

Can Abiy Govern in Chaotic Equilibrium?

*Ditch the Monkey Habit of Ethnic Entrepreneurship as Tactic,
Anchor the Four Singular Interests as Strategic Architecture, and
Arsi!—Declare and Legislate, It is The Constitution, Stupid!*

Mefkereseb G. Hailu (PhD)*

June 15, 2026

Preamble : Surviving Is Not Governing

I write as a nationalist on matters that I believe to be true, but not as a partisan, and that distinction lies at the heart of my approach. My objective is not to produce slogans or sound bites, but rather to present as comprehensive a perspective as possible within the limits of the subject under discussion.

This distinction matters because Ethiopia does not exist in isolation. My analysis is concerned with the national equilibrium that emerges from a dynamic and continuous interaction between internal politics and external geopolitics. Rarely are such matters reducible to simple binaries of right and wrong, friend and foe, or black and white. The reality usually resides in the grey areas, which must be carefully examined so that readers can evaluate competing arguments and reach their own conclusions.

Internal politics provides the structural foundation of the state. It shapes institutions, allocates power, establishes legitimacy, and determines the degree of national cohesion. External geopolitics, by contrast, concerns the state's position within a competitive and often anarchic international system. It involves the protection of borders, the security of trade routes, the management of alliances, and the mitigation of external threats.

Neither sphere can be understood independently of the other. Domestic political strength influences a nation's geopolitical leverage, while geopolitical realities frequently shape domestic political choices. The relationship is therefore not linear but cyclical: internal politics and external geopolitics form a feedback loop in which each continuously influences and constrains the other. Any serious assessment of Ethiopia's challenges and opportunities must begin with an appreciation of this interconnected reality.

So, let me repeat my consistent message again if I haven't been crystal clear already [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 1], and it is one. I prioritised **the four singular interests not as a menu but as one proposition in three layers**. *Unity* and *Red Sea Sovereignty* are the **constitutive** foundations of the Ethiopian state; *broad-based economic development anchored in democracy* is the **sustaining means**; and the *Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam* is the **engine** that makes the means feasible. **Foundations → Means → Engine**. None of the three layers is severable; none can be traded against another without dissolving the proposition itself.

I understand most of our people are either knee-deep in the monkey habit of ethnic entrepreneurship or serving—knowingly or unknowingly—as the scaffolding of a system that embodies national dismemberment and mutual massacre. There are no winners in this, only temporary triumphs and the misery of rotating hungry hyenas.

Anyone who has taken part in the Ethiopian X-Spaces (formerly Twitter) discussions, and who has followed the mushrooming YouTube news portals with their degenerate journalists and their half-baked intellectuals, will quickly recognise the narration of hate and division. While the lead advocates pursue a pernicious ploy, forever fine-tuning their stance to suit their sponsors, the majority—for all their eloquence—could only be classed as psychotic, or as severely mentally ill, marked by a persistent detachment from reality. This holds true on both sides.

Now, on a serious note, the vote of 1 June is behind us, conducted in parts of the country under telecommunications blackout and with scores of polling stations that never opened [30]. The PM and his PP will be returned as winners.

However, the question the election was supposed to settle—can Ethiopia convert historical sovereignty into modern power?—was not even asked. It now falls to be answered under a weather system no Ethiopian ballot could influence: a war between Iran on one side and the United States and Israel on the other that began on 28 February and has refused, through a season of collapsing ceasefires, to end [9, 10]. That war has done something the analysts did not price in. It has revealed a *resilient* Iran—decapitated at the very top yet still able to hold the Strait of Hormuz shut since March, punish the global economy, shield Hezbollah and Lebanon, and weaponise

*The author, aka MGH, is a global technical expert trained at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. MGH can be reached via mefkereseb.hailu1990@gmail.com and the views expressed are his own and do not represent any institutional position.

linkage, binding the Lebanese and Gulf theatres so that neither can be settled alone [9, 14, 12]. And it has opened, in plain daylight, a crack between Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump—one who now tacitly accepts that linkage, one who calls it intolerable—that may matter more to Ethiopia than any line in the manifesto [15, 16, 12]. As these words go to press, that crack has produced its result: a US–Iran deal, to be signed in Geneva on Friday the 19th, ending the war on Tehran’s central terms—Lebanon included, the Strait reopened, frozen billions released—with Israel, sidelined, calling it a deep disappointment and Iran calling it a victory [11]. The lesson for Ethiopia is not in the headline but in the structure: the coalition Addis hoped to lean on has just been overruled by a resurgent adversary, which is the final proof that sovereignty cannot be outsourced, and that, war or peace, the four interests must be held regardless. This article reads that external storm, and the internal fracture beneath it—TPLF, OLA, Fano, an unresolved sovereign default, and now the burning of Orthodox churches in Arsi—against the one instrument this series has used throughout: the **four singular interests**—foremost among them, *Unity*.

The fashionable word for what Abiy must now perform is *chaotic equilibrium*—to ride a system that looks random yet stays bounded. It is a real science and a real temptation. But a strange attractor that is not *anchored* does not hold a state together; it merely postpones the moment it flies apart.

The Middle East now shows what the unanchored version becomes at scale: a *permacrisis* that neither collapses nor resolves, authored by two powerful men who tried to ride the chaos and lost control of it. So the question this article puts in its title is not rhetorical. *Can Abiy govern in chaotic equilibrium?* He can certainly *survive* in it; he has. But surviving is not governing—and on the most damning reading of his method, what is praised as mastery is not statecraft at all but a *tactic*: the deliberate exploitation of ethnic difference, the manufacture of warring factions to keep them poor, weak and destitute so that one’s ethnic stock may rise through the wreckage, with the Oromo people held up as the shield. The TPLF, the OLF, Fano, and the PP’s useful-idiot collectives are no better. That tactic is a direct threat to all four of the singular interests at the very moment the nation most needs them, and it is built to blow up—on the Oromo first, as it once did on the Tigrayans. If the next turn is Fano’s, the blow-up to come will fall on the Amhara. This would have been self-evident even to a seven-year-old child, yet the people of the ancient nation of Ethiopia seem spellbound. My belief is that the only attractor that *holds* Ethiopia together is the four interests, legislated and made invariant. Everything else is the monkey-habit of ethnic entrepreneurship wearing the costume of strategy. And beneath all of it the old verdict stands, unrepealed: *it is the constitution, stupid*.

1 After the Vote, the Storm

This is the latest entry in an argument I have been making across the *Ethiopian Tribune* for almost six months, and it is worth restating the spine of it for readers joining late. The series began with the claim that the spirit of Adwa—a sovereignty that was *earned* rather than granted—must carry Ethiopia through both GERD and the Red Sea [2]. It then traced, across four parts, how the Abraham Accords were re-shaping the Gulf–Red-Sea–Horn corridor into a new energy and security architecture, and where Ethiopia and Eritrea¹ fit inside it [3, 4, 5, 6]. It examined the June election through the mirror of the East Asian developmental state [7], argued that national unity and Red Sea sovereignty are a bill that must be paid *now* rather than deferred to a more convenient decade [8], and, on the eve of the vote, insisted that both the foreign and the domestic readings of Abiy Ahmed had made the wrong thing the subject—the man, when the subject is the architecture [1]. The discipline throughout has been the same: judge the Ethiopian moment not by the personality in the Prime Minister’s office but by whether the four interests on which the nation’s existence depends are defended or deferred.

What is new is that the architecture is now being stress-tested from outside on a scale the series did not anticipate when it began. A regional war that the optimists assured us would be a short, surgical affair has instead become the defining fact of the Horn’s strategic environment, and it has reached into precisely the relationships—Gulf money, Israeli technology, American cover, Red Sea access—on which Ethiopia’s most ambitious bets depend. To read Ethiopia today without reading that war is to audit a ship’s accounts while ignoring the sea it is in. So I begin with the sea.

¹In this series, *Eritrea* refers to a polity that is internationally recognised as independent but historically and structurally inseparable from Ethiopia. The political separation was shaped by a combination of internal administrative mismanagement and, more decisively, by externally sponsored secessionist engineering via the EPLF, facilitated by colonial sentiments, Cold War geopolitics, and Nile-basin rivalries aimed at weakening Ethiopia and, by extension, Africa.

2 The War That Wouldn't End: Resilient Iran and Permacrisis

On 28 February 2026 the United States and Israel launched a joint air campaign against Iran—codenamed, on the American side, Operation Epic Fury—that struck military, nuclear and governmental targets and, in its opening hours, killed the Supreme Leader himself [9, 13]. The wager behind the strike was that an Iran weakened by years of sanctions, by the attrition of its proxies, and by the loss of its apex commanders would fold quickly into a favourable settlement. The wager has not paid. Instead Iran has waged what the strategist Robert Pape has described as a campaign of horizontal escalation: rather than meet overwhelming firepower head-on, it has widened the arena—striking American installations across the Gulf, harassing shipping in and around the Strait of Hormuz, and converting the war from a contest of military might into a contest of economic and political endurance, betting that it can outlast the willingness of its adversaries to pay the cost [9].

The resilience has surprised almost everyone, and it deserves to be stated plainly because Ethiopians have a particular reason to attend to it. A state can lose its head of state and *not* dissolve. Iran was struck at the very summit and continued to function, to retaliate, to negotiate, and—most consequentially—to defend its allies. Chief among them is Hezbollah, the Lebanese movement Tehran has nurtured since the 1980s as its forward line of defence against Israel; Iran has tied any ceasefire to the fate of Lebanon, insisting the war ends only when it ends for Hezbollah too, and it has made that linkage stick against a far stronger coalition [14, 12]. The Strait of Hormuz—through which a fifth of the world's traded oil moves—is the other lever, and it is no longer a threat held in reserve but a fact on the water: closed since the opening of the war in March and, on the present diplomatic trajectory, with no early reopening in sight [12, 9]. A waterway that was open until the United States and Israel struck has now stayed shut for an entire season, and the warning issued in March—that a closure persisting into the summer would carry grave economic consequences—has quietly become the world's standing condition, rippling through insurers, tanker routes, and fuel prices from Rotterdam to Addis Ababa. This is not the behaviour of a spent force. It is the behaviour of a revolutionary state that has discovered, under maximum pressure, that decentralised resistance and the chokepoints of others' prosperity are weapons that survive the death of any single man.

It is worth naming precisely what this failure has produced, because the name is the most important analytical import of the war for Ethiopia. The BBC's Jeremy Bowen has called it a *permacrisis*: not the clean, region-reshaping victory Trump and Netanyahu promised when they opened the war on the last day of February —Trump assuring Iranians from Mar-a-Lago that their hour of freedom had come and that the government would be theirs to seize, Netanyahu vowing from the roof of Israel's defence ministry to strike the regime he had spent forty years warning against—but a long, attritional condition that lurches in and out of open conflict without ever resolving [12]. The region *is* being reshaped; it is simply being reshaped into something neither architect intended and neither now controls. Their central judgement—that killing the Supreme Leader and his lieutenants would collapse the regime from within—was wrong, and with it they lost control of the consequences [12]. Iran's downing of an American Apache this week, its crew surviving by luck rather than design, is only the latest proof that Tehran can still draw blood and will not be pushed off its single war aim: survival itself, recast as deterrence, with control of Hormuz as the trophy [12]. Worse for everyone downwind, the men who have replaced the leaders killed in the opening strikes are no less ideological than the old guard and markedly more willing to take risks, having concluded that only painful, demonstrated consequences—not words—will deter the next attack [12]. A decapitation strike meant to produce a pliant Iran has instead selected for a harder, more reckless one.

This matters to a Horn of Africa nationalist for a reason that has nothing to do with sympathy for Tehran's evil regime but everything to do with method. A permacrisis is what an *unanchored* turbulent system looks like when the strongest powers on earth try to steer it by force and discover they cannot: it neither collapses nor settles; it simply churns, indefinitely, inside a basin no one chose. Hold that

image. It is the precise fate this article will argue Ethiopia courts at home if it mistakes mere survival for mastery.

The asymmetry Ethiopia should not miss. A decapitation strike on a centralised adversary can fail not because the adversary is strong but because its *cause* is distributed. Iran’s endurance is partly the endurance of an idea—revolutionary Islam—that does not reside in a palace and cannot be killed in one. A prolonged war that fails to break Iran does not merely leave Iran standing; it manufactures a *stronger* Iran and, behind it, a re-energised revolutionary Islam with a fresh martyr-narrative and proof of concept that the strongest powers on earth could not finish the job. For a Horn of Africa that sits on the Red Sea’s southern gate, astride the fault line between that ideology and the Gulf monarchies it despises, this is not a distant Middle Eastern affair. It is weather moving toward our own coast.

The deal now set for Geneva, examined in full below, does not refute this reading; it ratifies it. A war launched to break the Republic has ended with the Republic enriched and validated, its method of resistance written into a treaty—which is to say the permacrisis has not been resolved so much as *frozen with Iran on top*. The weather may clear over the Gulf; the front it leaves behind, an emboldened revolutionary Islam at the Red Sea’s mouth, is moving our way still.

3 The Crack in the Axis, and the Weapon of Linkage

The second great fact of the season is the daily widening of the distance between Jerusalem and Washington. The two leaders who once advertised themselves as politically inseparable are now, on the public record, pulling in opposite directions. Trump, facing a war that is deeply unpopular at home, wants a deal and has reportedly told the Israeli premier in the bluntest possible terms—an expletive-laden call in which he called Netanyahu’s conduct reckless—that continued strikes will leave Israel isolated and “on its own” [15, 16, 10]. Netanyahu, by contrast, has structural reasons to prefer that the war continue: it suspends a corruption trial grinding into its sixth year, it shelves the threat that loss of office would expose him to an International Criminal Court warrant, and his political base wants Iran punished, not bargained with [15]. More than once in recent days the sequence has been the same—Israel escalates, Iran answers, Trump telephones to demand restraint, and Israel halts the Iranian front while reserving the Lebanese one [10]. The relationship still holds; the leaders still call each other allies. But the *interests* have visibly diverged, and divergence of interests, not absence of affection, is what moves history.

The deepest reason the rift matters, however, is not temperament but a single idea that the BBC’s analysts have rightly placed at the centre of the war: *linkage*. Iran’s most consequential weapon in this round has not been a missile but a concept—the insistence that the Lebanese and Gulf theatres are one, so that there can be no ceasefire for Tehran that is not also a ceasefire for Hezbollah, and no settlement in the Gulf that does not pass through Beirut. The revealing moment came when Trump, on the familiar and repeatedly over-optimistic claim that a deal was close, leaned on Israel to call off a planned assault on Beirut: in doing so he *implicitly accepted* the linkage, conceding that what happens in Lebanon is bound to what happens in the Gulf [12]. Netanyahu rejected the same proposition outright—he called it intolerable and completely unacceptable—because his war aim, to press on until he can declare the regime in Tehran crippled, depends on keeping the two theatres *separable* [12]. He cancelled the Beirut strike and then let the IDF go on hammering southern Lebanon regardless: the posture of a man forced to honour a linkage he refuses to admit. And beneath it lies the calculation that should concentrate Ethiopian minds—that Trump will, in the end, put his own interest in ending an unpopular war ahead of Netanyahu’s determination to prolong it [12, 16].

Put in the language this article uses throughout, linkage is *coupling*. Iran has bound together two subsystems that Washington wished to keep independent, so that a disturbance in one propagates to the other and no purely local equilibrium can exist: settle Lebanon and you have already moved the Gulf; freeze the Gulf and you have already changed Lebanon. Coupling of exactly this kind is what makes a system behave chaotically—small inputs travel further and faster than anyone intends—and it is why a war that looked, in February, like a surgical operation has hardened into a single, indivisible, region-wide

problem with a global price tag bolted on at Hormuz. The significance for Ethiopia is that linkage *travels*. A Lebanon ceasefire that becomes a Gulf settlement that leaves Iran visibly unbroken is a chain whose last link reaches the Horn—and it reaches it through the very tissue Ethiopia had hoped to weave itself into.

Why should an Ethiopian nationalist care which way this particular friendship bends? Because the most ambitious of Ethiopia's external bets has been an implicit alignment with the very coalition this rift threatens. Across the Abraham Accords series I argued that the Gulf–Red-Sea–Horn was being re-wired into an architecture in which Israeli technology, Emirati capital, and American security cover formed a connective tissue—and that a forward-leaning Ethiopia, seeking the sea and seeking investment, had quietly positioned itself as a partner of that tissue [3, 6]. Call it, in shorthand, the latent **Netanyahu–Abiy–MBZ** constellation: an Israel that sells the sensors and the doctrine, a United Arab Emirates that writes the cheques and builds the ports, and an Ethiopia that offers the demographic weight and the Nile's leverage. That constellation was never a treaty; it was a *convergence of conveniences*. And a convergence of conveniences is exactly the kind of structure that a resurgent Iran and a Washington–Jerusalem rift can dissolve. And the dissolution is already visible in the leg of the constellation Ethiopia most needed: the Emirati one. The Gulf states built their whole modern proposition—the cheques, the ports, the promise of an oasis of stability into which a country like Ethiopia could plug its ambitions—on the premise that the region could be made calm enough for capital. Iran has shattered exactly that premise. Bahrain and the UAE, Israel's own Gulf partners, have taken hammer blows; the closed strait has throttled their petrochemical revenue; and the investors and tourists on whom the vision depends now see the oasis turning to mirage [12]. An MBZ whose stability dividend is in question is an MBZ with less to offer Addis Ababa and more reason to hedge. If the war ends with Iran visibly unbroken, the Gulf monarchies—who must live next to Iran long after the American carriers sail home—will hedge, not consolidate; the appetite for an overt anti-Iran bloc with an African wing will cool; and Ethiopia may find that the partners it was counting on have rediscovered the virtues of ambiguity. The lesson is not that the bet was wrong. It is that a bet placed on *other people's coalitions* is not sovereignty; it is clientage with better branding. The four interests are constitutive of the *state*, not contingent on the mood in Abu Dhabi or the survival of a coalition in Jerusalem—which is precisely why they, and not the constellation, must be the anchor.

4 Turkey: The Straddler Who Wins by Refusing to Choose

If one power emerges from this disorder with its options widened rather than narrowed, it is Turkey—and the reason is instructive precisely because it is not the reason the triumphalist reading supposes. Ankara did not want this war. Turkish analysts have described it as the realisation of some of their worst scenarios: missiles crossing Turkish soil, intercepts by NATO assets near Incirlik, the spectre of a refugee wave, the risk of a re-inflamed Kurdish question, and an energy-import bill made worse by the disruption of Iranian supply [17, 18]. Turkey is not a beneficiary because it is winning. It is a beneficiary because of *where it stands*—and it stands, by design, in the doorway between every divided house in the region.

Consider the straddles. Between the West and Russia, Turkey is the NATO member that hosts the Alliance's ballistic-missile radar and command nodes while buying Russian air defence and trading with Moscow through the sanctions—indispensable to both sides and captured by neither [19]. Between Iran and the US–Israel axis, it is the Muslim power that condemns Israel loudest—imposing a soft blockade on Israel-linked shipping and even moving to indict Netanyahu—while keeping its own technical military cooperation with Washington quietly operational [19]. Between Somalia and Ethiopia, it is the broker that holds a defence pact and a military presence in Mogadishu and yet convened the talks that pulled Addis Ababa and Mogadishu back from the brink over the Somaliland port question—arbiter of a quarrel in which it arms one side. And with Egypt it maintains a guarded friendliness that never quite becomes

trust, because the two are natural rivals for the leadership of Sunni political Islam and for influence over the same Red Sea and East Mediterranean waters. Above all, Turkey is now a genuine military *technologist*—a drone power whose exported systems have rewritten the economics of air power for middle states—which means it sells capability to all sides of several of these quarrels at once.

The Turkish position is the geopolitical analogue of a hedge that pays out under *every* scenario. Whoever wins the Iran war, the region will need a Sunni, NATO-embedded, drone-exporting power that talks to everyone—and that is Ankara. For Ethiopia the implication is double-edged: Turkey is a plausible supplier and an honest-enough broker on the Somalia file, but it is also a power whose interest is served by *managed* disorder in the Horn, not by a strong, consolidated Ethiopian state that needs no broker. One does not refuse to deal with the straddler. One deals with him clear-eyed, remembering that his profit is in the persistence of the very fractures Ethiopia must close.

5 Eritrea: The Patience of the Spoiler

Where Turkey straddles, Asmara waits—and a prolonged geopolitical machination is exactly the medium in which Eritrea thrives. Isaias Afwerki's statecraft has always been the statecraft of the spoiler with a long clock: too small to dominate the Horn, too disciplined to be dominated, and most comfortable when its larger neighbour is too distracted to threaten it. The Iran war and the cracking axis hand Eritrea two gifts. The first is *cover*: while the world's attention is fixed on Hormuz and Beirut, Asmara can deepen its backing of the forces that bleed Ethiopia from within—credible reporting has Eritrea cooperating with Fano and with the TPLF on military planning, the classic Horn pattern of indirect war through proxies [21, 20]. The second is *re-calibration room*. A drawn-out crisis lets Eritrea sell itself afresh to both the West and the Arab world as an indispensable Red Sea security actor—a coastline the Gulf wants to lease, a port the anti-Iran coalition wants to watch, a hedge the West can hold against an Ethiopia it does not fully trust. Every month the war continues is a month in which Eritrea's bargaining position improves and Ethiopia's deteriorates.

This is the uncomfortable core of the Assab question, which I have pressed throughout this series and will not soften here. Ethiopia's Red Sea claim is the recovery of a right, framed in peaceful priority but never in peaceful exclusivity [8, 6]. But the longer the regional storm runs, the more Eritrea can convert its small coastline into large rent by playing the very patrons Ethiopia hoped to court. The Crisis Group's warning that Ethiopia and Eritrea sit on a powder keg is not alarmism; the Tselemti and Raya flashpoints are live, and the calculus that has so far stayed Abiy's hand—fear of forfeiting the IMF programme and Western goodwill—is exactly the calculus a prolonged war erodes [20, 21]. A desperate treasury and a contested border are a combustible pair.

6 The Geneva Deal: The Cost of Peace & the Compass It Holds

As this essay went to press, the storm broke—or rather, was declared over. On 14 June the United States and Iran announced that they had reached a deal to end their war, to be signed in Switzerland on Friday the 19th, brokered by Pakistan and Qatar with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye credited as midwives [11]. Note also the missing names - Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Israel. The terms are worth reading slowly, because every one of them is a verdict on the argument of the preceding pages. Military operations are to cease *on all fronts, including Lebanon*—the linkage Iran insisted upon and Netanyahu called intolerable, written now into the settlement. The Strait of Hormuz reopens, toll-free, and the American blockade is lifted. Some twenty-five billion dollars in frozen Iranian assets are to be released, against Tehran's pledge not to build a bomb, with sixty days of nuclear talks to follow. Iran's officials call it a victory; Israel, not a party to it, calls it a deep disappointment [11]. On the evidence, both are right. The war that was meant to break the Islamic Republic has ended with the Republic enriched, vindicated, and its method of resistance ratified by treaty. Everything this series argued about a resilient Iran and the weapon of linkage has been confirmed not by analysis but by signature.

6.1 What the Peace Buys Ethiopia

The dividends are real, and an honest nationalist names them first. The reopening of Hormuz means oil flows again, and falling energy prices reach a long way south: for an Ethiopia strangled by a fuel-import bill, a collapsed birr, inflation above twenty per cent, and a sovereign default, cheaper crude and calmer shipping are a genuine fiscal reprieve at the precise moment of maximum strain. Regional de-escalation lowers the spillover risk to the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb, through which Ethiopia's own commerce must pass. And the lifting of the external weather removes the alibi: with no foreign tempest left to blame, the reprieve is a window—narrow, and certainly temporary—in which a government could do the structural work this series has urged, rather than plead the storm. Peace abroad is worth having. The only question is what Ethiopia does with it.

6.2 What the Peace Costs

But a deal is not a dawn, and the debit column is the longer one. An Iran that emerges from a war with the United States enriched by twenty-five billion dollars, its prestige restored and its model of asymmetric resistance vindicated, is not a diminished neighbour to the Horn but an emboldened one—a stronger Iran and, behind it, the re-energised revolutionary Islam this essay warned would be the war's true product, now flush and triumphant rather than chastened [11]. A settlement that *rewards* linkage and resistance is an advertisement to every non-state actor on the Red Sea's far shore that the method works; the waterway Ethiopia covets does not become safer because Hormuz has calmed. Israel, sidelined and disappointed, is now a wounded and unpredictable actor rather than a coalition anchor, and the Gulf, watching Washington overrule Jerusalem to deal with Tehran, will hedge toward accommodation, not consolidation. The mediators who emerge garlanded—Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Pakistan—are precisely the straddlers and hedgers of the earlier chapters, not the anti-Iran bloc with an African wing that Addis Ababa had quietly hoped to join. And the peace itself is fragile: Israel is bound by nothing, the nuclear talks are a sixty-day promissory note, and the ceasefire that preceded the deal was broken more than once. The hot war ends; the permacrisis is frozen, not cured.

The constellation, overruled

The single most important consequence for Ethiopia is the one least likely to make the headlines. The latent Netanyahu–Abiy–MBZ constellation—the convergence of Israeli technology, Gulf capital, and American cover on which Ethiopia's most ambitious Red Sea bet implicitly leaned—has just been *publicly overruled* by a resurgent adversary, with Washington itself casting the deciding vote against Jerusalem. A nation that had pinned its access to the sea on that coalition has watched the coalition lose. This is not a misfortune to be mourned; it is a lesson to be learned, and learned now, while the lesson is cheap.

6.3 Why the Peace Will Not Hold

And it should be doubted that it will last, for the deal rests on a foundation with a known expiry date. Iran's resistance has not deterred Israel; it has merely deferred it. Israel is party to nothing signed in Geneva, bound by nothing, and regards an Iran left enriched with its nuclear threshold intact as an existential matter on which it will, sooner or later, act in what it calls self-defence; the agreement restrains Washington, not Jerusalem. And the restraint of Washington is itself a wasting asset. The president who brokered this peace, lauded as the most pro-Israel in American history—a flatterer's title, since it was in fact a previous administration that signed the record thirty-eight-billion-dollar military-aid package—governs on a finite and shrinking mandate. By the November midterms the memorandum will very likely have begun to fray along its own sixty-day nuclear timetable and its unilateral Israeli wildcard; a president who loses ground at the midterms is a diminished guarantor through the back half of his term; and he is gone, by constitutional certainty, at the start of 2029. His domestic enemies, and a pro-Israel lobby incensed that a war meant to cripple Tehran has instead enriched it and reopened Hormuz on Iranian terms, will sharpen their knives over the misjudgement and the bad bargain—as that same lobby did against the nuclear accord of a decade ago. And Netanyahu, sidelined today, will spend

the interval doing what he does best: consolidating his proposed *Hexagon* alliance—Israel with India, Greece, Cyprus, and such Arab states as will still deal with him [19]—and waiting for the American hand to lift so that he may finish what the war left undone. The peace, in short, is an interlude. Any Ethiopian strategy that mistakes it for a settlement is building on a fault line that is already, quietly, slipping.

6.4 The Compass That Does Not Move

Which brings us to the heart of the matter, and to the one instruction this section exists to deliver. The deal changes the weather; it does not change the compass. Whether the peace holds or collapses, whether Iran rises or the old bloc reforms, whether the Gulf hedges toward Tehran or back toward Tel Aviv, *none of it alters what Ethiopia must do*, because the four singular interests were never contingent on any external configuration in the first place. That is the whole point of calling them constitutive rather than tactical. A sovereignty that depends on the survival of someone else’s coalition is not sovereignty; it is a sub-let. Geneva is merely the most expensive proof yet that the lease can be cancelled without notice. From this follows the posture Ethiopia must now adopt, and adopt deliberately. A nation of a hundred and twenty million, with the Nile’s leverage and the demographic weight of a coming great power, has no business being any patron’s pawn—not the UAE’s, not Israel’s, not Washington’s. It should enter the reshaped board not as a client seeking admission to someone else’s bloc but as a pole in its own right, forging an *asymmetric coalition* of its own making: a working alignment of unlike partners—Gulf capital here, a Red Sea littoral state there, a rival’s rival where interest dictates—bound not by ideology but by the single shared object of a secured Ethiopian outlet to the sea, and bound on terms of equality rather than dependence. On the end itself there can be no discount. Ethiopia should settle for nothing less than Red Sea Sovereignty—pursued peacefully by every preference, and by other means should necessity and right compel it, as the recovery of what was taken and the precondition of a hundred-million-strong nation’s survival. And it should be pursued *now*, while the board is in flux and the old certainties have just been shown to be anything but; windows of this kind do not stay open, and the configuration that follows may be far less forgiving than this one.

Unity and Red Sea Sovereignty, regardless

On **Red Sea Sovereignty**: the claim must be anchored on Ethiopia’s own right and its own strength—the Doumeira-to-Beilul corridor, pursued in peaceful priority but never in peaceful exclusivity, and never surrendered for want of another’s blessing—and never again outsourced to a Netanyahu, an MBZ, or a passing American mood, nor settled for anything short of sovereignty entire. Geneva has just shown how fast such patrons are overruled. On **Unity**: the clearing of the external sky removes the last excuse. There is no foreign storm to blame for the burned churches of Arsi, for Fano’s war, for the default, or for the monkey-habit of ethnic entrepreneurship that feeds them all. With the weather lifting, the fracture stands exposed as wholly home-made and wholly Abiy’s to answer. Foundations → Means → Engine hold in war and in peace alike, because a compass that swings with the wind is no compass at all. The deal in Switzerland is, for Ethiopia, finally a mirror: it asks not what the great powers will do, but whether a nation of a hundred and twenty million will at last decide to be the author of its own sovereignty rather than the ward of other people’s bargains. The lesson, once more, is from Adwa. There were alliances then, and supply lines for weapons; but the matter of sovereignty was Menelik’s alone—his, and that of the united noblemen and noblewomen of every creed and heritage who marshalled their people to the field.

7 Fracture: Fano, OLA, TPLF, and the Arithmetic of Default

No external storm sinks a ship that is not already taking on water, and Ethiopia is. Begin with the fractures. In Amhara, the Fano insurgency—an ethno-nationalist movement of perhaps fifty to seventy thousand fighters, born of the failed attempt to demobilise the militias that fought the federal war—now contests control across much of the region [22, 23]. In Oromia, the largest region and the Prime Minister’s own political base, federal troops and drones are committed against the Oromo Liberation Army in a conflict kept half-hidden by restrictions on access [21]. In Tigray, the Pretoria settlement of 2022 has frayed: the TPLF never fully demobilised, a faction seized the regional machinery, roughly two-fifths

of Tigray remains occupied or contested, and federal–Tigrayan forces have already tested one another’s resolve at Tselemti [20, 29]. Three insurgencies, three constituencies, one recurring pattern: each is, to some degree, a proxy in a wider game, and each links the internal fracture to the external one through Asmara’s hand.

Now the arithmetic, which is bleaker still because it cannot be talked away. Ethiopia defaulted on its billion-dollar Eurobond in December 2023—missing a coupon of some thirty-three million dollars, at the time the largest sovereign default the continent had seen—and, more than two years on, it has still not climbed out [24]. The bilateral track has moved: an agreement in principle with official creditors led by China in March 2025, a memorandum with the Official Creditor Committee in July [25]. But the private track is stuck in a doom-loop of comparability. A draft deal with bondholders early this year—offering a fifteen-per-cent writedown and a new note maturing in 2029—was rejected by the official creditors as failing the Common Framework’s comparability-of-treatment test, sending Ethiopia back to the bondholders, who in turn have now walked away again [26, 27]. Fitch rates the sovereign in restricted default [25]. The country already commits around a fifth of its export earnings to debt service, a share set to climb; the birr float that the reformers defend in principle has been brutal in distribution; inflation rides above twenty per cent; and the loss from the northern war alone has been put near eighty billion dollars [25, 28].

The convergence, stated as a single sentence

An economy locked out of international markets, a currency devalued, a fifth of exports pledged to creditors, three live insurgencies fed in part from across the northern border, a Red Sea ambition that depends on patrons whose coalition the Iran war is dissolving, and a constitution that rewards ethnic mobilisation over civic loyalty—these are not separate problems. They are one system, and the only question that matters is whether that system can be held in a bounded, survivable state, or whether it diverges into collapse.

8 The Arsi Massacres: Ethnic and Religious Violence

And then, as if the ledger above were not heavy enough, the fracture acquired a second edge—the most dangerous edge an Ethiopian crisis can acquire. In the East Arsi Zone of Oromia, an agricultural county some hundred and seventy kilometres south-east of Addis Ababa, a wave of attacks on Orthodox Christian villages that had been escalating since October 2025 and surged in February surged again around the 1 June election. From a flare-up that began on 30 May at Teleta Gebriel, in Aseko District, armed assailants burned a century-old church and looted others, killed worshippers, and drove families from their homes; reports put the dead in the latest incidents at thirty-seven to forty, with a church torched on election day itself and more than two hundred and eighty households displaced [31, 32]. It was not new, and it was not random: the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and independent monitors have documented the attacks as *systematic and organised*—coordinated assaults that bear the marks of training and direction, not the opportunistic violence of a spontaneous communal quarrel [33]. In March, at least twenty-one civilians had been killed in Shirka District in the same pattern—survivors abducted, homes burned—drawing joint condemnation from the Orthodox Synod, the Inter-Religious Council, and—this matters—the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, which denounced the killings alongside the others and warned against any attempt to exploit them to inflame religious hatred [31, 33]. The Patriarch, Abune Mathias I, gave voice to a grief that has curdled into a question the whole country is now asking.

The head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church mourned believers “unjustly killed” and hundreds displaced, and—naming the recurring injustice in the land of Arsi—asked simply: “*how long will this continue?*” The Archbishop of the Gurage Diocese, Abune Melchizedek, put the matter to the state in plainer terms still: the first duty of any government is to protect its citizens, and the repeated, systematic attacks on Orthodox Christians and their clergy must not be met with negligence [31].

Why does this, of all the wounds catalogued above, deserve a section of its own? Because it is the only one that couples Ethiopia’s two deepest fault lines at once. The victims of Arsi sit at the intersection of two identities—they are, in the main, Amhara, and they are Orthodox—and to attack that intersection

is to weld the ethnic fracture to the religious one. The distinction is not academic. Ethnic violence is, in principle, contained by the ethnic-federal map: a regional grievance burns in a regional theatre. Religion observes no such boundary. The Orthodox faithful are spread through every region and every ethnicity in the country; an assault on people *as* Orthodox does not stay in Arsi, it reaches into every parish from Gondar to Hawassa. That is what makes it the super-coupler this article has been circling: it fuses an Amhara grievance that is already under arms as Fano with a pan-Orthodox outrage that crosses ethnic lines, and so threatens to assemble a coalition larger than any single insurgency Ethiopia faces. And it is self-sustaining in a way that land disputes and office-sharing are not, because a desecrated sanctuary and a murdered believer cannot be split the difference of in a negotiation. You can divide a federal budget; you cannot divide a burned church. This is precisely why it will not stop easily, and precisely why it is the most direct assault conceivable on the first of the four interests—Unity—whose oldest binding agent, across all the ethnic lines the constitution drew, has been a shared faith.

The argument must here hold its discipline, because the perpetrators' design depends on our losing it. The Orthodox Church itself has said it fears the assailants want to drive a wedge between religious communities that have lived side by side in Arsi for generations [31]. That fear is the key to the whole matter. The villains of Arsi are the armed men who burned the churches and the state that failed to stand between them and the faithful—they are not the Oromo people, not Islam, not any community that shares that land; indeed Ethiopia's own Islamic Affairs Supreme Council has condemned the killings as plainly as the Church, and the country's religious and civic leaders have, with one voice, demanded that justice be individualised and evidence-based and that no community be visited with collective guilt. To answer a massacre engineered to manufacture a religious war by concluding that a religious war is upon us is to do the killers' work for them. That the attacks are organised, however, changes one thing: it means there are organisers, and the right response to an engineered atrocity is not to guess at the engineers from one's armchair but to demand that an independent inquiry name them from the evidence. The gravest error available to Ethiopians now is to meet the wedge with a counter-wedge; the second gravest is for the state to pretend the wedge is not being driven at all—which brings us to the government's response, and to the reason this episode, more than any other, may decide the Prime Minister's fate.

A detonator mistaken for a microphone. On the public record, the Office of the Prime Minister folded the massacre into a lengthy statement dominated by the seventh national election and by claimed economic gains, condemning the killings but framing them as a coordinated plot—attributed to the Oromo Liberation Army, allegedly acting with Fano—to disrupt the democratic process and inflame religious and ethnic tensions [32]. Set aside whether the attribution is sound; independent verification is thin, and the church and the rights bodies have stressed the pattern and the negligence rather than the perpetrator's name. The tell is the *framing*. To present a religious massacre primarily as a problem of political narrative—as an attempt to spoil an election—is to treat the dead as a footnote to a campaign, and to answer the burning of churches with a press line rather than a deployment. To the families burying believers in Arsi, that is not analysis; it is denial wearing the costume of statesmanship. And it is dangerous in a way the Prime Minister appears not to grasp: the one institution in Ethiopia with the cross-ethnic legitimacy and the mobilising reach to unmake a government is the Orthodox Church, and the one grievance capable of fusing the regime's separate enemies into a single front is the settled conviction that the state will not protect the faithful. A leader who treats that as a messaging problem is holding a detonator and calling it a microphone.

Let it be said as plainly as the analysis permits. Abiy may survive the Fano war; he has absorbed it for three years. He may survive the OLA war in his own region, the restricted-default arithmetic, and even the Eritrean border. He may not survive Arsi—not because the killers are militarily strong, for they are not, but because the *negligence* is politically unforgivable, and because the dead are Orthodox (whom the country's traditional Muslims have counted as brothers for millennia), and Ethiopia has buried that particular grievance before and watched it raise dynasties and bury them. This is the shock the science warned of in the abstract: the small input, sensitively placed, that throws the whole trajectory onto a divergent path. It is no longer a hypothetical lurking in the mathematics. It is in Arsi, it has a date, and it is counting its dead.

And because it is counting its dead, it can no longer be left to a government that calls the counting a

conspiracy. The Arsi massacres have crossed the threshold at which a domestic atrocity becomes a matter of international conscience, and the call must be made plainly. The governments of the democratic world, the United Nations and the African Union, and—because believers were cut down at prayer—the faith communities of the wider Judaeo-Christian world should condemn these killings without equivocation. Bodies whose declared vocation is the defence of persecuted believers—the United States Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, In Defense of Christians, and Christian Solidarity International among them—have both the standing and the duty to place Arsi on the international record and to press for accountability.

The call that must now be made

Condemnation. Governments, the UN and the AU, and the faith-based defenders of religious freedom—the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, Christian Concern-UK, ActAlliance, In Defense of Christians, Christian Solidarity International, and the broader Judaeo-Christian community—should condemn the Arsi massacres and name them for what they are: the targeted killing of a religious minority at worship. **Investigation.** The attacks bear the marks of coordination rather than spontaneity, and have been variously attributed—by the government to the OLA/OLF-Shene, allegedly acting with Fano, and by others to a wider current of ethno-nationalist and religious extremism—claims that only an independent international inquiry, with *unfettered access* to East Arsi, can test against the evidence rather than the megaphone, so as to establish who organised the killings and to fix responsibility on the perpetrators and on any official negligence alike. **Accountability, not a counter-wedge.** The object is justice for the murdered and protection for the living, never the indictment of a whole community or faith; the surest gift to whoever lit this fire would be a reprisal that turned a massacre into the religious war it was designed to start.

9 Chaotic Equilibrium: the Science, and the Seduction

It has become fashionable, among the cleverer defenders of the government, to describe Abiy's method as the mastery of *chaotic equilibrium*—the art of governing a system that appears wholly unpredictable yet never actually falls apart. His detractors call it *confuse and convince*. The phrase is not empty; it names something real in the mathematics of complex systems, and because it is being used to flatter a strategy of permanent improvisation, it is worth getting the science right before deciding whether the flattery is earned.

In the theory of dynamical systems, most systems settle into one of two simple fates: a *fixed point* (a single resting state) or a *limit cycle* (a regular oscillation). But some systems—those with strong nonlinearity and acute sensitivity to their starting conditions—do neither. They never repeat and never rest, yet their trajectory does not wander off to infinity either. Instead it loops endlessly inside a bounded, intricately folded region of possibilities called a *strange attractor*: aperiodic, impossible to predict in detail over the long run, and yet confined within a definite shape [34, 35]. The canonical example is Edward Lorenz's model of atmospheric convection, whose solution traces the famous twin-lobed butterfly that never crosses itself and never escapes its basin. Relatedly, in non-equilibrium thermodynamics, systems driven hard and far from rest—living cells, hurricanes, convecting fluids—can spontaneously organise themselves into stable structures, maintaining order not by sitting still but by continuously importing and expelling energy; Ilya Prigogine called these *dissipative structures* [36]. In fact, one of the most advanced and modern techniques in missile guidance system exploits the use of chaotic equilibrium, allowing bounded control in real-time towards less complex orbits on the basis of environmental changes acquired through a synthetic aperture radar sensory system—making it relatively immune to anti-missile systems. The deep point, common to both, is that apparent chaos can be *contained*: a system may fluctuate forever and still be trapped, by its own dynamics, within an invisible boundary.

Here is the seduction, and here is the trap. The defender's claim is that Ethiopia is such a system—turbulent on the surface, secretly bounded—and that Abiy is the operator who keeps it inside its attractor. The claim is seductive because it converts every sign of disorder into evidence of a deeper design: the wars, the defaults, the suspended polls are not failures but fluctuations *within the basin*, and the fact that the state has not collapsed is offered as proof that someone, somewhere, is steering. But three things are true of strange attractors that the flattering version omits, and each is fatal to the comfort it offers.

1. **The basin is fixed by the system's parameters, not chosen by the operator.** An attractor exists because the underlying equations confine it. If the parameters drift past a critical threshold—a *bifurcation*—the attractor can vanish, and the trajectory that was safely bounded yesterday escapes to ruin today. The operator does not get to decree where the walls are; he can only discover, often too late, that they have moved.
2. **Sensitive dependence cuts both ways.** The same sensitivity to initial conditions that lets a small, clever intervention nudge the system also means that a small *miscalculation*—one province pushed too far, one creditor too many, one border incident—can throw the whole trajectory onto a divergent path. Chaos is not controllable in detail; it is at best *bounded* in aggregate, and only while the parameters hold.
3. **An attractor is not a goal.** It is a description of where a system goes when no one is choosing where it should go. To celebrate that Ethiopia “stays within its attractor” is to celebrate that it has not yet collapsed—a low bar that says nothing about whether it is approaching unity, sovereignty, prosperity, or their opposites. A state can orbit a basin of permanent low-grade civil war indefinitely. That, too, is a chaotic equilibrium. It is also a catastrophe.

The Middle East is, at this very moment, supplying the illustration. The permacrisis that Trump and Netanyahu have authored is a chaotic equilibrium of exactly the malign kind: a system that will not collapse and will not settle, lurching for years between bombardment and stalemate inside a basin no participant chose and none can now escape. And it was produced by two of the most powerful men alive doing precisely what the flattering account praises—trying to reshape a turbulent region by force and surgical decapitation, certain they could ride the resulting chaos to a destination of their choosing. They could not. They mistook the basin, miscalculated the parameters, and confused the spectacle of action for control; and the mathematics delivered the ditch on a regional scale. This is the cautionary mirror Abiy should hold up to his own situation, because the temptation being marketed to him is identical—and a Prime Minister presiding over three insurgencies and a sovereign default has far less margin for the same error than a superpower and a regional hegemon enjoyed, and they had none to spare.

So: *can* chaotic equilibrium be mastered? Yes—but only in the narrow, demanding sense that a skilled operator who understands the parameters can keep a turbulent system inside a *survivable* basin while he does the slow work of changing the equations themselves. Mistake the basin, miscalculate the parameters, or confuse mere survival for direction, and the same mathematics that promised control delivers the ditch. “Riding the chaos” without anchoring it is not statecraft; it is a man congratulating himself on the view as the trajectory diverges. The honest alternative is not to abandon the system far from equilibrium—no developing state gets to sit at rest—but to *aspire to equilibrium in a controlled way*: to fix the basin deliberately around the four singular interests, so that whatever fluctuates, the foundations do not.

10 The Four Interests as the Controlling Invariant

Translate the mathematics into statecraft and the prescription is exact. A dissipative structure holds its shape because something in it is conserved while everything else churns. A state surviving far from equilibrium needs the same: a small set of *invariants* that are never traded against the fluctuations, that define the basin's walls, and that are placed beyond the reach of any season's improvisation. The four singular interests are precisely that set, and their architecture is what makes them suitable for the role.

The invariant, restated for a turbulent state

Unity and Red Sea Sovereignty are the constitutive foundations: lose either and the system is no longer a nation fluctuating within a basin but a territory dispersing without one. *Broad-based development anchored in democracy* is the means that keeps the structure dissipative—the inflow of energy, in the form of livelihoods for the roughly eighty-six million Ethiopians under thirty, that lets order persist amid churn. *GERD* is the engine that makes that inflow possible. Foundations → Means → Engine. To anchor the attractor is to make these three non-negotiable while everything else—tactics, alliances, the mood in foreign capitals, even the identity of the operator—is allowed to fluctuate.

The contrast with the current method could not be sharper. Today the things that are treated as fixed are the wrong things: the dominance of a single party, the centralisation of the apex, the personal indispensability of the leader. And the things that are allowed to fluctuate are the very foundations that ought to be invariant: unity is bargained against electoral advantage, the credibility of the Red Sea claim against the timetable of a debt negotiation, development against display. That is an attractor anchored on the operator's survival rather than the nation's—and it is exactly the configuration that, at the first hard bifurcation, throws the trajectory into the ditch. To re-anchor on the four interests is not to ask Abiy to be a saint. It is to ask him to fix the basin around the state instead of around himself, and then to ride the inevitable chaos *inside* those walls.

There is a final lesson here, and it comes straight from the Iran war. Linkage—the coupling of theatres so that none can be solved alone—is a weapon that cuts in both directions, and the difference between its uses is the difference between a strong state and a doomed one. Iran *authored* its coupling: it chose, over four decades, to fuse Lebanon to the Gulf, and that deliberate linkage is now the source of its strength. Ethiopia's coupling, by contrast, is at present the involuntary, ruinous kind. Its subsystems—Tigray, Oromia, Amhara, the Eritrean border, the sovereign default, the Red Sea claim—are *already* linked, and Asmara's whole strategy is to couple them further still, wiring each internal insurgency to the external border so that a tug on one tightens all the others. A state whose linkages are written by its adversaries is a system being steered from outside its own walls. The four singular interests, anchored and legislated, are the way Ethiopia authors its *own* coupling instead: Foundations → Means → Engine is itself a deliberate linkage—a single proposition, welded together, that no adversary can dismantle piece by piece because pulling on any one interest visibly pulls on the rest. That is the constructive form of what Iran has done destructively: to make one's survival a coupled whole rather than a set of severable conveniences an enemy can pick off one at a time.

11 The Tactic: Divide, Impoverish, and the Oromo Shield

We have now described two attractors—the malign one anchored on the operator's survival, the legitimate one anchored on the four interests—in the cool language of systems. Honesty requires descending from that language to name, plainly, the most damning reading of what the operator's-survival attractor actually *is* in Ethiopia today; for if that reading is right, the question in this article's title has already been answered, and the answer is no. The charge is this: that what is marketed as the mastery of chaotic equilibrium is not a strategy at all but a *tactic*—and that the distinction is the whole matter.

A strategy serves an end beyond the man who wields it; it has a destination—here, a unified, sovereign, prosperous Ethiopia—and every move is judged by whether it brings that destination nearer. A tactic serves only the position of the man who wields it, and it has no destination at all, only continuation. On the most damning but not implausible reading of the post-2018 record, Abiy's method has been the second kind: not to resolve the country's ethnic fractures but to *work* them—to set communities against one another, to let each faction exhaust itself in conflict and so be kept poor, weak and destitute, so that no rival bloc can ever consolidate into a threat, and so that one ethnic stock, cultivated as the regime's base, rises through a wreckage it helped to arrange. Divide; impoverish; rule. In the language this article has used throughout, it is the deliberate *manufacture* of bounded chaos: the operator does not merely tolerate the fluctuations, he induces them, because a permanently fractured polity cannot coordinate against him. That is why it can be mistaken, by the admiring, for the riding of chaos. It is riding the chaos—but the chaos is being fed on purpose.

Why a tactic cannot deliver a single one of the four interests. A strategy of national development has a terminal state that is good for the nation. A tactic of divide-and-impoverish has only the requirement that it keep producing enemies, for the day it runs out of factions to set against each other is the day it stops working. It is, precisely, a permacrisis *chosen on purpose*—and it is therefore the exact opposite of each interest it claims to be securing. *Unity* cannot survive a method whose mechanism is division. *Red Sea Sovereignty* cannot be won by a

state whose army and regions are turned inward against one another rather than outward toward a coherent national aim. *Broad-based development* is definitionally impossible where destitution is not a failure of the method but its instrument. And *GERD*, the engine, needs a nation that believes the dam is theirs in common, not an archipelago of aggrieved blocs each convinced the water will flow to someone else. A tactic that requires fracture cannot build the thing that requires cohesion. It does not threaten the four interests by accident; it negates them by design.

Here the argument must turn to the part of it that is most often left unsaid, and say it carefully, because it is the part that matters most for the people who will pay. Abiy governs from behind an Oromo identity and an Oromo political base; the Oromo name is the banner under which the tactic operates. But the ordinary Oromo farmer and labourer are not the beneficiaries of this arrangement—they are its shield, and increasingly its front line. It is in Oromia, the Prime Minister’s own home region, that federal troops and drones are committed against the Oromo Liberation Army in a war kept half-hidden from the country [21, 22]. The tactic spends the Oromo name while the Oromo countryside bleeds. That is the first cruelty. And it is here that the tactic reveals its deepest danger to its own author: a method that farms ethnic fracture for advantage cannot keep the fire ethnic. Arsi is the proof. A divide-and-rule that set communities against one another has now bred a *religious* blaze—churches burned, believers killed in an Oromo zone, the deed wrapped by the state in a narrative about a disrupted election—that no longer answers to whoever lit it. The monster has exceeded its maker; the entrepreneur of fracture has lost the franchise on the fracture.

The second is worse, and it is the warning this article most wants the reader to carry. A method that makes every other community—Amhara, Tigrayan, Somali, Afar, and the rest—poorer, angrier and more humiliated, while wrapping itself in an Oromo flag, is not protecting the Oromo people. It is fitting them for the role of the group that inherits the vengeance meant for the regime. This is the oldest and grimmest pattern of ethnicised rule in the Horn and beyond: when the resentment a leader has farmed across a whole country finally finds its object, the leader can fall, flee, or be flown out—but the people who were made his face cannot relocate, and they absorb the wrath. The tactic that hides behind the Oromo today is, on this reading, building the cause of a reckoning that will land on the Oromo tomorrow. To blow up in Abiy’s face is one thing; the tragedy is that it will blow up on the faces of the very people he is sheltering behind, who were never consulted and will not be spared. The deepest victims of ethnic entrepreneurship are always, in the end, the ethnicity it claims to serve.

This article does not need to settle the question of *intent*—whether the divide-and-impoverish pattern is cold Machiavellian design or the structural undertow of a constitution that rewards exactly this behaviour from whoever sits at the apex. The two readings converge, because the effect is identical and the remedy is identical. But the convergence is itself the indictment: a leader who is not deliberately running the malign attractor is being dragged into it by the founding equations, and a leader who *is* running it deliberately has chosen his own survival over the survival of the four interests and over the safety of the people whose name he carries. Either way, the man is presiding over the attractor that ends in the ditch—and the next section explains why the system keeps pulling him there.

12 Why the Arbiter Thrives and the Majority Stays Hostage

To say that Abiy runs a divide-and-impoverish tactic is to describe a behaviour; it is not yet to explain why he should *believe* it can work, nor why a nation of more than a hundred and twenty million should permit a centre that serves so few to rule so long. The explanation is not a mystery of personality. It is a structure, and the structure has a formal skeleton, a long history, a cultural grammar, a political economy, and two load-bearing failures—of the opposition and of the diaspora—without which the whole edifice would fall. This chapter takes them in turn, because the architecture of Ethiopian division is the single most important thing an Ethiopian patriot must understand, and the single thing the four singular interests exist to overcome.

12.1 The Arbiter's Wager: the Formal Logic of Divide-and-Rule

Begin with the mathematics of personal rule, because Abiy's wager is not original; it is a textbook equilibrium. In their model of kleptocracy, Acemoglu, Robinson and Verdier show precisely how a ruler who is *weak*—who could be removed the moment his subjects combined—nonetheless survives indefinitely: he plays the groups against one another, buying off whichever bloc is pivotal to any coalition that might depose him, and financing the bribe from aid and from rents the citizens themselves generate [39]. The cooperation needed to remove him is defused before it forms, by threats and rewards that never even have to be carried out. Their conclusion names Ethiopia without naming it: divide-and-rule succeeds where institutions are weak, where *aid and resource rents* give the ruler the means to buy off opponents, where the *opposition is short-sighted*, and where inequality between groups makes some cheaper to purchase than others [39]. Read that list again with Addis Ababa in view. This is not an analogy; it is a diagnosis.

The deep point—older than the model, and put most starkly by Mancur Olson—is that a populace is not a coalition [40, 41]. A hundred and twenty million people who would all be better off without misrule are not thereby *organised* against it; each waits for another to bear the cost of resistance, and the ruler's whole art is to ensure they keep waiting, and keep blaming one another rather than him. The arbiter does not need to be strong. He needs only to be the one fixed point around which divided others revolve. That is the wager—and on present arrangements it is, coldly, a sound one.

12.2 The Historical Layer: a Nation Made, and an Ethnicity Engineered

The arbiter's wager would not pay, however, if the cleavages it exploits were not already deep—and here the history must be told honestly, because it cuts against the despairing idea that Ethiopians are simply, primordially, at one another's throats. Ethiopia is one of the oldest continuous polities on earth, and Donald Levine's great study showed it to be not a cage of unrelated tribes but a genuinely *multiethnic civilisation*, its Cushitic and Semitic peoples bound over centuries by trade, faith, intermarriage, and a shared political imagination [42]. The centralising emperors—Amde-Tsion the Great, then Zara Yaqob, Gelawdewos, Tewodros II, Menelik, and finally Haile Selassie—forged from that civilisation a modern state, and in doing so created both a nation and the resentments of those subordinated to its Amhara-Christian core [45, 46].

But the decisive fact for the present is more recent and more deliberate. When the TPLF-led EPRDF took power in 1991, it did not find ethnic politics lying about; it *built* them, enshrining in the 1995 constitution a federation of ethnically defined “nations, nationalities and peoples,” each with its own territory and a right of secession, and making ethnicity the official currency of all political life [47, 48, 49]. The scholarship is near-unanimous that this was an architecture, not an inheritance: ethnicity in Ethiopia was *politicised and institutionalised*² by a regime that found the strategy of divide-and-rule congenial [44].

The instrumentalist insight applies in full—ethnic identity here is, in large part, elite work, mobilised from above for the capture of power and rent [50, 51]. This is the most important sentence in the chapter, because it is the hopeful one: *what was engineered can be re-engineered*. A division that was legislated into being can be legislated out of it.

12.3 The Cultural Layer: Wax, Gold, and the Grammar of Mistrust

Structure and history are reinforced by a cultural inheritance that makes the horizontal trust on which a common front depends peculiarly hard to build. Levine's classic account of *säm-enna-wärq*—“wax and gold,” the prized Amharic form in which an innocent surface conceals a hidden meaning—described a wider social grammar of indirection, concealment, and guardedness, a habit of never quite saying what one means [43]. Vaughan and Tronvoll, surveying the culture of power two generations later, found its political descendant intact: a vertical, patron-client order in which loyalty runs upward to a protector

²This is why I characterise Meles as an evil genius: not only did he engineer the cleavage along which Ethiopia could be dismembered, he also—very strangely—sought to lock her in landlocked, stripped of her millennia-old Red Sea sovereignty.

rather than outward to an equal, and in which suspicion of the neighbour is the rational default [44]. A polity schooled to read every overture for its concealed motive, and to trust the patron above the peer, is a polity in which the lateral solidarity required to face down a common ruler is the very thing the culture is least equipped to supply. The arbiter inherits that mistrust; he does not have to manufacture all of it.

12.4 The Political Economy: Elite Bargain or Why Allies Are Enemies

Here is the cruel core, and the answer to the question that most puzzles the honest observer: how can the elites of groups that are supposedly at war with one another all flourish at once? Because, in the political marketplace that Alex de Waal has anatomised across the Horn, the rival ethnic elites are not really each other's enemies—they are each other's *collaborators in a single system*, competitors for shares of the same pool of rent, loyalty, and office, whose quarrels are real at the level of the spoils but whose interest in the *game itself* is identical [52]. The Acemoglu logic completes the picture: the ruler buys off the pivotal elite of each bloc, and the elite, bought, delivers its “constituency” as a mobilised, aggrieved, and conveniently impoverished mass [39]. This is the precise sense in which, as the charge of this article has it, the elites are allies while the people are enemies: the men at the table—Amhara, Oromo, Tigrayan—share the rent and the rules, while the people in whose name they sit are set against one another in the streets and the fields. The fracture is retail; the collusion is wholesale.

The bargain, stated plainly

The genius of the arrangement is that it makes the victims into each other's jailers. An Oromo farmer and an Amhara farmer, each persuaded that the other is the threat, will each look to his own ethnic patron for protection—and each patron, so empowered, takes his seat at the centre's table and his share of the centre's rent. The masses supply the enmity; the elites bank the proceeds; the arbiter keeps the peace he profits from breaking. Every interest the nation needs—unity, a credible bid for the sea, development, the dam—requires the horizontal cooperation this bargain is precisely designed to prevent.

12.5 The First Failure: the Weakness of the Opposition

A structure this exploitable could still be broken by an opposition that offered the country a way to combine. Ethiopia's has not, and the reasons are by now well documented. The opposition is fragmented along the very ethnic lines the constitution drew, so that each party speaks for a group rather than for a programme, and the logic of *ethnic outbidding*—in which the path to a group's leadership runs through being its most militant champion, never its most conciliatory—drives even moderates toward maximalism and away from the centre where a national coalition would have to be built [51]. Observers of Ethiopian politics have noted for two decades that the opposition parties are weak, programmatically thin, and unable to translate episodic popular anger into durable, cross-ethnic organisation [44]. So we can answer the question the patriot keeps asking—is it weakness, or is it a failure of vision?—honestly: it is chiefly the second. The raw material of resistance exists in abundance; what is missing is a unifying *idea* large enough to subsume the ethnic claims without denying them, and a leadership willing to subordinate its group's short game to the nation's long one. Lacking that idea, the majority is not defeated so much as *uncoordinated*—and an uncoordinated majority is the kleptocrat's most reliable asset.

Let me here set down the analyst's third person and speak plainly, in the first, because this is the most personal conviction in the essay and the reader is owed it directly. I have characterised Abiy as a weak ruler who endures by buying off whichever bloc is pivotal, and I hold to every word of it. And yet I still believe he is the least ruinous custodian presently on offer—not because he is equal to the four interests, but because the opposition is weaker still, and weaker in a way that frightens me more than any failing of his. The proof is in the opposition's own public square. Anyone who has taken part in the Ethiopian X-Spaces and diaspora forums, and who has followed the mushrooming YouTube news portals with their degenerate journalists and their half-baked intellectuals, will quickly recognise the narration of hate and division that there passes for political thought. The lead advocates pursue a pernicious ploy, forever

fine-tuning their stance to suit their sponsors; while the majority—for all their eloquence—could only be classed as psychotic, or as severely mentally ill, marked by a persistent detachment from reality. And this holds true on both sides. What is aired there is not the rough, hopeful music of a people arguing its way toward a shared future. It is something stranger and colder: a torrent of ethnic grievance and conspiracy so total, so unleavened by any sign that the speakers imagine they share a country at all, that one strains to find in it the common dreams, the common sorrows and joys, the felt stake in one another's fate that are the very definition of a nation. I do not doubt the people behind the microphones love something; I doubt, listening, that it is yet *Ethiopia*—the whole of it, the neighbour's child as much as one's own. And this is the heart of the opposition's weakness, not a digression from it: an information ecosystem that rewards the outbidder, the conspiracist, and the sponsor's mouthpiece over the coalition-builder cannot incubate a coalition. It is a deeper deficiency than fragmentation or thin programmes; it is the absence of the national sensibility on which any worthy opposition would have to be built.

So let me say the hardest sentence in this essay, and mean it as the others were meant. I have called the constitution stupid; I must now call the opposition, in its present temper, more stupid still—for a foolish constitution can be rewritten in a decade, but a political class that has forgotten how to feel like one people cannot be repaired by any clause. This is not, let it be perfectly clear, a defence of Abiy; it is an indictment of our entire political generation, himself emphatically included. It is also the reason the conclusion this series keeps reaching is never “replace the man” but always “change the architecture.” When the centre exploits the fracture and the opposition merely *embodies* it, swapping one for the other moves nothing; only the four interests, which belong to no faction and to every Ethiopian, and the constitution that would make them the unit of our politics, can give the hostage majority something to be loyal to that is larger than its grievance. The least-bad man is not a substitute for the right foundation. He is only the reason we still have time to lay it.

12.6 The Second Failure: the Self-Defeating Fervour of the Diaspora

And then there is the diaspora, whose role in all this is the most painful to state because it is so often sincerely meant. Terrence Lyons's study of Ethiopia's “conflict-generated diaspora” established the mechanism with uncomfortable clarity: communities formed and sustained by the traumatic memories of the homeland's conflicts tend to hold the *least compromising* positions of anyone, and, insulated from the consequences, to fund, amplify, and validate the hardest line, thereby reinforcing and prolonging the very conflicts they grieve [53]. This is long-distance nationalism in Benedict Anderson's exact sense—a politics of maximal demands made by those who will not personally pay for them [54]. The tragedy writes itself: a diaspora that loves Ethiopia ferociously, and that could be its conscience and its treasury, too often instead becomes a veto player against every compromise, financing the ethnic outbidders, drowning the conciliators, and exporting home an absolutism that the homeland, which must actually live together, cannot afford. To call this merely foolish is too easy and not quite right; it is something sadder—a fervour that, by refusing the half-loaf, hands the whole loaf to the arbiter. The diaspora that wishes to break the divide-and-rule must learn the one discipline the model fears: to reward the coalition-builder and starve the outbidder.

And there is a second failure, stranger than the first: the failure to know its own strength. For the diaspora holds a power it scarcely seems aware of, and it is not moral but financial. Officially recorded remittances from Ethiopians abroad reached some \$5.4–6.3 billion in 2023/24 and are projected toward \$7.1–7.2 billion the following year—roughly *1.6 times* annual foreign direct investment (FDI), of the same order as all official development assistance from every bilateral and multilateral donor combined, and far larger than the contribution of any single donor [60]. And that is only the recorded sum; an unknown but, by many accounts, substantial further volume estimated \$10.3 billion moves through informal *hawala*-type channels, beyond the reach of the balance of payments and of the state. The Ethiopian diaspora is, in plain terms, the single largest and most resilient source of the country's foreign exchange—steadier than FDI, which flees political risk, and more durable than aid, which follows donor moods.

Now set that beside the leverage others wield. The United States and the European Union routinely use their development assistance as an instrument, tightening or loosening the tap to move the government on this policy or that. The diaspora commands a larger and steadier flow than either—and, unlike them, answers to no foreign ministry. A diaspora able to agree on even a single minimal demand—dual citizenship, the entrenchment of individual and democratic rights, the reform of the founding text on the defective constitution—would hold over Addis Ababa a lever no donor can match. But it cannot agree, and that is the whole tragedy restated in the language of money. Its interests are genuinely various, and some of its loudest voices are not the arbiter’s opponents at all but his clients abroad, bound to him by ethnicity or by the contracts and privileges his system dispenses. And so the one instrument that is authentically the diaspora’s own—the power of the purse it holds over a foreign-exchange-starved state—is never picked up. The remittances flow on, unconditioned; the household bills are paid; the regime banks its hard currency; and the leverage dissolves into the infighting of the public square. It is the self-defeating fervour in its purest form: a diaspora that will fund a faction to the last dollar but will not unite for a single right.

12.7 The Way Out: Enmity Against the Architecture, Not Each Other

The same model that explains the trap also names the exit. The kleptocrat’s equilibrium holds only so long as the groups cannot coordinate; it *breaks* the moment they combine on terms no side-payment can buy off [39]. The shared experience of being made hostage—the common enmity that misrule has bred in every community at once—is therefore not only the wound; it is the latent solidarity, the one resource the people have that the elites cannot bank and the arbiter cannot bribe away. But enmity alone disperses; it must be *aimed*. Pointed by each group at the others, it is the fuel of the divide-and-rule. Pointed instead at the architecture of division itself—at the system that makes the farmer fear his neighbour while the patrons split the rent—it becomes the foundation of exactly the trans-ethnic civic unity the four interests require.

The redirection that changes everything

This is the whole argument of the series in one move. The four singular interests are the unifying idea the opposition has lacked and the diaspora has scorned: a civic proposition under which Amhara, Oromo, Tigrayan, Somali, Afar and the rest are *co-owners* of one sovereignty rather than rivals for its fragments. *Unity* and *Red Sea Sovereignty* are foundations precisely because they are the interests no single ethnic group can secure alone and all are diminished by losing—which makes them the natural meeting-ground on which a hostage majority becomes a coordinated one. To stand for the sea, for the dam, for a development that reaches the people and not the patrons, is to stand on the one ground the arbiter cannot mine, because it belongs to no group and to every Ethiopian. Redirect the enmity from each other to the architecture, and the divide-and-rule that looked like an iron law becomes what it always was: a wager that depended on the victims never combining.

There remains one precondition without which the redirection cannot hold, and it is the one this series returns to because the country cannot escape it. You cannot build a civic meeting-ground on a constitution that makes ethnicity the legal unit of the state and writes the right of separation into its first principles. The architecture of division has a keystone, and the keystone is in the founding text.

13 Abiy: the Fork Between Dismemberment and Promise

Before we lay hold of that keystone, fairness demands that a different ledger be opened—the developmental one—because it is on this axis, more than any other, that Abiy’s leadership inside the chaos must finally be weighed, and because the fork it reveals is not only catastrophe. This essay has prosecuted the man at length; it would be dishonest not to credit him at equal length where credit is owed. Ethiopia is not condemned. It is, on the contrary, one of the very few nations on the continent with a proven path to greatness already mapped on its own soil—which is precisely why the squandering of it would be the larger tragedy.

13.1 What He Kept from Meles

Begin with the inheritance, because it is the most important and the least acknowledged. Under Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia became the closest thing Africa has produced to an East Asian developmental state—the case that, in Joe Studwell’s recent survey, comes nearest to completing the entire formula: agriculture first, finance disciplined and directed, industrial policy harnessed to exports, and the state organised around a single national mission rather than around plunder [55]. Meles, an avid student of South Korea and Taiwan, built rural roads and extension services, multiplied smallholder yields, trapped savings behind capital controls to lift investment toward Asian levels, and stood up the industrial parks that gave the textile push its start. Abiy, whatever his departures, kept the most valuable parts of that inheritance at the level of instinct and narration. The agriculture-first reflex is alive in the Green Legacy tree-planting campaign and, more consequentially, in the Wheat for Food Self-Sufficiency programme that earned him the FAO’s Agricola Medal in 2024 [58]; the industrial parks still run; and GERD—the engine of this whole series—was carried to completion on his watch. He did not throw the developmental template away. He inherited a working machine and kept its core turning.

13.2 What He Broke from Meles—for Better, and for Worse

He also broke with Meles, deliberately and on principle, and here the ledger is genuinely double-entry. Where Meles ran a closed, state-commanded economy, Abiy’s Homegrown Economic Reform of 2019–2020 turned the wheel hard toward the private sector: liberalising telecoms, opening banking to foreign entrants, privatising state assets, and—most consequentially—floating the birr under an IMF programme [57]. Against Meles, this had real merit. The TPLF-era model had fused the commanding heights of the economy to a single ethnic establishment, and opening it was, in principle, a blow against the very elite capture this essay has spent pages anatomising. But the same move carried a danger the developmental economists named at once. Studwell’s warning is blunt: a country that opens its finance too early forfeits the very tools—the directed credit, the financial repression—that made the export push plausible in the first place, so that to liberalise prematurely is not a triumph but a hazard [55, 56]. The forex crisis, the inflation, and the sovereign default chronicled earlier are at least partly the bill for reform sequenced by the textbook of the lender rather than the logic of the developmental state. Abiy broke from Meles in the right direction and, quite possibly, at the wrong time.

13.3 What He Brought That Was New

And then there is what is genuinely his own—a turn Meles never attempted. Abiy reimagined Ethiopian statecraft as an exercise in aspiration and image: the corridor-development and beautification projects remaking Addis Ababa, the pivot toward tourism and the modern, admired city, the public embrace of technology and a digital future. Set beside the austere, mission-driven developmentalism of his predecessor, this is a different register entirely—Ethiopia not merely as a factory to be built but as a destination to be shown. The instinct has its critics, and rightly; but it is not empty. The same period has seen real private industry arrive at scale, most strikingly the Dangote fertiliser complex rising at Gode in the Somali region—a project that has grown from a 2.5- to a four-billion-dollar commitment and promises, for the first time, to turn a chronic fertiliser importer into a regional producer and to anchor a genuine agro-industrial base [59]. Where the green legacy, the wheat drive, the fruit and horticulture push, and the private-manufacturing partnerships are concerned, the aspiration is matched by something real in the ground.

13.4 What He Broke, Full Stop

But a ledger is not a brochure, and the debit column is heavy. The single largest entry is, without exaggeration, the biggest development tragedy in a generation: the 2020–2022 war in Tigray, which killed an estimated six hundred thousand people and derailed the very developmental trajectory that

had made Ethiopia the continent's template [55]. To that must be added the slower, quieter damage—the starving of hard manufacturing and infrastructure investment to finance display and beautification; the premature liberalisation that helped tip a fragile external position into default; and the inflation that has made the official boast of a doubled GDP ring hollow in the market and the kitchen, where the collapse of the birr is felt long before any aggregate is [57]. The man who kept the engine turning also drove it into a war that wrecked the gearbox, and then sold the spectacle of the journey as though the wreck had not occurred.

13.5 And Yet—the Detractors Offer No Better

Here, once more, honesty compels the uncomfortable comparison. Weigh Abiy's developmental record, debits and all, against what his detractors propose, and the scale does not tip the way his critics imagine. The TPLF's model was this same developmentalism—captured, for three decades, by a single ethnic establishment, and defended now not as a national programme but as a regional inheritance. The OLF and the OLA offer no developmental programme at all, only a claim of grievance and a theory of who should hold the rent; Fano answers with the mirror image of the same. Not one of them has placed before the country an economic vision larger than its own constituency's share of the spoils. So the verdict of the earlier chapters holds on this axis too: Abiy is a flawed developmentalist presiding over real achievement and real wreckage, and his rivals are not better developmentalists with cleaner hands—they are, for the most part, not developmentalists at all.

13.6 A Necessary Correction: the Means in Aspiration and in Reality

Honesty now requires a correction the attentive reader will already have demanded. Throughout this series I have carried the second layer of the proposition as *broad-based economic development anchored in democracy*; in this very essay I have argued that development does not require democracy at all. Both statements are true, and the contradiction between them dissolves the instant one distinguishes the aspiration from the reality.

“Broad-based economic development anchored in democracy” is the *aspiration*: the mature, settled destination at which prosperity is both wide and accountable. “Broad-based economic development,” full stop, is the *reality*—the road, not the destination—and the road does not run through the ballot box first, nor through any egalitarian abstraction. It runs, as the road of every late developer from Meiji Japan to Park's Korea has run, through the deliberate concentration of capital. The developmental state picks winners and *makes* them: it lets some grow rich enough to build conglomerates of genuine scale, and bends those conglomerates to the national purpose. This is not a regrettable side-effect to be apologised for; it is the mechanism. A poor nation does not break into manufacturing for export, into mechanised agriculture, into advanced technology, on the strength of a thousand scattered workshops. It does so through firms large enough to stand on the world market—and such firms are built, at the outset, by concentrating capital in few hands [37, 55]. “Broad-based” names the fruit that follows—through employment, supplier linkages, and the agricultural foundation beneath—not the initial method, which is frankly, deliberately, unequal.

But here is the razor on which everything turns, and on which the argument of this whole essay finally balances. To make some men rich is *developmental* or *kleptocratic* according to a single test: discipline. The developmental state subsidises its champion against *performance*—export or be cut off, produce or forfeit the privilege; the predatory state rewards *loyalty*, and asks in return only allegiance and a cut of the rent [55, 39]. The same act—the deliberate enrichment of a few—built Korea and looted a dozen kleptocracies, and the difference between the two outcomes was never the concentration itself but whether it was harnessed to production or to plunder. So the indictment of elite capture that fills the earlier chapters is not the opposite of this argument; it is its necessary complement. Ethiopia must concentrate capital *and* discipline it—to the factory and the export berth, not to the patronage list and

the offshore account. That razor's edge, between the East Asian miracle and the African tragedy, is very nearly the whole art of the thing; and it is walked not by elections but by a state competent and honest enough to make its favoured rich men earn their favour.

13.7 The Fork: Dismemberment, or a Promise Without Limit

This is why the assessment must end not in despair but at a genuine fork. Ethiopia possesses what almost no other African state possesses at once: the scale of a nation of more than a hundred and twenty million; a developmental template that has already worked on its own soil; the completed engine of GERD; a young population; and an agricultural and industrial base now drawing serious private capital. Followed as a strategy—Foundations → Means → Engine, the four singular interests held as one indivisible proposition—these assets point toward a promise that is, without hyperbole, close to limitless: the African nation with both the scale and the proof of concept to take a real bite out of the continent's poverty by itself. Abandoned to the monkey-habit of ethnic entrepreneurship, the very same assets become merely the inheritance to be fought over as the state comes apart, and the promise inverts into dismemberment. The fork is not, in the end, between Abiy and his rivals. It is between the four interests pursued as strategy and the fracture indulged as tactic.

Development, democracy, and the one non-negotiable

Let one hard truth be stated without flinching, because the series has earned the right to it. *Economic development does not require democracy*: the East Asian record, and Meles's own, prove that an undemocratic state can grow a poor nation fast. But a *diverse* nation like Ethiopia cannot hold together on growth alone, because growth captured by a group dismembers even as it enriches—as it did under the TPLF, as it threatens to again. What such a nation requires, ahead of elections and ahead of slogans, is the *individual right*—the citizen, equal before the law irrespective of ethnicity, made the unit of the state—placed at the very foundation of a fair union for all. Democracy may be the capstone, and may wait; individual rights are the foundation, and cannot. And between the two runs the means—not an egalitarian slogan but broad-based development reached by *disciplined* concentration, capital gathered in few hands and bent, by the test of export and output, to the nation's production rather than to private rent. That, and not a ballot, is the precondition on which a diverse Ethiopia either becomes the promise or slides toward the fork's darker road—and it is, once again, a matter of the founding text.

14 It Is Still the Constitution, Stupid

And here the science runs into the one wall it cannot route around, the wall this series keeps returning to because the country keeps refusing to face it. You cannot fix the basin around civic unity while operating under a constitution that makes ethnicity, not citizenship, the fundamental unit of the state. The 1995 settlement does not merely *permit* ethnic mobilisation; it *rewards* it, vesting sovereignty in “nations, nationalities and peoples” and writing secession into the founding text. Under those equations, the attractor the system is mathematically drawn toward *is* ethnic entrepreneurship—the very monkey-habit that produces Fano, that sustains the TPLF, that gives the OLA its grammar, and that hands Asmara its proxies. A leader operating inside that constitution who promises civic unity is fighting his own founding parameters, and the parameters win.

This is why “chaotic equilibrium,” applied to the Ethiopia of the present constitution, is not mastery but managed decay. The most gifted operator alive cannot hold a basin of civic unity inside a system whose governing equations select for ethnic fracture; he can only postpone the divergence, season by season, until a shock he did not price—a war, a default, a border incident—pushes a parameter past its threshold. The way to move the walls is not a better mood, a louder slogan, or a more dazzling improvisation. It is to change the equations: to legislate constitutional reform, patiently and generationally, until the citizen and not the group is the unit of the nation. Everything else is decoration on a foundation that is engineered to crack.

The verdict, then. *Can Abiy govern in chaotic equilibrium?* He can *survive* in it—he has, for years—but surviving is not governing, and on present parameters governing in it is impossible, for two reasons that compound. The first is structural: the basin of civic unity he would need to hold is forbidden by the constitution he governs under. The second is the tactic: if the method is in truth divide-and-impoverish ethnic entrepreneurship, then it does not merely fail to deliver the four interests, it negates them by design, and no amount of operator brilliance can make a strategy out of a thing that has no destination but its own continuation. He could begin to govern only by ceasing to “ride” the chaos and beginning to *re-engineer* it—abandoning the tactic, anchoring on the four singular interests, and legislating the constitution that would make a civic basin mathematically possible. Do that, and turbulence becomes survivable, even productive, the way a hurricane is a stable structure while the energy keeps flowing. Refuse it, and the trajectory, sensitive to a shock no palace can foresee, will find the ditch—and the war, the default, and the border will decide between them which shock arrives first.

15 The Answer: Surviving Is Not Governing

I wrote, on the eve of the vote, that Abiy is imperfect as every consequential leader is imperfect, but was at that moment the figure most plausibly able to carry the architecture through—*if* he earned not merely an electoral mandate but the harder thing: the collective consensus of a law-abiding, hard-working citizenry [1]. I stand by the conditional; I must now press its harder half, the half the storm has forced into the light. That endorsement was always contingent on Abiy choosing to be the builder of the four interests and not the entrepreneur of ethnic fracture. If the method is the tactic this article has described—divide, impoverish, and shelter behind the Oromo name while the Oromo countryside bleeds—then the condition fails, and the qualified hope of that earlier essay curdles into its opposite. And yet—I have made the confession already and will not retract it here—the failure of the condition is not a warrant to reach for the opposition, which on the evidence of its own public square is weaker still and has not yet shown that it shares the nation those interests are meant to serve. That is the whole tragedy in a sentence: our choice is between a centre that exploits the fracture and an opposition that merely embodies it, which is exactly why the remedy can never be the exchange of one man for another, but only the laying of a foundation beneath them both. The external weather—a resilient Iran, a re-energised and more risk-acceptant revolutionary Islam, a cracking Washington–Jerusalem axis, a straddling Turkey, a patient Eritrea—is precisely the kind of environment in which a state with an unanchored attractor flies apart and a state with a fixed basin endures. Ethiopia does not get to choose calm seas. It gets to choose whether its foundations are invariant or for sale—and whether its leader governs the nation or merely outlives its factions one manufactured crisis at a time.

So the second mandate is not, in the end, a referendum on whether Abiy can improvise cleverly enough to keep the system from collapsing for another season. He can, for a while; he has. It is a test of whether he will do the one thing improvisation can never substitute for: anchor the nation’s survival to the four interests and legislate the constitution that makes civic unity possible, so that the chaos he rides is bounded by the state’s foundations rather than by his own longevity. That is the difference between mastering chaotic equilibrium and being swallowed by the ditch. And it becomes possible only if Ethiopians supply the one form of support no election provides: the consensus of a people that has decided, at last, to be a nation of builders rather than lamenters; to abandon the monkey-habit of ethnic politics; to demand accountability *and* defend sovereignty, because these have never been in conflict. The alternative is now visible, in real time, a few hundred miles across the Red Sea: a permacrisis—a country that neither breaks nor mends, churning for a generation inside a basin no one chose. That is what an unanchored chaotic equilibrium delivers, whether the operator is a superpower or a Prime Minister. Ethiopia has been offered the recipe. It must choose the other dish.

And it must choose quickly, because the clearest sign that the trajectory is already nearing the wall is not in Tehran or at Hormuz but in Arsi, where churches burn and a Patriarch asks how long it will continue. That is the shock most likely to find the ditch first—and the gravest danger now is twofold: that the state goes on treating a religious massacre as a messaging problem, and that grieving Ethiopians answer the wedge driven through their faith with a counter-wedge of their own. The killers of Arsi want

a religious war; the surest way to deny it to them is to refuse it, and to demand of the government the one thing it owes before any narrative—protection. Abiy may outlast every insurgency on the map and still not outlast the day the Orthodox conclude the state will not shield them. Surviving is not governing; and there are some shocks one does not survive at all.

Stand with Ethiopia

Stand with Ethiopia on unity, because without it there is no attractor to hold. Stand with Ethiopia on Red Sea Sovereignty, because it is the recovery of a right—pursued in peaceful priority, but never in peaceful exclusivity, and never surrendered to the patience of a spoiler or the mood of a patron. Stand with Ethiopia on broad-based prosperity through democracy, the energy that keeps the structure from decaying into disorder. Stand with Ethiopia on GERD, the engine that makes the means reach the people and not only the parks. Stand with the faithful of Arsi, and refuse the wedge the killers would drive between communities that have prayed beside one another for generations—answer the burned church not with a counter-fire but with the demand that the state protect every believer. And stand with Ethiopia on legislating the constitution, patiently and generationally, so the basin is fixed around the citizen and not the group. Do these, and chaotic equilibrium is no longer a gambler's excuse but a sovereign's craft—a turbulent nation held, as the Adwa generation held it, not because the storm was gentle but because the foundations were earned.

References

- [1] Hailu, M. G. (2026). Not Imperial Vision but Sovereign and United Ethiopia. *Ethiopian Tribune*.
- [2] Hailu, M. G. (2026). The Spirit of Adwa Must Carry Ethiopia Through GERD and the Red Sea. *Ethiopian Tribune*.
- [3] Hailu, M. G. (12 April 2026). The Abraham Accords, Part 1/4: Structural Order under NATO Crisis. *Ethiopian Tribune*.
- [4] Hailu, M. G. (19 April 2026). The Abraham Accords, Part 2/4: Competition and Permissive Disorder. *Ethiopian Tribune*.
- [5] Hailu, M. G. (26 April 2026). The Abraham Accords, Part 3/4: Ethiopia's Internal Constraint. *Ethiopian Tribune*.
- [6] Hailu, M. G. (3 May 2026). The Abraham Accords, Part 4/4: Assab, Sovereignty, and the Endgame. *Ethiopian Tribune*.
- [7] Hailu, M. G. (2026). Election 2026: Abiy, the Asian Mirror, and the June Election. *Ethiopian Tribune*.
- [8] Hailu, M. G. (16 May 2026). National Unity and Red Sea Sovereignty: Ethiopia Must Pay the Price Now. *Ethiopian Tribune*.
- [9] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (2026). The 2026 Iran war.
- [10] CNN. (7–9 June 2026). The US–Israel war on Iran: live coverage.
- [11] Reuters, Al Jazeera, CNN and NBC News. (14–15 June 2026). US and Iran reach a deal to end the war; signing set for Geneva, 19 June.
- [12] Bowen, J. (9 June 2026). Trump and Netanyahu wanted to reshape the Middle East — now they risk a permacrisis. BBC News.
- [13] Al Jazeera. (June 2026). War on Iran: live updates.
- [14] Al Jazeera / CNN. (June 2026). Iran ties any ceasefire to the war in Lebanon.
- [15] Al Jazeera. (9 June 2026). Did Netanyahu really defy Trump?
- [16] *The Washington Times*. (8 June 2026). The Iran war tests the Trump–Netanyahu relationship.

- [17] Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv. (12 March 2026). The War Turkey Did Not Want.
- [18] Middle East Institute. (March 2026). Turkey Caught in the Vortex of a Widening Iran War.
- [19] SpecialEurasia. (25 April 2026). Turkey–Israel Strategic Rivalry and the Proposed “Hexagon Alliance.”
- [20] International Crisis Group. (18 February 2026). Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tigray: A Powder Keg in the Horn of Africa. Africa Briefing N°210.
- [21] Atlantic Council, AfricaSource. (May 2026). Ethiopia and Eritrea Are on the Brink of War Again.
- [22] Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2026). BTI 2026 Ethiopia Country Report.
- [23] ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project). (2023–2026). Ethiopia situation updates: the Fano insurgency in the Amhara region.
- [24] Ecofin Agency / Bloomberg. (October 2025). Ethiopia’s 2023 Eurobond default, the continent’s largest at the time.
- [25] *Addis Standard*. (22 December 2025). Five Years in Limbo: Ethiopia’s debt-restructuring stalemate.
- [26] Reuters / CNBC Africa. (30 January 2026). Official creditors reject the draft Eurobond restructuring.
- [27] *The Reporter Ethiopia*. (June 2026). Bondholder committee rejects the latest Eurobond proposal.
- [28] Africa Practice. (3 December 2025). Ethiopia’s 2026 electoral dilemma: debt, devaluation, and the cost of the northern war.
- [29] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. (16 March 2026). Ethiopia: continued abuses after the 2022 cessation-of-hostilities agreement.
- [30] National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and Ethiopian press. (1 June 2026). Polling-day briefing.
- [31] World Council of Churches. (5 June 2026). Ethiopian Patriarch urges end to violence gripping Orthodox Christians in Oromia region.
- [32] Ethiopia Observer. (5 June 2026). Abiy says Arsi attacks were a broader attempt to disrupt the country’s democratic process.
- [33] *Addis Standard*, and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). (March–June 2026). Reporting and documentation of the East Arsi attacks: armed assaults on Orthodox-Christian villages described as systematic and organised; cross-faith condemnation and calls for evidence-based, individualised accountability.
- [34] Lorenz, E. N. (1963). Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow. *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences*, 20(2), 130–141.
- [35] Strogatz, S. H. (2015). *Nonlinear Dynamics and Chaos* (2nd ed.). Westview Press / CRC Press.
- [36] Prigogine, I., & Stengers, I. (1984). *Order out of Chaos: Man’s New Dialogue with Nature*. Bantam Books, New York.
- [37] Amsden, A. H. (1989). *Asia’s Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*. Oxford University Press, New York.

- [38] Vogel, E.F. (2011). *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- [39] Acemoglu, D., Robinson, J.A., & Verdier, T. (2004). Kleptocracy and Divide-and-Rule: A Model of Personal Rule. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 2(2–3), 162–192.
- [40] Olson, M. (1965). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- [41] Olson, M. (1993). Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development. *American Political Science Review*, 87(3), 567–576.
- [42] Levine, D.N. (2000 [1974]). *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- [43] Levine, D.N. (1965). *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- [44] Vaughan, S., & Tronvoll, K. (2003). *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life* (Sida Studies 10). Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm.
- [45] Markakis, J. (2011). *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*. James Currey, Woodbridge.
- [46] Clapham, C. (2017). *The Horn of Africa: State Formation and Decay*. Hurst & Co., London.
- [47] Aalen, L. (2011). *The Politics of Ethnicity in Ethiopia*. Brill, Leiden.
- [48] Abbink, J. (2011). Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia: reassessing the experiment after 20 years. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 5(4), 596–618.
- [49] Asnake Kefale. (2013). *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia: A Comparative Regional Study*. Routledge, London.
- [50] Brass, P.R. (1991). *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*. Sage, New Delhi.
- [51] Horowitz, D.L. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- [52] de Waal, A. (2015). *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- [53] Lyons, T. (2007). Conflict-generated diasporas and transnational politics in Ethiopia. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 7(4), 529–549.
- [54] Anderson, B. (1998). *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*. Verso, London.
- [55] Studwell, J. (2026). *How Africa Works: Success and Failure on the World's Last Developmental Frontier*. Profile Books, London.
- [56] Norbrook, N. (14 April 2026). 'If Ethiopia is genuinely opening up now, that would be a disaster' — Joe Studwell (interview). *The Africa Report*.
- [57] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia & International Monetary Fund. (2019–2025). A Home-grown Economic Reform Agenda: A Pathway to Prosperity; IMF programmes and exchange-rate liberalisation.
- [58] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (January 2024). Agricola Medal conferred on Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed for the Wheat Self-Sufficiency Programme and the Green Legacy Initiative.

- [59] Reuters. (2025–2026). Dangote–Ethiopian Investment Holdings urea fertiliser complex at Gode, Somali Region.
- [60] National Bank of Ethiopia, *Annual Report 2023/24*; and IMF balance-of-payments projections. Officially recorded private remittances ~US\$5.4–6.3 bn (FY 2023/24), projected ~US\$7.1–7.2 bn (FY 2024/25); FDI ~US\$4 bn; ODA ~US\$7.6 bn.