



Abiy's Drones Pouring Hell Over a Divided House

The Constitution Is Guilty of More Murder — Our Unity and Red-Sea Sovereignty

Mefkereseb G. Hailu (PhD)*

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Preamble: From Fighting Over the Country to Building It

Across twelve articles [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12] I have set out one mechanics: Ethiopia's singular interests stand on three layers — the Foundations, the Means and the Engine — and must be pursued in that order. The Foundations are national unity and Red-Sea Sovereignty, the latter a matter of self-defence before it is a matter of economics. The Means are broad-based development preferably anchored in democracy. The Engine is GERD-centred urbanisation and industrialisation, delivering education, water, electricity, healthcare and jobs to a population of which about seven in ten are under thirty. The order matters, because Ethiopia cannot keep spending its intellectual and political energy on who wronged whom while the country itself remains unfinished. Beneath our endless quarrel sits the elephant in the room: the **Constitution**. My last article asked whether Ethiopians can stop fighting over the country long enough to build it together [12]. This one shows what happens when they do not.

A recent Borkena study documents "Aerial Terror" on Ethiopian villages [13]. The strikes are real, and those that killed civilians are criminals — full stop. The record must be completed and carried to the international community, and to the International Criminal Court (ICC) when the road opens, against a government that commands every drone. But the record names the wound, not the disease. My answer rests on two pillars that are drivers for the Foundations - Unity and Red-Sea Sovereignty.

1. There is no unity while a divisive Constitution sits in Arat Kilo Palace. The 1995 **Constitution** makes ethnicity the master key to power, land and security. Individual rights and national unity cannot coexist with it. It has killed more Ethiopians than any drone.

2. Ethiopia's claim to the Red Sea is legitimate, and it is self-defence before it is commerce. The coast was surrendered without the nation's consent, by a faction allied to the beneficiary; Eritrea's independence is not in question, but its title to the whole shore, particularly from Doumeira to Beilul, is; and a small, shrinking Eritrea has already leased that coast to foreign armies. The Ethiopian government must stop the stupid argument of prioritising the latter. I set out the historical and legal case at length in the companion article that follows this one.

One further fact belongs here. Barely three in five Ethiopian adults can read [36], and more than four million children in one region alone are out of school [27]; international research finds lower cognitive attainment modestly associated with authoritarian and ethnocentric attitudes [37]. Ethnic politics spreads fastest where schooling is thinnest — the condition on which the monkey habit of ethnic entrepreneurship feeds.

The disease is kept alive by a racket of four estates — the political cadre, the economic oligarch, the religious authority and the intellectual. The government bears the heaviest guilt: it holds the monopoly of force, fails to protect its citizens, and turns its drones on them. The intellectuals are its most eloquent accomplices. Neither this government nor any ethnic party can lead the way out. It begins by **replacing** the **ethnic-based Constitution** with a **citizens' Constitution**. When individual rights have primacy, nothing is conditional. Freedom follows.

As I write, the war has returned: seven armed movements allied on 20 September, the northern offensive of 23 September, Mekelle falling to federal columns, drones now flying for both sides as far as Addis Ababa, and relations ruptured with Asmara and Cairo [31, 40, 42]. All of it is symptom. Abiy Ahmed is symptom too, a man the **Constitution** enabled; Meles Zenawi differed in degree, not in kind; the next such ruler may rise from Amhara or the Somali region.

What follows in this article: First, the war that returned in September 2026 and what a victory at Mekelle does and does not settle. Second, the drone record turned into a case file, and the forums that could hear it — now covering both sides' strikes. Third, who gains from this war and who pays for it. Fourth, the racket's four estates and the intellectual silence that shields the constitution. Fifth, the citizens' **Constitution**, the new Alliance for Survival measured against it, and the strongest objections to this article, answered. The ideology behind this government, and the island of enemies it has built around Ethiopia, are the subject of the companion article; the whole argument of the series is drawn together in the one after that.

*The author, aka MGH, is a global technical expert trained at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. The views expressed are his own and do not represent any institutional position. The article is written in L^AT_EX, and the source can be provided to editors. MGH can be reached via: mefkereseb.hailu1990@gmail.com



1 A Criminal Record, and the Diagnosis Behind It

The question I keep returning to is no longer who is right or who wronged whom. It is how Ethiopia moves from perpetual contestation to construction. Every article this year has come back to the same obstacle: a nation that argues without end about its past, inside a constitutional order designed to keep that argument alive, while the country it argues about waits, unbuilt.

Yihenew Ewnetu's study is a serious contribution to that argument, and I welcome it [13]. It gathers in one place what the government would rather scatter: strikes on markets, schools, clinics and churches; the suppliers in Ankara, Beijing, Tehran, Moscow and Abu Dhabi; the foreign technicians; the cost. The strikes it describes are real. Those that deliberately or recklessly killed civilians are crimes. And the chain of command that ordered them runs to one office: the Prime Minister, who is commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

The study is therefore more than a lament. It is the beginning of a criminal record. My purpose in this article is to help turn that record into a case file that will stand before the international community and, if the road can be opened, before the International Criminal Court. That requires two things the study does not yet provide. The first is evidential discipline: every figure reconciled, every source traceable, every legal term used in its legal sense. The second is diagnosis. The study documents what the drones do. It does not ask why a state turns its air force on its own villages. The answer is the **Constitution**, and that is the second half of this article.

Events have since overtaken the study. On 20 September 2026 seven armed movements announced an alliance to overthrow the government [31]; three days later the north was at war again; and as I write, Tigrayan forces are abandoning Mekelle while federal columns close on it [40]. Ethiopia is no longer arguing about the last drone war. It is fighting the next one, and this time the drones fly in both directions. I return to the alliance later, because it poses the same question in another form: what happens the morning after, if it achieves its stated aim of toppling Abiy's government?

When Abiy was inaugurated as Prime Minister in 2018 and made a sweet speech, almost all Ethiopians erupted in celebration, assuming that he would usher in a new era of unity and freedom. No one expected that he would bring a government worse than the EPRDF. That is the mistake. That is the misguidedness — because Abiy was a spy master of the EPRDF, and to expect anything different from him was nothing but expecting to hatch doves out of a serpent's eggs. There is no denying that Abiy has done some evil and some good things; all governments do, to their people and for their people. Now, I again warn that whoever supports these seven allied opposition forces must think twice that they will not be worse than Abiy's government, and that they will not repeat the Somalia experience in Ethiopia. Think again.

As always, I argue that Ethiopia has, if it must fight using weapons, only one fight — a fight for Red-Sea sovereignty. Therefore, the killing among ourselves must stop, and it must stop by peaceful means. Ethiopians have no cause worth fighting one another for; every war among us is a war the nation loses. The instruments against this government's crimes are evidence, law, exposure and a new constitution — not another armed faction, and not a foreign embargo that would disarm the nation rather than the men who misuse its weapons. Indeed, Abiy and his government have demonstrated a streak of violence since he took power: assassinations — of activists, military commanders, political rivals and civil servants — for which no independent inquiry has ever been allowed; war, with the Oromo Liberation Front since 2018, with the Tigray People's Liberation Front since 2020, and with Amhara Fano since 2023; and, most disturbing of all, orchestrated attacks and massacres against the historical residents of Amhara and Somali communities in Oromia, or at the least a failure to protect and safeguard those communities from massacre and displacement [25].

2 The War That Returned, and What It Settles

On 23 September 2026 Addis Ababa accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front of launching an all-out offensive into Amhara and Afar; Tigray's authorities answered that they had entered a defensive battle



after federal aircraft, drones and artillery struck them first [44, 40]. Both accounts are on the record; neither has been independently established. What is established is the sequence that followed.

Federal forces and the allied Tigray Peace Forces militia retook Alamata, Korem and Erebt [44], then the Alula Aba Nega airport outside Mekelle, and by 3 October TPLF fighters and leaders were leaving the regional capital, with government offices and police stations emptied of security personnel and residents fearing looting [40]. Debretsion Gebremichael signalled a return to guerrilla war, as in 2020 [40]. A drone strike hit the Tigray television building [41]. The offensive opened on 23 September with rebel seizures of three airfields; the main one, Alula Aba Nega outside Mekelle, was back in federal hands by 3 October, and residents reported looting of government property and the collapse of policing in the city [48]. Fighting has run simultaneously across Tigray, Amhara and Afar: the army reports some 270 Tigrayan fighters killed around North Wollo, and the Afar front threatens the Djibouti corridor through which most Ethiopian imports, fuel included, arrive [48]. On 1 October an explosion struck the Ministry of Defence in Addis Ababa — the first time this war has reached the capital [48]. At least fifty-two civilians have been killed; Médecins Sans Frontières reports a surge of wounded; and Amnesty International has recorded credible reports of the destruction of civilian objects by shelling and air strikes, of intensified forced conscription, and of other acts that may constitute violations of international humanitarian and human-rights law, calling on the African Union's Peace and Security Council to convene an emergency session before mass atrocities unfold [48, 49]. The Pretoria Agreement of November 2022, of which the African Union was a guarantor, is now shattered [48].

Three features of this war are new, and each matters for the argument of this article.

First, the drone monopoly is gone. For five years only the federal army flew armed drones. Now the conflict monitor ACLED reports drones linked to the anti-government alliance striking army and civilian airports in Oromia and Amhara, and the Critical Threats Project describes a rebel drone campaign across the country, including Addis Ababa [41]. Explosions were heard near the defence headquarters in the capital, and the intelligence service banned all drone flights around Addis Ababa [42, 45]. What the state normalised against its own villages has been learned by its enemies, exactly as the arithmetic of the swarm predicts. Every argument in this article about accountability therefore now applies in both directions: a drone over a market is a crime whoever launches it, and the case file must record the alliance's strikes as scrupulously as the government's.

Second, the internal war became an interstate crisis within days. On 1 October Ethiopia expelled ten Eritrean diplomats and closed its embassy in Asmara; Eritrea severed relations in return [42]. Ethiopia then declared an Egyptian diplomat persona non grata and Cairo reciprocated [43]. Field Marshal Birhanu Julia accused Eritrea, Egypt and Sudan of backing the rebels; all three denied it [44]. In a single week a quarrel among Ethiopians became a rupture with three neighbours. That is what a divided house buys.

Third, the political theatre continues regardless. The Prime Minister, silent through the crisis, was due to be sworn in for a new term after the June elections [42]. A government takes its oath while its second city changes hands.

2.1 What a victory at Mekelle settles

If federal forces hold Mekelle it will be presented as the end of the rebellion and a blow to the month-old alliance [40]. Remember what the same victory bought in November 2020: the city fell, the war was declared over, and within eight months the same force had retaken it and marched to within 200 kilometres of the capital [14]. Cities change hands; the quarrel does not. A state can win every battle inside its own borders and still lose the country, because the thing being fought over — who owns which land, in the name of which group — is written into the rule-book and cannot be captured by any army.

That is the argument of this article in one week's news. The drones are a symptom. The alliance is a symptom. Mekelle changing hands for the third time in six years is a symptom. The disease is a constitution that makes ethnicity the title to power, land and security, and so guarantees that every grievance becomes a war and every war becomes a regional crisis.



3 From Study to Case File

A dossier bound for prosecutors, UN bodies or foreign governments will be read by people paid to find its weaknesses, and the government's first defence will be to discredit the documentation. I therefore hold every claim in this article to one rule: it must rest on a named source any reader can check — a UN agency, an international human-rights organisation, a conflict monitor, a wire service, or the government's own budget. Where a claim rests on a regional authority or a single outlet, I say so; where something is my judgement, I say that too; where the facts are unknown, I leave the gap rather than fill it. What follows is offered in that spirit, not as criticism of the author but as the work any case file must go through before it is filed.

3.1 What is already established

The core of the study is corroborated. Drones turned back the Tigrayan advance of 2021, when rebels came within about 200 kilometres of the capital, and they have not ended the Amhara and Oromia wars [14, 16]. ACLED recorded 102 federal drone strikes in Amhara between April 2023 and September 2026, and at least fourteen in Tigray in 2026, seven of them in August; until that month only the federal army operated armed drones, so responsibility for every strike in this record runs through a single chain of command [14]. The supplying states attach no human-rights conditions [16]. Human Rights Watch records further strikes in 2025: in early February one in North Shewa killed a pregnant woman, her six-year-old daughter and a young man, and on 20 February one in East Gojjam killed sixteen people, including children [25].

The same report is clear that the government is not the only party committing abuses: Fano forces abducted and threatened teachers to keep schools closed, and gunmen killed teachers in Merawi [25]. A case file that hides this will be dismissed as partisan; one that records it is harder to answer, and it does not dilute the government's responsibility, because only the government commands the air force and only the government is sworn to protect every citizen.

3.2 Anchoring the sources and the figures

Three expert assessments cited in the study — from Pieter Wezeman of SIPRI, Jeremy Binnie of Janes and Wim Zwijnenburg of PAX — appear, as far as I can trace, in one AFP wire story of 8 September 2026 [14], not in the paginated reports to which they are attributed. The ECFR brief the study relies on was written by Zecharias Zelalem and published in February 2025 [16], not in 2026. Figures credited to the IMF and the ITU need their true sources, because those bodies publish neither military budgets nor antenna deployments. And the Prime Minister's words should be taken from the public record, of which there is no shortage: in July 2021 he told Parliament, on camera, that he could raise a hundred thousand special forces in weeks, half a million militiamen in months and a million youths [19].

The internal figures need the same discipline. The headline total of USD 815 million has no derivation; the study concedes it rests on generic baseline estimates. A regional hospital is priced at USD 15 million where it is equated to one Bayraktar TB2, yet the same total spread over thirty hospitals implies USD 27.2million each. The TB2 appears at USD 5 million in a table and USD 15 million in the text, with no distinction between airframe and full system. And the example of a six-to-eight-hour TB2 sortie to Mekelle launched from Asosa spans 659kilometres in a straight line, well beyond the line-of-sight data link commonly quoted for that aircraft. None of this weakens the finding that civilians were killed. All of it invites the government to change the subject.

The record itself should also be extended. The study omits Ethiopia's purchase of Turkey's top-end Akinci [14] and the reported acquisition of Chinese CH-7 drones [20]; its strike table ends in February 2025 and so misses Gedeb on 17 April 2025, where residents told AFP that at least fifty, and by one account more than a hundred, were killed while the authorities released no information [18], as well as the 2026 strikes on the Abbay Giyorgis monastery and on Hintalo, where a two-year-old died [15].



3.3 Using the language of the law

A case file must speak the language of the court it addresses. The strongest charges available on the public record are war crimes — intentionally directing attacks against civilians, or attacks that fail the tests of distinction, proportionality and precaution — and, where the attacks are widespread or systematic and follow a policy, crimes against humanity; the UN commission of experts on Ethiopia documented both in the northern war [38]. Genocide requires proof of intent to destroy a group as such, and the word used without that proof invites dismissal of everything else. Theories of trauma and claims about telecom targeting are context, not evidence, until the technical material exists.

In short, whoever prepares the dossier has six tasks: re-anchor the expert quotations to the wire story that carries them; replace the attributions to the IMF and the ITU with their true sources; use the Prime Minister's words from the public record; show the derivation of the cost estimates or present them as a range; add the strikes and aircraft the study omits; and state the charges in the terms the law recognises. Two further points belong in the dossier's opening pages: that only federal forces fly armed drones, so responsibility runs through one chain of command; and that the remedy sought is the accountability of individuals, not an embargo on the nation.

4 Who Benefits, Who Pays

Cui bono? The question I asked of the ethnic order in August must now be asked of the drone war [11].

The benefits are narrow. The governing party and its command gained survival in 2021 and, since then, the ability to wage internal war without mass conscription and without battlefield witnesses [14]. Foreign suppliers gained sales and influence: SIPRI's yearbook cites investigations into Iranian-made drones in Ethiopia and into Emirati drones reportedly flown from an Eritrean base [26]. The domestic plants gained budget and prestige, though analysts judge much of their content imported [14].

The costs are national, and they have accumulated across three wars rather than one. In Oromia the fighting has run since 2018 and has never stopped; in Tigray it ran from 2020 to 2022, resumed on 23 September 2026, and has now cost the region its capital twice over; in Amhara it began in 2023 and continues, with whole districts administered by neither side. Civilians have died in markets, homes, camps, a monastery and a primary school in all three [25, 18, 15].

The tolls must be attributed to the right war, because the government's defence feeds on confusion between them. The destruction of 967 health facilities and the demand for USD 10 billion in recovery funding are figures from the *Amhara* regional health bureau and regional officials, for the war that began in 2023 — not from Tigray's war of 2020–22, whose own reconstruction bill has never been independently assessed [28]. The more than four million children out of school and the four thousand closed schools are also Amhara's, counted by UN agencies [27]. Oromia's seven years of counter-insurgency have produced no comparable public accounting at all, which is itself a finding: the longest of the three wars is the least documented, and any serious case file must begin by closing that gap. In the 2025/26 federal budget about thirty per cent goes to servicing foreign debt and about six per cent to defence, against 7.2 per cent to education and 3.8 per cent to health [29], while the birr fell from about 57 to about 137 to the dollar between June 2024 and June 2025, so that every imported drone competes with fuel, fertiliser and medicine for the dollars that remain [30]. And the army that should be watching the frontiers and the coast is tied down in Gojjam, Wollega and Tigray — that last judgement is mine, and it is the subject of the next article in this series [46].

Three gaps must be stated honestly. The price Ethiopia has paid for its drones is not public — procurement is secret and the declared defence line excludes off-budget war spending — and I will neither invent a figure nor repeat one drawn from classified material; the budget shares above cover declared spending only; and the frequent allegation that loyal cadres, some of them abroad, have been rewarded with land, apartments or contracts is one I cannot verify and do not rely on.



A word about my own position, since it will be raised. I am an investor — under direct diaspora investment (DDI) in Ethiopia as well as a writer about it. I have yet to make a profit, and as DDI, I came with less stringent exist strategy to take a profit out of the country. Indeed, I went in with a commercial objective, because Ethiopia offers better opportunity than almost anywhere else and carries a far greater risk to match it; and what I have seen there is chronic corruption and a wholesale venality dressed in the language of prosperity. Some will say that a man who condemns both the government and the opposition while doing business under one of them has no standing. My answer is that the standing comes from the record cited here, not from me — and that the gap I am trying to close is the one between the parallel universes in which the ruling party’s entrepreneurs and the opposition’s entrepreneurs each live. Neither challenges the **Constitution**. That is the whole difference between them and this argument: I want their rule-book destroyed. The beauty contest among ethnic entrepreneurs is not honour among thieves; it is a competition for the same licence. Citizenship-based politics would let Ethiopians stand on their own two feet instead.

What the verified record shows is enough. The benefits of this war are concentrated in a governing party, its command and a set of foreign suppliers; its costs fall on millions who never chose it — the dead, the children without schools, the sick without clinics, and every citizen whose currency buys less while the country’s dollars buy munitions. That is the signature of a racket, not of national defence.

5 The Road to Accountability

The victims deserve more than a record. They deserve a forum. The obstacles are real, and it is better to face them honestly than to promise what cannot be delivered.

5.1 The legal ground, and the obstacle

Ethiopia’s wars in Tigray, Amhara and Oromia are non-international armed conflicts, and the laws of war apply to them in full. Under the Rome Statute, intentionally directing attacks against a civilian population in such a conflict is a war crime (Article 8), and a widespread or systematic attack on civilians pursuant to a state policy is a crime against humanity (Article 7); commanders are responsible for crimes by forces under their effective control that they knew of and failed to prevent or punish (Article 28); and official capacity, including that of a head of government, is no shield (Article 27) [58]. That is the frame in which the Prime Minister, as commander-in-chief, would be held to account and the evidence tested.

The obstacle is jurisdiction. Ethiopia is not a party to the Statute, so the Court can act only on a referral by the UN Security Council — where permanent members that supply Ethiopia’s drones hold a veto — or on a declaration by an Ethiopian government accepting its jurisdiction, which will not come from the government under suspicion [58]. It could come from a successor government committed to a citizens’ **Constitution**. Accountability and constitutional renewal are therefore the same project.

5.2 What can be done now

The absence of a quick route to The Hague is no reason for silence. The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights has already opened an inquiry into the northern war; the UN Human Rights Council’s commission of experts, created in 2021 and not renewed in 2023 [38], should be restored and extended to Amhara and Oromia; several European states exercise universal jurisdiction over war crimes; and governments can impose targeted sanctions on individuals in the chain of command without touching the nation’s defence. Meanwhile every strike should be documented to a common standard — date, place, victims, witnesses, imagery, munition fragments — and preserved, because the evidence gathered today is the prosecution of tomorrow.

The principle. Accountability must fall on persons, not on the nation. An embargo punishes Ethiopia; a prosecution punishes those who misused Ethiopia’s weapons against Ethiopians. Expose the record to the world, preserve the evidence, press every forum that can hear it, and write a constitution under which no Ethiopian government can do this again.



6 The Racket's Four Estates

In *Cui Bono?* I named the machine that profits from our division: a racket run by ethnic entrepreneurs with four estates [11]. None should be spared; each draws its rent from the **Constitution** and keeps it alive.

6.1 The political cadre — and above all, the government

The heaviest guilt lies with the state, because it alone holds the monopoly of force and the duty that comes with it: to protect every citizen, without asking his ethnicity. This government has failed that duty twice over. It has failed to protect: villagers massacred by armed groups have too often waited in vain for a state that came late or not at all. And it has done worse than fail. It has been trigger-happy — at war in Tigray, then in Amhara, then in Oromia, almost without pause [12] — and it has turned its drones on the very people it exists to defend.

The record, drawn from international reporting, speaks for itself: more than fifty killed in a strike on a camp for displaced people in Tigray in January 2022, according to aid workers [17]; an ambulance struck near Wegel Tena in December 2023, a doctor and a driver among the dead [22]; at least fifty, and by one account more than a hundred, killed at Gedeb in April 2025 with no official information released [18]; two civilians killed near the Abbay Giyorgis monastery in July 2026 and three, including a two-year-old, at Hintalo in September 2026 [15]. A state that kills those it is sworn to protect, and then refuses to account for it, has abandoned the first reason for its existence.

Around the government stands the wider cadre — the regional officials, party functionaries and militia commanders of every region — who owe their offices to the ethnic map and defend it as they would defend their salaries.

6.2 The oligarch, the pulpit and the pen

The oligarch profits from proximity: credit, foreign exchange, land and contracts flow to those close to the party of the day and the region of the day [11], and war is good business, since procurement, fuel, transport and reconstruction all pass through hands that prefer a permanent emergency to a transparent market. Impartial rules would end his advantage, so he has no interest in a citizens' **Constitution**.

The churches and mosques of Ethiopia have been among its oldest bonds, yet too many of their leaders have let them mirror the ethnic map — blessing their own people's cause, keeping silent when another people is killed, and, in the Orthodox Church's crisis of 2023, watching an attempt to split the synod along regional lines (public record). A pulpit that preaches only to its own tribe has joined the racket.

The fourth estate is the subject of the next section, because it is the case in point. The cadre holds the guns, the oligarch the money, the cleric the pulpit; the intellectual supplies the arguments that make all three look respectable.

7 The Intellectual Estate: Silence on the Constitution

The final item in the register — naming the root cause — matters more than all the others together. Even this valuable study stops at the wound and does not examine the constitution. That silence is not unusual. It is typical of our educated class, and that typicality is the charge I bring against it.

The 1995 **Constitution** vests sovereignty not in the citizen but in “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples” [59]. Article 8 makes the group sovereign. Article 46 draws regional borders by settlement pattern, language and identity. Article 39 grants every such group an unconditional right to secede. Article 49 gives one region a “special interest” in the capital. The **Constitution** does not merely tolerate ethnic politics. It constitutes them. It makes ethnicity the key to land, office, budget and security, and so guarantees a permanent contest over ethnicity. I have called this order a racket, run by ethnic entrepreneurs for the elite of four estates: the political cadre, the economic oligarch, the religious authority and the intellectual [11, 12].



Now watch the intellectuals at work. When a territorial quarrel erupts between two regions, each side's scholars reach for the **Constitution's** own procedures and argue which group the land belongs to. When a zone seeks statehood, its advocates invoke the **Constitution's** provisions for new regions, as Sidama did through its 2019 referendum, and others have demanded since. When the capital is contested, one side cites the "special interest" clause and the other cites history. When a people is massacred, its intellectuals demand justice for that people — and, in the same breath, demand more autonomy under the very **Constitution** that made the massacre thinkable. Every one of these arguments is made inside the ring. Not one asks why the ring exists.

This is the stupidity I will not soften. An intellectual who builds a political case on a foundation designed to divide is not a critic of division; he is its engineer, however learned, eloquent and sincere. In my last article I showed two able essayists spending thousands of words on whether one armed ethnic movement should ally with another, without a line on how the killing stops [12]. Julien Benda called this the treason of the clerks: the thinker who lends his gift to the passions of his tribe rather than to the truth [24].

The hypocrisy is sharpest among those who write about atrocities. They are outraged by the drone over the market, the militia at the church, the massacre on the road — rightly — yet they turn their eyes from the order that manufactures all three, treating inhumanity as the problem and the constitution as the neutral stage on which it happens. It is mourning the victims of a poisoned well while defending the man who poisons it, because he holds the deed to the land. And they are hermitised: each withdraws into his own ethnic cell and speaks only for its dead, each accusing the others of the bias he practises. None speaks for the citizen, because the **Constitution** recognises no such person as sovereign. The racket needs exactly this — clever men quarrelling horizontally, so that no one looks up at the machine that farms them all.

7.1 The five disguises of complicity

The complicity wears several costumes, and each looks respectable. The *chronicler of atrocity* counts his own people's dead with precision and treats each massacre as a moral event rather than a structural product. The *ethnic historian* mines the past to prove first ownership, and so supplies the raw material for a **Constitution** that allots land by identity. The *constitutional litigator* argues skilfully inside the 1995 rules about which group holds which zone, and every victory he wins confirms that ethnicity is the currency of power. The *diaspora patron* condemns the drone on Monday and wires money to his region's militia on Friday; he is the demand side of the racket [11]. The *court scholar* explains why the latest war was necessary and the latest strike regrettable, and never asks why the palace needs so many wars. Five costumes, one function: to keep every argument inside the ring and every eye away from the rule-book that draws it.

What honest scholarship owes the nation is the opposite. Document every civilian death, by every party, across ethnic lines, so that the record cannot be dismissed as partisan. Refuse money and platforms to anyone who organises by ethnicity. Convene lawyers, scholars, clergy and elders from every region to draft the principles of a citizens' **Constitution** before the next crisis rather than after it. Argue the case for the sea in the language of law and survival, never of conquest. Put diaspora skill and capital into production powered by the GERD rather than into factions [12]. And, above all, name the disease: a pen that condemns the drone and spares the **Constitution** wins the argument and loses the country.

There is a further point the opposition will not like. Abiy Ahmed is not an aberration; he is what this **Constitution** produces. Meles Zenawi governed under the same rule-book and differed in degree and in competence, not in kind: the same ethnic allocation of power, the same party-state, the same wars when a region stepped out of line. If the **Constitution** stands, the next Abiy will come — and he may come from Amhara, or from the Somali region, or from anywhere else. A system that hands the state to whichever group captures it is not reformed by changing the captor. To fight the man while protecting the rule-book is to fight the symptom and feed the disease.

It follows that the first pillar of this article is not rhetoric. It is a logical necessity.



Pillar 1. There can be no unity under the Arat Kilo Constitution. A document that makes the group sovereign cannot produce a nation of equal citizens. A document that grants every group a right to leave cannot bind them to stay. A document that awards land by ethnicity guarantees war over ethnicity. Unity and individual rights cannot coexist with it. They can only replace it.

8 Banks, Tanks and Now Drones: How Impunity Works

Since 2018 the federal centre has gathered three instruments. The *banks*: credit, foreign exchange and a sovereign holding company that answer to proximity rather than to performance [11]. The *tanks*: an army that absorbed the regional special forces in 2023 and then fought the region that objected [22]. And now the *drones*: a weapon that needs no conscript's consent and leaves no battlefield witness.

The governing party's political core was forged in the OPDO, the Oromo wing of the old ruling coalition, before it became the Prosperity Party; what its ideology amounts to, and whether *Medemer* is a civic philosophy or a screen for Oromummaa ascendancy, I examine at length in the next article of this series [46]. Here one sentence is enough, and the rest must be said just as plainly. The Oromo farmer in Wollega is struck by the same drones as the Amhara farmer in Gojjam and the Tigrayan child in Hintalo [15, 16]. The impunity belongs to a party-state, not to a people. To turn it into an ethnic indictment is to rebuild the machine one claims to condemn.

Why does the party-state enjoy impunity? Because the **Constitution** gives the citizen no sovereign standing. A villager killed by a drone is not a sovereign whose rights were violated. He is a fraction of a group, and his group's elite bargains over him — for him or against him. The drone completes from the air what the **Constitution** began on paper.

The government's own language shows the pattern. At the SkyWin inauguration in March 2025 the Prime Minister said the plant aimed at deterrence, not conflict [14]. Touring AeroAbay that September, he boasted that Ethiopia had moved from buying drones to making them, including suicide drones [21]. The army chief had earlier insisted that the air force does not target civilians [16]; the Gedeb strike, on which the authorities released no information, followed [18]. The language is that of national defence. The use is internal war. The result is that a just national cause is heard, at home and abroad, as a regime's diversion.

9 Precision, Swarms and the End of Safe Headquarters

Firepower is no longer counted in divisions; it is counted in precision and disruption. There is no rear area left: depots, command posts, dams and leaders are all reachable. A cheap drone forces the defender to spend far more to stop it; massed low-cost airframes saturate point defences that once held by density alone; fibre-optic control already defeats jamming [14]; commercial kits put these tools within reach of proxies; and remote killing lowers the political threshold for using force at all [16]. Two lessons follow. A headquarters once thought untouchable is now a target like any other, and only the cohesion of the society around it protects it. And what the federal army does today, a proxy funded from across a border can attempt tomorrow. That is why the army chief's boast — that 130 million Ethiopians today and 200 million tomorrow will not let “2 million people” decide their fate [23] — is obsolete arithmetic. A nation of 130 million at war with itself is not 130 million; it is a set of targets.

This is not an abstraction, and this month supplies the proof. The Tigrayan offensive into Afar threatened the corridor from Djibouti through which most Ethiopian imports, including fuel, pass [48]; an explosion was reported at the Ministry of Defence in Addis Ababa, the first spillover of this war into the capital [48]; and Eritrea, which holds the coast nearest to that corridor, severed relations and stands accused of arming the rebels [42, 44]. A landlocked state whose single lifeline can be cut by an internal insurgency, and whose nearest alternative shore is leased to foreign armies, is not secure in any sense of the word. That is why the second Foundation — sovereign access to the sea — is a matter of self-defence rather than of trade, and why the companion article to this one takes up the coast, its history and the isolation this government has built around it [46].



10 The Citizens' Constitution

Unity will not come from a drone, from a dialogue that rearranges the ethnic settlement, or from a new strongman. It will come from a new foundation.

A citizens' **Constitution** would make the individual Ethiopian, equally and individually, the sovereign. It would draw regional boundaries on administrative, economic and geographic grounds, so that no region is owned by a group. It would replace the secession clause with an indivisible union and strong local self-government. It would make the capital a city of its residents and the seat of all Ethiopians and of the African Union. It would require parties to organise across regions, and public service to reward merit over label. It would place one national army under civilian, parliamentary and judicial control — including every drone strike. And it would open the courts to every citizen who loses a child to a strike, whoever ordered it.

Those last provisions answer the victims' grievance at its root. A drone that must be justified to a parliament elected by citizens, reviewed by courts that serve citizens, and investigated when citizens die, is a weapon of defence. That discipline cannot be imported from Ankara or Brussels. It can only be written in Addis Ababa, by Ethiopians, for Ethiopians, as individuals.

Each community gains more from this than from any militia: the Amhara, equal standing wherever they live; the Oromo, courts that restrain insurgent and drone alike and a national stake in the capital and the coast; Tigrayans, an exit from the cycle in which their fate is bargained by others; the Afar, gatekeepers of Ethiopia's return to the sea rather than a buffer between armies; and every smaller people, rights that belong to them as persons, which no majority and no cadre can vote away. Culture and language lose nothing: they are protected as individual rights and through local government. What is lost is the ethnic entrepreneur's licence to own land, office and fear in the name of a people — which is why he resists it, and why his intellectuals will argue, at length and with footnotes, that it cannot be done.

11 The Alliance for Survival, and the Morning After

On 20 September 2026, five days after the drone study appeared, seven armed and opposition organisations announced the Ethiopian Peoples' Forces Alliance for Survival. They include the Amhara Fano National Movement, the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Army, together with movements from the Somali, Afar, Benishangul and Gumuz regions. The statement, read by the Fano leader who chairs the alliance, declared the historic responsibility of overthrowing the government and replacing it with an inclusive transitional government under a transitional charter [31, 32]. The published text also commits the signatories to an inclusive constitutional dialogue and to resolving their own differences peacefully [33].

Yonas Biru has written the most searching early assessment of this alliance, and his argument deserves to be engaged rather than applauded or dismissed [34]. I summarise it, then say where I agree and where I think it stops short.

11.1 What the assessment establishes

His central observation is that the communiqué is clear about what the alliance opposes and almost silent on what it proposes, and a coalition built on a shared enemy is not a blueprint for government. Two warnings follow from recent history. In Sudan, a broad front removed a dictator in 2019, the military seized power in 2021, and by 2023 rival armed forces had plunged the country into catastrophe. In Afghanistan, an agreement struck with armed men over the head of the sitting government delivered the country to those armed men. Removing a common adversary does not remove the contest for power; without rules agreed in advance, the transition itself becomes the next battlefield.

He then identifies two landmines. The first is self-determination: the OLA's position on Oromo self-rule, including secession, against Fano's insistence on territorial integrity, with the TPLF defending the order that made the quarrel possible — three partners, three incompatible visions of the state. The second



is contested land, above all Welkait and Raya, where both sides hold maximalist positions; for these he proposes an interim neutral administration under monitoring, with returns, shared revenues and final status settled later by referendum or arbitration, on the Brčko and Saar precedents. He adds two blind spots: an insular posture towards outside powers in a corridor where none can be ignored, and no stated condition for negotiation, which leaves foreign governments no option but to back the recognised state. His remedy is a binding transitional charter, published for public scrutiny, answering five questions: the shape of the federation; the mechanism for territorial disputes and returns; the position on secession; the sharing of power and the integration of armed forces; and the terms on which the alliance would talk. All of that is right, and it is more than the alliance has offered. His practical conclusion deserves underlining: these questions must be settled *before* a military outcome, because once a transitional government is installed, bargaining power belongs to whoever holds the gun.

11.2 Where the assessment stops short

Where I part company is on the destination. The middle ground he proposes — the OLA setting aside secession in exchange for guaranteed self-rule inside a reformed multinational federation, broadly the direction of the national dialogue’s reported recommendations — treats the 1995 architecture as a structure to be repaired. It is not. It is the disease in remission.

Strike the words “up to secession” from Article 39 and the group is still sovereign under Article 8. Keep boundaries drawn by identity under Article 46 and Welkait, Raya and a dozen other districts remain prizes to be won by whoever is armed in the decade ahead. Keep the capital’s “special interest” clause and Addis Ababa remains a trophy. Every landmine the assessment identifies is laid by the **Constitution**, and every one of them will be re-laid by a **Constitution** that keeps the group as the unit of sovereignty. A reformed ethnic federation would buy a decade. A citizens’ **Constitution** would end the quarrel that makes the decade necessary.

The interim administration proposed for Welkait is the clearest case. Under the present order it is a holding action until the next referendum on which ethnic group owns a district. Under a citizen’s **Constitution** there is no such question to settle: the residents, whatever their language, hold equal rights wherever they live, boundaries are administrative, and the dispute shrinks from a war aim to a matter of local government. That is not a utopian claim. It is how the same quarrel is managed in every state that has stopped assigning land to peoples.

11.3 No sides among the ethnic entrepreneurs

There is a question Ethiopians abroad are being asked to answer this month: whose side are you on? The honest answer is neither, and the reason is not squeamishness. Abiy Ahmed, Zemene Kassie, Debretsion Gebremichael, Jal Marro — and whoever follows them — are variations of one type. Each holds a constituency defined by descent; each claims a territory in a people’s name; each finances himself from that claim; and each requires an enemy of another descent in order to keep his position. They differ in uniform, vocabulary and foreign patron. They do not differ in kind, because they are all competing for the same prize under the same rule-book.

To pick among them is to accept the rule-book. The task is not to crown a better ethnic entrepreneur but to retire the trade: to remove these men from political life by lawful means, to try those against whom there is evidence of crimes — in Ethiopian courts where those can be made to work, and in international forums where they cannot — and to rehabilitate the rest as ordinary citizens under a **Constitution** that gives no one a people to own. The instruments are the case file, the court, the ballot and a new **Constitution**, not the choice of a favourite gunman.

11.4 The deeper problem, which is ours

There is something harder to say. In two generations Ethiopians have answered every political question with a rifle: an emperor, a junta, a liberation front, a reformer, and now a coalition of the men the reformer’s drones have been bombing. Each answer promised deliverance and produced a new claimant



to the palace with a new list of enemies. The government flies drones over its own villages; its armed opponents have spent years killing civilians of the communities they do not claim. We do not appear to know what we are wishing for, and we have not learned to settle a disagreement without killing. The alliance is therefore a symptom of the failure it seeks to end. That does not make its grievances false — those who took up arms after Mai Kadra [39], after Merawi [25], after Gedeb [18] did not invent their reasons — but it means the removal of Abiy Ahmed will not, by itself, deliver anything, as the removal of Mengistu Haile Mariam did not.

One warning belongs here. Government-aligned analysts already describe the alliance as a coalition assembled in Asmara and serving Eritrean purposes [35]. I cannot verify that and it may be propaganda, but it is credible enough to be believed, and that is the corridor argument in miniature: a house this divided cannot prove that its own opposition is its own. Any Ethiopian movement sheltering under a foreign patron — especially one holding the coast this nation needs — forfeits the national claim it says it is defending.

11.5 What it should publish, and what it should renounce

To be believed at home and taken seriously abroad, the alliance's transitional charter must say what kind of state it intends: a citizen's constitution in which sovereignty belongs to the individual Ethiopian; administrative rather than ethnic boundaries; an indivisible union with strong local self-government in place of the secession clause; one national army under civilian and parliamentary control, into which its own forces are integrated and disbanded as factions; the return of the displaced and the settlement of land disputes by law rather than possession; and accountability for abuses by its own fighters, not only the government's. It should renounce force where a political route exists, foreign patrons whose interests run against Ethiopia's sovereignty and its outlet to the sea, and the promise, to any constituency, of a victory over other Ethiopians. A coalition that did this would become what this country has never had — an opposition offering a rule-book rather than a ruler.

12 The Strongest Objections

A fair reader will raise objections. I state them at full strength and answer each.

The state had to defend the capital in 2021, and insurgents also commit atrocities. Both are true. Lawful weapons must still be used lawfully, and every civilian death investigated: that is a constitutional duty, not a concession.

*Ethnic federalism protects peoples whose cultures the old centralised state suppressed, and replacing the **Constitution** wholesale is itself destabilising.* Culture and language can be protected as individual rights and through local government; they require neither sovereignty by ethnic group nor a secession clause. The risk of a constituent process is real, and it is an argument for making that process inclusive and lawful — not for keeping a **Constitution** that already produces war.

The government has just won a military victory; the rebellion is collapsing. It may well hold Mekelle. It held Mekelle in 2020 and lost it in 2021. A battlefield victory inside one's own country settles the map for a season and settles nothing else, because the dispute is written in the **Constitution**, not on the ground.

You condemn the government, yet the alliance is now bombing airports and the capital. I condemn both, and in the same terms. A civilian killed by an alliance drone is as dead, and the crime as real, as a civilian killed by a federal one. The case file must carry both columns, or it is propaganda.

Abiy has done good things: the reforms of 2018, the prisoners released, the dam completed. He has, and the record should say so. But a leader is judged on the whole ledger, and this ledger contains three internal wars, a drone campaign against his own villages, and a rupture with three neighbours in a week. Acknowledging the good does not retire the account.



Pursuing the Prime Minister internationally will weaken the state. Impunity weakens it more. Accountability aimed at individuals leaves the army and the nation's defence intact and removes only the licence to use them against citizens.

This is the voice of a comfortable diaspora. I spend about half of each year in Ethiopia and half abroad, and in any case the argument does not rest on who makes it. Every fact here about the strikes, the schools and the budget comes from UN agencies, Human Rights Watch, wire services, conflict monitors or the government's own figures. Those who would dismiss the messenger — whether they live on benefits abroad or on favours from Arat Kilo — still have to answer the evidence.

The article attacks Abiy yet echoes his sea agenda. The goal is national; the vehicle is not. A government at war with its own people cannot carry a national cause — neither unity nor Red-Sea sovereignty.

13 Conclusion: It Is the Constitution, Stupid

13.1 Prosecuting the drones that have fallen — and those that will

Every drone that has fallen on a market, a camp, a monastery or a school in this country is evidence, and evidence does not expire. Under the Rome Statute, intentionally directing attacks against civilians in a non-international armed conflict is a war crime (Article 8); a widespread or systematic attack on civilians pursuant to a policy is a crime against humanity (Article 7); commanders are liable for crimes by forces under their effective control which they knew of and failed to prevent or punish (Article 28); and no official capacity, including that of a head of government, is a shield (Article 27) [58]. Amnesty International has now recorded credible reports of attacks on civilian objects and of forced conscription in this round of fighting — the second of those is itself a crime, not a recruitment method [49].

Four things must be done with that evidence, and they can be started today without anyone's permission.

1. **Record to a legal standard, on all sides.** Date, place, munition fragments, imagery, witness statements, chain of custody — and the same discipline applied to federal strikes and to the alliance's strikes on airports and the capital. A one-sided file is an advocacy document; a two-sided file is a prosecution brief.
2. **Use the forums that are open now.** The African Union's Peace and Security Council, which guaranteed the Pretoria Agreement and is being asked by Amnesty to convene an emergency session [49]; the restoration of the UN commission of experts, whose mandate was not renewed in 2023 [38]; and universal-jurisdiction prosecutions in European states where suspects travel.
3. **Open the road to The Hague.** Ethiopia is not a party to the Rome Statute, so the Court can act only on a Security Council referral — where the suppliers of these drones hold vetoes — or on a declaration by an Ethiopian government accepting jurisdiction [58]. That declaration is one of the first acts a citizens' government should perform, and the demand for it belongs in every transitional programme now being written.
4. **Aim at persons, never at the nation.** Targeted measures against individuals in the chain of command — assets, travel, prosecution — not an embargo that would disarm the state while leaving the men who misused it in office.

Prosecution is necessary. It is also insufficient, and the reason is the subject of this article.

13.2 Why an ethnic political dispensation is a licence to manufacture conflict

The comparative record is not ambiguous, and it was written before our own dead were counted. Philip Roeder shows that nearly every new state created since 1900 emerged from a segment-state — a territorial unit endowed with a titular people, its own institutions and the symbols of statehood — because such units manufacture the elites, the administrative machinery and the grievance archive that later demand independence [50]. Valerie Bunce shows that the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia broke apart



precisely along the seams their ethnofederal designs had stitched [51]. Svante Cornell finds that institutionalised ethnic autonomy raises the risk of violent conflict, because it hands elites a constituency, a budget and a border to defend [52]. Donald Horowitz showed decades ago that where parties are organised by ascriptive identity, elections become censuses and losers turn to arms, because the ballot can never change the arithmetic [54]. Jack Snyder showed that partial liberalisation in such states produces nationalist outbidding and war [53]. And students of Ethiopia said the same in advance: Jon Abbink warned that ethnic-based federalism was entrenching conflict and politicising identity; Lovise Aalen documented the creation of a class whose power depends on ethnic mobilisation [55, 56].

Set that literature beside our own thirty-five years. Boundaries drawn by identity produced permanent disputes over districts and towns. Article 47 made statehood a prize to be won region by region. Article 39 placed secession permanently on the table, inviting the centre to pre-empt it by force. In 2018 Ethiopia recorded the world’s highest number of new conflict displacements in a single year [57]. In 2020–22 the centre and a region fought a war whose dead are estimated in the hundreds of thousands. Since 2023 the Amhara war has produced 102 federal drone strikes and more than four million children out of school [14, 27]. In 2026 the cycle restarted, with drones on both sides and relations severed with two neighbours [48, 42].

The defence of the system — that the fault lies in implementation — cannot survive this record. The same text has now produced the same outcomes under a disciplined ideologue and an improvising populist, under a Tigrayan-led front and an Oromo-based machine, three decades apart. When the operator changes and the output does not, the fault is in the machine. The **Constitution** does not merely tolerate ethnic conflict. It licenses its manufacture, and it pays the manufacturers.

13.3 Abiy is the symptom; the licence is the disease

This is why I have refused, through fourteen articles, to make Abiy Ahmed the whole explanation. In his own eyes he is not a tyrant improvising. He is implementing, with the diligence of a convert, the hegemonic licence the **Constitution** issued: a centre that may distribute land, office and security by group, a capital held under a “special interest” clause, regions that exist as the property of peoples, and a right of secession that makes every political dispute a question of national survival. Whether one calls the result *Medemer* or Oromummaa — the question examined in the next article [46] — the licence is the same, and it was issued in 1995.

Remove him and keep the licence, and it passes to the next holder: Zemene Kassie, Debretsion Gebremichael, Jal Marro, or a name not yet known, from Amhara, the Somali region or anywhere else. Meles Zenawi held the same licence and differed in degree and competence, not in kind. This is not cynicism about men. It is arithmetic about institutions.

It follows that anyone who treats the **Constitution** as the common denominator of the Ethiopian nation — the one thing nationalists of every colour agree to preserve while they fight over who administers it — is not neutral. He is a participant in ethnic entrepreneurship and, through it, in the manufacture of the conflicts, the massacres and the displacements that follow. That includes intellectuals who litigate inside its provisions, diaspora patrons who fund a region’s militia, clergy who bless one people’s cause, and every armed movement in the present alliance whose programme begins after the **Constitution** rather than with it.

13.4 What the conclusion requires

Prosecute the crimes — all of them, on every side — because justice is owed to the dead and because impunity is the oxygen of the next war. Then tear up the **Constitution** that made the crimes rational, and write in its place one that knows only citizens: sovereignty in the individual Ethiopian; administrative rather than ethnic boundaries; an indivisible union with strong local self-government; one national army under parliamentary and judicial control; and an economy that treats a citizen in Gondar, Jimma, Jijiga and Mekelle exactly alike. On that foundation, and only on it, the four singular interests become achievable:



national unity and Red-Sea sovereignty, development anchored in democracy, and the GERD as the engine of urbanisation and industrialisation.

Everything else — which general holds Mekelle this month, which alliance signs which communiqué, which man takes the oath in Arat Kilo — is weather. The climate is the **Constitution**.

*It is the **Constitution**, stupid.*

14 The Last Call

As this article goes to press, Mekelle is changing hands for the third time in six years, drones are flying for both sides, and Ethiopia has broken relations with two neighbours in a single week. Ewnetu is right that the skies over Ethiopia have become a place of fear, and right that those who made them so must answer for it. The record he has begun must be completed, preserved and carried to every forum that will hear it. But a verdict against the men will not cure the order that produced them: holding the commanders to account, and replacing the **Constitution** that licensed them, will. The cure is ours to make, and there is little time left to make it.

Warn, warn, warn.

1. **The drone has abolished distance.** No headquarters, dam, depot or leader is beyond reach. Cohesion is now the only real air defence.
2. **There is no unity under the Arat Kilo Constitution.** A constitution of groups cannot make a nation of citizens. Tear it up and write the citizen in.
3. **The sea is legitimate, and it is self-defence.** Recover sovereign access peacefully first — peaceful priority, not peaceful exclusivity. If we must ever fight, it is for the sea, never against our own.
4. **Fight the disease, not the fever.** Abiy is what the **Constitution** produces, as Meles was before him, and as the next captor of the state will be — from whichever group. Remove the man and keep the rule-book, and the war returns with a new name.
5. **Neither this government nor any ethnic party can deliver it.** Only a government of equal citizens can speak for 130 million, and this one bears the heaviest guilt: a state that fails to protect its citizens and then turns its drones on them has forfeited the trust on which it rests.
6. **Take no side among the ethnic entrepreneurs.** Abiy, Zemene, Debretsion, Jal Marro and their successors are one type in different uniforms. Retire the trade: remove them from political life lawfully, try those against whom there is evidence, and rehabilitate the rest as citizens.
7. **Take the record to the world.** Document every strike, preserve the evidence, and press every forum — from the African Commission to the UN and, when the road opens, the International Criminal Court — to hold the chain of command to account.
8. **Intellectuals, name the disease, and build.** Mourning the dead while defending the **Constitution** that kills them is complicity. Turn the dam's power into cities, schools, clinics and jobs for a nation that is seven-tenths young.

The ideology behind this government and the isolation it has built around Ethiopia are the subject of the next article in this series [46]; the whole argument of the fifteen is drawn together in the one that concludes it [47].

The time for unity and Red-Sea sovereignty is not coming. It is now. Adwa was won by a people who stood as one. The swarm will not wait for a people still counting its tribes. So the question remains the one I asked before: can Ethiopians stop fighting over the country long enough to build it together?



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