Plunder of equipment up to 99%, while patient files and digital health infrastructure were burned or heavily vandalized
 - Direct economic damage to the health system exceeded \$500 million
-

2. Comparative Summary of Mass Atrocity Crimes Findings on the Tigray War

Organization	War Crimes	Crimes Against Humanity	Ethnic Cleansing	Genocide Risk/Indicators	Genocide Finding
<i>UN HRC ICHREE</i>	Yes	Yes	Evidence considered	Yes	Not definitive / investigation stopped by the Ethiopian Government/Not given access to Tigray
<i>U.S. State Department</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes (Western Tigray)	Not officially stated/Not formally determined	No official statement yet either way
<i>Tigray Genocide Commission/Tigray Emergency Coordination Centre</i>	Yes	Yes	Database of primary source evidence provided	Yes	Yes, with an evidentiary database
<i>Amnesty International</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Concern raised	No formal finding
<i>Human Rights Watch</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Concern raised	No formal finding
<i>New Lines Institute</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong evidence supporting the genocide allegation
<i>Yale University Law School</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Significant genocide indicators
<i>Ghent University</i>	Documentation focused	Documentation focused	Documentation focused	Evidence relevant	No legal determination
<i>UK APPG on Tigray</i>	Yes	Yes	Evidence presented	Yes	Concern expressed
<i>UK Parliamentary Inquiries</i>	Yes	Yes	Concern expressed	Concern expressed	No legal determination
<i>Genocide Watch</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

These reports collectively constitute the most frequently cited international documentation on atrocities, accountability, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and allegations of genocide during and after the Tigray War.

3. Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide (CITG) Publications & Reports

[Executive Summary: Targeted Destruction: Damage and Loss Assessment on Tigray's Public Infrastructure Sector](#)

[November 13, 2025](#)

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) has published an extensive report detailing the widespread destruction inflicted upon the Public Infrastructure Sector of Tigray. The Damage and Loss Assessment (DaLA) provides a comprehensive account of the deliberate destruction inflicted upon [Read More ...](#)

[Targeted Destruction: Damage and Loss Assessment on Tigray's Public Infrastructure Sector](#)

[November 13, 2025](#)

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) has published an extensive report detailing the widespread destruction inflicted upon the Public Infrastructure Sector of Tigray. The Damage and Loss Assessment (DaLA) provide a comprehensive account of the deliberate destruction inflicted [Read More ...](#)

[CITG Publications & Reports, Featured, News, Research Center for Infrastructure Damages](#)

[Executive Summary: Report on Tigray's Productive Sector and Livelihood: Effects and Impacts of the War, Siege, and Blockade – Volume 1](#)

[November 6, 2025](#)

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) has published an extensive report detailing the widespread destruction inflicted upon Tigray's productive sector and household livelihoods by the war, blockade, and siege that began in November 2020. The assessment, carried out across six [Read More ...](#)

[Report on Tigray's Productive Sector and Livelihood: Effects and Impacts of the War, Siege, and Blockade – Volume 1](#)

[November 6, 2025](#)

Devastating Impact on Tigray's Productive Sector The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) has published an extensive report detailing the widespread destruction inflicted upon Tigray's productive sector and household livelihoods by the war, blockade, and siege that began in [Read More ...](#)

[Executive Summary, Reversed Decades: War and Siege Damage and Loss of Tigray's Natural Resources and Environment – Volume 1](#)

[November 6, 2025](#)

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) has published an extensive report describing the widespread destruction in Tigray's natural resources and environment caused by the war that started in November 2020. The assessment, carried out across six zones and [Read More ...](#)

[Reversed Decades: War and Siege Damage and Loss of Tigray's Natural Resources and Environment – Volume 1](#)

[November 6, 2025](#)

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) has published an extensive report describing the widespread destruction in Tigray's natural resources and environment caused by the war that started in November 2020. The assessment, carried out across six zones and [Read More ...](#)

[Executive Summary: The Systematic Undoing of Society: War Damage and Loss in the Social Sector of Tigray](#)

[October 29, 2025](#)

This executive summary outlines the extent and magnitude of damage and loss sustained across Tigray's education, health, cultural heritage, and social welfare sectors during the war, blockade, and siege. Valued at over USD 10.8 billion, the report documents the collapse [Read More ...](#)

[The Systematic Undoing of Society: War Damage and Loss in the Social Sector of Tigray](#)

[October 29, 2025](#)

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) has published an extensive report describing the widespread destruction in Tigray's social sector caused by the war that started in November 2020. The assessment, carried out across six zones and all accessible [Read More ...](#)

[Executive Summary: War-Induced Genocidal Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Tigray](#)

[October 17, 2025](#)

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) presents findings exposing the widespread and systematic sexual and gender-based violence committed against Tigrayan women and girls during the Tigray war, urging justice, accountability, and healing.

[War-Induced Genocidal Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Tigray, Ethiopia Vol 1](#)

[October 16, 2025](#)

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) released a comprehensive report on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) across Tigray. The report has revealed alarming levels of violence committed against women and girls during the war that began in November [Read More ...](#)
