



Conclusion

A Mirror to the Nation — Past, Present and the Future

Unite and Reclaim the Sea, Secure the Dam, Fight Poverty Not Each Other

Mefkereseb G. Hailu (PhD)*

October 2026

Preface: The Verdict of 8-Years—Remove Abiy and the Constitution

It was my fortune to have regular interactions with high-calibre young professionals, university students born roughly between 1997 and 2012 (Gen-Z, or Zoomers), who convinced me to engage in Ethiopian politics, which I had religiously avoided all my life because I have witnessed first-hand how my parents' generation, "the 1960s youth", has remained withdrawn in a vicious cycle of hope and failure. In particular, it was the diametrically opposed view held about Abiy Ahmed by the youth and the older generation both at home and abroad that irked me into writing. In March 2026, I began this series with "The Spirit of Adwa", emphasising "When a New Generation Speaks, a Nation Must Listen". Like many of my own generation and the young, I criticised and praised Abiy and his government in equal measure, declaring: "It is the **Constitution**, stupid!" I argued that sovereignty, development, democratic legitimacy and generational transition must be pursued together, and that **GERD** and the Red Sea are existential components of one national strategy [1]. I write as a non-partisan, and I have avoided the pointless and destructive ethnic politics, as Proverbs 26:4 counsels: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him" — and, more bluntly, as the mug below puts it, in words popularly but falsely attributed to Mark Twain.



I deliberately chose the pen-name "Mefkereseb G. Hailu" to mean "my power is the love of people". The four articles on the "Abraham Accords" and the sixth article on the "June Election" attracted the most vitriolic attention in my email inbox. What was interesting and unexpected was that the attacks came from every corner in equal measure — **PP** cadres, Eritrean exceptionalists and other ethnic-nationalists. With my seventh article in May 2026, "**National Unity and Red Sea Sovereignty**", I extended my pen-name to "Mefkereseb *Goytom* Hailu" — and the email abuse only grew worse, an indication of how polarised the nation has become, thinking in ethnic silos and pigeonholing me as a partisan. The seventh article attracted 148 emails, the death threats from Eritreans screaming loudest. The anger was not at errors. It was at the articles' forecasts, which were coming true with pinpoint accuracy. In April the Abraham Accords articles named *permissive disorder* in the Red Sea, Eritrea as the launching pad for Ethiopia's adversaries, Ethiopia's internal fracture as the door through which they would enter, and Assab as the endgame [3, 4, 5]. By October the Houthis held the Arabian shore of the Bab al-Mandeb, Asmara had severed relations and stood accused of arming the rebels, seven armed movements had allied against the centre, four governments had declared the Red Sea the business of its coastal states alone, and Assab had become the open flashpoint between the two states (Section 3). The election article warned that a vote held under an ethnic-federal **Constitution** would change the occupants and not the machine [6]; the June election returned the ruling party with some nine seats in ten [34], and within four months the northern war had resumed.

Across the fourteen articles my argument matured into a single architecture: four singular interests forming one proposition in three layers — **National Unity and Red-Sea sovereignty** as the *foundations*, **broad-based economic development** anchored in democracy — measured by the end of poverty — as the *means*, and **GERD** as the *engine* of towns, industry and services [7, 11]. I named the obstacles too: a **Constitution** that turns identity into territory, and a *racket of ethnic entrepreneurs* led by **Abiy** that lives off it [11, 13, 14]. More importantly, I have argued that the *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor*, with Assab at its centre, is the historical injustice at the heart of Ethiopia's predicament; that **Red-Sea sovereignty** is a matter of self-defence before it is a matter of commerce, for a nation of 130 million whose every litre of fuel and every rifle passes through a foreign port can be strangled by whoever holds the coast [6, 8]; and that its correction must be sought by peaceful means first but not exclusively [5, 8]. Those offers have been refused (Section 7.5).

The Prime Minister calls Ethiopia and the Red Sea inseparable, yet offers shares in **GERD** and Ethiopian Airlines, even land, for a stretch of coast, and on 5 October promised again an outlet "on the principle of give and take" [37, 97]. That is unconscious incompetence. Give and take is the language of a buyer, and a buyer concedes that the goods belong to the seller: a nation that offers to pay for its own coast has conceded its title and handed whoever holds it a veto over its security. Terms can be negotiated; the title cannot. Nor need Ethiopia ask leave of those who looked away in 1991–93, when the world observed a referendum held under the guns of the beneficiary's ally and never asked whether Ethiopians consented to losing their sea (Section 7.2). The answer to a law misapplied is to invoke it, not discard it: the 1950 resolution that recorded Ethiopia's legitimate need for access to the sea [94], and the Charter's right of self-defence [67]. **Red-Sea sovereignty** is Ethiopia's historical and legal right to reclaim its corridor, and its anchor must be the **Constitution**: sovereign access written in as a standing objective binding on every government, as I have argued throughout [8, 9]. In eight years he has begun none of it — no reservation of the claim, no bill, no amendment, and a Jeddah agreement in 2018 that reserved nothing [155]. A claim in a speech is revocable; a claim in the **Constitution** outlives its author. If he will not act, he must be removed — not by the present rubber-stamp Parliament, which never will, but by force — and



made to answer before a future, working Parliament and the people, and before the International Criminal Court for his war on his own citizens, as a commander who surrenders a position without a fight answers before a court-martial.

This September every layer came under fire at once: fighting across Amhara and Afar from 23 September, Mekelle abandoned by 3 October, drones as far as Addis Ababa, relations with Asmara severed and an Egyptian diplomat expelled [15, 16, 17, 18].

A charge to two generations. Misery of this scale is not made by rulers alone. It was made by the youth movement of the 1960s, which carried the question of nationalities from the campus into the **Constitution** and then fell silent when the revolution devoured it; it is being made again by its heirs, young men recruited by descent to die for maps drawn by others; and above all by the pernicious intellectuals who lent the *ethnic entrepreneurs* their grievances, maps and vocabulary, or saw the trap and stayed silent. Behind all three lies why Ethiopia is so easily held hostage by dictators: short-termism bred by too little education, and a *racket of four estates* — cadres, oligarchs, religious leaders and warped intellectuals — that profits from every round [11].

What this article will tell you. It is the conclusion of the series, and it answers one question: *how does a nation of 130 million, at war with itself and cut off from the sea, stop fighting its past and start building its future — including the recovery of its sovereign Red-Sea corridor?*

It is built in five Parts.

Part I — The fourteen articles as a mirror: National Unity, for there is no war between us. Our quarrels were designed, cultivated and sustained from Cairo, first as hatching grounds for liberation fronts and now through their graduates — the **EPLF**, **TPLF** and **OLF**, *ethnic entrepreneurs* who cast the Amhara as the common enemy. The prize, for Cairo and every ethnic liberator inside the federation, is a Red Sea redrawn without Ethiopia and a nation held hostage, landlocked. Worse still, the Oromummaa project that grew out of the **OLF** and now holds the state is turning on the very authors of the design, the **EPLF** and the **TPLF**, who are fighting for their existence. Is it karma? Eight years of Abiy have added massacres of Amhara, Oromo and Tigrayans that history will record. The principle of the series stands: there is no war to fight between Ethiopian peoples — and if we must fight, it must be against poverty, for **Red-Sea sovereignty**, and against a regime that makes war on its own people.

Part II — Red-Sea sovereignty and the Constitution. How the coast was lost; what the law will give us; why the 1995 **Constitution** cannot be amended away; and how the war can end. **Part III — Democracy and development.** Land, the dam and grid, industry, tax and education, each measured and dated. **Part IV — The obligation to our citizens.** Thirteen commands and their order. **Part V — The responsibility of the intellectuals**, and the only two wars they may defend.

What eight years have changed in my view. “No war between us” remains my rule between peoples. But it cannot bind a people to submit to a government that makes war on it: one that bombs its citizens, has been found to commit crimes against humanity, renewed its mandate without whole regions and now plays with religious fire. Abiy will not leave peacefully, and no institution will remove him. Unfortunately, only force can end his impunity, or even bring him to negotiate. Resistance to such a regime is self-defence — aimed at the regime and never at a people, fought by the laws of war, and ending in a court, not in revenge (Section 2.4).

The mechanics of what comes next. Four rivals decide the next round, each by its own logic.

1. **Asmara, with Cairo behind it.** Asmara arms whoever keeps the federal army fighting at home, to keep Assab out of reach; for Cairo a divided, landlocked Ethiopia is the cheapest guarantee of the Nile and of regional primacy (Section 5).
2. **The Oromummaa camp — the Prosperity Party and the OLA.** One holds the state and the drones; the other fights it in Oromia, weak as an army but carried by a politically strong **OLF** with a global elite. They quarrel over who shapes Ethiopia, not over what shape it should take (Sections 5 and 4.2).
3. **The TPLF — divided, not finished.** Decimated by Abiy and Isaias, yet still the most experienced political machine, with a global elite and Article 39 in reserve (Section 3.3).
4. **FANO — the rival with the cause.** Not a liberation front but its opposite: it defends a people within Ethiopia rather than seeking to leave it. The newest and least tainted, by most accounts the alliance’s largest army — its chairman read the founding statement — fighting across Wollo, Gojjam, Gondar and Shewa, united since January under one command, though some groups remain outside; but its programme is thin and it lacks an intellectual class. Its stated aim — to remove both Abiy’s government and the 1995 **Constitution** — alone coincides with the four singular interests (Section 6.1).

That old enemies now talk rather than fight one another is a first step, though **FANO** and the **TPLF** still claim the same land in Welkait and Raya. Have they learned to build a national strategy for the morning after Abiy? On that morning, the two fronts with separatist programmes and seasoned elites could outflank **FANO**; and if Abiy instead defeats the alliance, Asmara, its buffer gone, may make its peace with him, and the Oromummaa project will remake Ethiopia unchallenged. **FANO** must therefore be inside the alliance without being owned by it — independent and strong, so that it cannot be betrayed (Section 6.3). *It is not too late: unite as citizens, change the Constitution and any government that will not act, secure the dam, reclaim the sea.*

*The author, aka MGH, is a global technical expert trained at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. The views are his own, not those of any institution. Contact: mefkereseb.hailu1990@gmail.com



PART I

The Fourteen Articles as a Mirror: No War Between Us

1 Fourteen Articles, One Argument

Fourteen articles written over seven months risk being read as fourteen opinions. They were one argument, advanced from four directions. This section gathers them, because a conclusion is only as strong as the case it closes.

There is a proverb for what we have been doing since 1974: *gulicha biqeyayer wet ayatafitim* — change the hearthstones as often as you like, the stew will not taste better. We have changed them four times — an emperor, a junta, a liberation front, a reformer — and served the same dish. What decides the result is not the stones but the *ingredients* — citizen, law and land, or else group, quota and grievance — and the *process*: how power, money and force move through the system, and who is burned by them. At present the ingredients are set by the **Constitution**, and the process is the *racket* that runs on it, as I defined it in *Cui Bono?* [11]. Every proposal in this series, including the ones in the agenda below, should be judged by a single test: does the machine then work for the people and the country, or for the men who operate it? I drew from the proverb, in earlier articles, that changing the ruler changes nothing; the **Constitution** is the real evil. This year has taught me the other half. A ruler who operates the machine for his own project will never let the rule-book be rewritten, so the stones and the stew must be changed together: the government of Abiy Ahmed removed, and the **Constitution** torn up or remade, in one movement. That is the task I now set before **FANO**.

1.1 The Architecture: One Proposition in Three Layers

The organising idea of the series is that Ethiopia's four singular interests are not a menu from which a government may choose. They are one proposition in three layers, and the order matters [7]. **National Unity** and **Red-Sea sovereignty** are the *foundations*: without a united people there is no state to defend, and without the sea — which is a matter of self-defence before it is a matter of commerce — the state is permanently exposed to coercion. **Broad-based economic development** anchored in democracy is the *means*, and it must be clear what development means: the end of poverty, which is the central issue of Ethiopian life. It is measured by jobs and wages, title to land, food on the table and a child who can read — not by the growth of an oligarchy or the boulevards of the capital. **GERD** is the *engine*: the power that drives urbanisation and industrialisation, and with them the services that only come when people live close together — schools, clinics and hospitals, clean water, electricity, jobs, and the integration of communities that once lived apart — for a population of which about seven in ten are under thirty, and, beyond our borders, interdependence with our neighbours [12, 13]. Take away one of the *foundations* and the *engine* powers a house that will not stand.

The whole argument works as one system, and it can be stated in two chains. The first is the machine as it is: a **Constitution** that vests sovereignty in groups pays elites to mobilise by descent; mobilisation produces armed movements and war; war leaves a captured state that cannot develop; and a captured, landlocked state is exposed to coercion. That exposure closes the loop: foreign sponsors feed the very mobilisation that weakens the state, which is why the internal war and the question of the sea are one problem. The second chain is the way out, and it runs in the same order: a citizens' **Constitution**, adopted through a constituent process; institutions that reward public service; unity under one army and one citizenship; development driven by the dam as the *engine*; and sovereignty on the Red Sea secured by treaty and held because the nation behind it is whole. Every link in both chains is a mechanism examined in the sections that follow, and each is defined so that it can be tested (Section 17).

1.2 The External Order: Forecasts Against the Record

The Adwa article set the historical frame: a nation at a decisive juncture, with internal fragmentation and demographic imbalance as its principal vulnerabilities [1]. The four-part Abraham Accords series then mapped the external order — and, with the record now in, mapped it accurately. Part 1 read the Accords as a



transactional security platform restructuring the Gulf–Red-Sea–Horn architecture, and argued that Ethiopia — with its young workforce, its land and its developmental space — enters that architecture as a principal, not a client [2]. Part 2 introduced *permissive disorder*: great powers distracted, middle powers competing through ports, recognition and proxies, and no referee to restrain escalation — a condition that is at once opportunity and trap. It identified Eritrea as a vulnerability node: a failing garrison state that can serve as a launching pad for Ethiopia’s adversaries [3]. Part 3 turned inward and named Ethiopia’s binding constraint: ethnic federalism’s security dilemmas, personalist governance and the absence of a civic settlement, the fracture lines through which external competition penetrates [4]. Part 4 assembled the legal-historical case for the *Doumeira–Rehyto–Beilul–Tio Corridor*, and framed force not as a first resort but as the credible backstop without which diplomacy is only a request [5].

Those were forecasts, and they can be checked. Permissive disorder was named in April 2026; by September the Houthis held the approaches to the Bab al-Mandeb and Saudi Arabia was building its own maritime coalition because no power would police the water [79, 80]. Eritrea was identified as a vulnerability node and a potential launching pad; it has since been accused by Addis Ababa of arming the rebels, has severed relations, and holds a shore already leased once to a foreign air force [17, 19]. Ethiopia’s internal fracture was named as the binding constraint on everything it wants abroad; within six months that fracture produced a seven-party alliance, a resumed northern war and a rupture with Asmara and the expulsion of an Egyptian diplomat in a single week [20, 30]. The “littoral principle” was described in September as a doctrine being written to exclude Ethiopia by definition; on 4 October four governments — Egypt, Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia — declared jointly that the governance of the Red Sea belongs exclusively to its coastal states [97]. And Assab was named as the endgame; it is now the explicit flashpoint between the two states. I record this not as vindication — there is no pleasure in forecasting a disaster that then arrives — but because a reader is entitled to know whether the method that produced those judgements is worth trusting with the ones that follow.

1.3 The Domestic Order: The Constitution, the *Racket* and the Ruler

The domestic articles asked why a nation with this much at stake cannot act as one. The election article held the June vote up to the Asian mirror — Korea and China’s disciplined sequencing against Malaysia’s rentier state-capitalism — and concluded, in the phrase I have repeated since, *it is the Constitution, stupid*: democracy is the capstone of development, not its scaffolding (developed in Section 8.9), and an ethnic-federal **Constitution** cannot carry either [6]. *National Unity and Red-Sea Sovereignty* argued that Ethiopia must pay the price for both now, with constitutional amendments beginning at Article 39 [7]. *Not Imperial Vision* answered those abroad who call the sea claim imperial: it is the self-defence of an existing right, which Ethiopia will pursue legally, and by force only if all else fails, without seeking anyone’s blessing [8]. *Chaotic Equilibrium* asked whether Abiy’s management of ethnic rivalry is a strategy or merely a tactic — setting factions against one another to keep all of them weak — and warned that such a tactic threatens every singular interest and could blow up in his face, with the Oromo people he stands behind bearing the brunt [9]. *The Women Who Anchor the Nation* found in those women, and in their song, a way out of what I called the *monkey habit of ethnic entrepreneurship* [10]. *Cui Bono?* named the beneficiaries: a *racket of four estates* — the *political cadre*, the *economic oligarch*, the *religious authority* and *the intellectual* — pumping fear, votes, land and money upward from the peoples. The true line, I wrote, is not Amhara against Oromo against Tigray; it is the peoples against the *racket* [11]. And the last two articles carried the argument into the present war. *Abiy’s Drones Pouring Hell Over a Divided House* laid the heaviest guilt for the killing of citizens on the government, turned the drone record into a case file for the courts, and concluded that the **Constitution** has killed more Ethiopians than any drone [13]. *Medemer, Oromummaa and the Soul of the Nation* then asked what this government is *for*, and answered in four parts [14]. It examined the charge of an Oromummaa project against the scholarship — including the Oromo scholarship that contradicts it — and showed that the remedy is identical whichever reading is right, because the dispute is about which tribe captures the machine and the machine is the problem. It traced where the grievance narrative was manufactured, and named the mechanism that makes it durable: a grievance settled stops mobilising, so it is never allowed to settle — a tactic now practised by Amhara and Tigrayan entrepreneurs as faithfully as by Oromo ones, because the **Constitution** pays a dividend for keeping the dead unburied. It showed this government to be a lead perpetrator of instability in the Horn rather than its victim, and Ethiopia an *island*



of enemies: nine fronts at once, relations severed with Asmara and an Egyptian diplomat expelled in a week, and the chaotic-equilibrium thesis I once tested now failed outright. And it set out the Red-Sea case from Aksum to 1890, answered the Eritrean counter-case from its own authors, and made the demand this conclusion adopts: that sovereign access be written into the **Constitution** itself, so that it ceases to be any government's political choice and becomes a standing national obligation.

1.4 The *Engine*: GERD as an Instrument of Peace

The dam's first purpose is at home: to power the towns and industries that bring schools, clinics, water and jobs to people who now live scattered and poor, and to bring Ethiopians of every descent to live and work close together. In September I returned to it and argued that **GERD**, the *engine* of Ethiopia's renaissance, can also become an engine of African peace: power traded with neighbours, floods regulated for Sudan, data shared in place of suspicion — a dam in which every neighbour has a stake is a dam no neighbour will attack [12].

1.5 The Fourteen Articles, One by One

A reader who has followed only part of the series is entitled to the whole of it in one place. Table 1 records what each article added to the argument, so that the programme set out in Parts II–V can be checked against the case that produced it rather than taken on trust.

Table 1: The fourteen articles and what each added to the argument.

#	Date	Article	The proposition it added
1	26 Mar	The Spirit of Adwa [1]	Sovereignty, development, democratic legitimacy and generational transition are one task, not four. GERD and the Red Sea are existential components of a single national strategy. Internal fragmentation and demographic imbalance are the principal vulnerabilities.
2	16 Apr	Abraham Accords, Part 1 [2]	The Accords are a transactional security platform restructuring the Gulf–Red-Sea–Horn architecture. Ethiopia, with its young workforce, its land and its developmental space, enters that architecture as a principal rather than a client.
3	19 Apr	Abraham Accords, Part 2 [3]	<i>Permissive disorder</i> : great powers distracted, middle powers competing through ports, recognition and proxies, no referee to restrain escalation — at once an opportunity and a trap. Eritrea named as a vulnerability node and a launching pad for Ethiopia's adversaries.
4	26 Apr	Abraham Accords, Part 3 [4]	Ethiopia's binding constraint is internal: ethnic federalism's security dilemmas, personalist governance and the absence of a civic settlement are the fracture lines through which external competition penetrates.
5	4 May	Abraham Accords, Part 4 [5]	The legal-historical case for the <i>Doumeira–Rehyto–Beilul–Tio Corridor</i> , with Assab at its centre. Force is not a first resort but the credible backstop without which diplomacy is only a request.
6	May	Election 2026 [6]	The June vote held against the Asian mirror — Korea's and China's disciplined sequencing against Malaysia's rentier state-capitalism. Following Ferguson, democracy is the <i>capstone</i> of an institutional edifice — rule of law and secure property at the base, a parliament controlling taxation and courts constraining executives above it — and an ethnic-federal Constitution supports neither: <i>it is the Constitution, stupid</i> [101].
7	16 May	National Unity and Red-Sea Sovereignty [7]	The four singular interests resolved into one proposition in three layers — <i>foundations</i> , <i>means</i> , <i>engine</i> . Ethiopia must pay the price for unity and the sea now, and the constitutional work begins at Article 39.
8	9 Jun	Not Imperial Vision [8]	An answer to those abroad who call the sea claim imperial: it is the self-defence of an existing right, to be pursued in law and by force only if all else fails, without seeking anyone's blessing.



#	Date	Article	The proposition it added
9	15 Jun	Can Abiy Govern in Chaotic Equilibrium? [9]	Is the management of ethnic rivalry a strategy or merely a tactic — factions set against one another to keep all of them weak? Such a tactic threatens every singular interest and will blow up in its author's face, with the Oromo people he stands behind bearing the brunt.
10	1 Jul	The Women Who Anchor the Nation [10]	The moral foundation of the civic argument: in the women who anchor the nation, and in their song, a way out of what I called the <i>monkey habit of ethnic entrepreneurship</i> .
11	Aug	<i>Cui Bono?</i> [11]	The beneficiaries named: a <i>racket of four estates</i> — <i>political cadre, economic oligarch, religious authority and intellectual</i> — pumping fear, votes, land and money upward. The true line is not Amhara against Oromo against Tigray but the peoples against the <i>racket</i> .
12	15 Sep	GERD : Engine of African Peace [12]	The dam converted from a grievance into an instrument: power traded with neighbours, floods regulated for Sudan, data shared in place of suspicion. A dam in which every neighbour holds a stake is a dam no neighbour will attack.
13	27 Sep	Abiy's Drones Pouring Hell Over a Divided House [13]	The heaviest guilt for the killing of citizens laid on the government; the drone record turned into a case file for the courts; and the conclusion that the Constitution has killed more Ethiopians than any drone.
14	Oct	Medemer, Oromummaa and the Soul of the Nation [14]	What this government is <i>for</i> . The Oromummaa charge tested against the scholarship, including the Oromo scholarship that contradicts it; the manufacture of grievance traced, and the mechanism that keeps it unsettled named — a grievance settled stops mobilising, so it is never allowed to settle. Ethiopia shown as an <i>island of enemies</i> and this government a lead perpetrator of Horn instability. The Red-Sea case set out from Aksum to 1890, and the demand that sovereign access be written into the Constitution itself.
15	Oct	This conclusion	Closes the case; sets out the two decisions — Red-Sea sovereignty and the Constitution — with their law, their options and their price; draws from them the way out of the cycle of violence; sets out democracy and development as the cure; states the obligations to our citizens in order; and calls the intellectuals to peace, the rule of law and development.

The series in one mirror

1. **Foundations.** National Unity and Red-Sea sovereignty. The sea is a matter of self-defence before it is a matter of commerce; unity is impossible under an ethnic-federal **Constitution** [3, 7, 13].
2. **Means.** Broad-based economic development anchored in democracy — development measured by the end of poverty: jobs, wages, land title and literacy for the many, with democracy as the capstone rather than the scaffolding [6, 11].
3. **Engine.** GERD, powering urbanisation and industrialisation, and with them health care, education, jobs and the integration of communities living close together at home; and interdependence with neighbours abroad [12].
4. **The obstacle.** The 1995 **Constitution** and the *racket* that lives off it; the line runs between the peoples and the *racket* [11, 13].
5. **The end game.** The African shore of the southern Red Sea: the *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor*, with Assab at its centre [5, 8].

2 Our Nation Fights Its Past; Humanity for Its Future

Before the case is closed, the reader is owed the verdict that sits beneath all fourteen articles, because without it the programme that follows reads as a list of policies rather than the correction of a habit. Ethiopia's



predicament is not the work of one man or one front. It is the accumulated result of a collective failure of foresight, a political culture that lives from one season to the next, leaders who could not read their time or the geopolitics around them, and a people who too often watched in silence.

2.1 A Collective Failure of Foresight

Each decision that brought us here was taken by men who read the moment in front of them and missed the decade behind it. In 1991–93 the coast was given up by a transitional authority that treated the sea as a settlement between wartime allies rather than as an Ethiopian inheritance [5, 11]. In 1995 a **Constitution** was written to end one war, and it organised the next six. In 1998 two governments born of the same 1991 victory went to war over Badme, and the port of Assab — the one asset that mattered — closed behind them and never reopened to Ethiopian trade [74]. In 2018 the nation celebrated a change of ruler as if it were a change of rule, and built no institution to hold the reform when the euphoria faded (Section 8.9). In 2020 a constitutional quarrel was settled by a war that killed, on the African Union envoy’s estimate, as many as six hundred thousand people [30]. None of these decisions was taken by fools. All of them were taken by men trained to win the next meeting rather than the next generation.

That is why I place education at the root of the failure and at the centre of the remedy (Section 13). Foresight is not a property of leaders; it is a property of a nation’s schools, universities, press and public argument. A country that does not teach its children to weigh evidence, to read a map of interests and to tell a grievance from a programme will produce leaders who cannot do so either — and a public that cannot tell when they have failed.

2.2 The Conspiracy of Silence

The second failure is ours, not theirs. Every one of those decisions was taken in front of a population that knew enough to object and chose not to. The educated class watched the coast go and argued about the wording. Civil servants drew ethnic boundaries they knew would produce conflict. Clergy blessed whichever ruler held the palace; businessmen financed whichever side held the licences [11]. The crowd that sang for each new ruler sang again for the next (Section 3.3). No one conspired — which is exactly what made it a conspiracy of silence. A people that does not speak while its interests are traded away is not neutral. It is a party to the trade. Two forces keep it silent. One is short-termism: a society denied education judges by the next harvest and the next salary, and will trade its children’s coast for this year’s calm. The other is interest: the four estates of the *racket* draw an income from every ruler in turn, and so have every reason to bless the next one [11]. That is how a nation becomes the hostage of its dictators.

2.3 Grievance Is Our History, Not Our Aspiration

The third failure is the one that now kills. Ethiopian politics has made a trade of grievance over things done by our forefathers — some of them five centuries ago, some more than a millennium ago — and each *ethnic entrepreneur* keeps a ledger of ancestral wrongs from which he pays his following [11, 14]. Those events are our history. They must be taught honestly and, where living people were wronged, answered by law. But a history is not an aspiration, and a nation that defines itself by what was done to its great-grandparents has surrendered what its grandchildren might do.

Consider the moment in which we are doing this. Humanity is in the middle of the most consequential technological transition in its history; across the world people are arguing about what artificial intelligence will do to work, to knowledge, and to the question of what makes us human at all. That argument is entirely about the future. Ethiopians, meanwhile, are fighting about the past — and using it to forge a bloody future. Young men are sent to die over which group ruled which valley before their grandfathers were born, while their contemporaries elsewhere learn to build the systems that will decide which nations matter in thirty years. That is not a tragedy that befell us. It is a choice, and it is pure evil and the grandest stupidity of our generation.



2.4 There Is No War to Fight Between Us

From that follows the principle on which the rest of this article stands. There is no war to fight between Ethiopians. No grievance between Amhara and Oromo, Tigrayan and Amhara, Afar and Somali is worth one more burial, because every one of them can be settled by a law that treats each citizen the same, and none can be settled by a rifle. If there is a war Ethiopia must be prepared to fight, it is the one for **Red-Sea sovereignty** — because that is a fight of self-defence and national survival against the external sponsor of our internal wars, not a fight of one part of the nation against another (Section 7). The two halves of that sentence are inseparable. A nation at war with itself cannot fight for its survival; a nation at peace with itself will rarely need to.

I must now state the condition that eight years have attached to that principle. It forbids war *between peoples*; it cannot forbid a people to defend itself against a government that makes war on it. A principle that binds only the governed and never the government is a licence for tyranny. The present government has bombed its own citizens from the air [21], has been found by a UN commission to have committed crimes against humanity [117], renewed its mandate in an election from which whole regions were excluded [34], and is now reaching for the most dangerous card of all, religion (Section 4.3). It will not leave by persuasion, and no institution will remove it: the Parliament that should hold it to account has been a rubber stamp under the EPRDF and the Prosperity Party alike, and no Ethiopian head of government has ever been removed by a vote. Unfortunately, only force can end its impunity — or even bring it to negotiate in earnest. Where a government sets itself against the people it was formed to protect, the tradition from Locke onward holds that it has dissolved its own claim to obedience, and that the people may resist [165]. Resistance of that kind is self-defence, and it is bound by three rules: it is aimed at the regime and never at a people; it is fought by the laws of war; and it ends in a court, not in revenge. Ethiopia has not accepted the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, but a successor government can do so by a declaration under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute, and should, so that the man who led the state through these years answers for them before a court no faction controls [53].

3 2026: The Region Redrawn and the War Returned

The fourteen articles forecast a region that would be redrawn by force, money and recognition, and an Ethiopia whose internal fracture would be the door through which every rival entered. Both forecasts arrived this autumn.

3.1 The Southern Red Sea Redrawn Without Ethiopia

With the United States and Israel at war with Iran and the Strait of Hormuz choked, Saudi oil was rerouted to the Red Sea, and in September the Houthis took the whole Yemeni shore of the Bab al-Mandeb; analysts described the result as Iran controlling “the Strait of Hormuz plus” [79, 80]. Mocha lies some 65 km across the water from Assab, and the strait’s main channel runs between Perim and the Doumeira headland, roughly 33 km apart.¹ Israel has recognised Somaliland and surveyed its coast for a forward base [81]; Egypt has troops in Somalia and plans for Assab’s port [84, 65]; Sudan’s war is fought on the Blue Nile below the dam [87]; and the Gulf has split, Riyadh with Asmara, Khartoum and Cairo, Abu Dhabi with Addis Ababa [31]. On 4 October Egypt, Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia declared that the governance of the Red Sea belongs exclusively to its coastal states [97] — a doctrine written to exclude Ethiopia by definition. Every shore of the southern Red Sea has changed hands, patrons or purpose in a year, except Ethiopia’s, because it has none. Permissive disorder, named in April as both opportunity and trap [3], is rewarding the bold and punishing the divided.

3.2 The Northern War Resumes and the Neighbours Break Off

On 23 September the alliance opened its offensive on several fronts. In the north the **TPLF**, with an Afar front, pushed into Amhara and Afar; federal forces drove it back, and by 3 October **TPLF** leaders were leaving

¹Great-circle distances computed by the author from gazetteer coordinates: Assab 13.01°N 42.74°E; Mocha 13.32°N 43.25°E; Perim 12.65°N 43.42°E; Ras Doumeira 12.71°N 43.12°E; Rehyto — also rendered Rahayta or Raheita — 12.72°N 43.06°E; Beilul 13.26°N 42.33°E; Tio 14.68°N 40.93°E. The corridor’s segment lengths are Doumeira–Rehyto 7 km, Rehyto–Assab 47 km, Assab–Beilul 52 km and Beilul–Tio 219 km, giving 325 km point to point.



Mekelle [15, 30]. Some 150,000 were displaced in Afar in the first week [30]. The heavier war is elsewhere. **FANO** fights on the widest front of any member — across Wollo, Gojjam, Gondar and North Shewa, and by its own claims into Wollega — and there, on its own account and in much of the reporting, it is still gaining ground against the government while the **TPLF** retreats [122, 168]. Nor should the federal recovery in Tigray be read as decisive: in 2021 the federal army collapsed within weeks and **TPLF** columns came within some 200 kilometres of Addis Ababa. Such reversals can recur. The federal monopoly of armed drones ended: rebel strikes now reach airports and the capital [16]. On 1 October Ethiopia and Eritrea severed relations and an Egyptian diplomat was expelled [17, 18]. The most useful outside reading is that Ethiopia’s several civil wars have *merged*, across four regional states holding nearly two-thirds of the population, with no mediation able to carry them [30]. And the destabilisation runs both ways: Addis Ababa is credibly accused of arming Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces and backing Eritrean opponents, as Asmara is of backing Ethiopian ones [30]. Every government in this quarrel rents its neighbour’s rebels and calls it national security. On 5 October the Prime Minister began a second term, promising an outlet to the sea “based on the principle of give and take” [97] — the language of a purchase, which concedes before any negotiation that Ethiopia holds a want rather than a right.

3.3 The Alliance for Survival: Seven Armies, No Shared Future

On 20 September seven armed movements — the **TPLF**, the Amhara **FANO** National Movement, the Oromo Liberation Army, a faction of the ONLF and groups from Afar and Benishangul-Gumuz — declared an alliance to overthrow the government [32, 20]. The founding statement was not read by the **TPLF** but by Zemene Kassie, chairman of the Amhara **FANO** National Movement, live on Tigray TV [58] — and **FANO**, by most accounts, fields the alliance’s largest army. Its members share an enemy, not a future: the **TPLF** and **FANO** still claim the same land in Welkait and Raya, the **OLA** calls the pact a “procedural consensus”, and the programme names what the alliance is against and nothing about which borders, which **Constitution** or which army would follow [32]. The fronts that entered Addis Ababa together in 1991 were at war along the Badme front within seven years [74]; an alliance of ethnic armies that succeeds produces not a transition but the next war among the victors. Behind it stands Asmara: Addis Ababa accuses Eritrea of financing and coordinating the armed movements, and outside analysis reads the purpose plainly — to keep the federal army fighting at home and unable to turn towards Assab [33, 31, 64]. And behind Asmara stands Cairo, which has spent two years building a constellation whose common denominator is the containment of Ethiopia — Eritrea’s ports, Somalia’s peacekeeping force, the Sudanese army’s supply lines — because a divided, landlocked Ethiopia can neither use the Nile without Egypt’s leave nor contest Egypt’s primacy in the region [85, 65, 84]. That is the key to everything that follows. The war on the federal government and the question of the sea are not two issues. They are one war, with one proxy in Asmara and one patron in Cairo — and its fuses run into Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and across the strait [31, 83].

The mystery of the alliance. The question every community is asking is how **FANO** and the **TPLF** can stand in the same alliance at all. They are diametrically opposed. The **TPLF** wrote the 1995 **Constitution** and its Article 39; **FANO** exists to tear it up. The **TPLF** regards Welkait and Raya as Tigrayan land seized in war; **FANO** regards them as Amhara land seized in 1991 and recovered in 2020. Each accuses the other of genocide, and each has a record the other can cite [118, 117]. Table 2 sets out what each member wants on the day after the government falls.

Table 2: The Alliance for Survival: what each member wants after the government falls.

Member	Aim on the day after	Collides with	What its community suspects
TPLF	Restore its rule in Tigray, recover Welkait and Raya, keep Article 39 in reserve	FANO on Welkait and Raya and on the Constitution ; Afar on the border	That FANO is being used to break the centre and will be fought next
FANO	Security for the Amhara, the disputed lands kept, a new Constitution	The TPLF and the OLA on land, on Article 39 and on the capital	That the TPLF and Asmara are using FANO as a battering ram, as the EPLF used the TPLF in 1991



Member	Aim on the day after	Collides with	What its community suspects
OLA	An Oromia with the widest borders and the capital within its reach	FANO on Addis Ababa and on the Amhara of Oromia	That it will inherit the Oromummaa project, not end it
Afar, ONLF faction, Benishangul groups	Autonomy and security in their own regions	Each of the larger members, sooner or later	That they are needed only until the centre falls

Read that way, the mystery dissolves into a familiar shape. It is an alliance of convenience against a common enemy, among movements that are themselves enemies. Its members can agree not to fight one another while they fight the government; they cannot agree on the land, the **Constitution** or the army that would follow, and so they will fight one another afterwards — as the victors of 1991 did within seven years [74]. For Asmara, which sponsors it, that is not a flaw but the design: an alliance that topples the centre and then dissolves into war among its members leaves Ethiopia divided whoever wins. The only party in the pact for whom a lasting Ethiopia is the goal rather than the obstacle is the one that wants Article 39 abolished; whether **FANO** can turn that into a programme other Ethiopians will trust is the question on which the pact, and much else, turns.

The balance inside the pact. That enemies of thirty years now talk rather than fight one another is a first step, and it should be acknowledged: an alliance that prevents a horizontal war for as long as it lasts has already done more than any of its members did alone. The question is whether they have learned anything about building a national strategy and a national political culture that would prevent the next war on the morning they depose the government — if they ever do. The members do not enter as equals, and the inequality runs in an uncomfortable direction. On my reading:

1. **FANO** is the least tainted and the newest. Since January 2026 it has had a single structure — one leadership, one chain of command and a political wing — though some local groups may still stand outside it [54]; but its political programme is still thin, and it lacks a coherent intellectual class to devise its strategy and advise its fighters. Its strength is its constituency — the Amhara, dispersed across every region, a people the census counts second but whom many believe to be the largest — and the sympathy of smaller peoples who fear the project at the centre [152, 122].
2. The **TPLF** is divided and was decimated in 2020–22 by the federal army and Isaias Afwerki's, but it was for decades the best-organised political machine in the country, and it has not forgotten how to negotiate a transition: it wrote the last one [74].
3. The **OLA** has been an ineffective army, but as the armed wing of the OLF tradition it carries a politically strong movement.
4. The **TPLF** and the OLF share two assets **FANO** lacks: a global, organised political and intellectual elite, and a programme that keeps Article 39 — the right to leave — in reserve.

That is the danger of the morning after. A transition is decided not only by who holds the ground but by who drafts the charter, staffs the ministries and speaks to foreign capitals, and on that terrain the two fronts with separatist programmes and seasoned elites could outflank the movement with the largest following and the best cause. **FANO** could stand alone; but alone it would be exposed to a horizontal war and to a coalition against it — one that could include the very government it fights, which has proved unable to defeat it and has every reason to fear it. The opposite outcome is no safer. If the government defeats the alliance, it emerges as the dominant force in the Horn. Asmara, its Tigrayan buffer gone, may then make its own peace with Addis Ababa, and the Oromummaa project would remake Ethiopia without a counterweight (Section 5). Either way the stake for **FANO** is the same: to be inside the alliance without being owned by it (Section 6.2).

A negative coalition, and the test it must pass. The debate on the alliance has settled into three readings: treason, an instrument of Cairo and Asmara; transformation, whose promise outweighs the risk of disintegration; or transformation only if the alliance agrees how it will govern before it wins. The third is right, but it does not go far enough. A pact named for “survival” is a *negative coalition*: defined by what it opposes, held together by the threat it fights, and released from that bond on the day the threat is gone [41]. The study of civil wars explains why its members cannot simply promise to behave afterwards. Alliances among armed groups follow relative power, not shared identity: when one member grows strong enough to



win alone, the others have every reason to turn on it before it does [42]. And no member can trust a partner's promise to share power once that partner holds the capital and the army, because nothing would then compel it to keep the promise — the commitment problem that starts wars and wrecks settlements [43, 44]. Ethiopia has lived this. The OLF entered the transitional government of 1991 beside the EPRDF; within a year, with neither army encamped as agreed, the two had fought, the OLF had boycotted the election and left, and over a thousand of its supporters were in prison [45]. The mujahideen who took Kabul in 1992 destroyed the city fighting one another [42].

The test, then, is not a list of good intentions but a set of commitments that bind before victory. For this alliance it has six parts, each aimed at a specific way it can fail:

1. **The sponsor's price.** What has been promised to Asmara and Cairo for their money and weapons? Will the alliance declare in writing that Ethiopia's claim to the coast and its rights on the Nile are not for sale? A coalition that cannot say so is a proxy, whatever its members intend.
2. **The rule-book before the ruler.** Does the 1995 **Constitution** with its Article 39 survive the transition? Members who wrote or live by it sit beside one that exists to abolish it. A transition that leaves the question to the victors leaves it to the strongest army.
3. **The land.** Are Welkait, Raya and every disputed boundary frozen and referred to an independent body under agreed rules, rather than settled by whoever holds the ground on the day?
4. **One army.** Are the members' forces encamped, verified and merged into one national army under civilian control, on a published timetable? In 1992 the failure to encamp was the first breach.
5. **A guarantor.** Who enforces the pact when a member breaks it? Settlements survive when a third party with no stake in the outcome guarantees them [44]; the alliance's known external partners are parties to the war.
6. **The capital.** Is Addis Ababa declared a federal city belonging to all citizens, held by no member's forces, before any column reaches it?

Each is a commitment that costs a member something now, and that is what would make it credible. An alliance unwilling to pay that price before victory will not pay it after, and an alliance formed for the survival of its members may yet endanger the survival of Ethiopia.

4 Eight Years of Abiy: The House Turned on Itself

One thing must now be said plainly, because the alliance that would replace this government will not say it and the government will not hear it. Since Abiy Ahmed came to power in April 2018, Ethiopia has been defined by internal war, massacre and displacement. Table 3 is not my characterisation: each line is documented by a UN mechanism, a human-rights body, the national human-rights commission or a displacement monitor, and each attribution of responsibility is the one that source makes. It is therefore the floor of the record, not its whole. Many more massacres — in villages, churches and mosques, in places no investigator has reached — have been reported by survivors and local media and never examined; a war fought behind communication blackouts leaves most of its dead uncounted.

Table 3: The record since 2018, as documented. Responsibility is stated as the cited source states it.

When	Event	Victims	Responsibility as documented
2018	Gedeo-Guji and other inter-regional clashes	The world's highest number of new conflict displacements that year	Inter-communal violence along the boundaries drawn by the Constitution [23]
Nov 2020 – Nov 2022	War in Tigray, Amhara and Afar	As many as 600,000 dead (African Union envoy's estimate)	UN Commission of Experts: war crimes and crimes against humanity by the federal army, Eritrean forces and Amhara regional forces and militias; war crimes by Tigrayan forces. Extermination and genocide not determined for lack of time [117, 30]



When	Event	Victims	Responsibility as documented
9–10 Nov 2020	Mai Kadra, Welkait	At least 600 civilians, mostly Amhara seasonal labourers (EHRC); more than 200 confirmed by the joint UN–EHRC inquiry	EHRC: a Tigrayan youth group (Samri) with local police and militia allied to the TPLF ; reprisal killings of Tigrayans followed when federal and Amhara forces took the town [171, 172]
Nov 2020 – 2022	Welkait and the disputed zone	Tigrayans expelled in their hundreds of thousands	Human Rights Watch and Amnesty: ethnic cleansing by Amhara officials, special forces and militias; federal forces complicit [118]
2021	Displacement nationwide	5.1 million new displacements, the most ever recorded in one country in one year	Conflict across Tigray, Amhara, Afar and Oromia [119]
18 Jun 2022	Tole, West Wollega (Oromia)	Hundreds of ethnic Amhara civilians; witness counts above 200	Attributed by the government and witnesses to the Oromo Liberation Army, which denies it and blames government forces; Amnesty demanded an independent investigation [120]
Apr–Aug 2023	Regional special forces dissolved by federal order; state of emergency in Amhara	Amhara communities disarmed; insurgency begins	Federal decision; many former special forces join FANO [122]
Jan 2024	Merawi (Amhara)	At least 45 civilians, the true number likely higher	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission: federal security forces, killing civilians accused of supporting FANO [121]
2023–25	Drone campaign in Amhara	102 federal drone strikes; more than four million children out of school	Federal government [21, 22]
Sep–Oct 2026	Seven-party war; Mekelle changes hands	Some 150,000 displaced in Afar in the first week	All parties; drones now flown by both sides [30, 16]

4.1 The Reckoning: Incompetence That Became Crime

The record must be laid at the door of the man who led the state through it. On the estimates available, the dead of his eight years — as many as 600,000 in the northern war alone on the African Union envoy’s estimate [30], before the wars in Amhara and Oromia are counted — exceed those attributed to Mengistu’s seventeen years, where the best scholarly estimates of killings and policy-induced famine deaths run to the low hundreds of thousands [173], and far exceed the war dead of the EPRDF’s twenty-seven, of which the 1998–2000 war with Eritrea accounts for 50,000 to 100,000 [126]. Every such comparison is uncertain, and the dead are not a competition. But the direction of the comparison is not in doubt. This is not incompetence alone. The UN commission found crimes against humanity committed by the federal army under his command [117]; the national human-rights commission found federal forces executing civilians at Merawi [121]; and the drone campaign over Amhara has struck markets, schools and villages [21, 13]. Responsibility for those acts runs up the chain of command, and an accounting that stops below its top is not an accounting.

4.2 Smoke and Mirrors: Strong at the Centre, Thin Everywhere

The government’s strength must be read as carefully as its record. Its economic signature is display: since December 2022 a corridor programme has widened boulevards in Addis Ababa and at least 58 other towns, demolishing homes and shops on a scale Amnesty International calls unprecedented, with little notice and little compensation [169]; tourism is promoted as a priority in a country at war with itself. Its writ runs firmly in and around the capital and its corridors — on my assessment the zone that generates some 60 to 70 per cent of the formal economy — and thinly or not at all across large parts of Amhara, Oromia and now Tigray. Its military edge is air power, and that edge was supplied from abroad: armed drones and cargo flown in from the United Arab Emirates turned the last war [170]. A state whose strength is borrowed, concentrated and displayed is stronger than it looks in a parade and weaker than it looks on a map. The recapture of Mekelle in October is real; whether it holds is another matter, and a strength built that way can crumble faster than it was assembled.



4.3 From Tribe to Faith: Playing With Religious Fire

As ethnic mobilisation loses its currency, there are signs that the centre of gravity is being moved to faith. In September the Oromia regional council, meeting in Adama, approved a new layer of government: six administrative clusters — East (Hararghe), South-East (Arsi and Bale), South (Guji and Borana), West (Wollega), South-West (Jimma, Illubabor and Buno Bedele) and Central (Shewa) — each under its own vice-president, with their powers and reporting lines still to be defined [38]. Critics have read the map by faith: four of the six vice-presidents, on their names and public profiles, are Muslims placed over predominantly Muslim clusters, and the cluster heads are said to answer to the regional council rather than to the regional president, building autonomy into the design [39]. The appointments have not been explained in religious terms, and that reading rests on inference. But it has a precedent. In January 2023 a breakaway synod was proclaimed in Oromia in defiance of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; the Church accused the government of backing it, eight people were killed at Shashemene in February, and the crisis ended only when the Prime Minister brokered talks [40].

Why this matters is not a matter of opinion; it is among the better-established findings in the study of divided societies. Ethiopia's divisions cut across one another. The Oromo, counted as its largest people, are roughly half Muslim and half Christian [152]; there are Muslim Amhara and Orthodox Oromo; faith joins what descent divides. Cleavages that cross-cut in this way restrain conflict, because a mobiliser who rallies one identity splits his own following on the other; where cleavages are made to coincide, the risk of civil war rises [46]. A map that aligns administrative units with faith turns a cleavage that moderates into one that reinforces, and the record elsewhere shows what follows.

1. **Outbidding.** Once offices are seen to follow creed, each community's politicians compete to be its most zealous champion, and the moderates lose [77]. Lebanon allotted its highest offices by confession in 1943, fought a fifteen-year civil war over the allotment, and has lurched from paralysis to collapse under the same formula since [47].
2. **Indivisibility.** Land and office can be split; a stake framed as faith is far harder to bargain over, and wars fought on religious claims last longer and end in settlement less often [48, 49]. Sudan learned it when Nimeiri imposed the September Laws of 1983 on a mixed country and reignited the war that ended in partition [50].
3. **The riot as an instrument.** Communal violence is most likely where politicians gain from polarisation, and least likely where the state needs the votes of both communities [51]. A government that draws its majority from one bloc loses the incentive to protect the other.
4. **The foreign patron.** In a region already organised by alignment (Section 7.5), a community defined by faith is a client waiting to be funded from across the Red Sea.

My own reading — a reading, not a finding — is that a leader who will do anything to stay in power treats the nation's two oldest institutions, the Orthodox Church and the Islamic establishment, as he has treated its peoples: as blocs to be divided, courted and weakened one at a time. Whatever the intention, the effect is predictable. Ethnic federalism split the nation into peoples; a politics of faith would split the peoples themselves, beginning with the Oromo, Muslim from Christian, and hand every armed movement a second banner. Tribal politics, I have argued, is primitive and degenerative; religious politics is worse, because it has no boundary to negotiate and offers no compromise its believers may accept. The remedy is the one the comparative record recommends: a state neutral among faiths; no office allotted by creed; administrative boundaries drawn by geography and service, not by descent or belief; and parties barred from organising on religion as on ethnicity (Sections 8.6 and 8.9).

4.4 Amhara and Tigray Pushed to the Brink

Read as a whole, the record shows two peoples pushed to the edge. Tigray was devastated by a war in which the federal army fought beside a foreign army that the Prime Minister himself has since accused of mass killing [59]. The Amhara have been killed in their homes in Wollega, disarmed by decree, governed by emergency law, executed in Merawi and bombed from the air by their own government [120, 121, 21]. To many Amhara and Tigrayans this is not a sequence of incidents but a project of subjugation, and some call it elimination.



I will not put a legal word on it that the evidence has not yet carried: the UN commission found crimes against humanity and said in terms that it lacked the time to determine whether extermination or genocide had occurred [117]. That is not an acquittal. It is an unfinished investigation, and finishing it — independently, for every victim, against every perpetrator — is a condition of peace (Section 9).

The record has a second edge, and honesty requires it in its true order. The first great massacre of the northern war was of Amhara civilians: at Mai Kadra in Welkait, on 9–10 November 2020, a Tigrayan youth group with local police and militia killed at least 600 people, most of them Amhara labourers [171]. Reprisals against Tigrayans followed, and over the next two years Human Rights Watch and Amnesty documented the expulsion of Tigrayans from Welkait by Amhara officials, forces and militias [118]; the UN commission found war crimes by Tigrayan forces in Amhara and Afar [117]. Every people in this war has been a victim and, through those who claimed to speak for it, a perpetrator. That is precisely why the war between us has no winner.

5 How a Design to Weaken Ethiopia Turned on Its Authors

The record of the last eight years is not an accident of personalities. It is the late consequence of a design, and a Red-Sea policy that does not understand that design will be captured by it. No single document states the design whole; it is my reading of sixty years of conduct by Cairo, Asmara and the fronts they schooled, and I set out the evidence for each link so that the reader can test the reading rather than take it on trust.

Four terms carry the argument, and they are defined here so that the reader can connect the dots that follow. *The design* is Cairo’s doctrine that a divided, landlocked Ethiopia is Egypt’s security on the Nile and the Red Sea, and the Eritrean ambition, built on it, of a coastal entrepôt living off a divided hinterland. *The three fronts* are the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Front — the liberation movements that carried the design into Ethiopia and, in 1991, into power. *The one narrative* is the thesis they shared: that Ethiopia is an empire of subject nations held by a colonising people. *The one enemy* is the people that narrative cast as the coloniser — the Amhara. The subsections that follow take them in order: the design (5.1), the narrative and its passage into the **Constitution** (5.2), the recoil of the design on its own authors (5.3), the third front now in power (5.4), and the repentance its authors owe (5.5).

5.1 The Design: A Divided Ethiopia and a Singapore on the Red Sea

For centuries Egypt has regarded a strong, united Ethiopia as a threat to the Nile and a divided one as its security [144]. The Eritrean Liberation Front was founded in Cairo in 1960 [145], and from its first day the Eritrean cause served that doctrine. The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front inherited the cause and refined the argument: Eritrea, it held, was not a province in revolt but a colony of Ethiopia, and Ethiopia itself an empire of subject nations [145]. After independence the ambition was stated openly: there was talk of turning Eritrea into Africa’s Singapore [146]. The logic of that ambition is the core of the design. A small, disciplined coastal state can live as the entrepôt of a large hinterland only so long as the hinterland is too divided to build its own outlet or bargain on equal terms. Ethiopia’s division was not an unfortunate by-product of Eritrea’s project. It was its condition.

Asmara is the proxy; Cairo is the patron, and its interest outlasts every Eritrean government. Egypt depends on the Nile for almost all of its fresh water, and its strategic doctrine has long been that it must remain the river’s sole effective beneficiary and the dominant power of the Red Sea and the Horn [144]. A united Ethiopia with a dam and a coast threatens both. Hence the constellation Cairo has assembled in two years — Eritrea’s ports, Assab’s upgrade, troops in Somalia, the Sudanese army’s supply lines and the New Alamein declaration that the Red Sea belongs to its coastal states alone [85, 65, 84, 97]. When Eritrea arms an Ethiopian rebel, the question to ask is not only what Asmara gains, but whom it serves.

5.2 The Export: A Colonial Thesis With an Amhara Face

The thesis had Ethiopian roots as well. The student movement of the 1960s debated the “question of nationalities”, and its best-known statement was written in 1969 by Wallelgne Makonnen, himself from Wollo and a



graduate of the Woizero Sehin school in Dessie [147]. Dessie in those years has a story of its own. The governor of Wollo was Dejazmach Solomon Abraha, the uncle of Isaias Afwerki, who lived and studied with him there; in May 1965 students were killed in Dessie’s Piazza under his governorship, and he was moved to the Ministry of Interior soon after [52]. Dessie also tells — and it is a rumour, not a finding — that the governor’s Cairo- and British-educated secretary, Dr Daniel Tesfagabir, quietly steered the town’s students towards the ideas that would later serve the fronts, without their knowing where those ideas led, and that Isaias was the best tutored of them. Whatever the truth of that, the sequence that followed is a matter of record: the student revolt, the Wollo famine of 1973–74, and the fall of the emperor. Ethiopia proper has tended to wake to such designs twenty or twenty-five years late — after the sea was gone — and it is doing the same now, clouded by ethnic politics while the greater danger approaches.

But it was the Eritrean front that gave the thesis its colonial form, fought beside the young **TPLF** in the field, and supplied the model of a liberation front that would end in a state of its own; the **TPLF**’s manifesto of 1976 called for an independent Tigray [124]. The OLF, for its part, cast Ethiopia’s relation to the Oromo as colonial [76]. Each of the three fronts thus built its founding programme on a figure of oppression that, in the vocabulary of the time, was given an Amhara face: “Amhara domination”, “the Amhara ruling class”, “Abyssinian colonialism” [76, 124]. In 1991 the fronts took power together; in 1995 the thesis became the **Constitution**, and a new Ethiopia was constituted — without Eritrea, without a coast, and with its largest historic state-building community recast as the nation’s original offender. Three decades of ethnic politics kept the narrative in circulation, and it has outlived the fronts that wrote it.

5.3 The Recoil: A Design That Devoured Its Authors

Designs of this kind rarely deliver what they promise their authors. Table 4 sets the promise against the outcome for each party.

Table 4: What the design promised each party, and what each received.

Party	What the design promised	What it received
Egypt	A weak upstream neighbour that would never dam the Nile	GERD built and inaugurated in September 2025 [86]
Eritrea’s ruling front	A coastal Singapore living off a divided hinterland	War with its former ally in 1998–2000, with 50,000–100,000 dead [126]; a garrison state without national elections and with open-ended national service [146]; relations with Addis Ababa severed and Assab now the explicit flashpoint [17]
The TPLF	Rule of Ethiopia from a secure ethnic base, with the right to leave in reserve	The centre lost in 2018; a war that killed as many as 600,000 [30]; its people massacred by the Eritrean army it now calls an ally [59, 60]; Mekelle abandoned again in October 2026 [15]
Oromo nationalism	Liberation from an Amhara “coloniser”	The centre captured in the Oromo name, by a party at war with the OLA ; Oromo dying on both sides of that war [9, 14]
The Amhara	Cast as the common enemy	The first victims: Wollega, Sheger, the drones and Merawi (Table 3); and now, for the first time, organised in arms

The three fronts that wrote the narrative are now disembowelling one another — Asmara and Mekelle against an Oromo-led centre, that centre against the **OLA**, and the centre against **FANO**. Yet they remain joined by the ideology that founded them and by the enemy it named. That is the strategic fact from which any policy on the sea must begin.

5.4 Oromummaa: A Project With a Following and No Stated Limit

The project of the third of those fronts now holds the state, and its ideology must be described as its own advocates describe it. Oromummaa is not an invention of its critics: its leading scholar-advocate distinguishes a local Oromo identity from a *national* Oromummaa “built on the Oromo national cultural identity and liberation politics” [148]. In power it commands a large following, and honesty requires saying so. Its critics



see in the conduct of the ruling party a modern *moggaasa* — the institution by which the Oromo expansion of the sixteenth century assimilated the peoples it conquered: their names, lineages and identities erased and replaced by Oromo ones. It is not to be confused with *guddifachaa*, the adoption of an individual into a family. Its historian records *moggaasa* as collective incorporation [123]; the descendants of the peoples it absorbed remember it as domination and elimination — an ethnocide by assimilation. The earliest written record of that expansion, the monk Bahrey’s chronicle of 1593, describes its speed, its organisation by age-grade and its absence of any fixed limit [149]. Bahrey wrote as a member of the society being overrun and is not a neutral witness; nor did Oromo power then sleep for centuries, for the Yejju dynasty dominated the imperial court in the Era of the Princes [150]. What is new is that the project now holds a modern state, an army, a treasury and drones.

The evidence of its appetite is in the public record. The 1995 **Constitution** reserves to Oromia a “special interest” in the federal capital [71]. In 2022–23 the region created Sheger City around Addis Ababa, and the national human-rights commission found its demolitions and forced evictions unlawful and, in places, selective by ethnic group [151]. The modern *moggaasa*, its critics argue, absorbs by other means: control of the security services and the capital, boundary and language, and the political disarmament of rivals in turn — Tigray first, then the Amhara, and now Eritrea named as the external enemy. A project whose claims grow with its power, and which states no limit, is limited only by institutions that bind it.

Hence the order of battle. Ethiopia must first defeat the Oromummaa project — not the Oromo people, whom the project claims as its constituency, but the project of capturing the state in one group’s image. Its weight is borne unequally: the Amhara and the Tigrayans have paid the heaviest price (Section 4), and Oromo who dissent have not been spared. It must be defeated as a political programme, by means that cannot be turned against any people: a citizens’ **Constitution** that denies every group the state, a capital that belongs to all its citizens, courts that strike down selective evictions, and a party law under which no one can win national power without winning across regions. That comes first because a campaign for the sea led by an unreformed Oromummaa state would be a campaign for that project’s coast, not the nation’s.

5.5 Repentance Owed: Eritrean Exceptionalism and Tigrayan Hubris

The authors of the design in Asmara and Mekelle owe their own peoples, and Ethiopia, an honest account of what they built and what it cost. The evidence so far points the other way. In Asmara it points to an exceptionalism that holds Eritrea categorically apart from, and above, the hinterland on which its prosperity would always depend — a conviction that produced a war with its closest ally, a garrison state and a generation in flight [146, 14]. In Mekelle it points to the hubris of a small leadership that believed a community of some six per cent of the population could rule a nation of 130 million through a **Constitution** written for the purpose [152], and that, having lost, could return to power in alliance with the army that massacred its own people at Axum [59, 31]. Until both leaderships repent, neither is a partner for peace; both remain partners in the narrative.

6 FANO: The Answer of the People Targeted

The design named an enemy, and in time the enemy answered. This section takes that answer on its own terms — its origin, its assets, its test — and then draws from it the citizen answer that links Part I to Part II.

6.1 A Revolt That Will Not Be Extinguished Easily

Into that history the Amhara have now answered in kind. **FANO** grew out of the protest movement of 2016–18, fought beside the federal army in Tigray, and turned against it after the federal order of April 2023 to dissolve the regional special forces left Amhara communities, as they saw it, disarmed among armed neighbours. A state of emergency followed in August, and an insurgency that by its own claim now operates across most of the region [122]. For the first time in the modern state’s history, the Amhara have organised *as Amhara* to take up arms against an established central government. But **FANO** is not a liberation front. The **EPLF**, the **TPLF** and the OLF, with its armed wing the **OLA**, were founded to liberate a people *from* Ethiopia, and



each keeps the right to leave in reserve if the country does not suit it; **FANO** was formed to defend a people *within* Ethiopia against massacre, and its cause is the integrity of the state the fronts were built to break. It is therefore the opposite of the fronts, not a fourth of them. **FANO** presents itself as a revolt against injustice and a struggle for the survival of the Amhara people, and its stated aim is to reach the levers of power, alone or in coalition — at the least as a force for political and security balance, if not for dominance. It carries its own record into that aim: the Welkait findings name Amhara militias among the perpetrators, a charge its present leaders say predates their organisation [118, 122].

Its constituency is wider than the map of the Amhara region suggests. The Amhara built the Ethiopian state, and that is both why they are scattered across every region and why they are hated. The 2007 census counted about one Amhara in five outside the Amhara region [152]; many more, settled for generations in Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz and the Somali region and speaking the local language, are recorded under the identity of the region they live in. On my reading the Amhara outside the region may approach the number within it.

FANO enters the next round with four assets no rival can match. Its *brand* is that of a fair revolt against injustice. Its *record*, because it is young, carries far less of the burden of massacre and expulsion that the **EPLF**, the **TPLF**, the **OLF** and the ruling party's own Amhara wing carry. Its *conduct* towards captured soldiers is widely reported in Amhara and beyond as humane — a reputation earned among the many soldiers it reports capturing [168], though not yet independently verified. And its *support* runs through the Amhara people and, among Ethiopians who reject ethnic politics as I do, well beyond them. Its stated objective — to remove both the government of Abiy Ahmed and the 1995 **Constitution** with the establishment that lives off it — is the only one among the armed movements that coincides with the four singular interests in three layers. On my reading it is the only organisation with the objective, the cause, the following and the credibility to carry that programme. Impartiality requires the other half of the ledger. For years **FANO** was several regional commands, divided at times by personality and strategy [122]. On 17 January 2026 the two main formations, the Amhara **FANO** National Force and the Amhara **FANO** Popular Organisation, merged into the Amhara **FANO** National Movement under one chairman, Zemene Kassie, a single chain of command, a military commander and a political wing [54]; some local groups may still stand outside it. It has yet to publish a programme that says what it would do with power, and it carries the Welkait findings into any settlement. A movement that cannot yet say what it would do with power gives other communities reason to wait and see. Its task is to convert a moral advantage into a national consensus before its rivals convert their narrative against it.

A movement born of the conviction that its people face extinction does not lay down its arms because it is bombed; the drones of the last three years have recruited for it [13]. Nor will it disarm for a promise. That makes peace harder, and it makes the terms of peace clearer. **FANO** will not be extinguished, and it should not be appeased with the dominance some of its partisans want. It can be answered only with what it says it is fighting for — security for Amhara communities wherever they live, a share of power that does not depend on a rifle, and a **Constitution** under which no people can again be named the nation's enemy. Those are exactly the terms the two decisions of Part II are designed to supply.

6.2 The High Moral Ground: What FANO Must Become

FANO's future will be decided less by its rifles than by its cause. The Amhara have been the most constant architects of the Ethiopian state and its most honest partners in it, and a movement that speaks in their name inherits that standard. It already holds much of what its rivals have spent: a cleaner name, a humane reputation and the trust of its people. That capital is perishable. To spend it on a national consensus — to become a national force rather than an ethnic one — it must do six things.

1. **Keep the high moral ground.** Go on treating prisoners as it is reported to do; fight by the laws of war, protect civilians of every descent, and hand its own abusers — including any named in Welkait — to an independent process. A movement that claims to resist injustice cannot be seen to commit it.
2. **Fight for an inclusive Ethiopia.** A citizens' **Constitution** for all, not an Amhara restoration. The dominance some of its partisans want is the mirror image of the project it is fighting, and would recruit every other community against it.



3. **Separate peoples from their elites.** The Oromo, Tigrayan and Eritrean peoples are not the enemy; the narrative and the machine that live off them are. Every statement **FANO** makes should be one an Oromo or Tigrayan farmer could read without fear.
4. **Confront the machine in every community, its own included.** The Amhara branch of the ruling party and the militias it arms have done the machine's work in Amhara itself. **FANO's** quarrel with them is the same as with any other part of the machine, and it is pursued the same way: by exposing them, isolating them and winning over their members — never by turning on the communities they claim to represent.
5. **Build its own political and intellectual leadership.** It should not wait for the Amhara intellectuals who have withdrawn into silence; it must recruit them, at home and in the diaspora, to do for it what organised elites have long done for the **TPLF** and the **OLF**. It now has one command; it needs to bring in the groups still outside it, a published programme, a political leadership answerable to the people it fights for, a seat at the constituent table set out in Section 8.4, and a transitional charter, agreed with its partners before victory, that meets the six-part test of Section 3.3.
6. **Stay independent and strong inside the alliance.** An alliance of convenience is not a trust. **FANO** should coordinate operations with its partners but never merge its forces, place them under a command it does not share, or disarm before the charter is signed and verified. It should state its red lines in advance — no Article 39 in the new order, no settlement of Welkait and Raya by fiat, no bargain over the coast or the Nile with the alliance's sponsors — and widen its base among the smaller peoples, and among Oromo and Tigrayans who reject their own fronts' programmes, so that on the morning after it is the movement others need rather than the one they can isolate. Independence and strength are not a betrayal of the alliance; they are the only insurance against being betrayed by it.

6.3 Inside the Alliance Without Being Owned by It: A Strategy for FANO

The Ethiopian social-media debate on the alliance has hardened into two critiques worth taking seriously. The first holds that it is a *negative coalition* — an alliance against a man, with no agreed charter for the morning after (Section 3.3). The second is harsher: that the arrangement serves the **TPLF** and the **OLA** far more than **FANO**. The **TPLF**, on this view, is a weakened force that has not regained the confidence of its own people; the **OLA** has fought since 2018 without extending its hold much beyond parts of Wollega and Shewa; **FANO**, by contrast, has grown fast because the Amhara face an existential threat — but its politics trail its rifles. The critique also asks the question that matters most: what stops the **OLA** from making a separate peace with a weakened government? That is not idle. At the Tanzania talks of 2023 the **OLA** asked for a transitional government in Oromia alone, not across Ethiopia [55]; and at the alliance's first press conference on 27 September its members said they had a transitional charter, a code of conduct and a joint master plan, with decisions by consensus and a two-thirds vote as fall-back — but did not publish them [56]. Both critiques are right about the risk. Neither offers a strategy. Here is one, built on a simple rule: **FANO** should give the alliance what it needs to defeat the regime, and nothing that would let its partners, or its enemies, defeat **FANO** afterwards.

Six principles.

1. **Publish first, and make publication the price.** **FANO** should publish its own programme — a citizens' **Constitution**, the integrity of the state, no Article 39, one army — and then make every deeper step of cooperation conditional on the alliance publishing its charter. A charter that cannot survive daylight will not survive victory, and a partner who refuses to publish has told **FANO** what it needs to know.
2. **Cooperate in tranches, not by a blank cheque.** Coordinate operations step by step, each step matched by a verifiable step from the partner — deconfliction, prisoner exchanges, joint monitoring of civilian protection. Reciprocity of this kind is how rivals build trust without betting their survival on it [57].
3. **Hold a blocking third.** If decisions fall to a two-thirds vote among seven members, five votes carry a decision and three block it. **FANO's** first diplomatic task inside the alliance is therefore to build, with the



- Afar, Benishangul and other smaller members — none of which has a secession programme of its own to protect — a bloc of at least three that can veto any clause on secession, disputed territory or the capital.
4. **Make a separate peace expensive.** Propose a no-separate-peace pledge: any negotiation with the government is conducted by a joint delegation on a joint mandate, and a member that negotiates alone is publicly named and loses the coordination it depends on. If partners refuse the pledge, **FANO** should plan on the assumption that one of them will defect.
 5. **Govern where it holds ground.** The strongest argument against the charge of ethnic dominance is a working example: civilian administration in the areas **FANO** holds that is open, accountable and equal to every resident, whatever their descent or faith. A movement that shows it can govern a district is believed when it says it can share a country.
 6. **Win the members of the machine, not only its battles.** The ruling party’s Amhara wing, heir to the ANDM, and the militias it arms are the instrument of an Amhara-against-Amhara war. Offer their rank and file amnesty and a place, isolate their leaders, and never let the conflict become one between Amhara communities.

Table 5: The plays **FANO** must anticipate, and its counter to each.

Actor	Likely play	FANO’s counter
TPLF	Use the alliance to recover Welkait and Raya and to draft the transition with Article 39 in reserve; lean on Asmara	Freeze the disputed lands under an independent body; a blocking third on secession; never place forces under a joint command it does not share
OLF/OLA	Bank the alliance’s pressure, then make a separate deal with a weakened government for an Oromia-only transition; claim the capital	No-separate-peace pledge and joint delegation; Addis Ababa a federal city held by no member; direct outreach to Oromo who reject the fronts’ programme
Ruling party (OPDO-PP)	Split the alliance with separate offers; play the religion card; brand FANO as “Amhara warmongers”; keep the drones flying	Refuse bilateral offers; publish its own programme; govern its areas equally for all faiths and peoples; record and publicise every civilian strike
Amhara branch of the ruling party (ex-ANDM)	Turn the war into Amhara against Amhara through regional militias and co-opted leaders	Amnesty and a place for the rank and file; expose and isolate the leaders; no reprisals against communities
Asmara and Cairo	Exact a price for their support — silence on the coast and the Nile	State in writing that the coast and the Nile are not for sale; accept no aid with that condition

The aim of all six principles is the same: that on the morning after, **FANO** is the indispensable member of a national settlement — too strong to be outflanked, too clean to be isolated, and too clearly committed to one Ethiopia to be mistaken for another front.

6.4 Neutralising the Narrative: The Citizen Answer

The narrative that turned three fronts against the Amhara, and now turns them against one another, cannot be defeated by a fourth narrative of the same kind. An Amhara counter-grievance, an Oromummaa triumph or a Tigrayan revanche would each reproduce the machine with a new operator. It can be neutralised only by changing what the machine rewards. That is the work of the four singular interests arranged in three layers, all resting on the citizen. **National Unity** and **Red-Sea sovereignty** as the *foundations* give every Ethiopian a common stake that no group can own: a coast belongs to the nation, not to a region, and a citizenship that is equal everywhere cannot be captured by any descent. **Broad-based economic development** anchored in democracy as the *means* removes the scarcity on which the *racket* feeds [11], because a farmer with title, a worker with a wage and a child who can read are no longer recruits. **GERD** as the *engine* gives the whole country a shared asset whose value rises only if the country holds together, and the towns it powers bring Ethiopians of every descent to live, study, work and be treated side by side. And the instrument that binds them is a **Constitution** in which the individual, not the group, is sovereign, and in which sovereign access to the sea is written as a standing obligation of every government [6, 14]. Under such a **Constitution** the Oromummaa project has no state to capture, the anti-Amhara narrative has no legal home, and Eritrean exceptionalism has no divided hinterland to live off. That is the bridge to Part II.



PART II

Red-Sea Sovereignty and the Constitution

7 Red-Sea Sovereignty: The Right, the Law and the Price

7.1 How the Coast Was Lost

The *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor* is not a random line on a map. It is the seaboard of the Afar, a people who live on both sides of the present Ethiopia–Eritrea–Djibouti borders and whose hinterland lies overwhelmingly in Ethiopia. Assab entered modern history in 1869, when an Italian shipping company bought the bay from local Afar chiefs as a coaling station; the Italian state took it over in 1882 and made it the first foothold of its Eritrean colony [96]. The coast became “Eritrean” through a European purchase and a European colonial map, not through any history of its own.

When the United Nations disposed of Italy’s former colony in 1950, it did not ignore this. Resolution 390 A(V), which federated Eritrea with Ethiopia, took account of Ethiopia’s legitimate need for adequate access to the sea [94]. That principle — that Ethiopia’s access to the sea is a legitimate international interest, not an imperial appetite — was the foundation of the 1952 settlement. It was abandoned in 1991–93, when a transitional government led by a liberation front, not elected by the Ethiopian people, accepted an arrangement that left what is now the most populous landlocked nation on earth without a single metre of coast [5, 7].

Even then, Assab remained Ethiopia’s port in practice. Until 1998 it handled the bulk of Ethiopian trade; the town and its refinery lived off the Ethiopian hinterland. The border war of 1998–2000 closed it, and Ethiopia has paid Djibouti for its access ever since [74, 1]. For a quarter of a century Assab has been a port without a hinterland, serving no one but, occasionally, foreign militaries and now, reportedly, Egyptian plans [65]. Ethiopia has been a hinterland without a port. That is the injustice: not that Eritrea exists, but that the coast of the Afar was severed from the country that is its natural hinterland by a decision in which the Ethiopian people had no voice.

I have argued throughout this series that the claim to sovereign access is imprescriptible — that it does not lapse with time or with the signatures of unelected men — and that it must ultimately be completed by treaty [5, 8]. I stand by both halves of that sentence. But a treaty is signed by two parties, and a regime that has not held a national election since independence, and has kept its youth in open-ended national service, will not sign away a coast because it is asked politely. Treaties that correct historic injustices are signed when the party that benefits from the injustice has more to lose by refusing than by agreeing. Creating that condition is the task of statecraft. It is the task Abiy has not performed.

7.2 Consent at Gunpoint: The Illegitimacy of the Separation Itself

Most arguments that Ethiopia has no claim to the sea begin and end with one fact: Eritrea is a sovereign state. That is true, and Eritreans fought long and hard for their freedom; no Ethiopian should pretend otherwise. But the argument skips the question that comes first. Before one can ask whether Ethiopia may reclaim a coast, one must ask how it came to be given away — by whom, with what mandate, and under what pressure. On that question the record is damning, and it is rarely read. Table 6 sets out the legal chain from 1991 to 2018, and the defect in each link.

Table 6: The legal chain by which Ethiopia lost its coast, and the defect in each link.

When	What was done	The defect
May–Jul 1991	The EPRDF enters Addis Ababa alongside its EPLF allies; the EPLF installs a Provisional Government in Asmara and holds the whole coast, Assab included; a conference convened by the victors adopts a Transitional Charter [74]	No elected Ethiopian authority existed. The government that would speak for Ethiopia was led by the EPLF ’s comrade in arms and sat in the capital partly by its arms



When	What was done	The defect
1992	The Ethiopian and Eritrean transitional governments jointly ask the UN to observe a referendum; the General Assembly creates UNOVER [153]	Ethiopia's "consent" was given by the party whose ally was the beneficiary, while that ally's army held the territory in question
Apr–May 1993	Referendum among Eritreans only: 99.8 per cent for independence; Ethiopia recognises Eritrea; UN membership on 28 May [145]	The Ethiopian people were never asked. The fate of the Afar coast and of the main port Ethiopia had used for half a century was settled by one side's vote
1998–2000	Eritrea attacks at Badme, in breach of the UN Charter [70]; Ethiopia's offensive of May 2000 breaks the Eritrean front [74, 126]	Ethiopia won the war, yet the same government negotiated as though it had lost
Dec 2000	Algiers Agreement: binding arbitration of the border; access to the sea is not on the table [129]	The strongest bargaining position Ethiopia had held since 1952 was spent without raising the sea. "We will not hand over our peace and democracy for the sake of Assab," its Prime Minister said in 2002 [154]
2002–18	The Boundary Commission awards Badme to Eritrea; Ethiopia refuses to implement it for sixteen years, then accepts it without condition in June 2018 [130]	The award was resisted, but the sea was never reopened
Sep 2018	Jeddah Agreement: the two states record that they are "respecting each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity" and undertake to implement the Boundary Commission's decision [155]	The first government of the reform era re-affirmed, in a fresh treaty, what an unelected government had conceded — and asked nothing in return

Read as a whole, the chain has one character: Ethiopia never consented. It was represented, in each decisive act from 1991 to 2000, by a government it had not freely elected, led by a front that had fought beside the beneficiary, installed in the capital with that beneficiary's help, and facing an army — schooled from its birth in Cairo's orbit [145] — that held the very coast in question. A transfer of a nation's outlet to the sea, made by such a government, under such pressure, without a vote, is not a settlement freely entered. It is consent at gunpoint. The international order that now answers every Ethiopian question with the single word "sovereignty" answers a question nobody asked, and in doing so becomes the guardian of an injustice it helped to create. The African Union, which applies its doctrine of inherited borders without asking which border Ethiopia carried into 1952, and the United Nations, which in 1950 recorded Ethiopia's legitimate need for the sea [94], had every reason to ask whether the Ethiopian people consented in 1993. Neither did.

The legal theories. The argument can be put in the law's own terms, and it should be. A state may invoke the invalidity of its consent to a treaty when that consent was given in manifest violation of a rule of its internal law of fundamental importance concerning competence, or when it was procured by the coercion of its representative or by the threat or use of force [156]. Ethiopia's case is that no Ethiopian law of 1991–93 gave an unelected transitional authority competence to alienate national territory; that the authority which gave consent was not a free agent but the ally and, in part, the creature of the party that gained; and that a nation was partitioned while one of the two armies concerned stood on the land being partitioned.

The counter-case, stated fairly. Every one of those arguments will be met, and the answers are serious. International law treats a government in effective control as the voice of the state, whatever its origin, so that the acts of the transitional government bind Ethiopia as the acts of the Derg did. The referendum was observed and certified by the United Nations, and Eritrea was admitted to the UN and the OAU with Ethiopia's support. The coercion grounds are read narrowly, and are hardest to prove when the consenting government was a willing ally rather than a coerced opponent. Boundary regimes are deliberately insulated from changes of government and of state [157]. And above all, successive Ethiopian governments have since confirmed the outcome by their own conduct: Algiers in 2000, unconditional acceptance of the boundary award in 2018, and Jeddah the same year. In law, a claim that a state never consented is weakened every time its later governments act as though it had.

What follows: stop the erosion, then entrench the claim. The illegitimacy of the separation is the strongest *political and moral* ground Ethiopia has, and a legitimate basis for the advisory route and the treaty agenda of Section 7.4. But it is a ground that later Ethiopian governments have eroded by their own signatures,



and international law is unforgiving of silence: a state that stays silent when the circumstances call for protest may be held to have accepted what it did not protest [158]. Every year without a formal reservation adds to the record of acquiescence that Algiers and Jeddah began. The remedy is the one I set out in the election article: replace a **Constitution** of groups with a **Constitution** of citizens, and write the demand for **Red-Sea sovereignty** into it, so that the claim stops being any government’s to trade and becomes the standing obligation of every government [6, 7]. I called it then *declare and legislate* [9]; what follows is its legal sequence.

1. **Declare, now, by resolution of Parliament.** The Ethiopian people never consented to the disposition of the coast in 1991–93; no act of any Ethiopian government since, Algiers and Jeddah included, is to be read as a renunciation of the nation’s claim to sovereign access; and the claim is reserved for settlement by treaty. It costs nothing, needs no constitutional change, and stops the clock of acquiescence on the day it is passed.
2. **Notify it, so that silence can never again be read as consent.** Deposit the resolution with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for circulation to member states, and attach to the Jeddah Agreement an interpretive declaration that its reference to “territorial integrity” is without prejudice to the question of sovereign access, which remains for negotiation between the two states.
3. **Entrench it in a citizens’ Constitution.** Under the 1995 text sovereignty belongs to “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples” (Article 8), so even the nation’s claim to the sea is legally the property of its ethnic units, any one of which holds a right to leave (Article 39). Only a **Constitution** that vests sovereignty in the citizen can make the claim the claim of every Ethiopian equally [6]. It must state sovereign access to the sea as a foundational objective of the state, binding on every government, together with the order of means — peaceful settlement first and exhaustively, and no renunciation of the rights any state retains if that route is refused [14].
4. **Lock it against the next Jeddah.** Provide in the new **Constitution** that no treaty, declaration or agreement touching national territory or the nation’s access to the sea binds Ethiopia unless approved by two-thirds of Parliament and by the people in a referendum. The coast was lost because a few men could sign it away; the remedy is that no few men ever can again.

The sequence matters. The resolution stops the erosion; the notification puts the world on record; the **Constitution** turns a grievance into a national obligation; and the lock ensures that the next government cannot undo in an afternoon what the nation will have spent a generation recovering. Ethiopia was under duress when the coast was taken, and it remains partly under duress today, with foreign troops on its soil and its rebels in foreign pay. A nation in that position does not argue its case by forgetting how it lost it — nor by leaving it to the discretion of whoever next holds the pen.

7.3 The Law: What Supports the Claim and What Stands Against It

A claim that will be put to a court, a mediator or a hostile capital must first be tested against the strongest case on the other side. Table 7 does that for every instrument that bears on it.

Table 7: The legal framework of the Red-Sea claim: each instrument, and the case it makes on each side.

Instrument	What it provides	For Ethiopia’s claim	Against it
UNGA Res. 390 A(V), 1950 [94]	Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia	Records Ethiopia’s legitimate need for adequate access to the sea as an international interest	Recognises a need for access, not title to a named coast; the federation it created was dissolved by Ethiopia itself in 1962
Referendum and UN admission of Eritrea, 1993	Eritrean independence, recognised by Ethiopia’s transitional government	The Ethiopian people were never consulted; the government that consented was unelected [5, 11]	Recognition binds the Ethiopian state, not only the government that gave it; no successor has withdrawn it



Instrument	What it provides	For Ethiopia's claim	Against it
Algiers Agreement, 2000, and Boundary Commission decision, 2002 [129]	A final and binding delimitation	Delimited a line; did not address access to the sea [5]	Places Assab inside Eritrea; Ethiopia accepted the decision without condition in 2018 [130]
UN Charter Arts. 2(4), 51; UNGA Res. 3314, Art. 3(g); ICJ <i>Nicaragua</i> , 1986	Prohibits force; preserves self-defence against armed attack, including attack by armed bands a state sends	Eritrean regular forces on Ethiopian soil since the last war, and sponsorship of armed movements, constitute an armed attack [36, 61, 68]	Attributing proxies' acts requires proof to a high standard; self-defence must be necessary and proportionate, and ends when the attack is repelled [95]
UNGA Res. 2625, 1970 [69]	No acquisition of territory by force to be recognised	My position: the title rests on a right never lawfully surrendered, not on force	Any incorporation achieved by force would be denied recognition
OAU Cairo Resolution, 1964; AU Constitutive Act, Art. 4(b) [131, 132]	Respect for borders existing at independence	Ethiopia's border at the 1952 federation included the coast [5]	The border applied to Eritrea is the colonial one of 1900–08, and African diplomacy defends such borders almost without exception
UNCLOS, Art. 125 [133]	Right of access to and from the sea, and freedom of transit, for landlocked states	An access right recognised in law and widely regarded as customary [127]	A transit right negotiated with transit states; it confers no sovereignty

The reading of that table must be stated without flattery. Under the prevailing interpretation of international law, title to Assab lies today with Eritrea, and no court or mediator will transfer it on the strength of history alone [127]. Ethiopia's strongest legal ground is therefore not title but three things that are real: an international interest in its access to the sea, recorded by the United Nations itself; a right of self-defence against an armed attack that continues on Ethiopian soil; and a political argument — that a nation's outlet was bargained away by an authority with no mandate — which no court will decide but which every treaty-maker must answer. My own position, set out above, stands: the right is imprescriptible and the question juridically live [5, 8]. But a live question is closed in only one way the world will recognise: *by treaty*. Every course below must be judged by whether it brings that treaty nearer.

7.4 From Grievance to Case: The Claim Made Precise

A grievance can mobilise a nation; only a case can move a court, a mediator or a neighbour. The Red-Sea argument has been criticised — fairly — for running four distinct propositions together, so that the strength of the strongest is lent to the weakest. They must be separated, because each needs different evidence and each is answered in a different forum. Table 8 separates them and states, without flattery, where each stands.

Table 8: The four propositions of the Red-Sea claim, the evidence for each, and its standing.

Proposition	Evidence	Standing
1. Landlockedness imposes a large economic and strategic cost on Ethiopia	Transport costs of landlocked states well above coastal peers [110, 111]; port and transit fees of about USD 1.5 billion a year [125]; one corridor and one road, which rebels tried to cut in 2021 and again in 2026 [35]	<i>Established</i> . No serious critic disputes it
2. Ethiopia has a historical and political connection to the corridor	Assab bought from Afar chiefs by an Italian company in 1869 and made a colony in 1882 [96]; the Afar hinterland lies mostly in Ethiopia; the UN's 1950 recognition of Ethiopia's need for access [94]; federation 1952–62; Assab as Ethiopia's working port until 1998 [74]	<i>Established as history</i> ; contested in its legal weight
3. That connection amounts to a present right to sovereignty	The UN's 1950 recognition; the absence of any mandate from the Ethiopian people for the decisions of 1991–93 [5, 11] (Section 7.2); the coast's colonial, not historical, origin as “Eritrean”	<i>Contested</i> . Under the prevailing reading, title lies with Eritrea and can change only by treaty or adjudication [127]



4. Ethiopia may pursue the claim by negotiation, by legal process and, if attacked, in self-defence

UN Charter Arts. 2(3), 33 and 51 [67]

Established for negotiation and legal process. Self-defence is lawful against an armed attack, but confers no title

This sharpens the claim; it does not weaken it. The strategic case is unanswerable, and it is the reason the question can never be closed by indifference. The historical case is strong. The title is where the argument must be won, and it can be won only at a table — which is precisely why the means decide whether the world sees a nation recovering its outlet or a state seeking another’s territory. A nation that intends to recover its coast at all cost must count legitimacy among the costs it cannot afford to lose. A coast taken without it would have to be held against the world for a generation; a coast won with it will be held *by* the world on our behalf.

The claim, defined. *Territory:* the *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor*, from Ras Doumeira to Tio, some 325km point to point, with Assab at its centre and the maritime zones attached to it (footnote 1). *Remedy sought:* sovereignty, transferred by treaty; and until the treaty, a guaranteed Ethiopian-operated port and corridor at Assab as an interim regime that prejudices neither party’s claim. *Legal basis argued:* the international interest in Ethiopia’s access recorded by the UN in 1950; the want of any Ethiopian popular mandate for the disposition of 1991–93; and the strategic necessity of a state of 130 million that has no other secure outlet. *The people who live there:* no settlement is legitimate that the Afar and the other residents of the corridor cannot accept. Every resident keeps his property, his language and his local self-government, chooses his citizenship, and is displaced by no one.

The instruments, in order.

1. **A national white paper.** Publish the documentary record — the treaties of 1900, 1902 and 1908, the record of the UN Commission for Eritrea, the Federal Act of 1952, the acts of 1962, and every decision of 1991–93 — and submit it to an independent panel of international jurists, foreign as well as Ethiopian, whose opinions are published even where they disagree with the government. A claim that fears scrutiny is not a claim.
2. **A standing offer to Asmara.** Bilateral negotiation, open to the present government and to any successor, under African Union and IGAD good offices.
3. **The advisory route.** The General Assembly may ask the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion without the consent of the state concerned. That is how Mauritius reopened a decolonisation the United Kingdom considered closed: an opinion in 2019 that its decolonisation had not been lawfully completed, a General Assembly resolution, and in 2025 a treaty [138, 139, 140]. The route cuts both ways — Eritrea would argue its own decolonisation from the same premises — and the Court has held that a state cannot be compelled to negotiate sovereign access to the sea it has not promised [141]. The advisory route is therefore an instrument for putting the question on the world’s agenda and shaping the terms of a treaty, not a substitute for one.
4. **A treaty between equals.** Borders have been redrawn by agreement to give a state its coast: in 1965 Jordan and Saudi Arabia exchanged territory and extended Jordan’s coastline on the Gulf of Aqaba by eighteen kilometres [142]. Such treaties are signed when both sides gain. Eritrea would gain an end to isolation, a share in GERD’s power, transit revenue from the largest hinterland in the Horn, and security guarantees — offered as the fruits of a settlement between equals, never as the price of a right.
5. **Self-defence, kept within the Charter.** Against the armed attack that continues on Ethiopian soil — and only against it — Ethiopia may use force that is necessary and proportionate, reported at once to the Security Council as Article 51 requires [67], aimed at ending the attack and the sponsorship behind it. Self-defence and title are two separate legal questions, and I do not claim that the first decides the second. Force may change who comes to the table and in what mood. It may not replace the table.



7.5 The Decision Cannot Wait; the War Can

My position has never changed: peaceful priority, without peaceful exclusivity [5, 8]. The peaceful route has been tried. In October 2023 the Prime Minister called access to the sea a natural right and offered shares in **GERD** for stakes in neighbouring ports; Asmara called the remarks excessive [91]. A reported offer of a stake in Ethiopian Airlines for port access, never officially confirmed, went nowhere [92]. In November 2023 he pledged publicly not to invade any neighbour [93]. The reply has been alignment with Egypt, sponsorship of Ethiopian armed movements, Eritrean troops on Ethiopian soil and, in January 2026, the accusation that Ethiopia had declared war [33, 36, 62]. Peace was offered. It was answered with proxies.

And the moment is real. The strait is being partitioned without us; the patrons who would restrain Ethiopia are consumed by their own wars; and every month that passes entrenches Egyptian investment in Assab and the alliance on Ethiopian soil [79, 84, 65]. When the map of the southern Red Sea is settled — and wars of this kind settle maps — the powers that stood on the shore will be at the table and the powers that did not will be on the menu.

The rules themselves are changing. The order that looked away in 1993 rested on a consensus led from the UN Security Council. That consensus is now paralysed by its own permanent members, and in the Red Sea it has given way to alignments: Gulf monarchies, Turkey and Egypt each acquiring ports, bases and clients, and four coastal governments declaring at New Alamein that the sea is theirs alone to govern [30, 97]. In such a region, international rules will not deliver Ethiopia's coast, and they will not stop others from taking positions on it. They remain the language in which a title is recorded and a treaty upheld, which is why the claim must be made in law. But whether it is ever realised will be decided by alignment, and by the strength of the nation that makes it.

But the urgency attaches to the *decision*, not to the first shot, and the difference is the difference between a war aim and a gambit. A gambit is an opportunistic grab in the hope that the enemy is weak and the world distracted; it ends, as Eritrea's seizure of Badme ended in 1998, in a war the grabber did not prepare for and a judgment against it in law [70]. A war aim is a declared national objective, grounded in a lawful grievance, pursued by a mobilised nation, bounded by a stated end state and paired with an offer of peace. What cannot wait is everything that converts a claim into a war aim: the reservation, the dossier, the codification, the parliamentary vote, the treaty offer (Sections 7.2 and 7.4). Those cost nothing in blood, and their absence has cost us thirty years. Force is the backstop, available in self-defence against the attack that continues on Ethiopian soil — and, as Section 7.6 shows, available with any prospect of success only to a nation that has first stopped fighting itself.

7.6 Four Courses and Their Price

Four courses are open to the nation, and each has a price that will be paid by people now living and by their children. Table 9 sets them side by side. The figures in it are the only ones I can source; where a cost cannot be quantified honestly, it is described rather than invented.

Table 9: The four courses on the Red Sea: what each gains, what it risks, and who pays.

Course	Gains	Losses and risks	Price to the nation now	Price to the future
A. Remain as we are: rented access through Djibouti	No war; no legal exposure	One corridor and one road through Afar, which rebels have tried to cut [35]; excluded from the “littoral” order by definition [97]	Port and transit fees of about USD 1.5 billion a year [125]	Permanent dependence; the claim decays into a slogan
B. Buy or lease access: port stakes, leases, memoranda	Lawful; diversifies corridors	Revocable; the 2024 Berbera memorandum united Somalia and Egypt against Ethiopia, and Berbera is now a Houthis target [82]; concedes that the right must be paid for	Equity, fees and political concessions	Access at others' discretion; no seat where the sea is governed



Course	Gains	Losses and risks	Price to the nation now	Price to the future
C. A negotiated sovereign settlement: a treaty transferring or sharing the corridor	The only course that yields recognised title; durable	Needs a counterpart in Asmara willing to sign; Eritrean nationalism; may take years	Diplomatic capital; trade, transit and partnership offered as the fruits of settlement, not its price	A recognised coast, and a neighbour bound to it by interest
D. Coercive recovery in self-defence, with the treaty offered from the first day	Ends the sponsorship at its source; creates the condition under which C becomes possible	Lawful only to repel the attack, not to acquire title [69]; non-recognition, sanctions and the IMF programme at risk [30]; Egyptian and Saudi reaction; a hostile population to govern	The last interstate war killed 50,000–100,000 [126]; this one would be fought beside the internal war of seven armed movements	Fought by a divided nation: another war turns into grievance. Fought by a reconciled one: possibly the end of the proxy war

Three conclusions follow, and they discipline the argument of the subsections before this one.

First, the end is fixed, and only one course reaches it. Course C — a treaty — is the only one that produces a sovereignty the world will recognise. Courses A and B are what we live on while we get there; course D is what creates the condition under which an unwilling counterpart signs. None of them is an end in itself.

Second, the decision comes before the shot (Section 7.5): the war aim declared, the evidence laid before the African Union and the UN, the sea written into the **Constitution**, Parliament’s vote.

Third, course D is open only to a reconciled nation. A recovery attempted by a government at war with its own Amhara, Tigrayans and Oromo would be fought on borrowed loyalty, would hand Asmara the internal allies it is already paying for, and would end, like 1998–2000, in a ruined border and an unchanged map. That is why the agenda places peace at home and a new **Constitution** before the prosecution of the claim (Section 15), and why the next section is not a digression from this one but its precondition.

7.7 Testing the Assumptions About Other States

Every course in Table 9 rests on assumptions about how others will act. A strategy is only as good as its worst-case assumption, so Table 10 states each one, its evidence, how robust it is, and what follows if it is wrong.

Table 10: Assumptions about other actors on the Red-Sea question, tested.

Actor	Interest assumed	Evidence	Robustness	If the assumption is wrong
Eritrean state	Keep the coast; keep Ethiopia divided, with Egyptian backing	Sponsorship of armed movements; Egyptian port and security ties; relations severed October 2026 [64, 17, 65]	High	A willing Asmara makes course C immediate — the best case
Eritrean public	Assab as part of national identity	Thirty years of independence; 1993 vote; hostility to the claim in the series’ own correspondence	High	Only a treaty that offers Eritreans more than the status quo can hold
The Afar	Divided by three borders; hostile to Asmara’s rule in part	An Eritrean Afar opposition movement is active against Asmara [66]	Medium	If the Afar oppose a settlement, it is illegitimate; their consent is a condition, not an assumption
Egypt	Remain sole beneficiary of the Nile and the region’s dominant power; contain Ethiopia on the Nile and the sea, with Asmara as its forward partner	Assab port upgrade; troops in Somalia; New Alamein declaration [65, 84, 97]	High	Plan for active opposition in every forum, which the legal route anticipates



Actor	Interest assumed	Evidence	Robustness	If the assumption is wrong
Saudi Arabia	Align with Asmara; keep the strait in littoral hands	Gulf alignment [31]; under Houthi fire and refused US air support [79]	Medium	A Riyadh freed from the Houthi war could weigh heavily for Asmara; another reason for the lawful case
UAE	Align with Addis Ababa	Gulf alignment [31]	Medium	Its port interests (Berbera) may prefer access deals to Ethiopian sovereignty
Djibouti	Keep Ethiopia's transit trade	Most Ethiopian trade passes through it [125]; Doraleh cooperation renewed February 2026 [143]	High	An Ethiopian coast is a revenue loss; Djibouti must be kept a partner, not made a casualty
United States	Distracted; sanctions on Eritrea lapsed	War with Iran; sanctions expiry [79, 66]	Low	A re-engaged Washington controls the IMF and World Bank leverage on Ethiopia [30]
African Union	Defend inherited borders	Cairo 1964; Constitutive Act Art. 4(b) [131, 132]	High	Only a negotiated settlement will ever be endorsed

The table points one way. The assumptions that are robust are hostile; the assumptions that are favourable are fragile. A strategy that depends on the fragile ones — a distracted America, a pinned-down Riyadh, a friendly Abu Dhabi — is a gamble on the weather. A strategy that survives the robust ones is the one set out above: a precise claim, a published case, peaceful priority, a treaty between equals, Djibouti kept as a partner, and force only within the Charter. That is not the cautious version of the claim. It is the only version that can still be standing when the windows of 2026 have closed.

7.8 The Sea and the Amhara: Why Following Abiy Is Russian Roulette

Ethiopia needs the Red Sea, and it needs Amhara **FANO**. The Amhara have built and defended the Ethiopian state longer than any other community in it, and in the last three decades they have also been the first victims of the narrative described in Section 5. That history imposes on them a duty that is the opposite of blind loyalty: to support the national claim to the sea without handing a blank cheque to the government that would prosecute it. On present evidence, to follow this government into a war for the coast is Russian roulette — and the chambers can be counted. Table 11 counts them, and names for each the indicator by which the Amhara, and every other Ethiopian, can tell whether it is loaded.

Table 11: How a Red-Sea campaign under the present government could be turned against the Amhara, and the indicator to watch.

Risk	How it would work	Indicator to watch
Vanguard and casualty	The war is fought from Amhara, Afar and Tigray soil, with Amhara conscripts and militias in the front line	Mobilisation quotas falling disproportionately on Amhara zones
Disarmament by pretext	A national emergency is used to demand FANO 's surrender of arms, or to fight it as a collaborator of the enemy	Emergency decrees naming FANO alongside Eritrea; amnesty offered only for disarmament without a political settlement
Consolidation at home	The rally round the flag is used to entrench the Oromummaa project while reform waits	Constitutional reform postponed "until after the war"; evictions and boundary changes continuing
A gambit that fails	A short campaign ends in a ceasefire that leaves Asmara entrenched and Ethiopia sanctioned, and the blame is laid on "Amhara warmongers"	No published dossier, no report to the Security Council and no parliamentary vote before the first shot
A deal over Amhara heads	A settlement with Asmara or Mekelle trades Amhara territory or security for acquiescence	Negotiations that include territories in Amhara without Amhara representation

From the table follow the conditions on which the Amhara — and **FANO** with them — can support a campaign for the coast without becoming its casualty:



1. the constituent process opened, and the Oromummaa project bound by law, before the first shot;
2. a ceasefire and a political settlement with **FANO** that recognises it as a party;
3. the security of Amhara communities guaranteed by law, with the displaced of Wollega, Sheger and elsewhere returned and protected;
4. the lawful case made in full — the dossier, the report under Article 51, the parliamentary vote — so that the war is national and not the government's;
5. Amhara represented in the command of the war and at every negotiating table;
6. no settlement touching territory in Amhara without its consent.

This is a judgment to be made by intelligence, not enthusiasm: each condition is verified by evidence, and each indicator is watched. Supporting the claim to the sea is a national duty. Following this government blindly into it is not. The difference between the two is the difference between reclaiming the sea and being spent on the way to it for someone else's project.

7.9 The Conditions of a Lawful Recovery

I am not writing a campaign plan, and no serious person should publish one. But the political conditions of success can be stated, and they are the responsibility of the government, not the army.

1. **Build the lawful case before the first shot.** Self-defence against an armed attack is recognised in Article 51 of the UN Charter [67], and the General Assembly's Definition of Aggression counts the sending by a state of armed bands and irregulars among the acts that constitute one [68]. For *proxies*, the International Court of Justice set a high bar in the *Nicaragua* case for attributing irregulars' acts to a foreign state [95], and Ethiopia must meet it: a public dossier — documents, intercepts, prisoners' testimony, financial trails — laid before the African Union and the UN Security Council. But note what needs no attribution at all. Eritrean regular forces have stood on Ethiopian soil in Tigray since the last war, in defiance of the Pretoria agreement and against the stated demand of Ethiopia's own foreign ministry [36, 61]. That is not an inference about proxies; it is a continuing armed attack by a state's own army. The trigger of Article 51 was pulled years ago. Ethiopia has simply declined to exercise the right. But the right carries conditions, and Ethiopia must be seen to meet every one: force necessary and proportionate to ending the attack, and reported to the Security Council at once.
2. **Declare the war aim, and its limit.** The objective must be stated publicly: to end Eritrea's armed attack and its sponsorship of the war on Ethiopia, and to secure by treaty the *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor*, with Assab at its centre, as Ethiopia's sovereign outlet to the sea. The sequence must be stated with it, because evasion here has cost us thirty years: *end* the attack; *hold* only what self-defence requires, for as long as the threat persists; *negotiate* from strength; and *never renounce* — the claim written into the **Constitution** and kept before the African Union and the United Nations until a government in Asmara signs. A defined end state is what separates a war of national survival from a war of conquest, in law and in the eyes of the world; and this end state — a treaty — is defined, bounded and published in advance.
3. **Mobilise the nation, not a faction.** Parliament must vote on it. The nation must be told the cost. The Tigrayan victims of Axum, the Afar whose coast it is, and the Amhara and Oromo who have been dying in someone else's proxy war must be addressed as citizens with a stake in the outcome, not as audiences for a speech.
4. **Fight by the laws of war.** Ethiopia's case rests on Eritrea's crimes. It cannot be won by committing new ones. Civilians in Assab and across Eritrea are not the enemy; the regime in Asmara is.
5. **Offer peace in the same breath — but buy nothing.** The treaty Ethiopia seeks — sovereign access, a demarcated border, an end to proxy war, compensation for Axum — must be on the table from the first day, whether the man across it is Isaias Afwerki or his successor. What must never be on the table is payment for the right itself. Ethiopia owes Eritrea nothing in exchange for an outlet it never lawfully surrendered: trade, transit and partnership may follow a settlement as its fruits, but they are not the price



of a sovereignty that was taken, not sold. The claim lies against Asmara, which holds an entire littoral on the strength of an Italian colonial proclamation; against the African Union, whose doctrine of inherited borders was applied without asking which border Ethiopia carried into the 1952 federation; and against the United Nations, which federated the territory under the Ethiopian Crown in 1950, watched that federation destroyed in 1962, and in 1993 treated the partition of a member state as the completion of a decolonisation it had itself already concluded [94, 69].

7.10 No Excuse Left: The Court-Martial of History

Abiy Ahmed has said all the right words. He told Parliament in February that the Red Sea and Ethiopia cannot remain separated forever [59]. Banners at his government's parades have declared that Ethiopia will not remain landlocked "whether they like it or not" [63]. He named Eritrea's crimes in Axum, Shire and Adwa [59]. His foreign minister demanded Eritrea's withdrawal from north-eastern Tigray [61]. President Isaias, for his part, accused Ethiopia in January 2026 of having declared war on Eritrea [62]. The words have been spoken on both sides. Only the decision is missing.

And they were spoken again on 5 October, at his own swearing-in for a second five-year term, with the coast called critical to Ethiopia's civilisation and the method given as "give and take" [97]. That was the third year of saying it. A leader who announces a national objective at every ceremony and never converts it into an instrument of state — a dossier, a parliamentary vote, a demarcation demand, a clause in the **Constitution** — is not pursuing the objective. He is using it. The distinction between a war aim and a gambit, drawn above, has a humbler cousin: the distinction between a policy and a theme.

Consider what Abiy has that no Ethiopian leader since 1991 has had. He has a Parliament in which his party holds some 90 per cent of the seats [34]. He has the constitutional authority of commander-in-chief of the armed forces [71]. He has the strongest air arm of any state in the Horn. He has a lawful grievance confirmed by his own testimony. He has an enemy that has declared itself by arming his rebels. And he has, for the first time in a generation, a region in which every power that would restrain him is fighting its own war. A leader who holds all of these cards and does not play them is not being prudent. He is failing in his first duty.

Between 2023 and early 2026 he let pass the moment when Eritrean troops sat on Ethiopian soil in defiance of the Pretoria agreement, when Tigrayans had every reason to join a war against the army that had massacred them, and when the **TPLF** was divided [36]. He chose instead to play Tigrayan factions against each other, until the faction he opposed retook Mekelle and joined Asmara [32, 31]. I called that a lost window in the previous article of this series. If he now lets this second, larger window close as well — if he spends another year fighting Asmara's proxies at home while Asmara, Cairo and Tehran's allies divide the strait among themselves — then it will no longer be a lost opportunity. It will be dereliction.

*A general who abandons a defensible position without a fight is brought before a court-martial. A head of government who holds every card his nation needs to correct its gravest historical injustice, who has promised his Parliament that he will correct it, and who lets the moment pass while his soldiers die fighting the enemy's proxies, deserves the political equivalent: removal from office, and a public reckoning for the national interest he surrendered. No Ethiopian expects Parliament to deliver it: under the EPRDF and the Prosperity Party alike it has been a rubber stamp that has never removed a head of government. A ruler who answers to no institution leaves his people only the instrument he chose himself, which is force. If Abiy will not act, that is how he will go — and history will convene the court-martial that our **Constitution** does not.*

The Jeddah blunder. One act of this government deserves a separate verdict, because it did more damage to the nation's claim than any speech has done good. In September 2018, at Jeddah, Abiy Ahmed and Isaias Afwerki signed an agreement in which the two states recorded that they were "respecting each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity", and undertook to implement the boundary award [155]. Whatever doubt the separation of 1991–93 had left about Ethiopia's consent — and Section 7.2 shows how much it left — Jeddah did its best to settle in Asmara's favour. It was signed not by the unelected transitional government but by the first government of the reform era, at the height of its popularity and with Asmara



eager for peace, when a single sentence reserving the question of sovereign access would have cost nothing. It asked for no port, no corridor, no reservation and no guarantee. The same Prime Minister now tells Parliament that the sea and Ethiopia cannot remain separated forever [59]. Both cannot be his policy. Jeddah was the gravest strategic blunder of his leadership and a betrayal of the claim he now invokes, and repairing it is the first task of any government that means what he says.

In *Not Imperial Vision* I wrote that Abiy would be judged against the four singular interests alone, and that a leader who failed to legislate and deliver them would join the forgotten leaders who promised much [8]. That was the gentle verdict. This is the hard one. I say it as someone who wants every leader who governs under the 1995 **Constitution** gone — Abiy included. But I would rather he act, and be judged for how he acted, than fail to act and be judged for that. The first judgment is survivable. The second is not.

8 The Constitution: Tear It Up or Mend It

8.1 Thirty-Five Years of Evidence

Look for the thread that runs through the Tigray war, the **FANO** insurgency, the Oromo insurgency, the Welkait and Raya disputes, the contested status of Metekel where **GERD** itself stands, and now a seven-party war to overthrow the government. It is not a person. It is a document. The 1995 **Constitution** made ethnic nations the sovereign units of the state, drew regional borders along ethnic lines, and in Article 39 granted each nation an unconditional right to secede [71]. It turned identity into territory and territory into a prize. Markakis and Leenco Lata documented long ago what it produced: not self-government but a competitive market for *ethnic entrepreneurship* [75, 76]. Horowitz’s comparative work explains why: where parties are organised by ethnicity, elections become censuses, every contest is existential, and losers turn to arms because the ballot can never change the arithmetic [77].

This is why the Alliance for Survival’s promise of a “constitutional dialogue” is worthless: its members are the ethnic armies the **Constitution** created. And it is why Abiy’s Medemer, meant to weave rather than partition, has failed: a reformer who will not reform the machine is its operator. Every war of his tenure has been fought along the lines the **Constitution** drew.

The comparative scholarship is not ambiguous either, and it explains our thirty-five years in advance. Philip Roeder shows that almost every new state created since 1900 emerged from a “segment-state” — a territorial unit endowed with a titular people, institutions and the symbols of statehood — because such units manufacture the elites, the administrative apparatus and the grievance archive that later demand independence [24]. Valerie Bunce shows that the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia dissolved precisely along the lines their ethnofederal designs had drawn [25]. Svante Cornell finds that institutionalised ethnic autonomy raises rather than lowers the risk of conflict, because it hands elites a constituency, a budget and a border to defend [26]. Jack Snyder shows that partial liberalisation in states whose politics is organised ethnically produces nationalist outbidding and war [27]. And students of Ethiopia itself said so before the bodies were counted: Jon Abbink warned that ethnic-based federalism was entrenching conflict and politicising identity; Lovise Aalen documented how the system created a class whose power depends on ethnic mobilisation [28, 29].

The standard defence — that the fault lies in implementation and not in design — does not survive the record. The same text has now produced the same results 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. Table 12 is the output.

Table 12: Thirty-five years of ethnic federalism: mechanism and outcome.

Period	Mechanism at work	Outcome
1991–95	Transitional charter and constituent process dominated by the victorious front; opposition organisations withdraw	The rule-book is written by one party and inherited by all; Eritrea’s separation settled with no Ethiopian vote [74]
1995–2005	Boundaries drawn by identity (Arts. 46–47)	Recurrent conflict over districts, grazing land and towns; identity becomes the route to resources [75]



Period	Mechanism at work	Outcome
2005–15	Dominant-party rule with ethnic quotas; Art. 39 held in reserve	Competition suppressed, not resolved; grievance accumulates inside the categories the Constitution created [29]
2015–18	Mass protest mobilised through regional identities; the centre changes hands	A change of ruler inside the same machine, celebrated as liberation
2018–19	Elite competition under the same rules; Gedeo–Guji and other displacements	Ethiopia records the world’s highest number of new conflict displacements in a single year [23]
2019–20	Art. 47 invoked: Sidama statehood and further demands	Statehood becomes a prize to be won region by region
2020–22	The centre and a segment-state at war	An estimated six hundred thousand dead; a foreign army on Ethiopian soil [30, 17]
2023–25	Regional forces dissolved by the centre; Amhara in arms; drones against civilians	102 federal drone strikes in Amhara; more than four million children out of school [21, 22]
2026	Seven armed movements ally; the northern war resumes; Mekelle changes hands; relations severed with Eritrea	The cycle completes and restarts, with drones now on both sides [20, 15, 17, 16]

8.2 Rival Explanations, Tested

A thesis that explains everything explains nothing, so the constitutional explanation must be set against its rivals. Table 13 does so, including the strongest counter-evidence: federations drawn along lines of language that have held.

Table 13: Rival explanations of Ethiopia’s recurring conflict, and what the record shows.

Rival explanation	What it predicts	What the record shows	Verdict
Poverty and land scarcity	Conflict wherever people are poor and crowded, whatever the institutions	Tanzania, comparably poor and more diverse, built a civic nation and has had no ethnic war [134]; in Ethiopia, violence concentrates on the boundaries the Constitution drew [75]	A stressor, not the cause of the conflict’s ethnic geography
Grievance from the imperial era	Violence greatest when the grievance was freshest	The grievances predate 1991; inter-communal violence along administrative boundaries rose after those boundaries became the boundaries of power (Table 12) [23]	The raw material; the institution converts it into war
The ruler, not the rules	A change of ruler changes the outcome	The same outcomes under Meles and Abiy, under a Tigrayan-led front and an Oromo-based party (Table 12)	Rejected as the sole cause
External sponsorship	Conflict follows foreign money and arms	Eritrean and Egyptian sponsorship is real [64, 85]; it works through fault lines it did not dig [4]	An accelerant, not the origin
Drought and climate	Conflict follows rainfall	Drought strikes across regions; armed conflict follows identity boundaries	A stressor
<i>Counter-evidence:</i> federations drawn by language that hold — India, Switzerland	Diverse units can be stable	They hold where sovereignty rests with the citizen, there is no right of secession, and parties compete nationally [135, 136]	<i>Refines the thesis:</i> what fails is group sovereignty, secession and ethnic parties — not diversity

The last row matters most, because it answers the charge that the thesis is hostile to diversity. It is not. India redrew its states by language in 1956 and has held together, because it vested sovereignty in its citizens, denied any unit a right to leave, and made parties compete for a national electorate [135]. Ethiopia’s 1995 **Constitution** did the opposite on all three. The lesson is not that diversity must be suppressed but that it must be housed in a state that belongs to all its citizens equally. Every one of the other causes in the table is real; the **Constitution** is the only one that is a choice.

8.3 The Legal Lock: How the 1995 Text Protects Itself

Those who say *tear it up* and those who say *amend it* usually argue without reading the amendment clause. It decides the question. Table 14 sets out the provisions that matter, in the **Constitution’s** own words where



the words carry the point [71].

Table 14: The provisions of the 1995 **Constitution** that decide whether and how it can be changed.

Provision	What it says	Consequence
Art. 8(1)	“All sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia.”	The citizen is not the sovereign; every institution derives from groups
Art. 39(1), (4)	An “unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession”; exercised by a two-thirds vote of the group’s council, a referendum within three years, transfer of powers and division of assets	Secession is a procedure, not a rupture; every ethnic elite holds an exit option as leverage
Art. 47	Any nation, nationality or people within a state may establish its own state by the procedure the article sets	Statehood becomes a prize, won region by region (Table 12)
Art. 62(1)	“The House has the power to interpret the Constitution .”	The House of the Federation — the representatives of the ethnic units — judges the text that creates them
Art. 104	Amendment initiated by two-thirds of either House, or by one-third of the State Councils, then submitted to public discussion	Initiation is easy for a dominant party
Art. 105(1)	Chapter Three rights, Article 39 among them, and Articles 104–105 themselves: approval by <i>every</i> State Council by majority, and by two-thirds of each House	Any single regional council can keep Article 39 — and the amendment rules — alive
Art. 105(2)	All other provisions: two-thirds of a joint session of both Houses, and two-thirds of the State Councils	Articles 8, 46–47 and 62 can be changed by a broad supermajority, without unanimity

Two facts follow. First, the clause that most needs to go is the one the **Constitution** protects most: Article 39 sits in Chapter Three, so one regional council — any one of twelve — can veto its removal. Second, almost everything else that makes the order ethnic — sovereignty vested in groups, boundaries drawn by identity, the House of the Federation as constitutional judge — lies outside Chapter Three, and can be changed by a supermajority that stops short of unanimity. But the amendment rules themselves, Articles 104 and 105, are locked with Chapter Three: there is no amendment route around the veto. The lock is real, and the only key is the one every constitution rests on — the people. A constituent process, agreed in a national settlement and ending in a national referendum, adopts a new **Constitution** entire, Article 39 included, rather than asking each of its beneficiaries to vote it away. Lawyers will object that such a process stands outside the 1995 text. So did the 1995 text itself, which replaced the 1987 constitution not by that constitution’s amendment procedure but through a transitional charter and an elected constituent assembly. A constitution’s authority comes from the people, and a referendum asks them directly what Article 105(1) asks only of their regional councils.

8.4 Three Routes and Their Price

There are three routes from the 1995 **Constitution** to the next. Table 15 sets them out with the same discipline applied to the sea: what each gains, what it risks, and who pays.

Table 15: Three routes from the 1995 **Constitution** to the next: method, gain, risk and price.

Route	Method	Gains	Losses and risks	Price now	Price to the future
1. Mend within the text	Article 105(2) amendments carried by the ruling party’s majorities	Legal continuity; no vacuum; can begin at once	Article 39 survives any single council’s veto; a ruling-party amendment is another victor’s text; the armed movements stay outside	Low	The machine repainted; the next war deferred, not prevented



Route	Method	Gains	Losses and risks	Price now	Price to the future
2. Replace through a constituent process	Ceasefire; national settlement; a constituent assembly elected on a citizen basis; national referendum	The only route legitimate to those now under arms; removes Article 39 with the order it anchors	Needs a ceasefire and the armed movements' participation; takes years; can be captured by the government that convenes it	Time, mediation, a costed transition	A citizens' Constitution the peoples adopted, not one imposed on them
3. Tear up by force	Government overthrown; transitional charter written by the victors	Removes the present operators quickly	1991 again: the victors' charter became the 1995 text; the alliance's members disagree on borders and on the Constitution itself [32]	Highest: a war to win, then a war among the victors	Partition by attrition

My position is *tear it up in substance, by law in method*. Route 2 is the only one that ends the order rather than its operators, and route 1 is useful only as its bridge — the single amendment that opens the constituent process. Route 3 is the route by which the 1995 **Constitution** was made, and the Alliance for Survival offers it again. The National Dialogue Commission established in 2021 is the nearest thing to route 2 the country possesses [128]. It will be only as credible as the participation of those who now carry arms, and only as serious as its willingness to put Articles 8, 39 and 47 on the table.

8.5 What a Replacement Must Establish

It is not enough to say that Article 39 must go. A replacement has to rest on a different principle of authority, and the principle is not new — it is the one the 1995 **Constitution** deliberately refused.

First, rights are inherent, not granted. Every Ethiopian holds them by virtue of being human, not by belonging to a nation, nationality or people, and not by the favour of whoever holds Arat Kilo. A right that is conferred by a group can be withdrawn by that group's cadre, which is precisely how the present order disciplines its own members.

Second, government exists to protect those rights and for nothing else. It is not the custodian of a culture, the sponsor of a festival, the owner of a history or the guardian of a people's destiny. Every one of those roles, assumed by this state, has been an instrument of coercion.

Third, sovereignty belongs to the people as individuals — not to a ruler, not to the state, and not to groups. Article 8 vests it in “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples”; the replacement must vest it in the Ethiopian citizen, and open with *We, the Ethiopian people*.

Fourth — and this is the guarantee our politics has never had — no majority may strip the rights of a minority or of an individual. A vote decides who governs and how money is spent. It does not decide whether a person has standing. That principle has to be built into the text and defended by institutions: a bill of rights entrenched beyond ordinary amendment, a constitutional court empowered to strike down any law or regional act that allocates rights by descent, an amendment procedure requiring supermajorities across regions so that no single bloc can rewrite the terms of citizenship, and courts open to any citizen whose rights are abridged by a federal or regional authority. Without that fourth element, a citizens' **Constitution** would merely replace the tyranny of a coalition of minorities with the tyranny of a majority — and Ethiopians, who have lived under both, should accept neither.

8.6 Unity Without Uniformity: A Citizens' Constitution for Diversity

The fair question to every advocate of a citizens' **Constitution** is the one asked by communities that value Article 39: *if you take away the door out, what do you give us inside?* The citizens themselves are asking it. In the most recent Afrobarometer survey, two in three Ethiopians favoured amending the **Constitution**, one in six wanted it replaced and one in six wanted it kept; fewer than half supported removing Article 39; and two



in three wanted more federal working languages beside Amharic [137]. A citizens' **Constitution** will therefore be won by persuasion or not at all, and it will persuade only if it offers every community more security than Article 39 does. Table 16 sets out what it must guarantee.

Table 16: Guarantees to diversity in a citizens' **Constitution**, how each is enforced, and where it has worked.

Concern	Guarantee	Enforced by	Precedent
Language	Schooling in the mother tongue; local working languages in administration and courts; several federal working languages — Afaan Oromo, Tigrinya, Somali and Afar beside Amharic	An entrenched language charter; the constitutional court	India's scheduled languages [136]; Ethiopian opinion [137]
Self-government	Regions and districts with entrenched powers, their own revenue and formula-based transfers; no unit abolished or its powers reduced without its consent	Constitutional court; an upper house of the regions	India; Switzerland [135]
Representation	An upper house with equal representation of regions; to win national office a party must win support across most regions	Electoral law; electoral board	Nigeria s. 134; Kenya Art. 138 [72, 73]
Share of the state	A "federal character" rule: the army's command, the civil service and the cabinet must reflect the country's diversity	Public reporting; judicial review	Nigeria s. 14(3) [72]
Culture and religion	Rights to cultural, religious and educational institutions, held by persons and their associations; a state neutral among faiths and peoples	Bill of rights; courts	—
Land	Individual titles, with registered communal titles for pastoral and forest communities	Land registry; courts	—
Protection from majorities	An entrenched bill of rights; a constitutional court any citizen may petition; amendment only by supermajorities across regions (Section 8.7)	Constitutional court	Kenya 2010 [73]
In place of the exit	<i>Voice instead of exit</i> : a suspensive veto for a region's representatives on laws on language, culture or communal land in that region	Upper house rules	—

Read as a whole, the table answers the charge that unity means uniformity. Article 39 gives a community one guarantee, which it can use only by destroying the country; a citizens' **Constitution** gives it eight, each of which it can use every day. Its language is taught, its region governs itself, its voice is required in national office, its sons and daughters command in the national army, its faith and culture are protected, its land is titled, its rights stand beyond any majority, and nothing touching its language or land can pass over its objection without delay. That is what *unity* has meant in this series from the first article: not one people, but one citizenship large enough for all of them.

8.7 Eleven Safeguards Against a Unity Tyranny

The danger must be conceded before it is answered, because in Ethiopia it is not theoretical. Unity has been the alibi of every Ethiopian despotism: the Emperor's centralisation, the Derg's revolutionary motherland, the Front's democratic centralism dressed as federalism, and now a synthesis preached from the podium while drones fly over Amhara villages [13]. The Soviet **Constitution** of 1936 guaranteed more rights than ours does; what makes a guarantee bite is not its wording but the institutions that enforce it. Table 17 lists eleven, in the order of how quickly they can be destroyed.

Table 17: Eleven institutional safeguards that stop a unity state from becoming the next tyranny.

Safeguard	Minimum conditions
1. A legislature that can refuse	No party holds more than a stated share of committee chairs; the budget originates in the chamber; a published division list on every vote; inquiry powers that can compel the security services
2. Courts that cannot be starved	Tenure to a fixed age; the judiciary's budget a statutory share of revenue; appointment by a commission in which the executive is a minority; a constitutional court, not the House of the Federation (Arts. 62, 83), open to any citizen [71]



Safeguard	Minimum conditions
3. Elections that can be lost	An electoral board appointed and removable only by cross-party supermajority; parties obliged to organise across regions [72, 73]; a hard two-term limit; results published by polling station
4. Property, above all land	Registered, transferable, inheritable and mortgageable long-term rights in place of Article 40's state ownership — at once a liberty guarantee and the largest economic unlock (Section 11)
5. A free press	No detention for reporting; a statutory right of access to public information with judicial appeal; no liability for publishing an official document in the public interest
6. Security under civilian control	One national army; no regional, party or personal armed formation; a parliamentary defence and intelligence committee with subpoena power; a duty to disclose the targeting record of every air and drone strike [13]
7. Decentralised administration, not sovereignty	Devolve delivery — schools, clinics, roads, water, extension, local policing under national standards; never citizenship, courts, army, currency, borders or rights. Draw units by population, catchment and roads, not descent
8. Minority and language rights held individually	Education and dealings with the state in one's own language wherever practicable, enforceable in court by the person — not a concession from the cadre who controls a region
9. Fiscal credibility	An independent central bank barred from lending to the treasury; a fiscal rule; an Auditor-General reporting to Parliament; full publication of state-enterprise and off-budget borrowing
10. Statistics no minister can edit	A statistics agency independent of the ministries it measures, with a protected head and published microdata
11. Transfer of power without a funeral	Term limits, a codified handover, no extension of a mandate by emergency, and Addis Ababa settled as a federal capital belonging to all citizens

None of the eleven is self-enforcing. **Constitutions** are defended by people with something to lose, and today almost no one in Ethiopia has an interest in enforcing one. A state that raises some seven per cent of output in tax and funds itself otherwise through rents, aid and a captive banking system does not need its citizens' consent and does not seek it. A state that must collect a fifth of output from businesses that can move, farmers who hold title and a salaried middle class that reads the audit is obliged to bargain — and the history of constitutional government is the history of that bargain [102, 103]. That is why Part III is not a sequel to this argument but its enforcement mechanism.

8.8 Who Decides the National Interest?

Not a person. In a country where the national interest is whatever the occupant of Arat Kilo says it is this week, there is no national interest; there is a ruler's interest with a flag on it. The answer is a procedure in four stages. It is *declared in the Constitution*, not announced in a speech, so that a Prime Minister who may not invent the national interest may not quietly abandon it either [14]. It is *specified by Parliament*, with its cost stated. It is *tested in court*, where any citizen may make the government prove what it invokes against his rights. And it is *revised at the ballot* against published measures that the government did not compile. A proposition is a national interest only if it survives its author, if its benefit cannot be divided by descent, if it can be stated as a measurable condition, and if a citizen can challenge its false invocation. The four singular interests pass that test — **National Unity** only when defined as equal citizenship rather than cultural uniformity, **Red-Sea sovereignty** plainly once codified, **broad-based economic development** only when given numbers, and **GERD** as an *engine* measured in kilowatt-hours delivered to a workshop, not in inaugurations attended.

8.9 Institutions Before Elections

The eleven safeguards assume that power sits in the institutions. In Ethiopia it has not done so for thirty-five years. Behind each ministry sits an informal circle — under the front, the party's own structure; in this administration, one widely understood to be organised around the inner Oromummaa network — whose members hold no corresponding office and answer to no committee, yet decide what the ministry does [99, 100]. The Prime Minister's own formation in signals and intelligence, and as a co-founder of the national information-security agency [98], fits that method exactly: compartmented, informal, several moves ahead. He did not



create the shadow structure; he inherited it complete and changed whose shadow it was. Three consequences follow. Thirty-five years of administrative reform failed because it was applied to the visible structure while power sat in the invisible one. The ethnic-representation defence of the 1995 order collapses, because the share is in the appointments and the control is in the circle. And an election alone cannot be the remedy, because a vote transfers the building and leaves the government where it was.

Hence the sequence I set out before the June election [6]. Democracy is the *capstone* of an institutional edifice, not its scaffolding: the rule of law and secure property at the base, parliaments that control taxation and courts that constrain executives above them, and only then a franchise that means more than a ritual [101]. *Institutions first* does not mean *freedom later*: the foundations *are* the liberties of the farmer who cannot be evicted and the journalist who cannot be detained, and they are to be built now. What matures slowly is the quality of electoral competition. The test of success is simple: the day the published organisation chart and the real one are the same document.

8.10 The African Lesson, and the Estates That Must Answer

Africa knows the alternative. Since the 1990s a large number of African states have restricted or banned ethnic, religious and regional parties [78]. Nigeria requires every party to be open to all citizens and bars names and symbols with ethnic or regional connotation [72]; Kenya requires every party to have a national character [73]. None of these countries is a paradise, but all of them learned, from civil war or the threat of it, that a state whose parties are tribes is permanently at war with itself. Citizen-based politics — parties that must win votes across regions, a federalism of administration rather than of blood, rights held by individuals rather than by nations — is not a Western import. It is the African lesson Ethiopia has refused to learn.

Nor should any estate of the *racket* be spared. The *political cadre* bears the heaviest guilt, because it holds the state and has used its drones on its own citizens [13]. But the *economic oligarch* who profits from scarcity, the *religious authority* who blesses the tribe, and *the intellectual* who supplies each *ethnic entrepreneur* with a grievance and a map are complicit in the same machine [11]. The intellectual class, above all, owes the nation an apology: it had the education to see the trap, and too many of its members chose to build it. The external war aim and the internal reform are not rival priorities. A nation mobilised to reclaim its sea is a nation that can finally tell its *ethnic entrepreneurs* to stand down; and a nation that has abolished ethnic politics is one that can hold what it reclaims.

9 Breaking the Cycle of Violence

The two decisions above are not an agenda for victory. They are the means of stopping a cycle that has turned in Ethiopia again and again for half a century, and that will turn once more — with drones on both sides and the Amhara now in arms — unless it is broken deliberately.

9.1 Four Outcomes and What Each Would Cost

Table 18: Four outcomes of the present war, and what each would mean for unity and for the sea.

Outcome	What follows at home	What follows for the sea
The Prosperity Party wins	The insurgencies crushed one by one; Asmara, its Tigrayan buffer gone, may make its peace with Addis Ababa; the Constitution postponed; the state remade in the image of the Oromummaa project with no counterweight left	Even a victory over Asmara leaves an isolated Ethiopia holding a coast by force, denied recognition and owned by a faction rather than the nation
The alliance wins	The centre falls, then the victors fight over Welkait, Raya, Addis Ababa and Article 39, as in 1998	No national army and no national claim; the coast is forgotten while the victors fight



Outcome	What follows at home	What follows for the sea
FANO prevails	The force best placed to end the Oromummaa project and abolish Article 39 — provided it governs as a national movement; if it sought dominance it would recruit every other community against it	National if FANO carries an inclusive programme and leads the constituent settlement; the claim then has a nation behind it
A constituent settlement	A ceasefire, one army, a citizens' Constitution adopted by referendum	A united nation that can reserve, codify and pursue the claim, by treaty first

The table answers the question the preface asked. It is not any victor that brings Ethiopia to the sea; it is unity. A constituent settlement is simply the only one of the four outcomes that produces unity rather than a new winner — and the measures below are how it is reached.

9.2 How the Cycle Turns

The cycle has five stages, and every Ethiopian over forty has lived through all of them. *Grievance*: a people is told, often truthfully, that it has been wronged, and told by an entrepreneur that only its own armed organisation can right the wrong. *Mobilisation*: the organisation recruits by descent, and its rivals recruit in answer. *War*: the state, itself captured by one coalition, fights them with whatever it has — since 2020, drones against villages included. *Victory*: one coalition takes the centre and writes the rules in its own image — the charter of 1991, the **Constitution** of 1995. *New grievance*: the rules allocate land, power and standing by descent, and the losers open a ledger. The victors of 1991 wrote the text under which the Amhara, the Oromo and, after 2018, the Tigrayans each came to see themselves as the victim; each victim produced an army; and those armies now sit in an alliance whose programme is to win the centre and write the rules again (Section 3.3).

The lesson is that the cycle is not broken when the right side wins. It is broken only by changing what the winner gets. For as long as victory confers the power to write a **Constitution** that allocates the state by descent, every group will fight to win it and every loser will fight to reverse it.

9.3 Why the Two Decisions Are One

The sea and the **Constitution** meet at exactly this point. A citizens' **Constitution** removes the prize over which Ethiopians fight one another; a national war aim, pursued lawfully by a reconciled nation, gives them a common purpose that no faction can own. Each needs the other. A new **Constitution** without a national purpose leaves the old entrepreneurs idle and looking for a quarrel; a campaign for the sea without a new **Constitution** hands Asmara a divided enemy and turns the army's losses into the next grievance. Asmara — and Cairo behind it — understand this better than Addis Ababa does: the sponsorship of Ethiopian armed movements is designed to keep the federal army fighting at home, unable to look at the coast or to secure the dam [64, 85]. Every Ethiopian who takes up arms against another Ethiopian serves that design, whatever his grievance.

It follows that the dam cannot be secured, nor Egypt brought to terms, nor the sea reclaimed, while the **EPLF**, the **TPLF**, the **OLF** and their successors survive as armed and political projects. They are the instruments through which Cairo and Asmara keep Ethiopia divided. To end them is not to make war on the Eritrean, Tigrayan or Oromo peoples, who have been their first victims; it is to defeat their armed formations where they wage war on the state, disarm and demobilise their fighters, try their leaders where there is evidence of crimes, and remove, through a citizens' **Constitution**, the licence by which a front can claim a people and a territory as its own.

9.4 Seven Measures That Break the Cycle

1. **A ceasefire and one inclusive mediation.** Every party under arms at one table — the federal government, the **TPLF**, **FANO**, the **OLA** and the rest — under an envoy all of them accept (Section 9.5). A ceasefire that leaves out any armed party is a pause, not a peace — and this government will come to such a table only when it can no longer win on the battlefield.



2. **One standard of accountability.** An independent mechanism with international participation — because the UN commission judged the prospects of domestic accountability “extremely remote” [117] — covering every massacre since 2018, Tole and Mai Kadra, Merawi, Axum and Welkait, the government’s drone strikes and the rebels’ crimes, against every perpetrator of every descent. Justice applied to one side is the next grievance.
3. **Security for every community where it lives.** The return of the displaced, under protection; Amhara communities in Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz and Tigrayans in Welkait and Raya guaranteed by the national army and the courts, not by an ethnic militia; and disputed territories settled by adjudication under the new **Constitution**, never by a referendum held under armed occupation.
4. **One national army.** Disarmament, demobilisation and the integration of every armed movement into a national army commanded on merit and balanced in its senior ranks, so that the balance **FANO** and others seek is supplied by an institution rather than by a rifle in every region.
5. **The constituent process as the price of the ceasefire.** Every armed movement that lays down its arms receives a seat in the constituent process (Section 8.4) and the right to compete for power — as a party that must organise across regions. None receives a territory.
6. **Retire the trade in grievance.** One law against incitement, applied to every side and to officials first; a history curriculum that teaches the wrongs of every century to every child without assigning guilt by descent; and an end to public money for organisations defined by descent. The narrative planted against the Amhara (Section 5), and every narrative planted against the Oromo, the Tigrayans or any other people, must be answered with evidence in the classroom and with law in the courts.
7. **Then, and only then, one national war aim.** The sea, codified in the new **Constitution** and pursued in the order set out in Section 7.6: by treaty first, and by self-defence only by a nation that has stopped fighting itself.

*There is no war to fight between our peoples. Every rifle an Ethiopian points at another Ethiopian is a rifle Asmara and Cairo did not have to buy, and every child kept from school by our quarrels is an engineer, a doctor or a programmer the coming century will not count among us. End the war among ourselves, write the citizen into the **Constitution**, and the only war left to prepare for is the one for the nation’s survival — which a united Ethiopia may never need to fight.*

9.5 The Mediation That Does Not Yet Exist

There is no serious diplomatic effort to stop this war. The African Union process that produced the Pretoria agreement was built for a bilateral dispute between one region and the federal government; it never oversaw implementation, its convener is distrusted by the opposition as too close to Addis Ababa, and it cannot carry a conflict that has changed in parties, geography and complexity [30]. Ethiopia’s partners have meanwhile been worse than passive: Washington lifted its arms embargo and sanctioned **TPLF** leaders, Western statements have blamed this round on the **TPLF** alone, and the Gulf’s rivalries — the UAE’s support for the RSF, routed in part through Ethiopian territory — helped assemble the very bloc of Sudan, Eritrea, Egypt and Ethiopian opposition movements that now confronts Addis Ababa [30].

What follows from that is a demand Ethiopians should make loudly, because it is in our interest and not merely in the mediators’: a new and more robust process that includes every party to the fighting, that is honest about the government’s own violations of Pretoria, and that is led by an envoy all sides can accept. The leverage exists — Ethiopia’s USD 3.4 billion IMF programme and its World Bank financing on one side, the alliance’s regional backers and its wish for a seat at the table on the other [30].

And note what the most sober outside analysis now lists among the deeper drivers that any settlement must address: disputed territories, accountability for wartime atrocities, and *disagreements over the **Constitution** and the federal system* [30]. The elephant is no longer invisible to anyone except the Ethiopians who profit from it. A mediation that stops the shooting and leaves the **Constitution** untouched will have bought the interval before the next war, as Pretoria did.



PART III

Democracy and Development: The Cure for Our Illness

10 Sovereignty Is Not Prosperity

This Part answers the charge I accept most completely. Of fourteen articles, eleven are principally about sovereignty, unity, the **Constitution** and the region, and three touch the economy, chiefly as the dam. Suppose Ethiopia woke tomorrow with everything those articles demanded: a citizens' **Constitution**, Article 39 gone, one national army, peace at home, the dam secured and sovereign access on the *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor* recognised by treaty. It would still be a country of 130 million exporting some three to four billion dollars of goods a year against imports several times larger; with manufacturing at four to five per cent of output; a tax take among the lowest in Africa; electricity consumption of the order of a hundred kilowatt-hours a head; and, on the Ministry of Education's own figures, some three school-leavers in a hundred reaching half marks in the 2023 entrance examination [114, 115, 116]. A flag does not teach a child to read.

Worse, sovereignty without productive capacity is not even strategically stable. A port is an asset only if something passes through it; a dam is an *engine* only if something is plugged into it; an army is only as large as a tax base will carry. Pakistan has a coast, nuclear weapons and more people than Ethiopia, and is a serial supplicant; Egypt holds the Nile and the Canal, and imports its bread. But for a landlocked state the two cannot be separated either. Being landlocked raises transport costs by roughly half and cuts trade by more than half [110]; landlocked developing countries pay roughly twice the transport and insurance costs of other developing countries [111]. The sea is not a rival to the economy. It is an input to it. The architecture therefore stands — **National Unity** and **Red-Sea sovereignty** the *foundations*, development anchored in democracy the *means*, the dam the *engine* — and what follows builds the floors, and prices them. This is the cure for our illness: democracy that gives the citizen a voice, and development that gives him a stake.

11 The Productive Chain and Its Binding Constraints

Ethiopian economic debate has two settings. One is a recital of growth rates and inaugurations; the other is a list of everything that is wrong. Neither is a strategy, because neither asks the only question that can be acted upon: of the many things that are wrong, which one, if fixed first, releases the others?

That question has a name and a method. Growth diagnostics begins from the observation that a poor country suffers from every constraint at once, and that attacking them all at once is the same as attacking none; one must identify the *binding* constraint — the one whose relaxation produces the largest gain — and attack it first [104]. It is the economist's version of a rule any engineer knows: in a series of processes, output is set by the narrowest section, and widening any other section is wasted capital. The ten-year quarrel about whether Ethiopia should be state-led or market-led is largely beside the point. The state should do what releases the binding constraint and stop doing what creates it.

So consider Ethiopia's productive economy as the chain it actually is. Land feeds people and earns the first foreign currency. Processing adds value to what the land produces. Manufacturing absorbs labour at a scale nothing else can. Energy and minerals are the inputs. Technology raises the output of every stage. Exports earn the foreign exchange; foreign exchange buys the capital goods; the capital goods create employment; employment and profit create a tax base; and the tax base pays for schools, clinics, courts, roads and an army. Each link transmits to the next, and a break anywhere stops everything downstream. Table 19 sets out the chain, what Ethiopia already has at each stage, what is actually binding, and the instrument that releases it.

Two warnings about that table. The figures in it are orders of magnitude drawn from official and multilateral reporting, and in a country whose statistics are compiled by the ministries they flatter they should be read as such — which is itself an argument for the independent statistical agency demanded in Section 8.7, and a reason to state ranges rather than false precision. And the table deliberately omits the largest constraint of all, because it is not an economic one: war closes a school, empties a district, voids a two-year export order



and reprices every risk premium in the country at once. Nothing in this Part is achievable while the shooting continues. That is why Parts I and II came first, and why the ordering in Section 15 is an economic argument and not a rhetorical one.

Read the rows as a sequence rather than as a menu, and read the third column with the most suspicion, because that is where Ethiopian policy has most often gone wrong. It is far easier to announce an instrument from the fourth column than to establish that the constraint in the third is the one actually binding — and an instrument aimed at a constraint that is not binding is not a policy. It is a subsidy with a justification attached.

Table 19: The productive chain: what exists, what binds, and the instrument that releases it. Figures are orders of magnitude drawn from official and multilateral reporting and should be read as such.

Stage	What Ethiopia has	The binding constraint	The instrument
Agriculture	About a third of output and two-thirds of employment; some 16 million smallholdings averaging under a hectare; the largest livestock herd in Africa	Not knowledge and not effort. Tenure: land is owned by the state and the “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples”, so the farmer holds a revocable use right — no title, no collateral, no consolidation, and no reason to invest in a plot an administrator can reallocate. Compounded by input supply rationed through a state importer and by foreign exchange	Registered, transferable, inheritable, mortgageable long-term land rights, rural and urban; liberalised import and distribution of fertiliser, seed and chemicals; extension services paid against measured yield rather than attendance; irrigation at smallholder scale
Agro-processing	Coffee, oilseeds, horticulture, pulses, hides, dairy and meat with the continent’s largest raw base	Post-harvest loss, no cold chain, no accredited grading, testing or certification, and power interruption that destroys a batch; working capital available at negative real rates to insiders and not at all to others	Rural electrification to processing standard; accredited national testing and certification laboratories recognised by buyers; warehouse receipts as bankable instruments; zero duty on processing capital goods; abattoir and cold-chain investment
Manufacturing	Some four to five per cent of output after thirty years of industrial policy; industrial parks largely under-tenanted; a very young labour force	Not wages — Ethiopian wages are among the lowest in the world and the parks still under-performed. Inputs and logistics: imported intermediates throttled by foreign-exchange rationing and corridor cost; no domestic supplier tier; and the loss of preferential market access in 2022 removed the buyer	Duty- and VAT-free imported inputs under genuine bonded warehousing; a supplier-development programme tying park tenants to domestic second-tier producers; restoration of preferential access; and the sea corridor (Section 14)
Energy	GERD at some 5,150 MW of installed capacity; a hydro-dominant system; abundant wind, geothermal and solar potential	Not generation. Transmission, distribution and losses, plus industrial tariffs set below cost so that the utility cannot finance the network the factories need. Consumption per head of the order of 100 kWh a year	Transmission and distribution investment <i>ahead</i> of further generation; a cost-reflective industrial tariff with a transparent household lifeline; an independent regulator; firm regional export contracts to convert surplus into currency
Mining	Gold, potash, tantalum, lithium-bearing pegmatites, industrial and construction minerals	Geological survey data is thin and not public, so no serious investor can price risk; licensing is discretionary; nothing is processed; and gold leaks across borders whenever the official price lags the market	Publish the national geoscience archive as an open public asset; rules-based licensing with a published register of every licence and holder; a processing requirement backed by a firm power guarantee; purchase gold at market-linked prices to end the leakage
Technology	A liberalising telecommunications market; millions of young entrants a year; a credible engineering diaspora	Electricity reliability, bandwidth cost, payment rails, and the fact that engineers are produced without employers — the output of the universities has no domestic demand curve to meet it	Data-centre capacity contracted against GERD power; open-access national backbone; interoperable instant payments; and government procurement deliberately used as the first customer for domestic engineering firms



Stage	What Ethiopia has	The binding constraint	The instrument
Exports	Goods exports historically of the order of three to four billion dollars a year, recently lifted by gold and coffee prices; a world-class airline in services	Concentration: five primary commodities carry nearly everything, so the country's economic complexity sits near the bottom of the world ranking [105] and every price cycle is a fiscal crisis	Make export earnings per head the single headline national measure; attach <i>export discipline</i> to every form of protection or subsidy, so support is withdrawn from any firm that cannot sell abroad within a stated period
Foreign exchange	A floated currency since 2024; remittances that exceed goods exports	The country imports a large multiple of what it exports and closes the gap with remittances, aid and borrowing. The parallel premium was a symptom; removing it did not remove the gap	Earn it rather than ration it — there is no durable substitute for export volume. Meanwhile: no surrender requirements, no allocation by discretion, and a published allocation ledger
Investment	A diaspora of several million; growing pension and insurance pools; a securities exchange opened in 2025	No collateral, because land cannot be pledged; no exit, because there is scarcely a market to sell into; and deposit rates below inflation, which taxes every saver to subsidise favoured borrowers	Land as collateral; real listings with audited accounts on the exchange; positive real deposit rates; diaspora instruments that are legally enforceable in an Ethiopian court by a foreign holder
Employment	Two to three million entrants to the labour market each year — the largest single fact about this country	A formal sector far too small to absorb them, and a missing intermediate skills tier between the unskilled labourer and the unemployed graduate	Labour-intensive manufacturing, construction and agro-processing are the only sectors that absorb at this scale; technical and vocational training rebuilt around employer-certified competences rather than enrolment counts
Tax	A revenue take of the order of seven per cent of output — among the lowest in Africa and far below the regional average	A narrow base, vast informality, and an exemption regime that functions as patronage, administered by services that are political assets rather than neutral agencies	Publish every exemption and its beneficiary; build value-added tax compliance on digital payment records; a property tax on registered urban land; and no discretionary waiver by any official
Public services	A real achievement in health extension; a near-universal primary enrolment	Financing — and the financing constraint is the tax take, which closes the circle. Everything the state is asked to deliver is rationed by the one number at the end of the chain	There is no instrument here that is not upstream. This row exists to make the point that schools and clinics are not a budget decision but the output of the entire chain above them

Four of those rows deserve more than a cell, because they are where the chain actually breaks.

11.1 Begin Where the People Are: Land

Two-thirds of Ethiopians work the land and the state owns it. That single sentence explains more about Ethiopian poverty, and more about Ethiopian politics, than any other.

The economic argument is not controversial among people who study it. A farmer with a revocable use right does not plant a tree, terrace a slope, dig a well or buy a pump, because the return accrues over years and the right does not. He cannot borrow, because he has nothing a bank may take. He cannot sell, so holdings cannot consolidate to a size that will carry a machine, and he cannot leave, because leaving forfeits the plot — which is why Ethiopian urbanisation has run behind every comparable country and why the rural population keeps subdividing the same hectares among more sons. The comparative record is equally plain: the East Asian transformations that Ethiopian commentary admires began not with factories but with land — Japan, Korea and Taiwan each carried out a redistribution that gave the cultivator a secure, marketable stake, and the yield increase from that reform financed everything that followed [109].

The political argument is the one Ethiopian governments have always understood, which is why none of them has acted. Article 40 is the most powerful instrument of control in the country. A farmer who can be evicted is a voter who can be instructed; a regional cadre who allocates urban plots is a man who cannot be voted out. Land is simultaneously the economy's largest unlock and the *racket*'s largest asset [11]. That is not a



coincidence. It is the whole structure of the problem in one clause — and it is why I place land reform beside the **Constitution** itself rather than somewhere in the middle of an economic annexe.

What is required is not a slogan about privatisation and not a return to anybody's nineteenth century. It is a registry and a title: a nationwide, parcel-level cadastre; a long-term, inheritable, transferable and mortgageable right vested in the person who holds the land; equal and independently exercisable rights for women; compensation at market value with judicial appeal for any expropriation; and a constitutional prohibition on the administrative reallocation of land for political purpose. Ethiopia has already registered tens of millions of rural parcels under donor-financed programmes, so the administrative capacity exists. What has been withheld is the right itself.

11.2 Why the Industrial Parks Did Not Work

Ethiopia did almost everything the development manuals recommended. It built the parks, offered the tax holidays, courted the buyers, trained the operators and advertised the wages. The parks are nonetheless far below the employment and export figures they were built for, and the standard explanations — low productivity, inexperienced workers, high turnover — are symptoms rather than causes.

The causes are three, and all three are upstream of the factory gate. First, an apparel or light-engineering plant lives on imported intermediates, and an intermediate that waits weeks for a foreign-exchange allocation and then weeks more in a single congested corridor arrives too late for a buyer who orders on a season. Second, there is no domestic supplier tier: everything from the thread to the carton is imported, so Ethiopia captured the thinnest slice of the value chain and none of the learning around it — which is the difference between hosting a factory and building an industry [106]. Third, in January 2022 the preferential access that made the whole calculation work was withdrawn, and the proximate reason was the conduct of a war.

That third point is the one Ethiopian industrial policy has never absorbed, and it belongs in this article rather than in a trade journal: *the binding constraint on Ethiopian manufacturing in the last five years has been the war*. Not wages, not skills, not even the corridor. A buyer placing a two-year order does not accept a political risk he cannot insure, and a government that loses market access through its own conduct has imposed a tariff on its own workers larger than any it could have negotiated away. The **Constitution** that produces the wars is therefore an industrial-policy problem as well as a constitutional one, and the citizen in Hawassa who lost a job in 2022 was a casualty of Article 39 as surely as anyone in Wollo.

The corrective is unglamorous and specific. Genuine bonded warehousing with inputs clearing in days rather than weeks. Protection and subsidy made conditional on export performance, withdrawn automatically from firms that cannot sell abroad after a stated period — the single mechanism that distinguished the Korean and Taiwanese programmes from the Latin American and African ones that produced permanently subsidised national champions [107, 108]. A supplier-development programme that pays domestic firms to meet tenant specifications, so that the second tier is built deliberately rather than hoped for. And an export agency judged on earnings per worker, not on memoranda signed.

11.3 A Dam with Too Little Plugged Into It: Generation Without a Grid

I have called **GERD** the *engine* of the renaissance and I stand by it [12]. But an engine is not a vehicle, and it is time to say what the dam has not yet done.

Ethiopia's problem has not been generation for some years; it has been that power generated in Benishangul must reach a workshop in Mekelle or a pump in Jijiga, and the network that would carry it is thin, lossy and not financed. Consumption per head remains of the order of a hundred kilowatt-hours a year, which is a fraction of the sub-Saharan average and a rounding error against the world's. Roughly half the population still has no connection at all. The reason is an old and ruinous bargain: tariffs are set below cost for political reasons, the utility therefore cannot finance the lines, the lines are not built, and the citizen who was to be protected by the cheap tariff has no supply to be cheap. Subsidising a price for a service that does not arrive is not social policy. It is the appearance of social policy, paid for by its own absence.



The sequence that works is the reverse of the one we have followed. Build and finance transmission and distribution ahead of further generation. Move industrial and commercial tariffs to cost, and protect households with a transparent, metered lifeline block paid from the budget where Parliament can see it, rather than hidden inside a utility's losses. Give the regulator genuine independence to set the tariff path. Then convert the surplus into foreign currency with firm, long-term export contracts to Kenya, Djibouti, Sudan, Tanzania and beyond — which is both an earnings strategy and the interdependence argument I made in the twelfth article, since a neighbour who buys your power does not bomb your dam [12]. And tie new industrial load to new generation deliberately: a data centre, an aluminium or fertiliser plant, an electric-rail corridor and a mineral refinery are each a way of exporting electricity in a container rather than along a cable.

11.4 GERD in a War Zone: Defend It Now, Share It Later

GERD was inaugurated in September 2025 [86]. A year later it stands in a war zone that its builders did not anticipate. Sudan's civil war is being fought across the Blue Nile state immediately downstream, with drones striking Ed Damazin and the Roseires Dam's supply routes contested [89, 87]. Khartoum accuses Ethiopia of hosting RSF fighters in Benishangul-Gumuz; Ethiopia denies it [88, 90]. Benishangul-Gumuz armed groups are among the seven signatories of the Alliance for Survival [32]. And Egypt, which regards the dam as an existential grievance, has placed its influence on three sides of Ethiopia [85].

The dam is therefore no longer only an engineering asset. It is a strategic target in a regional war with foreign sponsors. Its air defence, its transmission corridors and the communities of Metekel who live around it must be protected as the national assets they are. And the diplomatic argument I made in September remains the best long-term defence: a dam that shares data, regulates floods and sells power to its African neighbours gives every downstream neighbour a stake in its survival [12]. Secure the dam with arms today; secure it with interdependence tomorrow.

11.5 The Seven Per Cent Problem: A State Too Lightly Taxed to Govern

Of every hundred birr Ethiopians produce, the state collects something like seven in tax. The regional average is roughly double that, and the countries whose development Ethiopian officials cite in speeches collect two to three times as much. Everything the state is asked to do is rationed by that number: the teacher's salary, the clinic's drugs, the judge's independence, the soldier's equipment, the pension, the road.

A state that cannot tax does not become a smaller state. It becomes a different kind of state — one financed by rents, aid, borrowing, the inflation of its own currency and the financial repression of a captive banking system that is obliged to lend to it at negative real rates. Every one of those sources has the same political property: it does not require the consent of the person it is taken from. That is the deepest reason Ethiopian governments do not feel accountable, and no constitutional clause will fix it. Representative government was not invented by philosophers. It was extracted by people who were being taxed and insisted on terms [102, 103].

The instruments are known and all of them are politically expensive, which is why they are not used. Publish every tax exemption and holiday with the name of the beneficiary — a single measure that would end a large share of the abuse by embarrassment alone. Build value-added tax compliance on the digital payment trail rather than on inspectors. Tax registered urban land, which is the fastest-growing untaxed asset in the country and overwhelmingly held by the well-connected. Remove the discretionary waiver entirely: no official, at any level, able to forgive a liability without a published decision and an appeal. And state the target as a national commitment: from around seven per cent of output to fifteen within a decade, with the increment legally ring-fenced to education, the courts and the grid, so that the citizen asked to pay can see what he bought.

Implementation: the productive chain

Objective Raise productive capacity per head: triple goods-export earnings per capita, lift manufacturing from some four to five per cent of output towards fifteen, and raise revenue from around seven per cent of output to fifteen.

Baseline Agriculture about a third of output and two-thirds of employment; manufacturing four to five per cent; goods exports of the order of three to four billion dollars; electricity consumption near 100 kWh per head; revenue near seven per cent of output; economic complexity near the bottom of the world ranking.



Policy Titled and mortgageable land; liberalised agricultural inputs; bonded warehousing with input clearance in days; export discipline attached to every subsidy; transmission and distribution ahead of generation with cost-reflective industrial tariffs; published geoscience and rules-based mining licences; published exemptions and no discretionary waiver.

Institution A national land registry and cadastre under statute, not under a ministry's discretion; an independent energy regulator; an independent revenue authority with a published exemption register; a statutory statistics agency (Section 8.7); an export agency whose board is removable on export performance.

Funding Reallocation before new money: the fiscal space released by phased removal of below-cost industrial tariffs and of unpublished exemptions; the concessional envelope already committed under the current programme and the ongoing restructuring; and domestic savings mobilised once deposit rates turn positive in real terms. Land titling is cheap and has largely been piloted; what it costs is political, not fiscal.

KPI Goods exports per head; manufacturing value added per head; electricity consumed per head and hours of unplanned interruption per industrial customer; tonnes of agricultural output per hectare and per worker; parcels titled and loans secured against them; revenue as a share of output; days to clear an industrial input through customs.

5-year Full national land titling with mortgageable rights; input clearance within seventy-two hours; electricity consumption near 200 kWh per head; manufacturing near eight per cent of output; revenue near eleven per cent; every exemption published.

10-year Electricity consumption near 400 kWh per head; manufacturing near fifteen per cent of output; goods exports tripled per head and no longer dominated by five primary commodities; revenue near fifteen per cent, ring-fenced increment visible in schools, courts and the grid.

Risk War destroys the sequence at any point — the dominant risk, and not an economic one. Land titling is captured so that titles accrue to the connected rather than the cultivator. Tariff reform is announced and then reversed under urban pressure. Export discipline is written and then waived for the politically protected, which is how industrial policy usually dies.

Mitigation Settle the house first — the ordering in Section 15 is an economic necessity, not a rhetorical flourish. Title through a statutory registry with public parcel maps and a judicial appeal, so capture is visible and reversible. Legislate the tariff path rather than decreeing it, and pay the household lifeline from the budget where Parliament votes on it. Make every subsidy automatically lapse on a stated date unless export performance is certified by a body that did not grant it.

12 The Technology State: From Policy to Strategy

Ethiopia has a technology policy. It needs a technology strategy, and the difference is not semantic. A policy procures systems, builds a park, signs a memorandum and holds a summit. A strategy decides which capabilities the country intends to own in twenty years, and then bends procurement, energy pricing, education and tariffs towards acquiring them. The first produces announcements. The second produces engineers with employers.

I write this as someone trained to build things rather than to comment on them, and the engineer's objection to Ethiopian technology discourse is simple: we discuss technology as a consumption good — a service to be bought, an application to be downloaded, a platform to be hosted — when the only version that changes a country's position is technology as a *production* capability. The question is never whether Ethiopians use a system. It is whether Ethiopians can specify, build, maintain, repair and improve it, and whether anyone pays them to.

Six chains are worth the state's deliberate attention, chosen because in each case Ethiopia holds an input that most countries do not.

Energy to compute. Reliable, low-cost electricity and a cool highland climate are the two scarce inputs of a data centre, and Ethiopia has both. Power sold at a cable's margin earns little; power sold as hosted computation earns a multiple of it, in foreign currency, from customers across the region and the Gulf. The chain runs: firm power and redundant fibre, to regional data centres, to cloud and hosting revenue, to a domestic market for software and systems engineers, to the possibility of training and serving artificial-intelligence models on African data in Africa rather than renting the result back. The sovereignty dimension matters as much as



the revenue: a state whose records, payments, identity system and health data sit in another jurisdiction has outsourced a part of its sovereignty that no coastline will restore.

Sensing to yields. Agriculture is where technology has the highest return in Ethiopia and the least glamour. Satellite imagery and soil sensing to map what each district actually grows and lacks; weather and hydrological modelling for a country whose harvest turns on the timing of one rainy season; irrigation designed at smallholder scale; and advisory delivered to the cultivator's own handset in his own language. None of this is speculative, and all of it compounds with the land reform above, because a farmer with title is a farmer who will act on advice.

Automation to industry. The missing tier in Ethiopian manufacturing is not the assembly operator; it is the toolmaker, the maintenance technician, the controls engineer and the embedded-systems designer — the people who keep a line running and then make it better. A deliberate programme in machine tools, industrial controls, electronics assembly and embedded systems is what converts a host of foreign factories into an industry of our own, and it is the single highest-value use of a technical university's output.

Diagnostics to health manufacture. Ethiopia imports most of what its clinics use. The chain from diagnostics and medical devices through digital health to pharmaceutical formulation and manufacture is a foreign-currency saving, an employment of chemists and engineers, and a sovereign capability in an epidemic.

Geoscience to refined metal. Nothing in the mineral sector moves without data. Publishing the national geoscience archive as an open asset, modernising the survey and then *requiring* processing rather than exporting rock is the difference between a mining rent and a mining industry — and processing is where the power from the dam becomes an export earning.

Instruction to capability. The sixth chain is education, and it has a section of its own, because everything above fails without it.

Implementation: the technology state

Objective Convert technology from a purchase into a production capability: computation, agricultural sensing, industrial automation, health manufacture and mineral processing owned and operated by Ethiopians, earning foreign currency.

Baseline Negligible domestic data-centre capacity; bandwidth costs among the highest in the region; engineering graduates produced in volume without a domestic demand curve; most clinical and industrial equipment imported with no local maintenance tier; the geoscience archive unpublished.

Policy Long-term firm power contracts at published industrial rates for data centres; an open-access national fibre backbone with regulated wholesale pricing; interoperable instant payments; a statutory requirement that public bodies host sovereign data domestically; government procurement reserved in part for domestic engineering firms with transparent award criteria; zero duty on scientific and industrial instruments; publication of the geoscience archive.

Institution An independent communications and energy regulator with tariff-setting power; a national research and engineering council awarding competitively and publishing its awards; a standards, metrology and accreditation body recognised by foreign buyers — without accredited testing, no Ethiopian product enters a regulated market.

Funding Private and concessional capital for data centres against firm power contracts, which is how such capacity is financed everywhere; the research council funded by a legislated share of revenue so it cannot be raided; procurement reservation costs nothing and redirects spending that occurs anyway.

KPI Megawatts of contracted computation load; wholesale bandwidth cost per megabit; share of public systems hosted domestically; number of engineering firms with revenue above a stated threshold; share of public technical procurement won domestically; accredited laboratories; patents and industrial designs filed by residents.

5-year Geoscience archive published in full; sovereign public systems hosted domestically; first regional-scale data centres contracted against firm power; accredited laboratories for agricultural and food exports; a functioning instant-payment rail.

10-year Computation and digital services a material export line; a domestic maintenance, controls and toolmaking tier serving the industrial parks; refined rather than raw mineral exports; domestic formulation of essential medicines.

Risk Capability substituted by procurement — buildings and memoranda rather than engineers. Power promised to computation and then diverted. Procurement reservation degenerating into patronage for politically connected firms, which is the standard failure mode of every such scheme.



Mitigation Measure capability, never equipment: engineers employed, firms above revenue thresholds, systems maintained domestically. Contract power firmly, with penalties, and publish the contracts. Award every reserved procurement by published criteria with published scores and a right of challenge — transparency is the only known antidote to the patronage failure, and it works only if it is statutory.

13 Education as the National Operating System

If I were permitted one correction to the whole series, it would be this: I should have begun here. Every proposition in fourteen articles — a citizens' **Constitution**, a national army, an industrial strategy, a technology state, a navy on a reclaimed coast — is executed by people, and people are produced by a system that is at present failing on a scale we do not discuss honestly.

The numbers are not disputable and they are not survivable. In the university entrance examination of 2023, on the Ministry of Education's own published results, roughly three school leavers in a hundred reached the fifty per cent mark; the following year's figure was little better [114]. The World Bank's learning-poverty measure — the share of children unable to read and understand a simple age-appropriate text by the end of primary school — places Ethiopia near the top of the world's distribution [113]. More than four million children are out of school in Amhara alone because of the war [30]. We have built a system that enrolls almost everyone and teaches a minority of them, and then we argue about whose language the failure is delivered in.

The decisive research finding of the last two decades is that what raises national income is not years of schooling but *measured learning*: cognitive skill, tested, is what correlates with growth, and enrolment without learning correlates with nothing at all [112]. That should change what Ethiopia counts. We report enrolment, classrooms built and teachers hired. We should report whether a child can read, and publish it by district.

What follows is a pipeline rather than a wish, because the human capital must be specified by the economy that will employ it. Table 20 sets it out by age band: what the band must deliver, the binding constraint on delivering it, and the measure by which the nation should judge it.

Table 20: The human-capital pipeline the economic strategy requires.

Age	What this band must deliver	The binding constraint	The measure
5–12	Reading fluency, arithmetic fluency, elementary science and digital literacy. Nothing downstream is recoverable if this band fails	Teacher subject mastery and time on task, not buildings. A teacher who has not mastered the material cannot deliver it, however many classrooms are built	Share of children reading with comprehension at the end of this band, published by district and school
12–16	A genuine fork: an academic pathway and a technical pathway, both respectable, neither a dumping ground	Technical education is treated as the destination of failure rather than a choice, so the country produces graduates it cannot employ and lacks technicians it desperately needs	Share entering each pathway by choice; employer satisfaction with technical entrants
16–18	Specialisation — science and mathematics, technical and vocational — with laboratory and workshop practice that actually happens	Laboratories, workshops, instruments and consumables; and examinations that test what was taught rather than what can be memorised	Share reaching a defined standard in mathematics and science; hours of verified laboratory and workshop practice
18–22	University, technical college and apprenticeship, sized to what the economy can employ rather than to political demand for institutions	Quality and relevance. Expanding institutions without laboratories, libraries or qualified staff manufactures credentials rather than capability	Graduate employment and earnings at two years, published by institution and programme
22–30	Industry, research and enterprise — the years in which a trained person becomes a productive one	Absent employers, absent capital, absent mentors. A country can train an engineer and still have nowhere to put him, which is how it finances another country's industry	Formal employment of graduates; firms formed and surviving at three years; patents and industrial designs filed



Age	What this band must deliver	The binding constraint	The measure
30+	Leadership, capital formation and technology transfer — the band that must train the next one	Emigration, and a public sector that rewards loyalty rather than competence, so the best are absent from the institutions that need them	Share of senior technical and public posts filled on published competence criteria; returning professionals in post

Three things in that table are worth saying plainly, because Ethiopian education debate avoids all three.

The teacher is the constraint. Not the classroom, not the curriculum document, not the language of instruction — the teacher’s own command of the subject. A programme that tests teachers on the material they teach, retrains those who fail, pays for mastery rather than for seniority, and makes the profession something an able graduate would choose, is worth more than every new building commissioned this decade. It is also the single most unpopular reform in the sector, which is why it is not attempted.

The technical pathway must be a choice, not a punishment. An economy that needs toolmakers, electricians, controls technicians, welders, nurses, surveyors and agricultural mechanics is producing instead a surplus of degree-holders with no employer, because the system treats technical training as the destination of the child who failed. Until a skilled technician earns respect and a wage that a parent would wish for a son or daughter, no reform of the curriculum will matter.

Count learning, not enrolment. Publish, by district and by school, the share of children who can read and compute. Publish graduate employment by institution and programme. A ministry that publishes these numbers will be attacked for a year and will improve for a decade, and a ministry that refuses to publish them is telling the country what the numbers are.

13.1 The Diaspora: Transfer, Not Remittance

Several million Ethiopians live abroad and send home more foreign currency each year than the country earns from exporting goods. That fact is usually recited with pride. It should be recited with discomfort, because a remittance is consumption finance: it feeds a household, pays a school fee, builds a room, and leaves no productive asset behind. It keeps families alive and the balance of payments afloat, and it does not build an industry.

What the diaspora holds that Ethiopia needs more than money is the other four things: knowledge, technology, networks and management capability. A surgeon who returns for six weeks a year to teach a surgical technique transfers more than his remittance ever will. An engineer who places one Ethiopian firm in a foreign supply chain has done something no trade mission achieves. A professor who supervises Ethiopian doctoral students remotely builds a laboratory that outlives him. A manager who has run a plant to international standards carries the one input Ethiopian industry most lacks and cannot import in a container.

And the obstacle to all of it is not sentiment. It is enforceability and politics. A diaspora investor fears, with reason, that his capital can be expropriated by administrative decision, that his contract will not be enforced by a court, that his land will be reallocated, and that his politics will be audited before his business plan. Every item on that list is a constitutional problem, not an incentive problem — which is why the diaspora policy that matters is Section 8.7 and not another bond issue. Give a returning professional an independent court, a title that holds, a convertible currency and a politics that does not demand his allegiance to a tribe, and the transfer happens without being asked for. Withhold them, and no amount of appealing to patriotism will substitute.

Implementation: education and human capital

Objective Build the human-capital pipeline the economic and strategic programme requires: universal functional literacy and numeracy, a respected technical tier, and a technical and professional class large enough to staff an industrialising state.

Baseline Near-universal primary enrolment with learning poverty near the top of the world’s distribution; roughly three school leavers in a hundred reaching fifty per cent in the 2023 entrance examination; more than four million



children out of school in Amhara alone; technical education treated as failure; graduate unemployment alongside an acute shortage of technicians.

Policy Subject-mastery testing, retraining and mastery-based pay for teachers; a national reading and numeracy standard assessed by sample at the end of the first band and published by district; parity of esteem and funding for the technical pathway with employer-certified competences; laboratory and workshop provision as a funded entitlement rather than an aspiration; university expansion halted in favour of quality until graduate employment improves; publication of graduate employment and earnings by institution and programme.

Institution An independent national assessment and examinations agency, statutorily separated from the ministry it measures; an employer-led skills council certifying technical competences; a teacher-licensing body with real power to refuse a licence.

Funding The ring-fenced increment from revenue reform (Section 11) — the first claim on it. Within the existing envelope, a deliberate shift from construction and institutional expansion towards teachers, instruments, consumables and assessment, which are a fraction of the cost and the whole of the effect.

KPI Share of children reading with comprehension at the end of the first band, by district; share reaching a defined mathematics and science standard at eighteen; teachers passing subject mastery assessment; technical entrants placed in employment within a year; graduate employment at two years by institution; returning professionals in post.

5-year A published district-level reading and numeracy measure, improving; every teacher assessed and the failing cohort retrained or removed from the classroom; the technical pathway funded at parity with employer-certified standards; graduate employment published annually by institution.

10-year Functional literacy and numeracy near-universal at the end of primary school; a technical tier sufficient to staff the industrial and energy programmes; entrance examination results that no longer require explanation; a diaspora transfer relationship measured in placements and laboratories rather than only in dollars received.

Risk War closes schools, and it is closing them now — the dominant risk again. Published measures are suppressed the first time they embarrass a minister. Teacher assessment is defeated by the institutional interest it threatens. Technical parity is announced and not funded.

Mitigation Make the assessment agency's independence and publication duty statutory, with the data released on a fixed calendar that no minister controls. Legislate the funding ratio for the technical pathway. Phase teacher assessment with genuine retraining and a dignified exit, so the reform has a constituency rather than only enemies. And accept the first finding: Ethiopia is nowhere near as educated as its enrolment statistics have told it, and the recovery takes a generation that cannot begin while the shooting continues.

14 One System, Not Three Problems

Here the two halves of this article close on each other, and the objection that opened Part III answers itself.

I have been read — not unreasonably — as holding three separate positions: that Ethiopia needs the sea, that Ethiopia needs the dam, and that Ethiopia needs a different **Constitution**. Set beside the productive chain, they are not three positions. They are three inputs to one machine, and each of them is binding on the others.

The integrated proposition

The dam supplies the power. Firm, low-cost electricity delivered through a financed network makes industrial parks viable, mineral refining possible, agro-processing reliable, cold chains real and computation exportable. Without it, every industrial plan is a plan for a diesel generator. *Without the network and the tariff, the dam is an inauguration.*

The sea supplies the margin. Sovereign access on the *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor* removes a transport penalty that trade economists measure at roughly half again on costs and more than half on volumes [110], replaces a single foreign corridor with redundancy, ends a fee of the order of USD 1.5 billion a year paid to another treasury, and makes the export discipline above achievable rather than heroic. *Without the coast, Ethiopian manufacturing competes with a handicap collected at someone else's border.*

The Constitution supplies everything else. Peace, so that a buyer will place a two-year order and a child will sit an examination. Title, so that land becomes collateral and capital can form. Courts, so that a contract means something and a diaspora investor will risk his money. Independent statistics, so that performance can



be measured at all. And a politics in which no citizen needs an *ethnic entrepreneur* to protect his rights, so that the energy now spent on grievance is spent on production. *Without it, the other two are assets in a country nobody will insure.*

And the chain runs the other way too. Export earnings buy the capital goods; the capital goods employ the entrants; employment and profit create the tax base; the tax base pays for the army that holds the coast, the grid that carries the dam's power, the courts that enforce the **Constitution** and the schools that produce the people who run all of it. *A sovereignty that cannot be financed is a sovereignty that will not be held.*

State it as one sentence and the whole series reduces to it: *Ethiopia needs a sovereign and economically viable Red-Sea strategy, integrated with the dam's power, a titled countryside, an export-disciplined industry and a citizens' **Constitution** — because each is the condition of the others, and none of them survives alone.*

That proposition is much harder to dismiss than any of its parts. “Ethiopia wants a port” is a territorial demand that a foreign ministry can file away. “Ethiopia is building an industrial economy for 130 million people and requires sovereign access to the sea at its own cost, with interdependence offered to every neighbour who will take it” is an argument about the economic geography of the Horn, and the Horn's economic geography is on our side. One hundred and thirty million people are the hinterland of that coast. They always were. The map drawn in 1890 and ratified in 1993 pretended otherwise, and the pretence has cost both nations a generation.

Implementation: the integrated system

Objective Treat sea access, the dam and the constitutional settlement as one programme with one sequence, so that each is delivered in the order that makes the next possible.

Baseline Landlocked with the overwhelming bulk of trade through a single foreign corridor at a reported cost of about USD 1.5 billion a year; a dam inaugurated but under-utilised behind a thin network; a **Constitution** that generates the wars which cost the country its market access; and a tax base too small to finance any of the three.

Policy Codify sovereign access in the new **Constitution** as a standing national objective with the order of means stated — peaceful settlement first and exhaustively (Section 15); finance transmission and distribution ahead of generation; attach export discipline to protection; title the land; and legislate the revenue path that pays for all of it.

Institution A standing national strategy secretariat reporting to Parliament, not to the Prime Minister's office, publishing an annual audited report against each of the four interests; the independent statistics agency that supplies its numbers; and a parliamentary committee with power to compel its officers.

Funding Sequenced, not simultaneous: the constitutional and land reforms cost political capital rather than money; the grid and the corridor are financeable against contracted revenue; the revenue reform funds education and the courts. The one thing that cannot be financed is the present war, which consumes the capital all three require.

KPI Landed cost per container and transit days by corridor; share of trade not dependent on a single foreign route; electricity delivered to industrial customers and interruption hours; manufacturing value added and goods exports per head; revenue share of output; and an annual published scorecard against each of the four interests.

5-year A negotiated or legally established sovereign access arrangement under active construction; corridor dependence materially reduced; the grid financed and industrial tariffs at cost; land titled; the new **Constitution** in force with the four interests and the order of means codified.

10-year An export economy no longer dominated by five primary commodities, running through a corridor Ethiopia controls, powered by a network that reaches its workshops, under a **Constitution** no government can quietly abandon — and a neighbour buying our electricity rather than hosting our enemies.

Risk The sequence is inverted — a coastal campaign before a settlement at home, which is the most likely and most expensive error available to any Ethiopian government, including this one. Access is obtained and no economy is built to use it. The settlement is reached and the **Constitution** is repainted rather than replaced.

Mitigation The ordering in Section 15, and the ordering is the argument. Make every element justiciable and measured, so that a government which delivers one and abandons the rest can be shown to have done so. And codify, because a claim in a speech is revocable while a claim in the **Constitution** outlives the man who made it.



PART IV

The Obligation to Our Citizens

15 The First Obligation: That the Nation Survive

What the article has established. The nation's predicament is one system, not a list of troubles. A **Constitution** that vests sovereignty in groups pays elites to mobilise by descent; three fronts built their founding narrative on an Amhara enemy, and that narrative now consumes its authors and the nation with them (Part I). Asmara arms that division, with Cairo behind it, because a divided Ethiopia can neither turn to the coast nor hold the Nile, and the coast was lost by a disposition to which the Ethiopian people never consented and which later governments have failed to reserve (Section 7.2). The cure is a citizens' **Constitution** in which the individual is sovereign and the sea is codified, institutions that can say no, and one national purpose in place of many grievances (Part II). From that follow six obligations on which survival depends — and their order.

1. **Unite as citizens.** No sea is reclaimed by a divided house. A ceasefire and one inclusive mediation; one standard of accountability for every massacre since 2018; security for every community where it lives; one national army; and a seat in the constituent process for every movement that lays down its arms (Section 9).
2. **Change the ruler and the rule-book together.** A government that will not rewrite the **Constitution** will be neither voted out nor impeached; it will be removed by force, and the **Constitution** replaced with it. But force can only clear the ground. Replace ethnic federalism and Article 39, do not repaint them: sovereignty in the citizen, administrative rather than ethnic boundaries, one national army under parliamentary and judicial control, and parties that must organise across regions — written through a constituent process ending in a referendum, not dictated by the victors (Section 8.4).
3. **End the fronts and retire the *ethnic entrepreneurs*.** The **EPLF**, the **TPLF** and the **OLF**, and the men who lead them and the ruling party's machine alike — Debretsion Gebremichael, Jal Marro, Abiy Ahmed and whoever succeeds them — are one type in different uniforms, and so is any leader who would turn **FANO**'s cause into an ethnic one. Retire the trade by lawful means, try those against whom there is evidence, and rehabilitate the rest as citizens under a **Constitution** that gives no one a people to own.
4. **Reserve the claim, now.** A resolution of Parliament that the Ethiopian people never consented to the disposition of the coast and that no later act renounces the claim; notified to the United Nations and the African Union, with an interpretive declaration on Jeddah (Section 7.2).
5. **Codify the sea in the Constitution.** Sovereign access as a foundational objective of the state, binding on every government, with the order of means; and no treaty touching territory or access valid without two-thirds of Parliament and a referendum.
6. **Reclaim the sea.** Define the claim to the kilometre and publish its record; lay the evidence of Eritrea's armed attack before the African Union and the UN; offer Asmara, and any successor, a treaty between equals; open the advisory route; and answer the continuing attack in self-defence, within the Charter and by the laws of war. Never renounce the *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor*, with Assab at its centre. A nation does not annex its own coast, and it does not abandon it either. It recovers it — by a treaty the world will uphold (Section 7.4).

And in that order. Peace at home and a citizens' **Constitution** first — reached by a settlement that this government will accept only when force leaves it no other choice, the force aimed at the regime and never at a people; the reservation and the codification of the claim at once, because they cost nothing; the recovery of the coast last, by a nation that has stopped fighting itself. Reverse the order — a sea campaign before a settlement at home, or a change of ruler before a change of rule-book — and the result is the one we have had four times already.



16 The Second Obligation: That Survival Be Worth Having

What the article has established. Sovereignty is a precondition of prosperity, never a substitute for it (Part III). The binding constraint on the Ethiopian economy is not one bottleneck but a chain — land that cannot be mortgaged, a dam with too little plugged into it, industrial favours without export discipline, a state too lightly taxed to bargain with its citizens, and schools that enrol children without teaching them — and every link is also a constitutional question, because a state that does not need its citizens' taxes will never need their consent. From that follow seven obligations, each costed, measured and dated in Part III.

7. **Build the institution before the election.** Statutory independence and protected budgets for the courts, the electoral board, the auditor, the statistics agency and the central bank; a constitutional court any citizen may petition; every ministerial decision published with reasons and a named decision-maker (Section 8.9).
8. **Title the land.** Registered, transferable, inheritable and mortgageable long-term rights for every farmer and urban household, with equal rights for women and judicial appeal against any taking. It is the largest unlock in the economy and the largest asset of the *racket* [11], and those two facts are the same fact.
9. **Build the network before the next dam, and defend the dam.** Transmission and distribution ahead of generation, tariffs at cost, the household lifeline paid openly, the surplus sold abroad on firm contracts — and **GERD** and Metekel defended as strategic assets until interdependence protects them.
10. **Attach export discipline to every favour.** No protection, subsidy, land grant, credit or tax holiday that does not lapse unless the firm can sell abroad within a stated period.
11. **Tax the economy, and publish every exemption with its beneficiary.** From some seven per cent of output to fifteen within a decade, the increment ring-fenced in law to schools, courts and the grid.
12. **Teach the children to read, and publish the figures by district.** Test teachers on what they teach, pay for mastery, fund the technical pathway at parity, and report learning rather than enrolment.
13. **Make the numbers independent.** The statistics and examinations agencies, the auditor and the central bank publishing on a calendar no minister controls. Without this, every figure above is a press release — including mine.

How citizens should judge. Stop asking who should rule. Ask what will be delivered, by when, and measured how — of this government, of the seven movements that would replace it, and of every foreign capital that funds, arms or lectures us. *Here is the Ethiopia we want. Show us how your programme gets us there.* A people that learns to ask that question has stopped being anyone's constituency.

PART V

Conclusion and the Responsibility of the Intellectuals

17 The Responsibility of the Intellectuals

Every war in this series was argued before it was fought. The colonial thesis that cast the Amhara as the nation's offender was written by students and party theorists before it was written into the **Constitution**; the ledgers of ancestral wrong that recruit young men today are compiled by men with degrees. The Ethiopian intellectual class had the education to see the trap, and too many of its members chose to build it; too many of the rest withdrew into a hermitage of silence, as my parents' generation did after the hopes of the 1960s collapsed. Of all the estates of the *racket*, the *intellectual* owes the nation the plainest apology [11].

The charge is old and so is its answer. Julien Benda called it *la trahison des clercs*: the betrayal by thinkers who abandon reason and justice, which are universal, to serve the passions of race, class and party, which are not [159]. Edward Said described the opposite vocation: to speak truth to power, to belong to no faction's comfort, and to represent the people whom power forgets [160]. Ethiopia need not borrow the idea. In the



seventeenth century Zera Yacob, reasoning alone in a cave near Aksum, concluded that all human beings are equal by creation and that no faith, custom or authority may command what reason condemns [161]. Amartya Sen has shown what happens when that lesson is lost: violence is manufactured by reducing persons to a single, exclusive identity and persuading them that it is their destiny [162]. That is the precise mechanism of the *monkey habit of ethnic entrepreneurship*, and it is the intellectual's task to break it.

What, then, should Ethiopian intellectuals promote? Three things, and the philosophical tradition is unusually agreed on them. *Peace*, because, as Kant argued, a lasting peace rests on a republican constitution in which citizens, not rulers, decide whether to bear the cost of war [164]. *The rule of law*, because government exists to protect the life, liberty and property of the individual, and holds power only by the consent of the governed [165]. *Development*, because freedom is not only the absence of a tyrant but the presence of the capabilities — literacy, health, work, voice — that let a person live a life he has reason to value [163].

And war? The same tradition reserves it narrowly. Aquinas required a legitimate authority, a just cause and a right intention [166]; Grotius counted defence and the recovery of what is owed among the just causes [167]; the UN Charter confines the lawful use of force to self-defence against armed attack [67]. A war between Ethiopian peoples meets none of those tests: it has no authority but a faction, no cause but a grievance and no intention but power. An Ethiopian intellectual may defend two wars only. The first is the war of national survival — the defence of the nation against the external sponsor of its internal wars, and the recovery of its outlet to the sea, waged lawfully, by a united nation, as the last resort after the treaty has been offered and refused. The second is the resistance of a people against a government that makes war on it and will not yield to law, which Locke placed among the rights no government can extinguish [165]: aimed at the regime and never at a people, fought by the laws of war, and ending in a court rather than in revenge. Everything else is the treason of the clerks.

The discipline that follows is the one this series has tried to keep. Separate the fact from the inference and the judgment; state what would prove you wrong. The constitutional thesis is wrong if a change of ruling party under the 1995 text produces a decade of peace in which no unit invokes Article 39 or 47 by force. The unity thesis is wrong if communities governed under descent-based boundaries prove more secure than comparable communities governed under administrative ones. The sea thesis is wrong if Ethiopia's trade costs and strategic exposure prove no greater than those of coastal states of similar size and income [110, 111]. None has been refuted. I would rather be proved wrong than be right by assertion.

To the young Ethiopians who will inherit this

Your parents' generation was told that the sea was lost for ever and that ethnic federalism was the price of peace. Both claims were false. The sea was not lost; it was given away, by men you did not elect, in a transaction you were not asked to approve. And ethnic federalism did not bring peace; it brought war after war for thirty years. You owe no loyalty to either lie. You owe loyalty to a country large enough to hold all of you, and to a coast your grandparents traded through and your children should trade through again. Refuse to be recruited by a tribe. Demand to be counted as a citizen. And judge every leader — this one and the next — by one test: did he bring Ethiopia closer to the sea and to itself, or further from both?

18 Closing: What the Mirror Shows

Fourteen articles, one question. Not who is right about the nineteenth century, nor which man should hold Arat Kilo next, but whether the machine we live under can be made to work for the people and the country instead of for the men who operate it. After eight years the answer is plain: not while the machine stands, and not while its present operator holds the controls.

Adwa was not won by a nation that agreed on everything. It was won by a nation that agreed, for one season, on the one thing that mattered. This series began at Adwa and it ends there, because the question Adwa asked has come round again: when the powers of the region redraw the map around us, will Ethiopia be a party to the drawing or a line on someone else's page?

For fourteen articles I held up a mirror. It showed a nation with every resource needed for greatness — a dam, an army, 130 million citizens, a claim recognised even by the United Nations in 1950 — and a political



class that spent those resources auditing its own grievances. It showed foreign capitals that understood our interests better than we did and organised to deny them. And it showed a leader who spoke of the sea more eloquently than any Ethiopian leader in a generation, signed it away at Jeddah, offered to buy back what was never sold, and has acted on none of it — an unconscious incompetence that now heads the very *racket* it was supposed to dismantle.

What we must build. The four singular interests, in three layers, and in that order:

- the *foundations* — **National Unity**, as equal citizenship, and **Red-Sea sovereignty**, a matter of self-defence before it is a matter of commerce;
- the *means* — **broad-based economic development** anchored in democracy and measured by one test, the end of poverty;
- the *engine* — **GERD**, powering the towns, industry, schools, clinics and jobs that bring Ethiopians to live and work side by side;

all of it resting on the citizen, who is sovereign, and who is treated the same wherever he or she stands in Ethiopia.

What we must remove. Two obstacles stand between Ethiopians and peace, freedom and the sea. The first is the machine: the 1995 **Constitution**, which turns identity into territory and pays elites to recruit by descent. The second is the man who operates it: Abiy Ahmed, the leader of the *racket*, who will not leave by ballot and will not be removed by his rubber-stamp Parliament, which has never removed anyone or done anything credible independently. Change one without the other and nothing changes; the stones and the stew go together.

The only wars we may fight. There is no war to fight between us — not between Amhara and Oromo, Tigrayan and Afar, Christian and Muslim. I hold to that as firmly as I did in the first article. But two wars are not between us. One is the resistance of a people against a tyranny that makes war on it, aimed at the regime and never at a people, fought by the laws of war, and ending in a court rather than in revenge. The other is the recovery of **Red-Sea sovereignty** against those who sponsor our internal wars to keep us from the coast. Every other rifle raised by an Ethiopian against an Ethiopian serves Asmara, Cairo and the *racket*, and no one else. And let no one imagine that breaking the country would end the bloodshed: Eritrea was promised it would be Africa's Singapore, and has become one of the world's great exporters of refugees. Fragmentation does not bring peace; it only moves the war.

*It is not too late, but it is late. Unite as citizens, and refuse every tribe that asks for your rifle or your money. Tear up the **Constitution** that keeps us at war and write the citizen into its place, with the sea inside it. End the impunity of the man who has turned the state on its own people, and bring him before a court. Build with the dam's power, and measure every government by how many Ethiopians it lifts out of poverty. And reclaim the sea — the *Doumeira-Rehyto-Beilul-Tio Corridor*, with Assab at its heart — claimed in law, carried by a united nation, and never bought with an inducement for a right that was never sold. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). If not now, when? And if not these men, then the citizens they have spent thirty-five years dividing.*

References

- [1] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 26 March). The Spirit of Adwa must carry Ethiopia through GERD and the Red Sea. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [2] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 16 April). The Abraham Accords, Part 1: The force re-shaping the Gulf-Red-Sea-Horn architecture. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [3] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 19 April). The Abraham Accords, Part 2: Competition and permissive disorder. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [4] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 26 April). The Abraham Accords, Part 3: Ethiopia's internal constraint. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [5] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 4 May). The Abraham Accords, Part 4: Assab, sovereignty, and the endgame. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [6] Hailu, M. G. (2026). Election 2026: Ethiopia's direction of travel — Abiy, the Asian mirror, and the June election. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.



- [7] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 16 May). National Unity and Red Sea sovereignty: Ethiopia must pay the price now. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [8] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 9 June). Not imperial vision but sovereign and united Ethiopia: Reading *The Economist* and *Horn Review* against the four singular interests. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [9] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 15 June). 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! *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [10] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 1 July). The women who anchor the nation: The song — a way out of the monkey habit of ethnic entrepreneurship. The same war-drums the song pleaded to stop in 2021 are being beaten harder. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [11] Hailu, M. G. (2026, August). *Cui bono?* The racket vs Ethiopia's four singular interests. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [12] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 15 September). GERD: From engine of Ethiopia's renaissance to engine of African peace. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [13] Hailu, M. G. (2026, 17 September). Drones pouring hell over a divided house: The **Constitution** is guilty of more murder — our unity and Red-Sea sovereignty. *Ethiopian Tribune*. ethiopiantribune.com.
- [14] Hailu, M. G. (2026). *Medemer, Oromummaa and the Soul of the Nation: The Making of Ethiopia an Island of Enemies — and the Red-Sea yet to Recover*. Ethiopian Tribune (draft, submitted), October.
- [15] Agence France-Presse (2026). Ethiopia's Tigray rebels abandon regional capital Mekelle as pro-government forces advance. *France 24*, 3 October. france24.com.
- [16] Agence France-Presse (2026). Ethiopian pro-government militia claims Tigray airport as regional tensions spike. *France 24*, 2 October. france24.com.
- [17] Agence France-Presse (2026). Ethiopia and Eritrea break diplomatic ties over conflict. *France 24*, 1 October. france24.com.
- [18] Eastleigh Voice (2026). Ethiopia expels Egyptian diplomat as regional tensions escalate. 1 October. eastleighvoice.co.ke.
- [19] RT Africa (2026). War and diplomatic crisis in the Horn of Africa: why Ethiopia is at odds with its neighbours. October. rt.com.
- [20] Reuters (2026). Seven Ethiopian armed groups announce anti-government alliance. 21 September. usnews.com.
- [21] Agence France-Presse (2026). Ethiopia boosts drone production to fight rebels. *Kuwait Times*, 8 September. kuwait-times.com.
- [22] Africa Defense Forum (2025). Fighting continues in Ethiopia's Amhara region (citing UN OCHA). February. adf-magazine.com.
- [23] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2019). *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019*. Geneva. (Ethiopia recorded the world's highest number of new conflict displacements in 2018.)
- [24] Roeder, P. G. (2007). *Where Nation-States Come From: Institutional Change in the Age of Nationalism*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- [25] Bunce, V. (1999). *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [26] Cornell, S. E. (2002). Autonomy as a source of conflict: Caucasian conflicts in theoretical perspective. *World Politics*, 54(2), 245–276.
- [27] Snyder, J. (2000). *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*. Norton, New York.
- [28] Abbink, J. (2011). Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia: reassessing the experiment after twenty years. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 5(4), 596–618.
- [29] Aalen, L. (2011). *The Politics of Ethnicity in Ethiopia: Actors, Power and Mobilisation under Ethnic Federalism*. Brill, Leiden.
- [30] Meester, J. (2026). Ethiopia's widening war threatens the Horn of Africa. *Clingendael Institute*, 2 October. clingendael.org.
- [31] International Crisis Group. (2026, 25 September). Arresting the dangerous descent back into war in northern Ethiopia. Statement, Africa.
- [32] Ali, F. (2026, 24 September). Fighting widens across Ethiopia as Tigray clashes escalate. *Al Jazeera*.
- [33] Al Jazeera. (2026, 7 August). Northern Ethiopia's shifting alliances explained.
- [34] *Foreign Policy*. (2026, 25 September). Ethiopia, TPLF rebels return to war in Tigray region.
- [35] Council on Foreign Relations. (2026). Conflict in Ethiopia. *Global Conflict Tracker*.
- [36] Berhane, D. (2026, 23 February). The growing threat of conflict in the Horn of Africa. *The New Humanitarian*.
- [37] Ethiopian News Agency. (2026, 4 February). Ethiopia, Red Sea naturally inseparable entities, says PM Abiy. Via *AllAfrica*. allafrica.com.
- [38] *Advocacy for Oromia*. (2026, 29 September). Oromia restructures: Six new administrative clusters and their administrators. advocacy4oromia.org.
- [39] Biru, Y. (2026, 30 September). Oromia's six new regions: The final dagger in the heart of Oromummaa (opinion). *Borkena*. borkena.com.
- [40] *The EastAfrican*. (2023, 16 February). Ethiopia Orthodox Church says row over as rogue bishops apologise. theeast-african.co.ke.
- [41] Omer, M. K. (2026, 25 September). Ethiopia's new rebel alliance faces an old problem (opinion). *Al Jazeera*. aljazeera.com.
- [42] Christia, F. (2012). *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



- [43] Fearon, J. D. (1995). Rationalist explanations for war. *International Organization*, 49(3), 379–414.
- [44] Walter, B. F. (2002). *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- [45] Human Rights Watch. (1993). *World Report 1993: Ethiopia*. hrw.org.
- [46] Selway, J. S. (2011). Cross-cuttingness, cleavage structures and civil war onset. *British Journal of Political Science*, 41(1), 111–138.
- [47] Salamey, I. (2014). *The Government and Politics of Lebanon*. Routledge, London.
- [48] Toft, M. D. (2007). Getting religion? The puzzling case of Islam and civil war. *International Security*, 31(4), 97–131.
- [49] Svensson, I. (2007). Fighting with faith: Religion and conflict resolution in civil wars. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51(6), 930–949.
- [50] Johnson, D. H. (2003). *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*. James Currey, Oxford.
- [51] Wilkinson, S. I. (2004). *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [52] Hussien Adal Mohammed. (2025, 5 April). Ethiopia and Eritrea: A shared history distorted by political agendas (commentary). *The Reporter* (Ethiopia). thereporterethiopia.com.
- [53] United Nations. (1998). *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, Article 12(3). UN Doc. A/CONF.183/9.
- [54] Plaut, M. (2026, 18 January). Ethiopia: Fano forces statement on their complete unification, establishment of the Amhara Fano National Movement and leadership. martinplaut.com.
- [55] Endale, A. (2023, 18 November). What is on the table in Tanzania? *The Reporter* (Ethiopia). thereporterethiopia.com.
- [56] *UMD Media*. (2026, 28 September). Ethiopia's Alliance for Survival uses first press conference to define political, military and post-Abiy Ahmed transitional agenda. umdmmedia.com.
- [57] Axelrod, R. (1984). *The Evolution of Cooperation*. Basic Books, New York.
- [58] *AllAfrica*. (2026, 21 September). Ethiopia: Seven Ethiopian armed groups formally announce formation of a coalition. allafrica.com.
- [59] Getachew, S. (2026, 3 February). Ethiopia's prime minister accuses Eritrea of mass killings during Tigray war. *Associated Press*.
- [60] Amnesty International. (2021, 26 February). Ethiopia: The massacre in Axum. Report and press release.
- [61] APA News. (2026, February). Ethiopia–Eritrea border “heavily militarised”.
- [62] Stratfor. (2026, 13 January). Eritrea: President Isaias accuses Ethiopia of declaring war on Eritrea. Situation report.
- [63] *African Business*. (2026, March). Why tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea are rising again.
- [64] Christophe, F. (2026, 22 May). Ethiopia and Eritrea are on the brink of war again. Atlantic Council, *AfricaSource*.
- [65] *The National*. (2025, 24 December). Egypt increases pressure on Ethiopia through port deals with Eritrea and Djibouti.
- [66] Horn Review. (2026, 23 September). RSADO raises alarm as US lets Eritrea sanctions expire.
- [67] United Nations. (1945). *Charter of the United Nations*, Articles 2(3), 2(4), 33 and 51.
- [68] United Nations General Assembly. (1974). Resolution 3314 (XXIX): *Definition of Aggression*, Article 3(g).
- [69] United Nations General Assembly. (1970). Resolution 2625 (XXV): Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States.
- [70] Eritrea–Ethiopia Claims Commission. (2005, 19 December). *Partial Award: Jus ad Bellum, Ethiopia's Claims 1–8*. Permanent Court of Arbitration, The Hague.
- [71] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (1995). *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, Proclamation No. 1/1995, Articles 8, 39, 47, 49(5), 62, 104 and 105.
- [72] Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, Sections 14(3), 134 and 222–223.
- [73] Republic of Kenya. (2010). *Constitution of Kenya*, Articles 91 and 138.
- [74] Negash, T., & Tronvoll, K. (2000). *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean–Ethiopian War*. James Currey, Oxford.
- [75] Markakis, J. (2011). *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*. James Currey, Oxford.
- [76] Leenco Lata. (1999). *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration?* Red Sea Press, Lawrenceville NJ.
- [77] Horowitz, D. L. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- [78] Bogaards, M., Basedau, M., & Hartmann, C. (2010). Ethnic party bans in Africa: An introduction. *Democratization*, 17(4), 599–617.
- [79] Lawal, S. (2026, 11 September). Can the Houthis close the Red Sea after seizing the Yemen coast? *Al Jazeera*.
- [80] Al Jazeera, AFP & Reuters. (2026, 11 September). Houthis control key shipping route after gains along Yemen's Red Sea coast.
- [81] *Ynet News*. (2026, 11 March). Israel eyes African forward base to bring war to Houthis' doorstep (citing Bloomberg).
- [82] *War on the Rocks*. (2026, 4 June). The recognition question: Somaliland, Israeli security geometry, and the Red Sea power struggle.
- [83] United Nations Security Council, Panel of Experts on Yemen. (2025, 15 October). Final report (as reported by South24 Center, 3 November 2025).
- [84] Horn Review. (2026, 2 April). Egypt's Somalia strategy and the rising pressure on Ethiopia.
- [85] Horn Review. (2026, 22 April). As Ethiopia doubles down on the Nile, Egypt deepens its Eritrea alignment.
- [86] Horn Review. (2026, 21 September). How Cairo's institutions read Ethiopia.



- [87] Africanews. (2026, 13 August). RSF claims key victory in Sudan's Blue Nile region.
- [88] *Sudan Tribune*. (2026, 7 September). Sudanese official reaccuses Ethiopia of hosting paramilitaries near border.
- [89] *Sudan Tribune*. (2026, 13 September). Drone swarm strikes Sudan's Ed Damazin amid escalating Blue Nile front.
- [90] AllAfrica / Addis Standard. (2026, 3 September). Sudan's Burhan inspects army's readiness in Blue Nile State amid escalating clashes and reported RSF build-up near Ethiopia border.
- [91] *bne IntelliNews*. (2023, October). Somalia rejects Ethiopia's call for negotiations on Red Sea access.
- [92] ch-aviation. (2023). Addis Ababa dangles Ethiopian stake to Eritrea — report (citing *Amba Digital*; not independently verified).
- [93] *Nation* / AFP. (2024, 1 January). Ethiopia, Somaliland agree deal on Berbera port access.
- [94] United Nations General Assembly. (1950, 2 December). Resolution 390 A(V): Eritrea — Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea.
- [95] International Court of Justice. (1986). *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America)*, Merits, Judgment. ICJ Reports 1986, p. 14.
- [96] Negash, T. (1987). *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact*. Uppsala University.
- [97] Al Jazeera. (2026, 5 October). Ethiopian PM Abiy demands Red Sea access as tensions with neighbours rise. [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com). (Swearing-in for a second five-year term; the “give and take” formula; and the 4 October New Alamein meeting of Egypt, Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia declaring Red-Sea governance the exclusive business of coastal states.)
- [98] Gardner, T. (2024). *The Abiy Project: God, Power and War in the New Ethiopia*. Hurst, London. (Military and intelligence formation, INSA, and the conduct of power.)
- [99] Vaughan, S., & Tronvoll, K. (2003). *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*. Sida Studies No. 10, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm.
- [100] Helmke, G., & Levitsky, S. (2004). Informal institutions and comparative politics: A research agenda. *Perspectives on Politics*, 2(4), 725–740.
- [101] Ferguson, N. (2011). *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. Allen Lane, London.
- [102] North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [103] Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. Crown, New York.
- [104] Hausmann, R., Rodrik, D., & Velasco, A. (2005). *Growth Diagnostics*. John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; reprinted in N. Serra & J. E. Stiglitz (eds.), *The Washington Consensus Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- [105] Hausmann, R., Hidalgo, C. A., Bustos, S., Coscia, M., Simoes, A., & Yildirim, M. A. (2014). *The Atlas of Economic Complexity: Mapping Paths to Prosperity*. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.
- [106] Hirschman, A. O. (1958). *The Strategy of Economic Development*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- [107] Amsden, A. H. (1989). *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- [108] Wade, R. (1990). *Governing the Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization*. Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ.
- [109] Studwell, J. (2013). *How Asia Works: Success and Failure in the World's Most Dynamic Region*. Profile Books, London.
- [110] Limão, N., & Venables, A. J. (2001). Infrastructure, geographical disadvantage, transport costs, and trade. *World Bank Economic Review*, 15(3), 451–479.
- [111] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. *Review of Maritime Transport* and UN-OHRLLS reporting on landlocked developing countries, successive editions (transport and insurance costs of landlocked developing countries relative to the developing-country average).
- [112] Hanushek, E. A., & Woessmann, L. (2015). *The Knowledge Capital of Nations: Education and the Economics of Growth*. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.
- [113] World Bank & UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2019). *Ending Learning Poverty: What Will It Take?* World Bank, Washington DC.
- [114] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Education. (2023). Results of the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination, as announced by the Ministry and reported in the Ethiopian press: approximately 3.3 per cent of candidates scored 50 per cent or above; the following year's figure was marginally higher.
- [115] World Bank. *Ethiopia Economic Update* and *World Development Indicators*, successive editions (output composition, revenue as a share of GDP, electricity access, manufacturing value added, merchandise exports).
- [116] International Energy Agency. *Africa Energy Outlook* and *World Energy Outlook*, successive editions (electricity consumption per capita; Ethiopian and sub-Saharan comparators).
- [117] UN News. (2023, 13 October). Ethiopia: Victims 'left in limbo' as rights probe mandate ends (final report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia). news.un.org.
- [118] Human Rights Watch & Amnesty International. (2022, 6 April). “We Will Erase You From This Land”: Crimes against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone. [hrw.org](https://www.hrw.org).
- [119] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2022). *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022*. Geneva. As reported by NPR, 28 May 2022: Ethiopia set a world record for displacements in a single year — 5.1 million in 2021. [npr.org](https://www.npr.org).
- [120] Amnesty International. (2022, July). Ethiopia: Authorities must investigate massacre of ethnic Amhara in Tole. [amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org).
- [121] Al Jazeera. (2024, 13 February). Ethiopian forces killed ‘at least 45 citizens’ in Amhara, rights body says. [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com).



- [122] *The Africanists*. (c. 2025). Who is Fano? Inside Ethiopia's Amhara rebellion. Analysis. theafricanists.info.
- [123] Mohammed Hassen. (1990). *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570–1860*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [124] Aregawi Berhe. (2009). *A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (1975–1991): Revolt, Ideology and Mobilisation in Ethiopia*. Tsehai Publishers, Los Angeles.
- [125] Associated Press. (2026, 28 February). Abiy's vision of Ethiopia includes a seaport in Eritrea. Some see a looming conflict (citing the consultancy Africa Practice for annual port fees of USD 1.5 billion). arabnews.com.
- [126] Dagne, T. (2000, 6 July). *The Ethiopia–Eritrea Conflict*. CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, Washington DC (an estimated 50,000–100,000 killed).
- [127] Zelalem Tamir. (2026, 3 January). What if Ethiopia claimed Assab — legally? *The Reporter* (Ethiopia), commentary. thereporterethiopia.com.
- [128] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2021). *Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation*, No. 1265/2021.
- [129] Agreement between the Government of the State of Eritrea and the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2000, 12 December). Algiers, Article 4(15); and Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission, *Decision regarding Delimitation of the Border* (2002, 13 April).
- [130] Reuters. (2018, 5 June). Ethiopia says it will fully accept peace deal with Eritrea.
- [131] Organisation of African Unity. (1964). Resolution AHG/Res. 16(I) on border disputes among African states, Cairo.
- [132] African Union. (2000). *Constitutive Act of the African Union*, Article 4(b).
- [133] United Nations. (1982). *Convention on the Law of the Sea*, Article 125.
- [134] Miguel, E. (2004). Tribe or nation? Nation building and public goods in Kenya versus Tanzania. *World Politics*, 56(3), 327–362.
- [135] Stepan, A., Linz, J. J., & Yadav, Y. (2011). *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
- [136] Republic of India. (1950, as amended). *Constitution of India*, Eighth Schedule (languages) and the Constitution (Sixteenth Amendment) Act, 1963 (sovereignty and integrity of India); States Reorganisation Act, 1956.
- [137] Afrobarometer. (2023, 16 November). Ethiopians seek constitutional changes to add federal languages, Afrobarometer survey shows. News release. afrobarometer.org.
- [138] International Court of Justice. (2019, 25 February). *Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965*, Advisory Opinion. ICJ Reports 2019, p. 95.
- [139] United Nations General Assembly. (2019, 22 May). Resolution 73/295: Advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965.
- [140] United Kingdom & Republic of Mauritius. (2025, 22 May). *Agreement concerning the Chagos Archipelago including Diego Garcia* (signed; awaiting ratification).
- [141] International Court of Justice. (2018, 1 October). *Obligation to Negotiate Access to the Pacific Ocean (Bolivia v. Chile)*, Judgment. ICJ Reports 2018, p. 507.
- [142] Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan & Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (1965, 9 August). Boundary agreement exchanging territory and extending Jordan's coastline on the Gulf of Aqaba by some 18 km.
- [143] AllAfrica. (2026, 27 February). Ethiopia, Djibouti agree to deepen cooperation at Doraleh port amid shifting Red Sea geopolitics. allafrica.com.
- [144] Erlich, H. (2002). *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Nile*. Lynne Rienner, Boulder CO.
- [145] Iyob, R. (1995). *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941–1993*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [146] Harun, I. (2025, 22 April). Away from the global spotlight, Eritreans are trapped in a garrison state. *Al Jazeera*, opinion. aljazeera.com.
- [147] Walleligne Makonnen. (1969, 17 November). On the question of nationalities in Ethiopia. *Struggle* (University Students' Union of Addis Ababa).
- [148] Asafa Jalata. (2010, 24 April). Oromummaa: National identity and politics of liberation. Paper, OLF Eastern US Regional Mid-Year Conference. trace.tennessee.edu.
- [149] Bahrey. (1593/1954). History of the Galla. In C. F. Beckingham & G. W. B. Huntingford (eds. and trans.), *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646*. Hakluyt Society, London.
- [150] Abir, M. (1968). *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes — The Challenge of Islam and the Re-unification of the Christian Empire, 1769–1855*. Longmans, London.
- [151] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. (2023, 31 March). Report on demolitions and forced evictions in Sheger City, as reported in “Newly formed Sheger City breaches human rights law: report”, *The Reporter* (Ethiopia), 1 April 2023.
- [152] Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia. (2008). *Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census*. Addis Ababa.
- [153] United Nations General Assembly. (1992, 16 December). Resolution 47/114: Referendum in Eritrea (establishing the UN Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea, UNOVER).
- [154] IRIN. (2002, 16 April). Ethiopia: No trading peace for “territorial expansion” — Meles (citing the Prime Minister's interview with Ethiopian television and radio). reliefweb.int.
- [155] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia & State of Eritrea. (2018, 16 September). *Agreement on Peace, Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation* (Jeddah Agreement), Preamble and Article 4. peaceagreements.org.
- [156] United Nations. (1969). *Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*, Articles 46, 51 and 52.



- [157] United Nations. (1978). *Vienna Convention on Succession of States in respect of Treaties*, Article 11 (boundary regimes).
- [158] International Court of Justice. (1962, 15 June). *Case concerning the Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodia v. Thailand)*, Merits, Judgment. ICJ Reports 1962, p. 6 (acquiescence by silence where protest was called for).
- [159] Benda, J. (1927/1928). *La Trahison des clercs*. Grasset, Paris. Trans. R. Aldington, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. William Morrow, New York.
- [160] Said, E. W. (1994). *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*. Pantheon, New York.
- [161] Sumner, C. (1976). *Ethiopian Philosophy, Vol. II: The Treatise of Zär'a Yaeqob and of Wäldä Heywat — Text and Authorship*. Commercial Printing Press, Addis Ababa.
- [162] Sen, A. (2006). *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. W. W. Norton, New York.
- [163] Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- [164] Kant, I. (1795/1991). Toward perpetual peace: A philosophical sketch. In H. Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [165] Locke, J. (1689/1988). *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [166] Aquinas, T. (c. 1270). *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, Question 40 (On war), Article 1.
- [167] Grotius, H. (1625). *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace), Book II, Chapter 1.
- [168] AllAfrica / Shabelle Media. (2026, 11 September). Ethiopia: Fano claims capture of more than 150 Ethiopian soldiers in Amhara clashes (claims not independently verified). allafrica.com.
- [169] AFP / Arab News. (2025, 14 April). Amnesty urges halt to Ethiopia evictions for urban development. arabnews.com.
- [170] Al Jazeera. (2021, 25 November). UAE air bridge provides military support to Ethiopia gov't. aljazeera.com.
- [171] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. (2020, 24 November). *Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violations in Maikadra: Preliminary Findings*. Addis Ababa. addisstandard.com.
- [172] Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights & Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. (2021, 3 November). *Report of the Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by All Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region*.
- [173] de Waal, A. (1991). *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia*. Africa Watch / Human Rights Watch, New York.