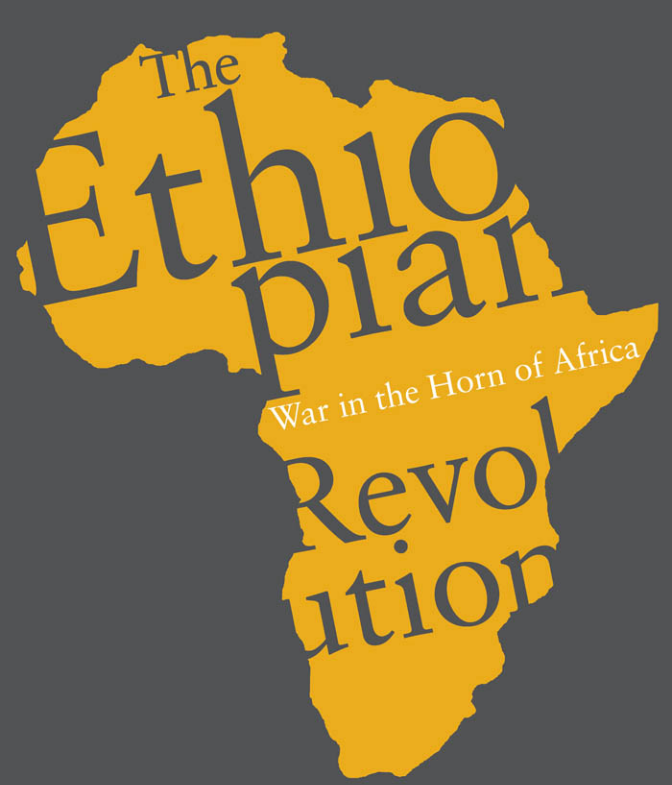

GEBRU TAREKE

Foreword by Donald Kagan
and Frederick Kagan

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The Ethiopian Revolution

War in the Horn of Africa

Gebru Tareke
Foreword by Donald Kagan
and Frederick Kagan

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In memory of my parents
Widisti Menkir
Tareke Mengesha
And
All those who died for a free, democratic, and secular Ethiopia

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Foreword

War has been a subject of intense interest from the beginning of literature around the world. Whether it be in the earliest literary work in the Western tradition, Homer's *Iliad*, or the Rigvedic hymns of ancient India, people have always been fascinated by this dangerous and challenging phenomenon. Few can fail to be stirred by such questions as: How and why do wars come about? How and why do they end? Why did the winners win and the losers lose? How do leaders make life-and-death decisions? Why do combatants follow orders that put their lives at risk? How do individuals and societies behave in war, and how are they affected by it? Recent events have raised the study of war from one of intellectual interest to a matter of vital importance to America and the world. Ordinary citizens must understand war in order to choose their leaders wisely, and leaders must understand it if they are to prevent wars where possible and win them when necessary.

This series, therefore, seeks to present the keenest analyses of war in its different aspects, the sharpest evaluations of political and military decision-making, and descriptive accounts of military activity that illuminate its human elements. It will do so drawing on the full range of military history from ancient times to the present and in every part of the globe in order to make available to the general public readable and accurate scholarly accounts of this most fascinating and dangerous of human activities.

Gebru Tareke's *The Ethiopian Revolution* is a remarkable work that tells the story of an obscure corner of the world unknown to most Americans, but that is nevertheless bound up in America's most serious preoccupations. Although the Horn of Africa seems to most a remote and impoverished area notable chiefly

for the suffering of its people, it has played an important role in recent American history, and it is likely to play a significant role in the future of America and the West in general. The humanitarian intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s was undertaken by the George H. W. Bush administration in ignorance of the historical and regional context. As that context imposed itself upon American forces, most notably with the "Blackhawk Down" disaster in Mogadishu in 1993, the Clinton administration chose to leave the region once again to its fate. That withdrawal, cited endlessly by al Qaeda and related Islamist movements, created a global impression of American weakness and fecklessness that persists in some quarters to this day. And ignorance of the region's history and real importance, of course, led to the deaths of American soldiers in a vain effort.

The Ethiopian Revolution is the history of the quarter century that led up to the American disaster in Somalia, but it is much more. It also describes the rise and fall of the Ethiopian socialist dictatorship and its ruler, Mengistu. The collapse of that tyranny in 1991 spawned civil wars and regional conflicts that devastated this already impoverished region and brought into question the very feasibility of maintaining state structures in the Horn of Africa. That devastation coincided with the rise of al Qaeda and the expansion of Iranian efforts to establish links with Islamist extremists in Africa in the 1990s. These effects converged in Sudan, where they remain intertwined. Somalia's collapse provided fertile ground to al Qaeda affiliates, which took over Mogadishu and most of southern Somalia in the first decade of this century. American unwillingness to re-engage in Somalia so soon after the Blackhawk Down disaster led a reviving Ethiopia to invade Somalia and eject its Islamist rulers in 2006. But no one who knows the history of this region at all can imagine that things will now remain stable. The Horn of Africa may be, to borrow a phrase, a "far-off land of which we know little," but it is nevertheless vital terrain for anyone concerned about Islamist terrorism, to say nothing of humanitarian disasters. *The Ethiopian Revolution* is required reading for those who wish to understand this complex and important area.

But *The Ethiopian Revolution* would be an important work even if it did not address so critical and so understudied a region. Tareke's work integrates detailed narratives of conventional military operations and multiple revolutionary wars. It is almost a course in counterinsurgency by itself because of the numerous similar yet disparate cases it examines. Tareke narrates the Somali attempt to seize the Ogaden region of Ethiopia in 1977, shortly after Mengistu rose to power in Addis Ababa, noting that the Somali plan included a prepared insurgency within the Ogaden coordinated with a conventional invasion from Somalia. He then describes how the Ethiopian revolutionary government, with the ex-

traordinary assistance of thousands of Cuban and Soviet advisors and troops, not only defeated the Somali invasion but also suppressed the remaining insurgency using a combination of military and nonmilitary operations and social, political, and humanitarian efforts.

But Mengistu became overconfident and launched another major operation in 1982 aimed at subduing the long-simmering insurgency in Eritrea. This attempt led to disaster, as the better-organized and more popular Eritrean insurgency first beat back Ethiopia's forces and then defeated the Ethiopian army in a series of battles at the end of the 1980s that led ultimately to the fall of the Ethiopian dictatorship and the collapse of the state. Tareke explicitly asks the fascinating question: Why were the Ethiopians so astonishingly successful at counterinsurgency in the Ogaden and so appallingly bad at it in Eritrea only a few years later? His answer is based not only on solid examinations of the specific military capabilities of the Ethiopian forces and their insurgent opponents, but also on a detailed exploration of the differing social, political, and economic situations of these two areas. The Ethiopians misread the nature of the Eritrean insurgency and wrongly assumed that techniques proven in the Ogaden could be transported to the north with little change. And the world changed, too. By the end of the 1980s, Ethiopia's Soviet and Cuban sponsors had their own problems and much less attention to spare helping Addis Ababa fight its internal wars. Counterinsurgency, like any other kind of war, is an art, not a science, as Tareke shows clearly. Success comes not from divining the correct tactical techniques or systematizing civil-military programs, but from recognizing each insurgency as a unique organism with its own causes, strengths, and weaknesses. That is a lesson that Americans would do well to heed.

Donald Kagan and Frederick Kagan

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Preface

Happy the nation whose people has not forgotten how to rebel.

—*R. H. Tawney*

Happier the nation that uses the recurring tension between the social forces of repression and resistance to expand the boundaries of freedom and justice. Happier still that which utilizes historical memory of collective resistance to mold a more egalitarian and coherent political community. Ethiopia has had movements of popular rebellion, and an inquiry into the most recent and cataclysmic clash between authoritarian regimes and insurgent forces committed to their eradication has led to this inescapable conclusion: with sufficient popular and external support, the leadership of dedicated and competent fighters, a land suitable for guerrilla warfare, and an incumbent regime whose legitimacy is in jeopardy, revolutionary insurgents are hard to beat. But rarely has a successful insurgency guaranteed political and civil rights or empowered the powerless. No country better exemplifies the failure of an insurgency than Eritrea, which gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993, having fought a thirty-year war of "liberation" led by guerrillas inspired by Marxism-Leninism. Independence has delivered neither liberty nor prosperity. By comparison, Ethiopia, also led by former insurgents, has done better in both the political and the economic sphere since the end of military dictatorship. Even there, the political situation is troubled and social justice for the masses of people who bore the brunt of the civil wars a distant dream.

Despite the plethora of historical writing, there is a glaring gap in our knowledge of recent military events. Although we know why the Ethiopian revolutionaries fought, we still do not know how and by what means they killed one

another for so long. Ethiopian historiography has been vastly enriched since the revolution of 1974. Ethiopianists have analyzed the origins, processes, and main outcomes of the revolutionary transformation, stressing points of continuity and discontinuity. The contending centripetal and centrifugal forces have not been neglected, but the coverage of war making and state making, the single dominant feature of Ethiopian history of the last half century, is too meager. This work will go a long way toward closing the gap.

The revolutionary wars have remained a subject of sharp controversy, with passions running too high to allow critical assessments of the more recent past. My aim in writing this book is to open the first chapter of this important but astonishingly contentious subject. I wish to tell an epic story by paying close attention to the multiple forces and voices involved in the conflicts, to the ideas and ideologies that determined or influenced political behavior and action, to the interplay between the political and the military and between the domestic, regional, and international, and to the organization, leadership, strategy, and tactics of the rival parties and their techniques of mobilizing and garnering popular support, as well to the lasting legacies of the wars and revolution. I cannot honestly claim that I have been entirely objective. If objectivity is equated with neutrality in the interpretation of such critical and momentous issues and events, then I plead guilty; it is unattainable. I have made special effort, though, to keep my biases to a minimum. I hope this study will help fellow Ethiopians come to terms with their recent history at a time when the country has embarked on a journey that is full of promises and risks. That journey of nation construction and development will no doubt entail more turmoil, but has such a gigantic mission ever been painless?

The story I tell is politico-military in the sense that it dwells largely on organized violence (warfare) and the politics of such violence. The experiences of the vast majority of people directly affected by the wars, both civilians and the rank and file of combatants, have been relegated to the margins of my narrative. But interlaced in these wars, with varying force and clarity, were all facets of Ethiopian social life. A record of the armed conflicts must, therefore, take all these features into account, paying close attention not just to how well politics blended with the military and the local with the international but also to how and to what extent the civil wars redefined, reorganized or reconfigured, and transformed the society that waged them. These issues have not been completely neglected here, but they deserve a separate and elaborate exploration in a *social history* of the revolutionary civil wars.

In reconstructing the narrative, I have relied primarily on Ethiopian archival material drawn from two repositories: the Ministry of National Defense and the

Ministry of Internal Affairs, both located in Addis Ababa. The discussion inevitably presents the story from that side. But this is all the more needed since almost all the available accounts of the wars see them from the viewpoints of the insurgencies, especially the Eritrean insurgency, which, because of its longevity, has attracted the greatest attention. A little admission here: what was obtained was occasionally incomplete or inconsistent, as state documents commonly are. There is, for instance, a tendency to exaggerate the enemy's losses while minimizing one's own, and the numbers are sometimes contradictory. Once in a while one finds zealous commanders exalting the bravery of their troops or belittling those of their opponents in order to meet the expectations or win the approval of their military or political superiors. There are instances of misrepresentation, distortion, and outright fabrication. Despite such drawbacks, and since there rarely were independent observers at the battlefronts, the official reports are our most valuable sources. It is impossible to reconstruct the history of the civil wars or the interstate wars without them. I am not aware of primary historical sources that are more informative, authentic, and indeed more reliable or credible. Oral evidence by and large corroborates them and the published material seldom contradicts them.

Testimonies of participants in the conflicts have been collected to the extent possible to complement the state documents. Willing informants filled out questionnaires in Amharic or English or gave interviews. More than five hundred were involved, most of them former officers, noncommissioned officers, and rank and file. The missing voice is that of the Eritreans, who were hard to reach; regrettably, questionnaires were never filled out and repeated requests for interviews were ignored. What was secured from the others has been carefully double-checked, for personal recollections tend to be affected not only by the conflicting interests and loyalties of the informants but also by exaggeration and outright invention.

Unlike similar historical experiences, the Ethiopian civil wars have not yet generated a flood of memoirs or novels. There are indeed only two notable novels. Baalu Girma's *Oromay* was inspired by the Red Star campaign (chapter 7). Though a story of love and humanity in the midst of conflict, it is actually a gripping and scathing critique of the war in Eritrea. *To Asmara* by Thomas Keneally is a highly partisan but moving fictional account that may have put the Eritrean struggle on the international stage. These works still cry out for worthy successors. Memoirs have just begun to appear, the most notable of which are *On the Battlefield* by Brigadier General Tesfaye Habte Mariam, *Dedication and Firmness* by Major General Hussein Ahmed, and *Reminiscences of Lt. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam*, by Genet Ayele Anbessie. These voices of leading par-

ticipants in or witnesses to the conflicts are no less valuable than the state archives.

Books of this type are not the fruit of individual efforts only. I wish to acknowledge all those who, in big and small ways, directly or indirectly, contributed to the completion of this study. It could not have been produced without the support of family, friends, colleagues, organizations, and institutions and the cooperation of participants in the wars and revolutions.

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Social Sciences Research Council provided generous financial support for research, the Ethiopian government granted access to the archives of the Ministries of National Defense and Internal Affairs, and several hundred former Ethiopian soldiers kindly gave of their time to either fill out questionnaires (most of them) or be interviewed. To all of them, I am profoundly grateful.

Many individuals in government and academia facilitated my work and I owe huge debts to them. The book would probably have never seen the light of day without the assistance of Siye Abraha, minister of defense, Tsadkan Gabre Tensae, chief of staff, and particularly Haile Selassie Gabre Kidan, chief archivist of the ministry, as well as the late Kinfe Gabre Medhin, head of security in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Siye also gave four hours of his busy schedule for an interview. To him, his comrades above, and other members of his political organization who granted interviews or filled out questionnaires, I am deeply thankful.

Thanks to Bahru Zewde, who, as director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, was instrumental in my acquiring two of the scarcest commodities in Addis Ababa: an apartment and a private telephone. Many of his compatriots assisted in varied ways, from providing transport to inviting me to their homes. Their anonymity in no way devalues their kindness and hospitality.

I am deeply indebted to Belay Abebe and Makonnen Berhane for their invaluable contribution as my research assistants. Both were students at Addis Ababa University, and I could not have found more assiduous, reliable, and resourceful helpers. I was stunned upon hearing of Makonnen's premature death and saddened that he did not live long enough to see this product.

As is clear from the bibliography, the literature on the Ethiopian Revolution is rich. I have benefited from it enormously, as I have from the knowledge and wisdom of some of its authors. As regards this particular work, none has been more forthcoming and helpful than Christopher Clapham, one of the expatriate scholars who truly know and understand Ethiopia. His comments and recommendations on two of the chapters when they were initially published in the

Journal of Modern African Studies, of which he is the chief editor, were valuable and invigorating. I am thankful for his efforts. In this connection, thanks are due to Cambridge University Press for permission to adapt these articles and Boston University for allowing me to reprint an article from its *International Journal of African Historical Studies*.

I am very thankful to Christopher Rogers, executive editor of Yale University Press, for his enthusiastic embrace of my book and his integrity and kindness, as I am to his colleague Laura Davulis for her forthrightness and scrupulous professionalism and to Jack Borrebach, my production editor, for his promptness and courtesy. I extend my gratitude and admiration to Roslyn Schloss for her considerable and diligent editing.

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Some colleagues and friends at Hobart and William Smith, with which I have been associated for the last thirty years, have helped all the time, a few others at critical junctures. To Sheila Bennett, former provost and dean of faculty, for her spirited support of my scholarly endeavors and her sympathy and comfort at difficult times; to Dunbar Moodie and David Ost, for their passionate discourse on the "politics of antipolitics"; to David, additionally, for his critical and stimulating reading of chapter 1; to Alan Frishman, with whom I have had the wonderful experience of teaching a bidisciplinary course for a long time, for his generosity and collegiality; to all my colleagues in the history department and Africana studies, for their good fellowship; to Daniel Singal and Derek Linton, in particular, for their constant interest in my work, encouragement, and recurring conversation about "the West and the rest of us"; and to Judy Mahoney-Benzer, our efficient and indefatigable secretary, for her patience, ebullience, understanding, and warm friendship, I extend my deep appreciation and satisfaction.

It is with special pleasure that I recognize my own kin and immediate relations who have been unsparingly helpful, supportive, and inspiring. My younger brothers continually kept me updated with the relevant literature published in Ethiopia. The youngest one installed the software of the Ethiopian script in my personal computer, typed the first chapter, and undertook many other chores. He made it easier to prepare the manuscript. My sisters supplied me with *shiro*, *barbare*, *qolo*, and Aksum's finest *gabi*, without which I could not easily have endured upstate New York's long, bitter winters. Thanks are due to my three sisters-in-law, for their interest and their supply of information and books, and to Teresa's children, for their friendship and goodwill.

I cannot thank my own children enough for what they have given and taught

me in life. Their incredible tenacity and resilience in the face of an unimaginable adversity during their tender years have sustained, humbled, but steeled me even more. For all of that and more, I am eternally grateful.

Teresa Kidane, my wife, best friend, and most reliable counselor, has been my main pillar. This book is a product of her efforts as much as mine. Teresa is a person of marvelous gifts. Her vivacity, boundless optimism, and hearty and infectious laughter would uplift even the most depressed. Her patience, generosity, love for life and people defy description. Cheerfully, she pulled me out from the emotional and intellectual ennui into which I had sunk following a traumatic experience. Patiently and tenderly, she helped me soldier through the most difficult years of my life. Words cannot sufficiently express the depth of my gratitude.

Abbreviations

ALF	Afar Liberation Front
AMC	Agricultural Marketing Corporation
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement (formerly EPDM)
CELU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions
COPWE	Commission to Organize the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia
CSO	Central Statistical Office
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
Echat	Ethiopian Oppressed People's Struggle (Amharic)
EDORM	Ethiopian Democratic Officers' Revolutionary Movement
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
EEBC	Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPDM	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (now ANDM)
EPLA	Eritrean People's Liberation Army
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ESUE	Ethiopian Students Union in Europe
ESUNA	Ethiopian Students Union in North America
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
HSIU	Haile Selassie I University
IFLO	Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development

Meison	All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (Amharic)
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MOND	Ministry of National Defense
MPLA	Popular Liberation Movement of Angola
NUEUS	National Union of Ethiopian University Students
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
PDRE	People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1987–91)
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council (Derg)
POMOA	Provisional Office of Mass Organizational Affairs
PRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
SALF	Somali-Abo Liberation Front
SLF	Sidama Liberation Front
TLF	Tigray Liberation Front
TNO	Tigray National Organization
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
USUAA	University Students Union of Addis Ababa
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia
WSLF	Western Somali Liberation Front

Part One

The Specter of Revolution and War

REVOLUTIONARY BROTHERS AT WAR

> Revolutions are rare. Most societies have never experienced revolutions, and most ages until modern times did not know revolutions.
>
> —*Samuel P. Huntington*

> War is at best barbarism. . . . Its glory is all moonshine. . . . War is hell.
>
> —*General William T. Sherman*

Ethiopia is one of the very few countries that have experienced a revolution in modern times. In fact, in the midst of civil wars it witnessed two parallel revolutions with essentially the same ideological goals though different strategic ones. Revolution and war fed each other in a dialectic that was at once destructive and constructive. For nearly two decades, Ethiopia was a land of war, death, destruction, despair, and misery, but also one of hope, reform, and reconstruction; of struggles for national cohesion and identity but also for autonomy, freedom, dignity, and an unfettered future. This book seeks to show how these conflicting political sentiments and emancipatory visions played out on the battlefields. It is a story of how revolutionary insurgents, expertly using Mao Zedong's fundamentals of protracted war, debilitated and then annihilated a superior conventional force led by self-proclaimed Leninists. It is a story that sheds much light on the politics of insurrectionary movements and why some succeed while others fail. While it confirms the universal applicability of Mao's canons of people's, or revolutionary, war, it also cautions that their effectiveness is as variable as the globe's

landscape, social structures, and cultures of agrarian society. They are not meant for everyone, anytime. It also suggests that any counterinsurgency strategy that is not adaptable to widely varied local conditions is unlikely to yield the intended outcomes all the time.

The year 1991 was a watershed in contemporary Ethiopian history. After seventeen years of iron rule, the Marxist-Leninist government of Ethiopia fell, following the total defeat and disintegration of its armed forces. The president, Mengistu Haile Mariam, fled into exile, and his erstwhile enemies, the Marxist-Leninist insurgents of Eritrea and Tigray, split the country in two. On May 24, 1991, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) captured Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. It was the end of thirty years of civil war. Four days later, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of four political organizations dominated by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), marched into Addis Ababa, putting a close to seventeen years of warfare in the rest of the country. In 1993, Eritrea formally became a sovereign state. Ethiopia lost its two ports on the Red Sea and, once again, became landlocked. It also became a federation of ethnic states.

Why and how did it all happen? Was this the disastrous defeat of the only truly African social revolution by its sinister domestic and foreign enemies, as the fallen regime alleged, or the triumphant culmination of people's revolutions from below against an odious military dictatorship, as the victors claimed? Will history register the long drawn-out civil wars as needlessly wasteful or the tragic but inescapable outcomes of a backward and poor country experiencing the pangs of modernity? What explains the defeat of the Ethiopian military, then the second largest in Africa, or, conversely, the success of the liberation fronts? What kind of counterinsurgency strategies did the regime use, and why were they so ineffective? Can countries like Ethiopia, with dependent economies and borrowed technologies of destruction, actually fight and win against people's wars or guerrilla insurgencies without unflagging outside support? How extensive was foreign involvement in the Ethiopian civil wars? To what extent have revolution and war strengthened or weakened the foundational myths of the Ethiopian state? What was the overall impact of war and revolution on the state and the society as well as on the environment? This book attempts to answer these questions by examining not only why the Ethiopian "revolutionary" armed forces lost but also why their adversaries won. Its main conclusion is that the civil wars were won or lost as much by the rear guard as at the fronts. The revolutionary government ultimately lost because it failed to deliver on its big promises: freedom, equality, and prosperity. As a description of the interconnection between armies, revolution, and war, the book is the first military history of the Ethiopian

Revolution. Previous studies have thoroughly analyzed why the revolution from above succeeded at the center. This study examines why and how it lost to the revolution at the periphery. As much as theories of revolutionary wars have been illuminating, I hope that the book will provide useful empirical insights into theories of war making and state formation, ethnonationalism, insurgency and counterinsurgency, and revolutionary warfare.

Perhaps the most intractable problems that confronted the Ethiopian military men who seized power in 1974 were the numerous armed revolts set off by the revolution. In addition to the war in Eritrea, which had been simmering since the early 1960s, rebellions, most of them ethnic-based, sprouted in various regions, threatening the country's unity. Of the two dozen groups, the Afar Liberation Front (ALF), the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fought, with varying degrees of effectiveness, to the last days of the military regime. Nevertheless, it was the combined efforts of the EPLF and TPLF that terminated the dictatorship. They and the most decisive battles they won are the main focus of this work.

How did the combatants explain or justify the protracted wars? The dissidents, who preferred to call themselves liberation forces of one variant or the other, declared that their primary goal was to reclaim or to affirm rights denied by successive repressive regimes, the most recent of which they characterized as a military dictatorship of the fascist type. The Eritrean rebels and some Oromo and Somali dissidents went further, asserting that their struggles were no different from the anticolonial fights waged in the rest of Africa and Asia between the 1940s and 1970s. For them Ethiopia was one of the last colonial empires in Africa that had to be decolonized. The targeted regime scoffed at the claims, contemptuously dismissing their authors as ordinary bandits—its favorite term—or, worse, mercenaries devoid of any sense of identification with the nation-state. Indeed it considered the dissident nationalists so unpatriotic as to be willing to do the dirty work of others for pay. It called the Eritrean rebels "petrodollar mercenaries"—that is, pawns of Arab reactionary forces inimical to the Ethiopian state. To admit that the Eritreans had legitimate grievances was to compromise the indivisibility of the state. No nationalist, the regime argued, could submit to the Eritrean demand for independence: to do so would create a fatal precedent for disintegration of a fractious country. Eritrea, it insisted, was indissolubly Ethiopian. As for the Tigrayans, they were misguided collaborators in a diabolical scheme to dismember the state. The Eritreans were just as committed to reclaiming independence as the Tigrayans were to full autonomy. The destruction of the oppo-

nent was seen as the final solution to the irrepressible conflicts. What made the situation even more intractable was that the antagonists' views of one another bordered on the Manichean: the self was good, the other evil. For instance, the TPLF attacked the military leaders as fascists or "man-eaters," and the soldiers habitually referred to their adversaries as faithless, murderous quislings. Mengistu's regime was a wicked dictatorship but the rebels were not blameless saints either. Both lied, tortured, and killed with a flagrant disregard for basic human rights. The differences lie in the magnitude of the criminal offences. The Ethiopian civil wars were immensely complex, in that many conflicts often mingled or overlapped, painful choices were made, and strange alliances were sometimes formed.

Explanations for victory or defeat are as dramatically polarized. As their triumphalist narratives show, the winners point to the fact of victory for history's vindication.[1] The vanquished portray their defeat as a national catastrophe brought about by an amalgam of domestic and foreign forces dedicated to the destruction of the oldest state in sub-Saharan Africa.[2] Interested observers have supported one or the other side, depending on their ideological proclivities or susceptibility to propaganda. Few issues in Africa have summoned more partisan support or opposition than the Ethiopian civil wars.

War reveals fundamental fault lines in society or strong disagreements about critical policy issues. The contemporary Ethiopian crisis was an outcome of the twin and complex historical processes of state construction—which is apparently far from completion—and social and ethnic identity formation in the Horn of Africa, which embraces Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and fractured Somalia. A volatile region, the Horn is where demography, identity, and borders intersect and overlap in limited space. Among others, three intertwined factors explain the historical infelicity and pandemic of organized violence in the region. First, there is the continuing contest for state construction and the consolidation of state power, a process that began long before the dawn of European colonialism. The tensions and conflicts that rival nationalisms and counterhegemonic movements generate are accentuated by scarce and diminishing resources in the face of exploding populations and rising social demands. Second, following independence, the state became both the source and site of conflict because, in the absence of a dominant class with a grip on the economy, the state acts as the chief custodian and allocator of national resources.[3] This often spurred violent competition for political power, since differential access to the state meant unequal access to wealth and privilege. In extreme cases, political enterprise gave rise to nonideological armed gangs whose activities can only be described as terrorist and criminal. Jean-François Bayart captures it nicely: "War's great ad-

vantage over simple delinquency is that it legitimizes in the name of justice and the revolution the use of arms to get access to the resources of the State. . . . The reduction of war to a mode of political production is all the more viable south of the Sahara since it is in itself a source of accumulation."[4] Distinguishable from the predatory warlordism of Somalia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone were the Eritrean and Tigrayan movements that were more like the purposeful, popular, and disciplined struggles of China and Vietnam, whose organizational, mobilizational, and combat techniques the Ethiopian rebels so assiduously and efficiently replicated. In Ethiopia, politics was in command; in the other cases, it was the Kalashnikov. The historical, social, and cultural conditions from which the northern rebels sprang, their ideological orientation, their exemplary self-discipline, and the degree of legitimacy they won as a result, both domestically and internationally, set them apart from the bands of rapacious miscreants who terrorized societies with a callous disregard for the sanctity of life.

Third, foreign actors both fueled and sustained the bloody conflicts. Napoleon's dictum that geography is destiny may be an overstatement but it is illuminating. Few people have been more distinctively shaped by their land and its location than Ethiopians. Geographic factors were evident in the origins and distinct cultural qualities of the state, in the interstate wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as in the contemporaneous civil wars. "To a great extent, both internally and externally, the pressures on Ethiopia have been geographically induced. The complex problem of political integration, coupled with the interference of external forces in the internal affairs of the strategically situated nation, have served to stimulate and intensify the Ethiopia-Eritrea configuration," observes Edward Morgan.[5] During the cold war, the Horn became an arena of superpower rivalry, and the rivals were all too willing to arm their local surrogates. Clearly, the wars entailed class and national contradictions, power struggles, and personal ambition. Domestic actors instigated them, but the internecine conflicts could not have lasted for so long and with such undiminished intensity and brutality without external meddlers. Regional adversaries were provided with extensive access to varied arsenals of weaponry that increased the scale and scope of violence and destruction. Except for the ruling political class, no segment of society was spared. This was Ethiopia's modern total war.

The twentieth century is said to have been one of war and revolution. War is not always the harbinger of revolution, even though some of the major revolutions were sparked by it. Conversely, revolution has often ignited wars. In Ethiopia, the two have had a symbiotic relationship, and the military has been a key player in the drama. The Eritrean insurgency that started in 1961 was a vital cata-

lyst of the Ethiopian revolution that began in 1974 and toppled an autocrat, put an end to dynasticism, destroyed feudal social relations, and altered interstate relations. That revolution, in turn, encouraged foreign aggression and intervention while unleashing domestic forces that either challenged the new regime's legitimacy and policies or altogether disputed the state's authority to rule over them. There was a resurgence of suppressed ethnic or cultural identities seeking self-affirmation and greater control over local resources. The quest for autonomy or independence further fueled the fires of war and revolution. The revolutionary regime built a huge military apparatus with which, for seventeen years, it continuously waged wars against the insurgencies in order to keep itself in power and defend its nationalist policies of centralization and state integrity.

The outcome was extensive militarization of society. The number of men in arms, the wide array of weapons, and the sheer scale of violence and destruction were simply without precedent in the country's history. War caused enormous material and human loss, massive population displacement, ecological deterioration, and finally the dismemberment of the state. The military rulers failed in one of their principal missions: the preservation of the state's territorial unity. The Ethiopian state was historically forged by war, and by war it has been broken up. Yet revolutionary warfare has led to the construction of a new democratic order in which the various peoples and nationalities are granted equal autonomy. As the first revolution officially abolished inherited and unjust entitlements and privileges, the second has severely curtailed arbitrary powers by enacting constitutionalism, parliamentary democracy, and the legal equality of citizens. These are enshrined in the federal system of power sharing, an innovation in Ethiopian political history. It would take extraordinary circumstances to reverse these historic achievements, but it will be a long while before they are securely established. War, and particularly revolutionary war, can be a powerful vehicle of social progress and has thus to be seen as a historical process with multiple consequences, some of which may be beneficial in the long haul. Still, peaceful means should always be preferable to violent means.

The debate over why the military lost or the insurgents won has just begun and it will be long time before a consensus is achieved, if it ever is. One view holds that the wars, for the military, were inherently unwinnable or that the insurgents were destined to win; such assumptions are unmindful of the fact that not all guerrilla movements in recent memory have been successful. The opposing argument is that victory or defeat in the Ethiopian civil wars was not preordained, for, too often, history is decided by *contingent* factors. Indeed, there were moments when success seemed to swing the other way. In fact, until about the mid-1980s the only certainty about the conflicts was their unpredictability.

It was only after the army's rout at Af Abet in 1988 that the pendulum swung irreversibly in favor of the rebels. This was due to the convergence of three critical elements. A seriously discredited regime could no longer withstand the coordinated assaults by two powerful organizations that now enjoyed wide grassroots support. The centrist and authoritarian regime lost to autonomist aspirations more because of its own weaknesses than because of the overwhelming strength of its adversaries.

This book is based on two assumptions. The first embraces Christopher Clapham's proposition that between 1975 and 1991 two elite-led revolutions with more or less the same ideas and ideologies were simultaneously waged in northern Ethiopia. The one that started in the cities and gradually spread to the countryside was nationalist and centrist. The other was regionalist or ethnonationalist and favored decentralization.[6] It succeeded because it managed to mobilize a large segment of the rural population that the hegemonic center had alienated. Both sides called themselves Marxist-Leninist. They used the same terminology and similar methods of organization and mobilization. The sanguinary conflicts were never between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries, as the regime claimed, or between fascists and democrats, as the rebels maintained. Rather, they were between groups of men, each with its own vision of a socialist future in a backward and poor country. It was a highly complicated affair in which self-declared communists were mercilessly pitted against one another. The Ethiopian civil wars were wars of comrades against comrades.

The second assumption posits that, under the unique circumstances in the Horn of Africa in the late 1980s, the best the regime could have hoped for was a military stalemate leading to a negotiated settlement of the conflicts. To achieve a stalemate, the incumbent regime needed the undiminished support of a significant section of the population—especially the peasantry, which provided the human and material resources—as well as foreign diplomatic and material aid. That proved a mirage.

If war is the continuation of politics by other means, as Karl von Clausewitz has stipulated, then surely politics must play a decisive role in how wars end. Under the military dictatorship all politics were mediated through coercion—its features were repression, terror, and mass suffering. The so-called urban and rural mass associations were mere instruments of autocratic rule. Forced conscription and the various modes of legal and illegal taxation and labor extraction were as unpopular as the much-hated programs of forced resettlement, villagization, collectivization, and rigid price control of agricultural produce. Then there was the hierarchy of authoritarian, abusive, venal, and incompetent party and state functionaries. Hidden and open resistance begot more repression and

misery. As authority lost its legitimacy, popular allegiance shifted toward the insurgents. And as grassroots support faded and military setbacks increased, morale and discipline in the army declined and the will to win evaporated.

On the other hand, every small victory boosted the spirit of the rebels, reinforcing their conviction in the justness of their causes, the correctness of their strategies, and the certainty of victory. The decisive element in their eventual victory was the support of the peasants, who saw the guerrillas—in contrast to the corrupt party and state officials—as honest, honorable, competent, frugal, and genuinely concerned about the welfare of ordinary folks like them. They admired the fighters' courage, determination, and selflessness. And most of those fighters were themselves peasants. Though led by insurrectionary intellectuals or commissars, the conflicts were truly peasant wars because the combatants on both sides were drawn predominantly from the agrarian population. Village Ethiopia was at once the site and the means of the conflicts.

If there was then little or no prospect of political victory, the regime's only chance was to quash the insurgents militarily. With Soviet technical advice and material support, it tried to achieve that objective through a series of military campaigns. Only once did it come close to crushing, though not necessarily extinguishing, the Eritrean resistance. To continue those ultimately fruitless campaigns would have required a much larger army, a continuous flow of volunteers, and undiminished external assistance. All proved unattainable. Having lost both foreign support and that of the people, and faced with highly organized and resilient foes, the army and regime withered.

The military regime never quite fully accepted that—to paraphrase Clausewitz—the womb of all wars is politics. Political problems were addressed by military solutions as if the battlefield could be separated from society and politics. The regime saw the military destruction of the guerrillas as the solution to the country's security problems. It was not that no attention was paid to politics but that the overriding belief was that victory on the battlefield would produce a permanent political solution to the fratricidal conflicts. Secret negotiations between the government and the EPLF were held in Berlin and Rome in 1978 and 1982, respectively; similar meetings between the government and the TPLF took place in the late 1980s in Atlanta, Georgia, Nairobi, Kenya, and Rome. The belligerents were unwilling to compromise. The rulers were never able or willing to weigh carefully the political benefits of a negotiated settlement against the staggering military costs of belligerency. Convinced of the justness of their cause and of their ability to wear down their enemies, they thought they could win the wars by amassing armaments and by multiplying the numbers of men in arms. It was a delusion. Unable to take full account of the state's military capacity vis-à-

vis the insurgents, the rulers plunged the country into a quagmire from which it became impossible to disengage before disaster struck.

At the same time as they underrated their adversaries, the men in uniform had an exaggerated view of their own capabilities. They badly misjudged the ideological commitment of the insurgents and their determination to attain their goals regardless of the sacrifices. Treating them as mere pawns or instruments of external forces whose supposed interest was to reverse the revolution or break up the country, or both, the men in power were unable or unwilling to recognize their armed opponents and deal with them directly. Their singular focus on foreign enemies, real and imagined, prevented any serious consideration of how Eritrean independence could have been made strategically tolerable. And by insisting that the Tigrayan movement was merely an extension of the "Eritrean conspiracy" to dismantle the state and thus lacking in historical legitimacy, the leaders derailed any serious discussion of how the Tigrayan quest for autonomy might have been accommodated within a truly restructured state. The half-hearted measures they took along these lines, at the beginning and then again toward the end of their political lives, were inadequate and therefore rejected by equally belligerent forces. What made negotiation and compromise impossible was the conviction of the antagonists that their respective causes were absolutely just and defensible. What every contestant demanded of the other was complete surrender. That came in 1991 with the annihilation of the military and the expiration of the dictatorship.

Revolution and war caused incalculable bloodshed, imposed tremendous material cost,, and inflicted lasting psychological and spiritual damage. Thousands of soldiers and civilians perished, their names unknown and their graves unidentified. Grieving parents, widows, and orphans wait for their "lost" warriors to come home. In 1994, I met a mother of two lost sons who could not accept the fact of their deaths. "How could I not hope for their return? I am a mother," she told me in anguish. There can be no greater grief for the living than to wait endlessly for the dead to return. Even though the former troops were speedily demobilized and reabsorbed into civilian life, there is a lingering mutual distrust and animosity between them and their former adversaries. It would have been politically prudent, in the spirit of conciliation and national unity, to have declared "no victor, no vanquished"; instead, the annual celebration of victory serves only to rub salt into the wounds of the losers. What is rejoicing for one is mourning for the other. Many of the defeated continue to regard their vanquishers as renegades, as illegitimate wielders of power. National accord demands realism on the part of the victors and forgiveness on the part of the defeated. It will be a long time before these two groups are fully reconciled and the wounds and psychic

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scars are healed. Only when they are will the people of Ethiopia and their immediate neighbors of the Horn begin to enjoy the fruits of enduring peace and untrammeled development. But before we can talk of the present and speculate about the future, we need to examine how the revolution that gave rise to a murderous dictatorship and spurred destructive civil wars unfolded.

1

Roots and Outcomes of Revolution: A Review

1960: BEGINNINGS

The world only goes forward because of those who oppose it.

—*Johann W. Goethe*

Selecting benchmark dates as beginnings or endings of long and complex historical processes can be arbitrary, often faulty. But if we were to choose *the* event that both foreshadowed and inspired the generation that catalyzed the Ethiopian Revolution, it certainly would be the aborted coup d'état of 1960. That event set in motion a decade of political protest against monarchical absolutism that did not abate until the more momentous upheaval of 1974. What transpired in that year, of course, was not imagined by the conspirators of December 1960.

Thirty years after his coronation as king of kings of Ethiopia and eight years after the Free Officers of Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser banished the monarchy, as well as Britain's "veiled" colonialism, from their country, Emperor Haile Selassie I survived his first major political challenge from his own troops. On December 13, 1960, some elements of the Imperial Bodyguard (IBG), a relatively privileged sector of the armed forces mainly entrusted with the protection of the royal family, tried but failed to dethrone him while he was out of the country. The abortive coup was led by the commander of the IBG, Brigadier General Mengistu Neway, and his brother Girmame, the alleged mastermind of the plot, with the reluctant connivance of the police chief, Brigadier General Tsige Dibbu, and the security chief, Colonel Workneh Gebeyehou. Except for Girmame, the only civilian among the quartet and someone vocal about his progressive views, the conspirators were trusted and loyal servants of the monarch.[1] A salutary force

for change, Girmame was immersed in the intellectual currents of his era; the three high-profile officers, by contrast, were caught up in the trappings of power and the good life. It was widely believed that Mengistu—a mightily handsome man with a magnificent, intimidating moustache—had acted only in response to the incessant goading of his firebrand younger brother.

Poorly conceived and badly managed, the plot misfired. All the elementary principles of an orderly overthrow were violated. The coup was hurriedly planned and implemented with little coordination. The architects of the successful Egyptian coup of 1952 may have planned for as long as a decade without being detected. Cleavages within the military and the mistrust and suspicion for which Ethiopians are well known appear to have precluded such painstaking preparation. Indecisiveness was another major weakness; while the conspirators temporized, the initiative was stolen away from them by the loyalists. The revolt incited little popular support outside the University College of Addis Ababa. Little wonder it was extinguished in barely three days.[2] All the ringleaders were murdered, and many of the fleeing rebel soldiers were stoned or knifed to death by mobs; the survivors were imprisoned or discharged dishonorably. In one concentrated effort, the military center of opposition was erased, at least for the time being. The military ceased to be an independent political actor for another decade.

The conspirators may have been inspired by the Egyptian nationalist revolt, but they were far less radical than the Nasserites, whose main motive was the abolition of the monarchy and colonialism. They did not seek to abolish the monarchy, let alone transform the hierarchically structured social order. They were concerned with alleviating the most obvious economic injustices and political incompetence. Although they spoke in the name of the oppressed segments of society, their actions were an expression of the aspirations and ambitions of a new rising class—the petite bourgeoisie, an amorphous stratum of intellectuals, midlevel state functionaries, artisans, and shopkeepers.

Although the personnel of the United States embassy in Addis Ababa had assisted in suppressing the revolt, some well-placed Americans in the city did not miss its wider or long-term implications. They saw it as a harbinger. A month after the event, a close adviser bluntly warned the emperor that "disaster and catastrophe" would result if a "a truly responsible government" was not instituted. "We must not be misled into believing that we have a choice," he said. "The forces of history are in motion, and while they may be halted temporarily, they can never be repulsed permanently. We must either move with them or be overwhelmed by them. But this is not a real choice. Even if your Imperial Majesty feels the risks are great, they must be accepted."[3]

It was an eloquent and grimly prophetic exhortation. But the emperor did not see the threat in such apocalyptic terms and was loath to yield his autocratic power. He set the memorandum aside. His only response was to reshuffle some ministerial posts and bolster the state's security apparatus. He also quickly abandoned his official residence, where many of his closest advisers, court attendants, and senior ministers were slaughtered by the rebels in a last desperate act, and moved into the new and more imposing Jubilee Palace. The old palace became the hub of a new university bearing his name—and soon a center of dissension.

Although jolted, the ruling political class saw no urgency for social reform. To the contrary, it resorted to various acts of oppression, censoring even its own members. Seemingly distressed by the fact that the goal of nation building was being sacrificed for selfish and factional concerns, Lieutenant General Abiye Abebe, a socially prominent former son-in-law of the emperor, pleaded with the powerful and privileged to put the national good ahead of self-interest by refraining from malfeasance and injustice. In religiously couched language, he prophesized sternly that the next fire may be even more devouring than the last.[4] The patricians contemptuously dismissed his pleas and censored his book. He, too, unfortunately, would be consumed by the conflagration he foresaw.

Although it failed to upset the status quo, the soldiers' direct interference in state politics nonetheless subverted the monarchy's hallowed image and authority. In the eyes of many, the emperor's person was no longer sacred, nor was his authority inviolable, as his constitution had declared it. The Decembrists stirred up a new political consciousness, heralding a decade of social activism. At long last, the country had entered the "age of the masses," or popular politics.

After the coup, and largely because of it, the challenge to autocracy shifted from the palace to the open space of society, from clandestine to overt, from parochial to popular, from peaceful to violent opposition, from sectional conspiracies to mass-based insurgencies, and from the center to the periphery. During the decade before the revolution, there were three areas of popular resistance: at the center was a radical student movement and at the periphery were the Eritrean insurgency for separation and peasant revolts for the redress of a cascade of local problems. The student rebellion was confined mainly to Addis Ababa and other major cities, but it was the only persistent challenge to state authority and one of the catalysts of revolution. The other was the Eritrean revolt. Following independence from Britain in 1953, Eritrea was federated as an autonomous region with imperial Ethiopia by a United Nations act. The federation was an anomalous political arrangement that was destroyed when, in violation of the UN decision, the Ethiopian government annexed the region. This move was destined to give the Ethiopian state its share of grief. The Eritrean in-

surgency that began a year after the coup was the most enduring challenge from the periphery to the imperial regime. The two movements became autocracy's nemeses.

The 1960s also saw revolts in other parts of the country, although they were much less significant than the Eritrean resistance. A pauperized peasantry rose up in arms in the provinces of Bale, Sidamo, Wello, and Gojjam between 1963 and 1970. These revolts failed to cohere, however; localized, fragmented, and lacking support from the depressed sectors of the urban population, they could not withstand the state's repressive machinery. But they did impose considerable strains on the state's financial and military resources. This was particularly true of the rebellion in Bale, a southeastern province bordering Somalia. Waged from 1963 to 1968, it was the second-longest and bloodiest uprising, and the province was not pacified until 1970. It was able to sustain itself longer than the others in part because ethnic particularity conjoined with geographic marginality to give it greater intensity. Moreover, the military and logistical support it received from the state of Somalia, which was in the midst of territorial disputes with its neighbors, was unmatched anywhere but Eritrea.

Resistance to the autocratic state was thus intermittent and of little immediate consequence. Poverty, insecurity, and fear of repression were obvious deterrents, but, as will become clear, the fractionalization of society itself posed formidable obstacles to collective action transcending and cross-cutting class, ethnic, and regional boundaries. Despotism had little difficulty containing the social forces unleashed by state-driven modernization, but not indefinitely. In the 1970s, the unstoppable forces that the American adviser had so starkly warned about finally overwhelmed the monarchy, already in advanced decline, because domestic and international conditions were more favorable than in the 1960s. A spate of irreversible events brought about a political, social, and cultural transfiguration. The circumstances have been traced many times, but I must briefly recount them here to provide a context for the revolutionary wars.

THE PITFALLS OF AUTOCRATIC MODERNIZATION

> A revolution is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity, and policies.
>
> —*Samuel P. Huntington*

"The scintillating halls of the Hilton Hotel in the city were the scene of one of the most extravagant wedding parties witnessed in the modern history of Ethio-

pia just on the eve of the February 1974 Revolution. . . . A wedding cake costing the fabulous sum of Eth $10,000 was flown in from London for the occasion. As the 5,000 guests assembled at the Hilton Hotel for the wedding party washed down their exotic cakes with champagne, the death toll from famine in Wello was reaching the 200,000 mark. . . . In the midst of simulated plenty, the people were being ravished by famine and pestilence."[5]

Many saw the extravaganza as an affront to humanity and a bad omen for royalty. It was the kind of excess amid want and misery that General Abiye Abebe had predicted would bring trouble. And indeed the prince who gave the affronting banquet was one of the first victims of revolutionary violence. Only a year after the spectacle, fifty-two of the most exalted members of Ethiopia's privileged class were shot and dumped into an unmarked grave. The slaughter bruised a nation's conscience and presaged darker days ahead. More violence, terror, and civil wars, coinciding with the greatest famine in living memory, would follow—all outcomes (by no means ordained or necessary) of historical developments that were of long duration. The purpose of this chapter is to retrace those developments, which culminated in a classically violent and transformative revolution that fundamentally changed old institutions and the feudal structures and myths that supported and sustained them; it is to recapture the structural and intellectual origins, the precipitating factors as well as the immediate results, of this extraordinary African social phenomenon.[6]

Ethiopian society, which was undergoing a transition from feudalism to capitalism before it was ruptured by the epochal events of 1974, comprised many of the ingredients for revolution and war. It was a heterogeneous society characterized by minimal integration, minimal and uneven growth within regions as well as within social classes, and interlocking social relations and multiple identities that were "subject to multiple pressures for cohesion and dissolution."[7]

The decade between the military uprising and the revolutionary crisis of 1974 witnessed a growing rift between the absolutist state and the society. The expansion of the educational system, the slow but steady growth of the capitalist sector of the economy, the increasing inequalities between social groups and between towns and villages, the extortionist activities of the state in the countryside, and the deepening agrarian crisis combined to undermine the feudal order upon which absolutism rested. The monarchical regime managed to hold on for another fourteen years largely because society was fractured, both horizontally and vertically. Neither the peasantry nor the embryonic urban classes saw themselves as sharply differentiated from each other. There was no social class or faction of one sufficiently self-cognizant or organized to challenge state authority effectively. The intermittent rural rebellions were quelled one at a time.

Although student activism and the Eritrean insurrection proved irrepressible, their impact on both state and society was limited until the end of the 1960s, the former remaining essentially a student affair and the latter confined to the sparsely inhabited parts of Eritrea. But if revolutions are the culmination of past political activities and experiences, then these multifaceted popular protests in rural and urban Ethiopia must be considered the precursors of the upheaval of 1974. We need to examine the emerging state and society to appreciate the autocracy's longevity, the soldiers' failure in 1960 and their phenomenal success in 1974, the unusual role of students in one of the least-developed countries in the Third World, the varied nature of the civil wars, and the eventual triumph of ethnonationalism over state nationalism, of the periphery over the center, and of Maoist revolutionary insurgents over Leninist military dictators.

When Ras Tafari Makonnen ascended the throne as Haile Selassie I, king of kings of Ethiopia, in 1930, he had three basic goals: to build a modern nation-state out of the tapestry of ethnicities, to safeguard its independence and his own authority with modern national organizations of coercion, and to rule without any intervening forces, that is, to become an absolutist monarch. It was a gigantic task, but through intelligence, charm, cunning, dogged determination, and the assistance of a few intellectuals as well as Britain, Haile Selassie established a centralized dynastic state by eradicating provincial autonomies and cautiously steering a feudal polity into the modern world. But his achievements should not be exaggerated, for, as Bruce Porter observes in *War and the Rise of the State*, "state-driven innovation was substituted for social initiative, and despotism became an instrument for containing the social forces unleashed by modernization."[8] What the emperor really wanted was political order and safety in relative stagnation.

A land of enigmatic beauty, Ethiopia was a vast and backward country of mountain barriers and deserts and rudimentary communication. The population was extremely heterogeneous. Some of the ethnic groups harbored their own aspirations and a few of the tamed regional elites still nurtured hopes of a restoration of lost privileges. Most of the people were poor and illiterate, and the conservative polity was not readily receptive to new ideas. In the face of resistance from the aristocracy and clergy, which associated secular education with heresy and science with the work of the devil, Haile Selassie shrewdly and courageously introduced a series of lasting reforms. He used inducements and punishments to achieve his goals. During the six years before the Italian invasion in 1935, a new constitution supplanting the provincial sovereignties was adopted; the groundwork for the establishment of a national army was put in place; a system of schools that offered comparable education to both sexes, endeavoring to

inculcate patriotism and the virtues of a civic culture, was instituted; and modern financial institutions, as well as transportation and communication systems, were either expanded or opened to facilitate the country's integration into the world economy. Royal writ was replaced by a unified legal code, and the new constitution contained provisions that guaranteed respect for civic liberties and political rights. Adult suffrage was introduced and a bicameral parliament established. These were some of the changes that reform-minded Ethiopians had envisaged and advocated.[9] Haile Selassie surely must have appeared to them as the archetypal leader that the preeminent intellectual Gabre Hiwet Baykedagn anticipated at the beginning of the last century: a man of intellect, experience, energy, order, and passion for progress—an enlightened despot that is.[10] In the end, however, Haile Selassie turned out to be an astute politician who was interested less in transforming the state and society than in creating a faux-Western absolutist monarchy. In this he was immensely successful.

The innovations reinforced the apparatuses of royal power whose political function was the containment or repression of dissident forces, particularly the peasantry. By extending the state's authority over society, the emperor became an autocrat whose power was scarcely mediated by law and unrestricted by any counterweight. By stamping out regional autonomies and building a quasi-modern bureaucracy, he freed the monarchy from most traditional intermediaries of power. The centralized state was sufficiently fortified with modern organizations and tools imported from the West. Its hegemony was almost complete and it enjoyed a high degree of autonomy both from the domestic classes and from the international constellations of states, notwithstanding its heavy reliance on the United States for economic and military assistance. There were few constraints that inhibited its behavior and action domestically; unencumbered, it determined the nature, scope, and tempo of change and development.

Despite a democratic facade, Haile Selassie's was untrammeled autocracy. Even though the constitution of 1955 provided for popular elections to the lower house, Parliament was a caricature of a truly representative institution. Mostly, it rubber-stamped decisions made by the emperor and his cabinet. Its competence as a legitimate legislature and as a force of potential opposition was impaired by the autocrat's prerogatives in not only the legislative arena but also the executive and judicial ones. The emperor could abrogate or suspend the constitution, and in the event of "emergency" he had the right to make laws himself. He retained the right to appoint members of the upper house, to initiate or veto legislation passed by Parliament, and to declare war or make peace.[11] The imperial court was completely outside the jurisdiction of Parliament, whose power in matters of defense and foreign relations was extremely circumscribed. Codified laws

lacked consistency and predictability because the emperor interpreted them as he saw fit and all too often litigants appealed directly to him, bypassing the judiciary. Power and wealth could render laws meaningless. Moreover, if one wished to dodge accountability and responsibility in this byzantine world, one could always avoid the written word, as the emperor routinely did. As a court player observed, "Whoever wanted to climb the steps of the Palace had first of all to master the negative knowledge: what was forbidden to him and his subalterns, what was not to be said or written, what should not be done, what not be overlooked or neglected."[12]

The modern cabinet, headed by a prime minister, was a pliable instrument of personal rule. The king of kings alone could appoint, promote, demote, transfer, suspend, or dismiss ministers, judges, generals, governors, directors, mayors, and commissioners. State servants, who obeyed him without question and with slavish devotion, often crawling on the ground before him, could be dismissed for no cause and could not resign without permission. As fount of justice, the emperor alone could grant pardons and amnesties or commute penalties. Unsalaried, he knew no boundaries between the public treasury and his own coffers. Not even religious matters were outside his purview. Faithfully participating in important festivities and arcane rituals, the emperor approved the composition of the Patriarchate, or Holy Synod, of the Orthodox Church, the principal weapon of conformity, which became autocephalous in the early 1950s. His unremittingly autocratic reign lasted for a little over four decades, with only a brief interruption (1935–41) following the Italian invasion and subsequent collapse of the imperial state.

Yet even if only to a lesser extent, Haile Selassie was as modernizing an autocrat as his contemporary Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–78) of Iran. He began his long political tenure as an enthusiastic reformer, eager to emulate Europe but especially Japan. Unwilling to tamper with the existing social structure and political system, Haile Selassie was nevertheless hesitant to follow in the footsteps of the Meiji revolutionaries. In fairness, the emperor could not have led a revolution like theirs, lacking as he did the necessary resources, personnel, and political maneuverability, as he remained tied to the otherwise subjugated provincial nobilities. His program was more narrowly focused, both in scope and purpose, and the new was clumsily imposed on old and redundant institutions. There is no denying that state-driven modernization heralded the advent of industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, secular education, and social classes whose aspirations and ambitions clashed with those of the old order. But innovation was largely a matter of imitating modern organs of state authority, fortifying the panoply of monarchical powers, reorganizing patrimonial politics,

and inserting the country's economy into the world market mainly through the export of cash crops, coffee accounting for two-thirds of them. These exports originated from the resource-rich southern regions, and the imports they paid for were mostly consumed in the capital. As industrialization was extremely meager, precapitalist methods of production dominated in much of the country. Modernization never penetrated very deeply into peasant Ethiopia.

The country remained a predominantly agrarian society marked by social distinctions that were, however, less sharp than in feudal societies elsewhere in the world. The power and wealth of the traditional polity rested on land, an alliance with the Church, and, later, foreign sources of capital. Peasants made up more than 90 percent of the total population and worked close to 98 percent of the cultivated land, growing the bulk of the country's exports: cereals, oil seeds, pulses, hides, and coffee, which accounted for 60 percent of foreign currency earnings during 1965–75. Whether peasants had usufructuary rights to the land they cultivated, as in the northern regions, or were tenanted to landlords, as in the southern provinces, most could not produce enough to support themselves and meet their obligations to the state and landlords at the same time. Average holdings were barely a hectare in size; in the north, soil fertility and productivity had significantly diminished because of continuous subdivision and overuse, while in the south, state and landlord demands stifled initiative. Farming tools everywhere were hopelessly antiquated, and climatic changes caused yields to fluctuate considerably. Nature's caprice and human greed constantly placed the peasant's survival at risk.

Modernizing autocracy was unresponsive to the problems and needs of rural Ethiopia. Subsistence farming remained virtually unaltered. The augmentation in the obligations of the population was not offset by improvements in the techniques and organization of production. The economic conditions of the peasantry steadily worsened. This agrarian crisis was the cumulative result of physical limitations, technical backwardness, a grossly inequitable system of landholding, and insufficient capital investment in the agricultural sector that provided for more than 85 percent of employment and more than 90 percent of exports. As agrarian property relations and state policies obstructed the development of productive forces, subsistence levels continued to decline in the face of demographic increases. Everywhere in village Ethiopia, the tenuous balance that allowed for subsistence within an inequitable set of social and economic relations was breaking down by the 1970s. Food production was falling behind population growth, which was increasing at the rate of 2.5 percent annually compared with the 2 percent growth in agricultural production. Efforts at agrarian reform were frustrated by the landed, who were in effect the political class. The state

also never targeted the agricultural sector, backbone of the economy, for investment; it always received much less than the defense and security sectors, which accounted for about one-third of all recurrent expenditures for the three decades preceding the revolution. During that period agriculture was allotted about 4 percent of state expenditures. This is not to deny state attempts to stimulate commercial farming but to show that that initiative was too limited. Emphasis was placed on cash-crop production, mainly coffee, cotton, sugar, tea, and sesame. Mechanized farming was practiced on only a little over 2 percent of the total cultivated area, but that was sufficient to threaten or undermine the fragile situation of cultivators who depended on land rentals for their livelihood.[13] Failure to raise agricultural output meant that the overwhelming majority of Ethiopians lived in appalling conditions, the peasantry frequently ravaged by famine, as in 1958 and 1973–74. The 1983–84 famine was the worst in a century, the result of environmental degradation, demographic growth, misguided agrarian economic policies, war, and drought. Drought may be beyond human control, but surely the social conditions of famine could and should have been long eliminated.

Although impoverishment was most acute in the north-central regions, rural Ethiopia as a whole was abysmally poor, lacking the minimal amenities. Most people lived in scattered clusters of villages where daily life and the tools of production had changed little in hundreds of years and where time was still measured by the sun and rain. Peasants raised the same livestock, tilled the same soil using the same implements, planted the same crops, ate the same food, and reverently observed the same timeworn customs. Most of the villages were at least a day's walk to the nearest roadway and market; their direct route to the nearest town was a path suitable only for donkeys. Few had access to educational and health facilities, which in any case were sparsely and unevenly distributed. Estimates indicate that there was one doctor for 200,000 or more people, 80 percent of whom had no access to health care. Mortality was 125 deaths per 1,000 births, one of the highest in Africa. Although the educational system expanded by almost tenfold between 1950 and 1970, illiteracy hovered between 90 and 95 percent, and only 8 percent of those eligible attended primary school. One of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world, Ethiopia had a per capita GNP only slightly over US $100. Not everyone, of course, shared this poverty. Life in Ethiopia varied from rarefied luxury to oppressive misery. There was real wealth in the towns and cities, much of it drawn from agricultural rents, dues, and taxes. In contrast to the peasantry, the rapacious royalty, absentee landlords, and venal state officials who resided in those urban centers were getting used to an ostentatious way of life, building lavish houses and im-

porting expensive vehicles, clothing, and beverages. They created virtually nothing in the arts, produced little, but consumed voraciously.

There was little correspondence between social reality in the villages and political behavior, however. State centralization had brought the peasantry into national life for the first time even though political authority remained distant and generally uncaring. Peasants were subjected to multiple exactions, but they seldom rebelled and never at the national level. Although the fracturing of feudal loyalties opened possibilities for a new and broader consciousness, rural society lacked cohesion, unable to express its grievances across ethnic or provincial boundaries. The social structure stressed vertical and sectarian loyalties rather than horizontal and class-based allegiance. It sought local solutions for what it perceived as local problems. Geographical dispersion in small, scattered hamlets, ethnic and religious atomization, varying forms of feudal relations and obligations, the dearth of communications, a culture of individualism and mistrust hindered the development of national consciousness and organization. In none of the few though significant revolts that occurred between the 1940s and 1960s were peasants able to renegotiate their relations with the state. None of the rebels had as a principal, or even incidental, aim the destruction of the existing order. None, therefore, had any measurable impact on the production imperatives that governed their lives or on the essential character of state power.

The partial transformation of the agrarian economy gave rise to new social classes with new and often conflicting aspirations and goals. They were, however, minuscule in size and politically feeble—more so even than the rural populace. Although state-directed industrialization had been expanding since the 1950s, domestic capital accumulation was negligible. As a result, the social groups that played so important a part in the economic and political development of the West were almost nonexistent. The rise of a national bourgeoisie was stunted by aristocratic obscurantism, state monopoly, and the prominent role of foreigners, who controlled up to 80 percent of the industrial and commercial enterprises. Nationals were engaged mainly as hoteliers, restaurateurs, retailers, and transporters; their total contribution to the GDP was about 5 percent. The so-called bureaucratic-military bourgeoisie was bourgeois neither in its strategic location in the national economy nor in its political outlook and practices. It owned little capital and exercised even less or no hegemony over the subordinate social groups, for it lacked homogeneity and self-identity. It had no political clout and was utterly incapable of pioneering a democratic revolution.

What about the incipient middle class, or small bourgeoisie? There is no better evidence of the near nonexistence of a middle class than the complete absence of an appropriate term to express the concept in any of the local languages,

including the official language, Amharic. Nevertheless, there was a social group that stood apart from workers and peasants. This transitional class included the intelligentsia—professional men and women such as lawyers, doctors, college and school teachers, military officers, journalists, civilian administrators or technocrats, representatives of banks and factories, and traders. Numbering about a thousand (excluding the merchants) by 1973, the bulk of this class was made up of the new educated elite that was largely embedded in the state bureaucracy and whose chief characteristics were servility, social conformity, and political acquiescence. It was both fractious and submissive, its ethos the pursuit of individual or family interests. As individuals and in cliques its members feverishly competed among themselves to gain maximum access to the absolutist state, the chief custodian and dispenser of material resources, privileges, and social status.

Under patrimonial rule, vertical and personal ties frequently overrode institutional channels. Though culturally homogeneous, the political elite was fractious, with feudal characteristics. The imperial system of patronage encouraged intergroup conflicts that were detrimental to the formation of social identity and solidarity. Beyond the clientelist networks of the state itself, there were no political parties or any formal organizations on which they could rely. None of the elaborate sets of overlapping and competing civilian and military hierarchies were autonomous, and all of them were dependent on the monarch. Patron-client or personal connections and family alliances heavily influenced people's success or failure in the social and bureaucratic hierarchies. State functionaries owed their allegiance to those who arranged or influenced their appointments or promotions. These clientelist networks of loyalties and attachments leading to the emperor were unpredictable and often unstable, as they were subject to the vicissitudes of patronage politics. Men and women were prone to intriguing, conspiring, and spying on one another for self-preservation or promotion, social advancement, or protection of privileges, a pattern of behavior the Machiavellian monarch studiously cultivated. He manipulated their ambitions and fears to pit them against one another. Fear of jeopardizing the security of one's livelihood and status discouraged open or public criticism of either the autocrat or his regime. It was a labyrinthine world that allowed little room for honest, competent, and freethinking individuals. As one of those servile men would later confess, "Thinking was a painful inconvenience and a troubling deformity."[14] With no objective base in the economy, wedded to a quasi-modern bureaucracy, and tottering under the weight of an obscurantist autocracy, the inchoate group was too puny and obsequious and to have any political impact on either the state or society. Wavering between careerism and public service tinged with patriotic activism, it wallowed in a culture of despair, cynicism, and hubris.

It is important to point out that there were individuals in the civilian and military branches of the bureaucracy who were reform-minded. Most of them were university or high school teachers or junior officers in the army, air force, or police who had attended military academies and pursued advanced degrees either at home or abroad, mainly in the United States and India. Of mixed social origin, they were largely the children of village notables, army officers, middle-level civil servants, merchants; some were of peasant stock.

The emerging working class was likewise small, factional, and inconsequential, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Industrial and economic growth in Ethiopia was highly unequal and uneven between and within regions. The estates were mainly concentrated in parts of the provinces of Shewa, Harar, and Eritrea. Workers, mainly uprooted peasants, labored in overcrowded and underserviced plants, often without contracts. The labor force was barely 1 percent of the active population and physically dispersed in over four hundred plants, most of them employing only a dozen persons—a situation that was detrimental to social coalescence but ideal for regimented control. Industrial workers were organized around the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU), which was founded in 1962. CELU consisted of 120 unions with a total membership of only eighty thousand by 1973. Its core leadership, mainly university graduates, could hardly have shared the basic interests and strategic goals of workers. One of the leadership's main functions was to hold workers' radicalism in check by negotiating and harmonizing employer-employee relations on the one hand and worker-state relations on the other.[15] Tiny, largely uneducated and unskilled, badly paid, weakly organized, ill represented, and with little or no social security, the Ethiopian proletariat remained relatively placid and dormant throughout the 1960s. The torpor was shattered only amid the dramatic circumstances of the 1970s. A far larger component of urban society was the "subproletariat," which had been driven out of the countryside by the stagnation of agriculture and the consequent decline in subsistence. It would play a significant role in the impending political crisis.

Despite the new web of contradictions and social forces that state-driven modernization had unleashed, Ethiopia was bereft of legal opposition and all media outlets were state owned. But the static political system was incompatible with the disruptive effects of economic growth, even limited as it was. By comparison, the Iranian autocracy, at one time or another, was tolerant of opposition organizations, including a Communist Party. Ethiopia did not even have an official party like the shah's National Resurgence Party. Yet it seems paradoxical that the Ethiopian autocracy was far less repressive than its Iranian counterpart. Ethiopia did not have anything resembling the much-feared National Security and

Information Organization (SAVAK).[16] Iran was more like a police state—and not surprisingly. The country had its "petro-bourgeoisie" and a huge industrial force, both fairly conscious of themselves and for themselves. Its intelligentsia was more impressive and more combative. And although the Orthodox Church taught political conformity and meekness, Shiism emphasized rebelliousness and martyrdom. Clearly, Ethiopian society was infirm and politically muted by comparison.

That does not mean, however, that the autocratic regime was completely immune to criticism. With modern education had come new ideas, some critical of the political and social order but they were often expressed opaquely for fear of retribution and they came from individuals—mainly novelists, playwrights, and poets—not organizations. The criticism was easily censored or stifled as the mutiny and episodic rural revolts were bloodily suppressed with foreign economic and military assistance.[17]

But the state was too weak to contain or manage the strains that its own developmental policies generated, and those tensions would bring together all the disparate strands of resistance to ignite a revolution. By denying self-expression or autonomous organizations and by making peaceful protest nearly impossible, the absolutist state made the emergence of radical groups firmly committed to its destruction almost certain. This cleared the way for the triumph of Marxist ideology, which, in the eyes of its young adherents, seemed to offer the only coherent explanation of Ethiopia's predicament, as well as a guide to political mobilization and action. Ethiopian history since the 1960s is incomprehensible without the student movement. Its ideas and motives, the fevered relationships that precipitated a cataclysmic period of revolution, civil wars, invasion, superpower intervention, and the turmoil and tragedy that destroyed the lives of many of its members deserve special attention.

THE YOUTH MOVEMENT OPENS A PANDORA'S BOX

Power never concedes anything without a demand. It never has and it never will.

—Frederick Douglass

After the coup, political dissent became endemic at the university. In the absence of professional civic organizations capable of mediating between state and society, students, the only group that supported the failed coup, became the conveyors of progressive ideas and torchbearers in the struggle for liberty and social progress. A radical student movement was the dominant force of protest between 1960 and 1974 for three reasons. First, the sociological makeup of the

student population had dramatically changed since the 1950s; second, the 1960s were a decade of worldwide student uprising; third, students were less fearful of the cost of rebellion than those who had families to support and property or established careers to protect. By dint of history, then, students became autocracy's bane. As resolute fighters they had no parallel anywhere in Africa, and in the rest of the Third World, only Iranian students were comparable. Though sectarian and polarized, like their Iranian counterparts, Ethiopian students catalyzed a social revolution that would tragically consume them. No other social group in the country fought so relentlessly and sacrificed so mightily for lofty ideas and ideals, and no other group contributed as much to the making of insurrectionary, or "revolutionary," wars, with all their consequences for society.

These students were not, of course, the first to invoke the idea of reform or progress. In the early twentieth century, a few enlightened members of the emergent intelligentsia had probed the causes of the country's technical backwardness, offering possible solutions. They had written about the gross social inequalities, graphically describing the depressed and depressing conditions of agrarian life. In their calls for reform, using Japan as their model, the Progressives, as they are sometimes called, were voices in the wilderness. Nevertheless, they raised the most fundamental question that stirred the generation of the 1960s: what kind of state and socioeconomic system was most suitable for the country and society?[18]

Although the militant students shared the sentiments of the Progressives, they differed from them in three major ways. Far more than their predecessors, they were inclined to move beyond verbal criticism to overt action in order to emancipate society from the yokes of feudalism and autocracy. They injected new concepts and a new vocabulary of social conflict and change into the political discourse, moving from simple assaults on the autocrat and individual ministers to attacks on the landed class and state bureaucracy as discrete and parasitical social groups. Any satisfactory answer to the country's problems, they contended, had to deal with the authoritarian political culture, the exploitative social relations of production—the nexus of which was land—and the unequal treatment of the country's various ethnic and linguistic groups. It is not that the militants felt society's injustices more deeply than their precursors but that they identified with its victims more strongly and were committed to changing it. In this regard, they proposed that public space be expanded by directly bringing the masses into politics. Their aim was to transform subject peasants into free citizens of a secular and liberal state.

Second, this section of the nascent intelligentsia was the one most integrated into the international system and thus uniquely equipped to view the state as a

whole along with its network of alliances in that system. Whereas the Progressives, especially Gabre Hiwet, were ambivalent about it, the radical students saw the penetration of capitalism under the aegis of imperialism as detrimental to the country's development and to the welfare of its working people. They also saw it as bolstering absolutism. They were as hostile to "American imperialism" as they were to its local client, the Ethiopian monarchist regime. This was a time when capitalism and US power were considered the chief culprits in the world's woes. Where the Progressives had looked toward Japan for a model, the militant students were more impressed with the Soviet and Chinese socialist experiments, which they saw as ordained by history.

Third, peaceful means of resolving class and ethnic conflicts were to be preferred; if that was not possible, they were willing to use any means necessary, including violence. Hadn't Frantz Fanon and George Sorel celebrated the creative function of mass violence much as Lenin had called for violence to end all organized (state) violence? The students embraced violence as a legitimate weapon of struggle and a rational instrument for changing contested power relations. That was a new and revolutionary idea.

The Ethiopian student movement coincided with the decolonization of Africa and a dramatic change in the social makeup of the university. The students of the 1960s came from backgrounds that were different from those of the previous generation. The university population expanded from less than a thousand in the 1950s to about eight thousand on the eve of the revolution, nearly a fourth of whom were studying abroad, mainly in Western Europe and North America. Numerical growth also meant that the social composition of college students changed significantly, the majority coming from the lower classes and from small towns and villages. These children of peasants, small merchants, artisans, and civil servants were clustered at the six colleges that constituted Haile Selassie I University, their number far exceeding those of the upper class. Student life deteriorated markedly during the decade of expansion: inferior and inadequate housing, appalling food, a decaying social environment, as well as a shrinking job market. College education, no longer the ticket to well-paying jobs and privileged status, lost its magic as a social equalizer. Students were thus driven by a genuine outrage against social inequality but also by personal frustration. The radicals would probably have found it more difficult to spread their subversive ideas had it not been for these conditions, which, along with the repressive policies of the state, facilitated indoctrination. Politics so infused campus life that almost everyone was compelled to participate in order to avoid criticism and ostracism; even the children of the powerful and rich underwent ideological conversion. To be sure, student activism remained essentially an intellectual

phenomenon, barely reaching the subaltern social groups, but it kept the torch of resistance burning until the final days of autocracy.[19]

Their activities were patterned after those of similar groups elsewhere in the world: continuous debate, agitation, strikes, disruption of normal government activities, and popularizing of such slogans as "education for children of the poor," "bread for the hungry," "land to the tiller," and "down with monarchical rule." Although the radicals constituted a minority, they controlled the student organizations and through them dominated the political debate that continues to influence society. United by a vision of a just society, a total rejection of the existing order, and an unfaltering commitment to changing it, they shaped political thought and action, ultimately giving birth to the Ethiopian political left. Undaunted by punitive measures that included the banning of their organizations, repeated temporary closure of the university, expulsion, imprisonment and torture in the country's fetid cells, and even death, the students moved from peaceful demonstration to open confrontation with the police, publicly espousing violence as an organized and purposeful force of emancipation (later to be developed into the strategy of armed struggle). By the late 1960s the movement had grown sufficiently to have branches in Europe and North America. Repression at home sent many more men and women into exile, swelling the ranks in the West. Repression also helped foster a paradigm for accepting suffering and a willingness to be martyred. The students' uncommon devotion, energy, and dynamism sustained the urban opposition force that constituted the nucleus of a growing revolutionary movement guided by socialist ideas and principles.

Revolution's attractiveness has to be seen against a wider international setting; worldwide radicalism animated student activism. Those were times of great intellectual ferment everywhere, popular and cultural movements in the West, and antihegemonic struggles in much of the Third World. Almost all across Western Europe and North and South America, students were in open revolt, questioning and challenging authority. In 1968 hundreds of rebellious Mexican students may have been massacred by a repressive state. In France, students barricaded the streets of Paris, reinventing the 1871 Commune, while in the United States universities were besieged by opponents of the war in Vietnam and supporters of the civil rights movement at home. There was a cultural revolution as well, in which flower-bearing hippies chose love rather than war. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, people's wars were being waged to oust obdurate colonialist or authoritarian national regimes. Those were times when peasant-based revolutions seemed not merely a possibility but something that college students could help spark. It is hard to blame those young Ethiopian romantics and idealists who sincerely believed they were moving with the tide of progressive history.

There is no doubt that they drew inspiration from those international movements and events as much as they did from Marxist visions of social revolution, which they initially acquired from smuggled books and pamphlets.

The dissident students studied and theorized revolution and wrote copiously about their country. But their writings, full of pedantic exegesis of Marxist texts, lacked the acuity, texture, and historical depth of the Progressives'; sometimes sloganeering became a convenient substitute for conceptual rigor. Their debates were highly theoretical and not infrequently based on premises that had little to do with the actual conditions of society. There was scant analysis of the exact properties of state and society and their ties.[20] Nevertheless, their polemics and the zeal with which they pursued their goals were effective in galvanizing a significant portion of the student population both at home and abroad.[21] Idealistic rhetoric created utopian expectations that, in turn, nurtured uncompromising dissent and dogmatism.

In embracing Marxism, or "scientific socialism," as a modernizing ideology, the students earnestly believed that, with its concern for social justice and civic equality, it was best suited for Ethiopia's needs.[22] Hobsbawm has shown how Third World intellectuals were driven into revolution by Leninism without really being Marxist.[23] Indeed, Marx's materialist conception of human progress would appear to contradict the idea of socialism in noncapitalist societies. At the risk of oversimplification, for Marx the transition to socialism and then communism was the inescapable outcome of the moribundity of capitalism. That is to say, the material progress that capitalism made possible ushers in structural contradictions that are not amenable to peaceful resolution. The communist revolution that the working class inaugurates as an alternative and more just system occurs at a moment when capitalism is no longer able to reconcile its inner contradictions and is therefore incapable of prolonging its existence. The proletariat seizes the moment to bury the bourgeoisie.

The historical process that Marx so conceived was circumvented by socialist revolutions in which the social, political, and cultural conditions for such a transformation were nonexistent. All of them were radical interventions on behalf of socially and politically inarticulate groups and of something that existed far in the future, communism. They were inspired by a Leninist heresy that defied the canons of Marxist orthodoxy by insisting that undeveloped countries like Lenin's own Russia did not have to wait until the full flowering of capitalism, which in any case, Lenin suggested, was obstructed by imperialism. These semicapitalist societies could make a democratic transition to socialism under the guidance of a vanguard Communist Party organized and led by revolutionary

intellectuals, with the proletariat as its main force and the peasantry playing a supporting role. It was to this historical and subversive idea that the young Ethiopian intellectuals were irresistibly drawn.

Marxism's explanation of capitalism, of social relations, of class oppression and its cure was appealing, as was its vision of a liberated future, even though the explanation applied specifically to advanced capitalist societies. Marxism provided a revolutionary theory of societal transformation. It was espoused precisely because Ethiopia was a poor and underdeveloped country for which it was thought that revolution would be a shortcut to progress, combining development and social justice. The students saw the universal triumph of socialism as inevitable and a socialist state as best serving the interests of Ethiopia's peasants and workers. They hailed such mythic figures as Ernesto Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh as the rectifiers of cosmic wrongs and believed that Marxism-Leninism would help forge a nation out of the "mosaic of peoples" by resolving the interconnected problems of class, nationality, and gender. As for the instrumentalist purpose of Marxism, many seized on it without so much as a glance at any of the classics because it promised power and social mobility.

The students apparently dreamed of a world that was not yet realizable. With reference to Russia, Hobsbawm has concluded that "the conditions for such a [socialist] transformation were simply not present in a peasant country that was a by-word for poverty, ignorance and backwardness and where the industrial proletariat, Marx's predestined grave digger of capitalism, was only a miniscule, though strategically located, minority."[24] Ethiopia was even poorer, more ignorant, and more backward, and its incipient classes smaller. Yet for the young radicals living under crushing material conditions, as for their Russian predecessors, the promise of utopia was alluring. Perhaps the most seductive appeal of revolution is its promise of empowerment—empowerment of exploited workers, overburdened peasants, subjugated minorities, and suppressed women. The political ideas and critical issues that unified the movement, however, also divided it.

Throughout its life the student movement, which was really a loose amalgam of several groups and tendencies, was saddled with intractable and ultimately fatal problems. The diverse social and ethnic backgrounds of the students, their divergent experiences and views, and their pursuit of clashing and often incompatible goals, strategies, and tactics led to factionalism and sectarianism. Basically, there were two contradictory but interlocking tendencies—unity in opposition to royal absolutism and diversity in thought and organization—which were really reflections of generational and experiential differences, social atomization, and a culture of mistrust and deviousness deeply ingrained in the popu-

lar psyche. Sincere idealism, inadequate or mistaken historical analysis, lack of political experience and skill, and costly dogmatism were the main reasons for the intensifying disagreements and factionalism. Sectarianism also reflected the social divisions and fragmented identities of society, as well as the geographical dispersion of the movement itself. The existing social system affected Ethiopians in multiple ways and their perceptions of social reality also differed.[25]

Drawn from diverse social backgrounds, the students were spread across three widely separated continents, in countries with different political cultures and educational systems. Those studying in Europe and the United States generally lived in relatively comfortable exile, with access to a large array of literature and the benefits of a far freer political environment than that of their counterparts at home, who lived under harsh economic conditions, in a much less tolerant social climate, and who bore the brunt of political repression. Far removed from social reality, the exiles tended to dwell on theory and were more divided than the more militant domestic front that had been unified under the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA) since 1967. Their respective experiences meant that the two groups diverged both in their critical analysis of the objective and subjective conditions in the country and in their strategies for changing them. These differences prefigured the factional armed conflicts that occurred during and after the revolutionary upheaval.[26]

To its credit, the student movement introduced a new paradigm that questioned authority, challenging a political culture that stressed obedience and passivity. Boldly it criticized a traditional educational system that was exclusively but facilely intellectual and divorced from real life. Where the social function of the traditional intellectuals had been to secure and sustain the legitimacy of royal authority and class rule, the new intellectuals were bent on delegitimizing and destroying them. They acted as educators and mobilizers, providing leadership to a movement that strove to break the aristocratic hold on society. These "organic intellectuals"—to use Gramsci's expression—were extremely successful in fashioning a dissident culture.

Yet they were outrageously intolerant and frequently dogmatic, not entirely unlike the autocratic regime whose narrowness and brutality they had fought with admirable selflessness and dedication. They proved unable to break out from a political culture that cultivated secrecy, mendacity, suspicion, and intrigue while devaluing openness, trust, and candor— survival tactics in a society marked by extreme inequality and scarcity. By undermining the democratic forum it itself had introduced, the movement began to lose those very qualities that make a social movement truly democratic: internal openness and tolerance, free and substantive dialogue, and critical self-evaluation. The wider the

disagreements, the greater the rigidity and dogmatism became. The effects on both the students and society were calamitous.

Perhaps nowhere else on the continent but Ethiopia, with the possible exception of South Africa, has the heritage of the past sparked political upheavals that have yet to run their course. And there has been no issue that is at once so unifying and so divisive as the "nationality question," or identity politics. The contending perspectives in the 1960s were between state authority and students on the one hand and between students on the other. Student politics posed a grave challenge to royal authority's religious and dynastic legitimacy and to its goal of national unification and homogenization. The imperial project sought to unify the "ramshackle empire" within one national identity by restricting the expression of ethnic and cultural differences. It stressed the idea of Ethiopia as an integral whole with uninterrupted historical continuity from the Aksumite period in the first millennium to modern times.

In contesting these official views, students shook the imperial state's mythic foundation. The student perspective, which would give rise to subnationalist and ethnonationalist movements, conceived Ethiopia as a polyglot empire founded not in the first millennium but later and through conquest, as an aggregate of disparate and unequal ethnic groups and fractured identities. These long suppressed, exploited, and marginalized communities, the students believed, lacked a common imprint with the Amhara, who enjoyed a dominant position with respect both to them and to the state. To the students, the official narrative disguised society's fragmentation and concealed the empire's profound and often irreconcilable structural and cultural cleavages.[27] They mocked the dynastic state for seeking to forge a national identity out of a multitude of distinct linguistic groups brought together in the late nineteenth century by force.

These profoundly subversive ideas came to the forefront for the first time in 1969, when Wallelign Makonnen, a student at the University of Addis Ababa, wrote in the student paper *Struggle* that Ethiopia was a multiethnic and multilingual state, each nationality with its own territory, language, culture, history, and so on. In this "prison of nations," he polemicized in a Fanonist fashion, it was difficult for members of the oppressed nationalities to appear Ethiopian without wearing the "Amhara mask." He also supported the Eritrean secessionist movement as progressive.[28] What gave the ideas greater cogency was that the author was believed to be an Amhara. Wallelign was from Wello, Ethiopia's melting pot, where Christians, Muslims, the Amhara, the Oromo, the Tigray, and possibly the Afar have been intermingling for centuries. That he might have been of mixed background was never suggested, for it was important symbolically that the "question of nationalities" was broached by a member of the "oppressor na-

tion." In essence, Wallelign was seen as Ethiopia's Lenin. Was it not Lenin the Russian who advocated self-determination for the oppressed nationalities of the czarist empire?

While it is true that the nationalist perspective glossed over the fact of conquest and cultural subjugation, the advocates of pluralism all but ignored the fact that communal identities are socially constructed, contingent, porous, and continually negotiated. They also underestimated the extent to which increased commercial activity, or the rise of a mercantilist class, and urbanization had helped blur ethnic distinctions and the extent to which both the polity and the bureaucracy had become transregional. That autocracy was closely associated with the Amhara segment of the population, which constituted the core of the empire, however, is beyond question.[29] The domination of the Amhara in the administration was absolute and Amharic was the official language and medium of instruction in primary schools. Amharas held key positions in most of the provinces. In challenging Amahara hegemony, and the territorial and ethnic configuration of the empire-state and the official narrative of its formation, the students brought to the fore the cultural antagonisms and contradictions among the major components of the Ethiopian heritage and between the goal of state nationalism and the reality. Whereas nationalist rhetoric promoted the idea of national unity and concord, students seemed to promote discord and balkanization. And in asking for the "renarrativizing" of the country's history and the complete secularization of the state by detaching it from the Church, they advanced an idea that was as subversive of the polity's ideology and the status quo as it was divisive and injurious to their movement.

In the movement, passionate and at times acrimonious debate centered on the interrelatedness of class and ethnicity and of power and identity. While there was basic agreement on the fact of national oppression, there was strong disagreement on how that oppression could be expunged. One group, inspired by Lenin's thesis, maintained that the oppressed nationalities of Ethiopia were entitled to the right of self-determination, including secession.[30] Most Ethiopians, it insisted, were wedded to their ethnic identities because they were excluded, marginalized, and even persecuted precisely for the ethnicities that defined them. To forge a national identity that subsumed these identities involuntarily was an unjust and impossible goal. The alternative was to emancipate them. The other group, while accepting the principle, argued that it could be exercised only under specific historical, social, and political conditions that did not fully obtain in the country and that Lenin's support of oppressed nationalities up to the point of secession was actually a tactical move to undermine czarist authority and not a license to promote political fragmentation. It contested the principle's universal

and automatic applicability to the Ethiopian situation. What gave urgency to the debate was, of course, the Oromo-Somali rebellion in Bale and the intensifying insurgency in Eritrea, itself multilingual and multicultural. At its Eleventh Congress in Berlin in August 1970, the Ethiopian Students Union in Europe (ESUE) adopted the Leninist solution without qualification. At its Eighteenth Congress in August 1971, the Ethiopian Students Union in North America (ESUNA) followed suit by accepting ESUE's resolution overwhelmingly. The move was opposed by a small but equally convinced group. A permanent and harmful rift was created, marking the beginning of an internecine history.[31]

Polarization increased as the debate on whether class or nation was the primary cleavage in the country heated up. One view maintained that national oppression was more blatant and explosive than social oppression; consequently, its resolution superseded all other contradictions. This stance would lead to the emergence of ethnonationalist movements. The other view laid greater emphasis on the class affinity of the oppressed, refusing to consider national particularism as an enduring problem. Ethnonationalism it viewed as a dangerous distraction from the primary class cleavages and class loyalty and the ensuing struggles. It foresaw an end to national antagonisms soon after the eradication of unequal social relations. The multinational parties that were born just before the revolution would remain steadfast upholders of this perspective although ultimately losing to the ethnonationalists, who convinced their supporters that nationwide class interests must be supplanted by culturally based forms of solidarity. The Tigrayan students were the most successful "ethnic entrepreneurs."

The other divisive (though less catastrophic) issue was whether a revolutionary situation existed in the country. One segment, mainly associated with ESUNA and USUAA, believed that conditions were ripe for an armed struggle. The old guard of ESUE dismissed this as sheer infantile adventurism, accusing their opponents of promoting focoism, the theory that what is needed to activate peasants to armed insurgency is a few highly motivated, disciplined, and militant intellectuals. ESUE instead emphasized planning, organization, and educational work among workers, peasants, and intellectuals prior to violent engagement against the state. Although the students proposed a coherent ideological alternative based on socialism to the dominant assumptions and beliefs of society, they never carefully analyzed the balance of political and economic forces, both domestic and international, or devised an effective strategy to attain power. That task fell to professional revolutionaries. The widening schism between what came to be known as *acher guzo* ("short march") and *regime guzo* ("long march") eventually resulted in the formation of two rival parties that were caught almost unawares when the revolution the militant students had done so

much to catalyze broke out in 1974. Unprepared and ill-equipped to lead it, the parties became entangled first in polemical debate and then in bloody feuds that would consume a large portion of the generation of quixotic, enthusiastic, and fearless militants, inadvertently helping a group of ambitious soldiers to expropriate the revolution. We are reminded of Hegel's "cunning of reason" in that the outcomes of major political movements do not always coincide with the desires and aspirations of the participants.

FROM MUTINY TO REVOLUTION: THE BERET FOR THE CROWN

> Never was any such event . . . so inevitable yet so completely unforeseen.
>
> —*Alexis de Tocqueville*

> It was, ultimately, the revolution that made the Derg rather than the Derg that made the revolution.
>
> —*Christopher Clapham*

For better or worse, the revolution of 1974 was arguably the most pivotal event in contemporary Ethiopian history. It was a paroxysm that shook the country as no other event had done in a hundred years—that is, since the formation of the empire-state. As the first social movement that envisioned a radical transformation of both polity and society, it shared profound similarities with the great revolutions. Never before had civil society so dramatically and so powerfully made its imprint on the political landscape. And no contemporary events were as encompassing as the civil wars it unleashed except perhaps the battle of Adwa of 1896 and the Ethiopian-Somali war of 1977–78.

It is difficult to be as categorical about its inevitability as Alexis de Tocqueville was about the French Revolution. Nonetheless, the Ethiopian Revolution was unplanned and just as sudden and unforeseen—a great surprise to everyone, even the radical activists who had propelled it—but widely popular and initially bloodless. It was, of course, all too clear that by the early 1970s society was in the throes of a gigantic social upheaval. "Revolutions," writes Walter Laqueur, "seldom, if ever, come as a bolt from the blue; like thunderstorms, they are usually preceded by unmistakable warning signs."[32] Actually, they never come as bolts from the blue. There are always the progenitors. In Ethiopia, there were the soldiers' and rural revolts, seething urban discontent, an aging patriarch, a strife-ridden political class, demographic and agrarian crises—all signs of systemic

stress and breakdown. Yet, when the revolution arrived, it was the result more of a fortuitous configuration of seemingly separate and isolated circumstances than of any systematically laid-out plot by any particular group. The rapidity with which events unfolded and the relative ease with which the old regime was removed were astonishing even to the keenest observers of Ethiopian politics. There had been some expectation by elements of the intelligentsia, the proletariat, and even the armed forces, but despite the incessant student protests, the raging Eritrean insurgency, and the apparent strains on the archaic social order, few political "experts" anticipated the events and none predicted them. But the apparatus of the old regime did not fall like ripe apples, nor did the aged monarchy crumble without a push. There was active human agency.

The clue to why and how things transpired as they did is provided by Lenin, who in one of his most poignant observations on the revolution in his country, wrote, "That the revolution succeeded so quickly and—seemingly, at the first superficial glance—so radically, is only due to the fact that, as a result of an extremely unique historical situation, *absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous* class interests, *absolutely contrary* political and social strivings have *merged*, and in a strikingly 'harmonious' manner."[33] His words could have described the Ethiopian Revolution even though it was far from identical. The intensity of class conflict and the participation of the peasantry were far greater in Russia, while the external catalytic agents were far less evident in the initial phase of the Ethiopian Revolution, which was spurred almost exclusively by domestic forces. But, like the Russian Revolution, it was a heterogeneous movement in which many factions with divergent, even contradictory, objectives were united temporarily not by a shared vision of the future but by a common hatred of autocracy. For historical and sociological reasons, the peasantry remained passive before and during the first phase of the revolution. In its origins the revolution was entirely an urban phenomenon.

What turned out to be Africa's most disruptive social upheaval to date began peacefully and rather innocently, without any conscious or deliberate planning by any group or organization. It had no person to lead it and no ideological precepts to guide it. Once ignited, however, it spread quickly and widely, turning into one of the most violent social movements of the twentieth century. The crisis began on the fringes but was bound to crystallize in the center. If the state had heretofore been able to control the pace of political development, it was largely due to the remarkable concentration of governmental and educational institutions, industrial plants, mass media, and civic organizations in Addis Ababa, the nation's political, economic, and cultural hub. This also meant that, in the event of any weakening of the forces of repression, opposition would initially cohere

in the capital. The ease and rapidity with which the old regime was crushed provides the clearest testimony to its narrow base, to the fact that it rested on a thin and parasitic social layer.

To say that the revolution began spontaneously does not mean that there were no actors or agents. The soldiers detonated it and aggrieved civilian groups further inflamed it. Where the generals had failed miserably in 1960, the rebellion of ordinary soldiers thirteen years later sparked a political upsurge that profoundly upset the whole social order. An event that occurred on January 12, 1974, produced a unique historical situation by setting off a series of mutinies, strikes, and defections throughout the country. In the southern province of Sidamo, the Twenty-fourth Brigade of the Fourth Division was stationed at a military outpost in Neghele to quell disturbances by the ever-restless Oromo and Somali peoples. To vent their bitterness over their low pay and wretched living conditions, the soldiers mutinied against their officers. When the army commander came to calm them down, they detained him. This seditious act sent shock waves throughout the military, whose regulars and noncommissioned officers began to agitate for price controls, higher wages, better pension and injury benefits, and better living conditions. Open dissent within an organization that had so dutifully supported the regime, quashing popular resistance, gave heart to already indignant segments of the civilian population, who took to the streets. Students, teachers, taxi drivers, workers, civil servants, the long-suppressed Muslims, and even the normally passive clergy—incensed by the rising cost of living (exacerbated by the dramatic increase in gas prices subsequent to the Arab-Israeli war of 1973)—were the precipitants of the revolution.

By March the public demonstrations had grown decidedly political, as sectarian demands were overshadowed by a quest for social reform.[34] The progressive intelligentsia, in alliance with students, played the leading role in mobilizing dissent, using the press to disseminate its ideas more widely: those were "the days of the leaflet." To destroy the regime's legitimacy, credibility, and moral authority, as well as to discredit it internationally, it shrewdly seized on the famine, presenting it as largely man-made. Such propaganda was fairly effective, and the opposition successfully expanded its social base.

Several factors aided its success. First, state authority had atrophied and there was no capable individual to replace the emperor. By the end of the 1960s, the autocracy was in an advanced stage of decay. Age and debility were taking their toll on the monarch; sapped of vitality, he was losing his grip on the apparatus of power. None of his offspring had his fortitude and willpower. Limited in talent and lacking his father's powerful personality, the crown prince was a paraplegic undergoing treatment abroad. The aging cabinet was led by a man who, though

adept at intrigue, proved incompetent at the decisive moment. If the emperor's reaction to the mass uprising was perplexity and disorientation, that of his chief minister was trepidation, equivocation, and procrastination.

Second, the contending forces were operating within objective and subjective social conditions that either constrained or expanded their capabilities and actions. No one can say for certain that the crisis could have been averted, reversed, or stopped, but it was obvious that the political class badly misjudged the situation and proved spineless in an emergency. It was deposed with notable ease for lack of coordination, cooperation, promptness, and vigor. Its various factions lacked cohesion and consensus even as they feebly endeavored to avert a disaster. The turmoil served only to highlight the factionalism and clientelism that had underlain Ethiopian politics since restoration in 1941. Amid the political turmoil and the raging war in the north, rival courtiers and state officials feverishly competed to retain or gain access to the reins of government by pulling the baffled emperor in opposite directions. In their efforts at subversion, they stumbled against one another, inadvertently bringing the whole political edifice tumbling down. Clientelist politics, which had facilitated absolutist control, unraveled. The civilian bureaucracy, the military, and the system of patronage on which the autocrat had built his power began to disintegrate as individuals or groups shifted loyalties or forged new alliances. The fall of the old cabinet and the appointment of a new one under Endalkachew Makonnen on February 28 and the few subsequent concessions from the government raised expectations of greater change than was intended. Public clamor for more proved difficult to contain or suppress, confirming one of Machiavelli's deeper insights: "For punishments inflicted in time of dire necessity come too late to be useful; and the good that you do will be also fruitless, for it will be seen as forced on you, and no one will feel in any way grateful."[35] The old order had arrived at its final impasse.

Third, the tolerant international atmosphere was fairly conducive to the uprising's success. The United States, quick to intervene in 1960, maintained an outward stance of neutrality in 1974. This enormously emboldened the opponents of the regime and may have discouraged the emergence of counterrevolutionary elements, especially within the ranks of the military.[36]

The fourth and most critical factor that allowed the movement to expand geographically and finally to triumph was the behavior of the military. It should be said that, even though they ignited the revolution, the soldiers were extremely hesitant actors. Hardship, ill treatment, and class consciousness aroused the indignation of the reluctant rebels, but they embraced the revolutionary cause only when they realized that the autocracy's legitimacy and authority had

frayed. They acted when they felt that the psychological impediments to revolt had been removed, for in Ethiopia, as Christopher Clapham concisely puts it, "power was respected only so long as it was effective."[37] Unlike in Iran, where several loyal military units were disarmed by the fedayeen and mujahideen along with armed civilian and revolutionary troops, resistance in the Ethiopian armed forces was almost nonexistent. As one preeminent revolutionary theoretician and leader remarked, "No revolution of the masses can triumph without the help of a portion of the armed forces that sustained the old regime."[38] If the old regime had been able to rule for decades with relative stability, it was due less to the consent of the subjects than to the loyalty of its armed forces. At that epochal moment, instead of turning their bayonets against the civilian protestors as they had faithfully done in previous years, they pointed them at the political elite. The entire system of controls had broken down and there was no force to prevent the cataclysm; the government, in effect, was disarmed, unable to disperse the clamorous protestors. The erosion of the state's coercive system had made it more vulnerable to a multiclass assault.

Yet for nearly six months the popular upsurge remained anchorless. It had neither a mobilizing ideology nor a unifying personality. Spontaneity was the uprising's main strategic weakness, as it was its strength. In comparison, the Iranian Revolution, which was, of course, far less spontaneous in its beginnings, was more coherent; the various civilian political organizations and factions jockeying for power were able to form a broadly based coalition. Islam provided a powerful vehicle for mass mobilization, while the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a pious and charismatic person with impeccable nationalist credentials and a mass following, soon emerged as the unifying and undisputed leader of the revolution. The absence of such a credible figure, the lack of organizational experience, and the frailty of civil society permitted the dissident soldiers to assume leadership and provide guidance to the chaotic movement. What made it possible for them to hijack the movement was the extreme fractionalization of the civilian opposition and the complete absence of a tradition of public discourse that allowed space for the peaceful settlement of political differences and disputes.

The leadership grew out of the deputations and committees that had sprung up all over the country since the Neghele mutiny. June 27 is the official date when the barrack deputies merged into the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army. It was made up of 109 privates, NCOs, and junior officers below the rank of lieutenant colonel drawn from the various ethnicities and regions, though not proportionally. These men had no core ideas or beliefs; they seized power on a platform of fighting privilege, profligacy, and corruption. The popular upsurge had far exceeded the initial aims of even the

most radical of them. So in December 1974 the committee issued a populist manifesto appealing to the chronic disaffection of workers and peasants. It explained its political philosophy of "Ethiopian Socialism," the cardinal elements of which were "equality; self-reliance; the dignity of labor; the supremacy of the common good; and the indivisibility of Ethiopian Unity." It preached virtue, honesty, selflessness, and love of the motherland expressed as "Ethiopia First" (*Itiopia Tikdem*).[39] Its actions were intended to soothe the radical intelligentsia, which kept pressing for sweeping changes. At the same time, it quickly arrogated power but without openly challenging the emperor's authority. By August, it had emerged as a rival source of power, removing or arresting high officials, appointing new ones, and passing new orders almost at its pleasure.

The state of equilibrium, or dual sovereignty, came to an end on September 12 with the dethronement of the emperor, without a single rifle lifted in his defense, and the formation of the Derg, or Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC). The council disbanded Parliament, scrapped the constitution, and eradicated a monarchy that traced its lineage to the mythic house of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Since the monarchy had detached itself from its rural roots by abolishing the traditional sources of power but without consolidating a reliable urban base, there was no social group—rural or urban, traditional or modern, peasant or worker, poor or rich—willing to defend it. And in the face of a fractured civilian opposition, the Derg was able to seize state power and hold on to it for another sixteen years. This closed the first, and peaceful, phase of the revolution. The beret had replaced the crown.

The second phase, which began in 1975, was extremely violent, causing death, mayhem, and destruction on an incalculable scale. It witnessed landmark reforms as well as the escalation of both domestic and external aggression. The opponents of the fallen regime had been temporarily united by their critique of the existing order, not by a collective vision of a liberated future. Once they achieved the common goal of eliminating autocracy, a goal achieved with remarkable ease and little bloodshed, they imploded into competing groups. When some of the better organized and ideologically more vigorous actors began to pull the uprising in different directions, the coalition fractured, triggering one of the bloodiest episodes in the country's history.

The conflict was three-dimensional. On the one hand, there were the rivalries for leadership within the PMAC and, on the other, there were the struggles between the soldiers at the helm and the civilian political groups seeking to replace them as the new rulers of the country. This was further complicated by deadly factionalism within the Left, which spoke the same Marxist language and shared the same goal of refashioning society. The deep animus and suspicion

with which each side regarded the other made dialogue extremely difficult, and by rejecting any accommodation with the Derg, one of the parties made any peaceful settlement impossible. In the process of dealing with multiple conflicting pressures, the Derg became radicalized, but as the revolution took a leftward course it also consumed the Left.

Both the radicalization of the soldiers and the elimination of the principal leftist organizations in the urban areas occurred between the end of 1974 and the middle of 1978, in the turmoil precipitated by the demands and pressures brought to bear on the evolving leadership. The events that transpired during that period both drew on and deepened those stresses. In the beginning the soldiers had only a hazy vision of the new society they wanted to create. As their manifesto of Ethiopian Socialism clearly demonstrated, they were patriotic populists who earnestly but naively believed that the obliteration of monarchical absolutism would inexorably lead to the peaceful construction of a unified, secular, democratic, and just society. That changed toward the end of 1974, triggered by two events.

The first, which led to the inauspicious abandonment of the Derg's lofty slogan "Ethiopia first, but without bloodshed" (*Itiopia tikdem yale minim dem*), reflected differences within the Derg between those advocating a political solution to the Eritrean problem and those favoring a military one. The advocates of a political, or peaceful, settlement were headed by Lieutenant General Aman Mikael Andom, chairman of the PMAC, minister of defense, and an Eritrean by birth. Like the Egyptian Free Officers who inducted General Muhammad Naguib, the rebel soldiers had selected him for the chairmanship because of his progressive, patriotic, and impressive military credentials. The hard-liners, or militarists, headed by the first vice chairman, Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, found Aman's pacifist approach to the conflict in his home province suspect. The disagreements led to his murder on November 24, 1974. In the aftermath, the Derg frantically executed fifty-two political prisoners (including General Abiye Abebe), all high officials in the defunct imperial government, two of its own members who had sided with the general, and five members of the army. This second event was a portent of much worse to come. The "Saturday massacre," which prefigured the Red Terror, appeared to have solidified the unwieldy council, strengthened the centralists, and aroused the deepest of conflicting public emotions, ranging from disillusionment and fear to optimism and euphoria. The hopes for a peaceful change had been dashed and the exaltation of violence as a means of achieving social justice heightened.

The PMAC, swayed by civilian intellectuals, instituted policies that pushed it further to the left while deepening the rifts within the Left. It was the Marxist

intellectuals in particular who convinced the soldiers that the dream of equality and justice would be unrealizable without the eradication of the whole system of social domination, which, in turn, called for class warfare. In the early months of 1975, the soldiers struck a blow at feudalism and encroaching capitalism by nationalizing all rural land, major industries, financial institutions, and insurance companies. Not only did the land reform abolish the material base of feudalism, thereby preventing its restoration, but, as one keen analyst of Ethiopian agrarian relations puts it, it also "prematurely laid incipient rural capitalism to rut."[40] The soldiers also sent a group of council members to the Soviet Union for political education. They took that significant step in part because they believed it would satisfy their radical critics, whose ideological guidance they wanted. And one would indeed have thought that these radical measures would have established the progressive credentials of the soldiers, but not all Marxists were convinced of their revolutionary commitment. That accentuated the sharp divide within the Left.

The two rival Marxist-Leninist organizations that challenged the PMAC were the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (acronym in Amharic, Meison). Their differences on several substantive issues, but particularly on democracy and the national question, led to conflicting tactical measures the outcomes of which were disastrous. By rendering "critical support" to the soldiers, Meison was able to outmaneuver its rival, but only ephemerally. This precipitated the Red Terror that nearly devoured both of them. The remnants of Meison completely abandoned the struggle at home, while those of the EPRP waged armed struggle in the northwestern parts of the country until 1991. Both organizations grossly underestimated the soldiers' lust for power and their ability to quickly learn the Marxist vocabulary and Leninist methods of organization and propaganda. Missteps and tactical errors enabled the soldiers to neutralize the civilian revolutionary groups and to condemn their former allies as enemies of the people and of the revolution.

In other countries with similar experiences, the use of "revolutionary terror" was ascribed to three causes: ideology, historical contingency, and desire for power.[41] In Ethiopia, all three contributed to the Red Terror, but ideology was the least important, for the factions subscribed to the same world outlook. The violence was largely the result of conflicts of "negotiable" principles, ambitions, and personalities. The regime claimed that it had to respond to the chaos at the center forcibly to restore the authority of the state and to defend the integrity of the country. There is some justification to the allegation because the factional struggles were being fought precisely at a time when both revolution and state were being assaulted by the Somali invaders from the east and claimants to

power from all corners of the country. Nevertheless, the Terror was also an instrument of power consolidation by a cabal of officers headed by Mengistu and it was disproportionate, pitiless, and random. In the end, popular will yielded to the repressive state organs that, in turn, were employed to establish authoritarianism.

The Terror had many consequences. First, urban society was utterly crushed and remained captive for a decade; second, in addition to the dead, the crippled, and the disappeared, thousands went into exile, mostly to the West, to form one of the largest African communities in diaspora; third, hundreds and perhaps thousands were driven into the regional insurgencies to feed the expanding civil wars. By quashing or weakening the multinational parties, the Dergists made the rise and eventual triumph of the ethnonationalists eminently possible. Finally, by eliminating the organizations that stood between it and civil society, the Derg guaranteed the ascendancy of Mengistu, who had already established the *Abiyotawi Seded* ("Revolutionary Flame"), a clandestine party most of whose members were men of the sword, and the sword prevailed over the pen in a very tragic way.

It was a violent transition that may be compared to what Marx called the Bonapartist moment: the inability of either warring classes to win total victory and establish a stable equilibrium allows an individual to usurp power as the arbiter and rescuer of the nation. At the moment of crisis, the concentration of power in the hands of one man was achieved—violently—in two overlapping stages within the span of fifteen months. In the first phase, as the rivalry between the civilian political factions degenerated into armed combat, the Derg, which had already splintered into rival groups vying for supreme power, ceased to be a comradely ruling body. The purges and assassinations that began in July 1976 culminated in the ascension of Major Mengistu Haile Mariam as undisputed leader on February 11, 1977, a week after the murder of the titular chairman of the PMAC, Brigadier General Teferri Banti, and six other key members of the council in a palace shootout. This marked the end of collective leadership and the creation of a personal dictatorship more tyrannical than monarchical autocracy.

The rise of Mengistu was one of the most astounding aspects of the revolution. Practically nothing was known about him prior to 1974 beyond his workplace in the city of Harar. Clearly he was driven by a mixture of raw ambition and consuming hatred for the existing order. When Mengistu enlisted in the imperial army, he was following in the footsteps of his father, a retired sergeant. Mengistu enrolled in the Military Training School at Holeta in 1957 at age eighteen and graduated two years later as a second lieutenant. A member of the nineteenth

graduating class, he was assigned to the celebrated Anbessa, or Third Division in Harar, from which he was twice (in 1963 and 1969) sent to the United States for specialized training in ordnance. Of limited formal education, Mengistu was nonetheless intelligent and endowed with inordinate ambition. A good listener and fast learner, he possessed an outstanding memory, a gift for detail, demagogic eloquence, and firm determination. He was also a shrewd political operator, maneuvering his way into power first by getting chosen to represent his division, then by persuading his colleagues on the Coordinating Committee, most of whom shared his humble social origins—privates, NCOs, and graduates of Holeta—to elect him their first vice chairman. Revolutions are made by focused, dedicated, bold, and decisive persons. Mengistu presented himself as one such and was perceived as a man of the people and a staunch nationalist committed to the survival, unity, and revolutionary transformation of the country. By and large, the soldiers, poor workers, and lumpen were seduced; they quickly embraced the man of plebeian origins as their hero. Since he was from one of the oppressed southern minorities, Mengistu's ascendancy erased, both symbolically and in reality, the "natural" entitlement to power.

Short and rotund, Mengistu was mercurial, given to extremes. He could be sober, reflective, cautious, scrupulous, tireless, graceful, and decisive; he was also impulsive, with a penchant for intemperate remarks, socially awkward but excitable, sentimental, treacherous, ruthless, and cowardly. Outwardly, he appeared supremely self-confident, but he was terribly insecure, trusting few and suspecting all. The pragmatic shrewdness and cunning of the Ethiopian peasant, the chilly callousness, and the juvenile diffidence were all manifestations of a deep sense of inadequacy. Mengistu was nevertheless unostentatious and not personally corruptible. Though not ascetic, he lived simply and showed little interest in financial gain or material possessions. Nor was he a philanderer like most of his colleagues. No wonder that there is no person in Ethiopia today as widely revered or as fiercely reviled as Mengistu.[42]

The shift to military dictatorship that began on February 11, 1977, was completed in December 1979 with the formation of the Commission to Organize the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE), which five years later made Ethiopia a rigid one-party state. COPWE was transformed into the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984, and three years later the empire was replaced with a republic. Singlemindedly and ruthlessly, Mengistu had put in place the organizational apparatus with which he could rule the country, crushing everyone who dared defy his authority. Mengistu could not have succeeded so spectacularly without the unqualified support and loyalty of men who shared his drive, self-will, malice, and malevolence. Foremost among these were Ser-

geant Major Legesse Asfaw, Major Getachew Shibeshi, Lieutenant Ali Mussa, Lieutenant Melaku Teferra, and Corporal Gabre Hiwet Gabre Egziabher. Cunning and opportunistic, Mengistu and Legesse, in particular, were ambitious schemers and reckless gamblers. They were extravagantly devoted to each other until their dramatic fall.

Under Mengistu, the state's control of the cities and towns was almost absolute; it also penetrated rural society as never before, but the totalitarian credo best articulated by Benito Mussolini, "Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state," remained far beyond his grasp.[43] The obstacles to the state's reach were a lack of strong communication networks and the fact that its authority was contested by a wide array of armed groups for the duration of its tenure. Before the urban opposition was completely crushed, the fulcrum of the struggle had, in fact, already shifted from the towns to the countryside. For the next sixteen years, Ethiopia would be immersed in civil wars that would determine the state's reconfiguration as well as its political system. The crucible of these insurrectionary wars was northern Ethiopia, particularly the provinces of Eritrea and Tigray. The Maoist insurgents of these provinces fought the state's forces by adapting the classic methods of people's war, the main features of which are delineated in the next section.

Part Two

Comrades Against Comrades

THE TWIN REVOLUTIONS: THE ABCS OF REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.

—*Mao Zedong*

Two revolutions were waged simultaneously in Ethiopia from 1975 to 1991. One was led from the center by radical soldiers who dubbed themselves Marxist-Leninists and used the state's resources and tools of control. It was a top-down revolution that relied heavily on force and compulsion. The second was guided by insurgent intellectuals, also Marxist-Leninists, and its primary base was the countryside. Although the means were military, its principal weapon was mass mobilization and political organization. To stress that the military was only ancillary to the political, Mao qualified his famous utterance by explaining that "the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party." The second revolution was thus the inverse of the first: with the peasantry as its social base, it was a bottom-up or "peasant" revolution. To understand why the insurgents (rural-based revolution) won and the soldiers (urban-based revolution) lost, it is necessary to examine revolutionary, or people's, war, the essential elements of which are described below.

The revolution stirred a hornet's nest in the country. In 1974 there was only the Eritrean revolt, but in the decade following the revolution, resistance to central authority grew wider and more complex. By the government's own account there were twenty opposition groups both within and outside the country, fifteen of which were engaged in armed combat. Government officials dismissed

most of them as merely noisy and ineffectual. Indeed, few of these organizations began with a coherent functional program based on a realistic vision of the future informed by the lessons of the past. Little wonder most simply withered away. Although the government admitted that the EPRP, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) were gaining ground, it saw the EPLF and TPLF as its most serious enemies.[1] The numbers justified its concern. By the late 1970s, the total rebel force in the country was estimated at a little over 56,000, about 47,000 of the rebels concentrated in the north.[2] By 1987, the guerrillas had increased to between 87,000 and 120,000, 88 percent of them located in the autonomous regions of Eritrea, Tigray, and Afar, as well as in the provinces of Gondar and Wello. It was believed that of the total number of insurgents in the north, 50 percent were Eritrean, 32 percent Tigrayan, and only 18 percent belonged to the other three regions.[3] Eritrea and Tigray were the epicenter of armed conflicts, where the state had deployed more than two-thirds of its troops.

The tactics that the northern insurgents used to defeat the Ethiopian revolutionary army were adopted from strategists who developed and practiced the principles of revolutionary war. The use of these principles did not always guarantee success, of course. Why some insurgencies fail while others succeed is a theoretical as well as an empirical question. The history of revolutionary wars suggests that at least five factors determine the outcome: peasant support, the incumbent regime, organization and technology, external assistance, and geography and terrain. Each of them was crucial to the victories of the northern rebels.

In predominantly agrarian societies marked by gross inequities, it is impossible to forge a revolution without an alliance—even if unequal—between radical elites and oppressed peasants. A "revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them," declared Mao Zedong, who was quick to add that only if the political objectives of revolutionary insurgents converge or coincide with the basic interests and aspirations of the peasants can they win the peasantry's "sympathy, cooperation, and assistance."[4] It is hard to imagine peasant aspirations neatly coinciding with the ambitions of the elite, but neither group can wage a revolution without the other. "Without the consent and active aid of the people, the guerrilla would be merely a bandit, and could not long survive. If, on the other hand, the counterinsurgent could claim this same support, the guerrilla would not exist, because there would be no war, no revolution," observes Robert Taber.[5] The Maoist dictum thus seems to be: There is no mass support without a political project committed to social revolution, and no victory without popular support. The necessary correlation

between popular goals and successful guerrilla warfare is surely influenced by many other structural and contingent factors. If not, what would explain the variable fortunes and misfortunes of contemporary insurgencies? Among those factors are social structures and the agrarian systems in which they occur, the coercive capacities of states, and the quality of insurgent leadership, organization, and commitment.

Without taking these elements into account one would be hard put to explain certain differences. It took the Chinese Communists, for example, more than two decades of struggle to succeed, but scarcely four years for the Cuban rebels. The National Resistance Army of Uganda seized power after only six years of armed combat. The Eritreans, on the other hand, had to endure thirty years of continuous fighting before they achieved their goal. A study of revolutionary insurgencies in Latin America concludes, "Peasant support is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the victory of rural guerrilla movements." Only when peasant support, a militarily strong guerrilla movement, and a weak political regime converge, moreover, is victory a likely outcome of revolutionary insurgencies.[6] But to say that "absent any one of those features, revolutions will not be the likely outcome" is to be too mechanistic.[7] Human activities such as insurgencies are too complicated to be reduced to such generalities.[8]

It is not at all surprising that structurally weak states are far easier to beat. As in all other armed combat, the overriding objective of the guerrilla is to vanquish his opponent's army. Success depends partly on how strong the central authority and its coercive apparatus are. "Success or failure of a guerrilla movement depends not only on its courage, wisdom and determination but equally on objective conditions and, last but not least, on the *tenacity and aptitude of the enemy*," notes Walter Laqueur.[9] Disgruntled, demoralized, and ill-disciplined troops do not fight tenaciously and competently.

How was it that less than a thousand guerrillas under Fidel Castro were able to overwhelm a combined force of some fifty thousand state soldiers and march from the Sierra Maestra to Havana in four years? What happened in Cuba was not so much the victory of the rebel army as the collapse of a decayed dictatorship that had been abandoned by all the country's social groups.[10] Even though the conditions that led to this highly glorified victory did not exist in Central and South America, many intellectuals there believed that the Cuban Revolution could be replicated. They rushed to instigate armed struggles, the outcomes of which were mostly disastrous. Only in Nicaragua were the Sandinistas successful, partly because the ruling oligarchy was in a state of decomposition. But even then, they did not defeat the National Guard conclusively. Victory was negotiated with the help of a foreign power.[11]

In Africa, there were only two instances that paralleled the Cuban experience. The Rwandan Patriotic Front and the National Resistance Army of Uganda succeeded not because of popular support or military capabilities but largely owing to the disarray of corrupt and incompetent armies in the two countries.[12] In Ethiopia, it took three decades for the Eritrean nationalist insurgents to win because the governments they fought were too strong. When the revolutionary regime lost both domestic and outside support, the balance of forces shifted in favor of its enemies, who defeated it.

Besides the enemy's capabilities, external assistance and geography are essential components for success or failure. People's wars have mostly been fought in predominantly agrarian societies that relied heavily on imported tools of warfare. Insurgents need more than weapons and modern communications equipment; they need medicine against communicable diseases, and they need political and diplomatic aid. External help does not ensure success, however. The Mozambique Resistance Movement failed to beat a relatively weak opponent—despite the enormous financial, technical, and logistical assistance it received from South Africa and other governments and organizations—because its grassroots support was too narrow. It relied more heavily on terror and coercion. On the other hand, the Kenyan revolt of the 1950s failed partly because it was shut out from the outside world, as indeed was Boer resistance to British imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century. In Ethiopia, no matter how self-reliant the insurgents were, they did not win without external material and diplomatic assistance. Both the state and its armed opponents were able to fight for so long because they received external support—the rebels from a variety of sources and the government first from the United States and then from the USSR. When aid to the government diminished or ended, it lost.

Revolutionary insurgents use guerrilla warfare as their main tactic, especially in the early phase of their struggle. The ideal terrain for the guerrilla is an expansive area of forests, marshes, or mountain ranges and gorges that are not easily accessible to conventional motorized forces. A vast stretch of territory gives the guerrilla maneuverability, while rugged or forested terrain provides "natural concealment." The guerrilla can more easily strike or ambush his enemy from his hideouts and retreat swiftly. The greater the contested area and the more scattered the rural settlements, the more laborious it is to track the guerrillas and control the population. Overstretched supply and communication lines necessitate dispersal of troops, who then become more vulnerable to discrete attacks. Though relatively safe in his remote natural hideouts, the guerrilla cannot, however, remain far removed from the rural population, his primary source of recruits, food, and information.[13]

Terrain was a huge factor in the Ethiopian wars. The northern plateau, one of the most scenic spots on the African continent, is crisscrossed by majestic rivers, of which the Abay is the longest; divided by canyons such as the Abay and Tekezze and by chains of mountain massifs, of which Ras Dashen (14,700 feet) is the highest; dotted by picturesque lakes, of which Tana is the largest; traversed by winding roadways that cut through tortuous but breathtaking mountain cliffs; and half girdled by semidesolate plains. It can be tormenting and disheartening even to the most hardened soldiers. There are no jungles or marshes in the northern parts of the country, the crucible of war. The land has largely lost its natural vegetation. The barren topography is, however, an intricate maze of soaring mountains, parched valleys and ravines, and treacherous slopes. The ground is so hard and dry that it would even crumple the knees of a camel, the sturdiest of pack animals; in the Sahel of Eritrea particularly, rocks ranging from pebbles to boulders cover the land, tearing at even the toughest boots. These physical features, combined with poor infrastructural conditions, significantly diminished the army's numerical and technical advantages, as it could not bring its superior firepower to bear on the enemy wherever and whenever it wanted. On the other hand, the rebels were very agile and crafty at exploiting the vast and rugged landscape to their tactical benefit. Northern Ethiopia is perfect guerrilla country.

In a revolutionary war that exploits terrain, the guerrilla's potent weapons are time, space, will, and politics. E. L. Katzenbach Jr., puts it succinctly: "Mao's military problem was to organize *space* so that it could be made to yield *time*. His political problem was how to organize time so that it could be made to yield *will*."[14] A revolutionary war is not winnable unless the agrarian or peasant-based movement converts tactical into strategic strength through mobilized and popular support, a task that is preeminently political, not military. Whereas doctrines of conventional war stressed quick victory and the capture and retention of territory, Mao, the master strategist and tactician of guerrilla warfare, eschewed both because he lacked the means. By avoiding engagement with the enemy in places and at times not suitable to him, Mao traded space (territory) for time that he devoted to agitation and organization of the peasantry. "The protracted nature of a revolutionary war does not result from a design by either side; it is imposed on the insurgent by his initial weaknesses," observes David Galula.[15] For the guerrilla fighter, who must ensure his survival before he can hope to win, space and time are weapons of struggle, not goals, and the creation of a people's army with an iron will to win is a long, arduous political process. Mao's theory of a people's war thus exploits the advantage of time and space by subordinating the military to political objectives and considerations.

Mao's theory conceives of three phases, which his great student the Vietnamese strategist General Vo Nguyen Giap defined as contention, equilibrium, and counteroffensive.[16] In phase one, the insurgent remains on the strategic defensive because he is still comparatively weak. Following the selection of a sanctuary in an area that is geographically and demographically suitable, the revolutionary organization patiently agitates and mobilizes the population (in which, to use Mao's image, it seeks to insinuate itself like fish in water) through intensive propaganda and material enticements. Steadily it recruits, trains, and arms the nucleus of a people's army. A dual transformation takes place in the first phase: while they teach the peasants the politics of insurrection and the techniques of combat, the visionaries from the towns learn village mores, acclimate themselves to the physical environment, and develop revolutionary élan.

In this first phase, survival is the main concern and it is achieved through the complicity of a mobilized peasantry that feeds and shelters the fighters and provides them with information about the army's movements. Che Guevara specified three conditions as essential to survival: "constant mobility, constant vigilance, constant distrust."[17] The message seems to be use anyone but trust no one. Tactics emphasize extensive intelligence, preparation, rehearsal, harassment of the enemy, and education and winning over of the masses. The army seeks to quash the insurgency quickly and cheaply but often fails. The guerrillas elude it by exploiting the environment to their advantage, thereby prolonging the conflict. Relying on speed and mobility, they attack suddenly and disengage as quickly, or, in Mao's famous words: "The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue."[18] Put another way, "The guerrilla fights the war of the flea. The flea bites, hops, and bites again, nimbly avoiding the foot that would crush him. He does not seek to kill his enemy at a blow, but to bleed him and feed on him, to plague and bedevil him, to keep him from resting and to destroy his nerve and morale."[19] Through hit-and-run tactics, the guerrillas wear down the opponent, who tries to contain them through a series of sweeps and encirclements. They profit from lulls in the conflict to expand their combat effectiveness. Every operational success brings in more weapons and recruits. The rebels have reached a stage where they can take the initiative, operating as mobile columns up to divisional strength.

In phase two, both sides contend for territory, more or less equally. The insurgents now command larger and better-equipped forces capable of carrying out wide-ranging offensive operations that still retain guerrilla tactics as auxiliaries to conventional war.

In the last and decisive stage, the insurgents attain military parity or even superiority sufficient to allow them to launch a full-scale offensive to annihilate the enemy and establish political hegemony over the populace. The enemy has lost strategic and tactical initiative and cannot hope to win from a defensive posture. Every setback undermines the army's morale and erodes the government's legitimacy and residual authority. The inherent contradictions and weaknesses of the state unravel under the stress of war, precipitating the collapse of the army, soon followed by the demise of central authority.[20] Both Mao and Giap made it abundantly clear that unless and until small bands of guerrilla fighters are superseded by regular forces with heavy equipment, the chances of success in a people's war are close to nil. Giap conceded, however, that insofar as the insurgent army is able to wage a "comprehensive offensive," it is not necessary or may not even be desirable to go on to the third phase.[21] But Giap was criticized for being impatient and for wanting to move to the last stage before conditions were favorable.

In practical life, the process is more complicated, as Giap himself acknowledged, and as has been already pointed out, some insurgencies win without going through this long and extremely arduous process.[22] Yet in practice the three phases overlap and cannot easily be demarcated. The political and organizational work that precedes armed hostilities is a continuous process. Similarly, guerrilla operations do not cease completely even when, as a result of qualitative and quantitative growth, the insurgency reaches the climactic phase of the protracted struggle.[23] Nor is the transition from one phase to the other definitive, as military setbacks can force the insurgents to revert to a lower stage, as happened in Eritrea more than once.[24]

The picture of a triumphant revolutionary insurgency is derived from the specific Chinese and Vietnamese experiences and cannot be mechanically duplicated even though the basic principles and tactics of guerrilla warfare are adoptable universally. The effectiveness of these principles varies according to local conditions. Insurgencies differ in their social and historical origins, in the extent of their social base, in their organizational and leadership capabilities, in their ideological commitment, in the élan, discipline, resolve, and skill of their armed men and women, and in the external aid they receive and the opposition they face. This is not to deny that Mao's revolutionary theory can serve as a helpful guide but to stress that the fate of a people's war is determined by a conjunction of concrete local, national, and international forces and geographic factors. The political and military activities of a popular organization unfold within the given sociocultural conditions, which vary widely from place to place. Neverthe-

less, as will become clear, the Eritrean and Tigrayan rebels closely followed the principles of protracted war by adroitly adapting their tactics to their own physical and social environments and by creatively improvising on the Chinese and Vietnamese models. Their "unconventional" methods of warfare, their organizational coherence, motivation, and endurance, the vastness of the country, its difficult topography, and a dearth of transport all frustrated the military's efforts to stamp them out.

Similarly, the outcomes of counterinsurgent warfare are bound to differ simply because no two social movements are alike. In fact, as this book reveals, even within the same country two revolts occurring simultaneously may have contrasting outcomes. The divergent fortunes of guerrilla movements in the modern world suggest that no counterinsurgency strategy can predictably have the same results in all places and at all times. Whether a counterinsurgency campaign succeeds or fails depends on a wide range of factors, including the political, social, and cultural milieu; the commitment, resolve, and skill of the insurgents; the extent of domestic and foreign support for (or opposition to) the warring parties; the demographic and topographical configurations; and whether the insurgency is against a native or a foreign government.

Success against guerrillas has been elusive for counterinsurgents ever since Spanish partisans outmaneuvered Napoleon's troops in the early nineteenth century. The difficulty in fighting and defeating guerrillas lies in the fact that, until or unless the correlation of forces shifts in their favor, they have no tangible center that can be attacked. The last century saw two main counterinsurgency approaches. One aimed at quelling resistance brutally, by draining the pond, to paraphrase Mao, in which the guerrillas swam—that is, the civilian population. The other combined force with social services to win the hearts and minds of the people supporting the rebels. In both instances, there seem to have been more failures than successes. Even powerful armies could not decisively defeat weaker enemies. In what was perhaps Africa's most celebrated and costly anticolonial resistance, the Algerians held the French to a stalemate after eight years of fighting. The French failed again in Vietnam, with the Americans following suit. The Soviets were driven from Afghanistan, and the Russians are bogged down in Chechnya today.

The British were the outstanding exception. But even in Malaysia (where suppression took more than a decade) and Kenya, success owed much less to British strategic innovation than to the glaring weaknesses of the revolts, which were narrowly based both demographically and geographically. In Malaysia, the rebels were almost exclusively drawn from the Chinese minority, and even though the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army was supported by the dominant Kikuyu tribe,

it was still one of many. By confining segments of the colonial population to "protected hamlets," or concentration camps, a method that had worked well for them against the Boers of South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, the British were able to isolate and defeat the revolts. The other clear case of success through a systematic brutalization of the population (mainly native Indian) was in Guatemala; there, too, the guerrillas were separated from a defenseless peasantry and crushed, but only after thirty years of resistance. Although it was bent on a policy of force and annihilation, the Ethiopian government tried both strategies and failed to defeat the northern insurgencies.

The Eritrean and Tigrayan insurgencies arose in adjacent provinces with historical, linguistic, and cultural ties, but they were quite different in origin, duration, and outcome. The Eritrean nationalist movement preceded the revolution by a decade and was one of its catalysts, whereas the Tigrayan ethnonationalist revolt was set off by the revolution. The Tigrayan insurgency drew its inspiration, and learned the fundamentals of protracted warfare, from the Eritrean conflict thirteen years earlier. The two groups' relationship, however, has been checkered, shifting between friendship and a hostility that has proved disastrous.[25] Both movements achieved their goals not because they were democratic but because they were extraordinarily effective military organizations. Their techniques of mass mobilization were varied and complex, but ultimately consent was obtained through a subtle mixture of persuasion and coercion. Had it not been, the peasants who carried the insurgents to victory on their backs would not have been so easily marginalized so soon after the end of the armed struggles.

Eritrea may be one of the extreme cases, but the postrevolutionary experience from Algeria to Vietnam has been basically the same: the rise of authoritarian kleptocracies that thrive on patronage and corruption and the marginalization of impoverished masses. If the people are powerless, it is precisely because of their incapacity to represent themselves directly. And the peasant ia always outwitted by the commissar. The continuing agony of the Eritrean population has, however, few parallels. Seldom has a people sacrificed so much for so long for the promise of freedom and justice. Seldom, too, has one been so disillusioned. If the popular masses (*hafash*) had been politicized and made fully aware of their inalienable rights during the armed struggle, as the EPLF loved to tell the world they were, how is it that they have surrendered them so quickly and so easily? Could it be out of fear of merciless repression by the tyrant who has run the country or is it that, as W. B. Yeats reflected, "too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart"? As the next two chapters demonstrate, the postindependence situation of betrayed hopes and promises could have been predicted; military success

achieved through skilled organization is no guarantee that democratic ideals will triumph. "Revolutionary democracy" has invariably been little more than the seizure by self-selected elites of what Lenin calls "the heights of power." As the history of revolutionary wars has repeatedly and distressingly shown, power seized by force has hardly ever been shared or relinquished voluntarily.

2

The Victorious Nationalists: Insurgent Eritrea

All guerrillas impose their authority upon the people in the territories they wish to control. The systems of justice they exercise are revolutionary rehearsals of the power they hope to wield one day on a large scale.

—*John Lee Anderson*

The Leninist principle of democratic centralism appears to provide an extraordinarily effective mechanism for combining tightly centralized elite control with the cooptation of the able and ambitious, and at least a token level of mass participation and democratic accountability.

—*Christopher Clapham*

From earliest times a relatively restricted space that today incorporates most of Tigray and much of Eritrea formed the core of Ethiopia. Its proximity to western Asia, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean placed it in a zone of extensive intercommunication and commercial networks. The intermingling of humans, animals, plants, cultures, and ideas across the Red Sea produced a distinct civilization that can be described as Afro-Asiatic. Its heartland was Aksum, the antecedent of the modern Ethiopian state.

Legatees of the Aksumite civilization, the Tigrayans and Eritreans of the southern highlands (Kebessa) spoke the same language (Tigriniya), used the same script, belonged to the same political realm and church (Orthodox Christian), with its Geez liturgy, and shared the same agrarian culture and social hierarchy for at least two millennia. It was not until the fourteenth century A.D. that an apparent sense of separate identity emerged. It began when the king residing

in Gondar divided the region into two parts for administrative purposes. The line of demarcation was the Merab River. The governor of the new province to the north of the river bore the title of Bahir Negash (Ruler of the Sea) and his counterpart in the southern province held the title of Tigre Makonnen (Lord of Tigray). It of course never occurred to the king that the new administrative divide would become a permanent political boundary almost five centuries later: in 1890, taking advantage of the sudden death of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872–89), the Italians colonized the northern province, including the coastal lowlands, calling it Eritrea. The roots of the Eritrean conflict were firmly planted.

RISE OF DISSIDENT NATIONALISM: FROM ELF TO EPLF

> The temptation to subject Eritrea firmly under her [Ethiopia's] own control will always be great. Should she try to do so, she will risk Eritrean discontent and eventual revolt, which, with foreign sympathy and support, might well disrupt both Eritrea and Ethiopia herself. . . . It is to her own interest as well as Eritrea's that she should ensure that the Federation survives in the form its authors intended.
>
> —*G. K. N. Trevaskis*

Fifty years of colonial rule (1890–1952) wrought economic changes with attendant social cleavages and political differences. The Italians introduced a cash economy and a new infrastructure, creating postal, telephone, and telegraph systems and constructing roads and rail lines linking Asmara, the new capital, with the port of Massawa in the east and Kassala in the west. They also built agricultural and industrial plants, which attracted a growing number of Eritrean and Tigrayan peasants, and instituted modern secular education. The material changes engendered by capitalism brought a corresponding social transformation. Incipient classes of entrepreneurs, workers, civil servants, and intelligentsia emerged, with new modes of thinking and living. These would play a central role in the coming political drama. The new urban classes learned Italian and adopted aspects of Italian culture that distinguished them from their own rural society and from their kin across the Merab. Despite the integrative impact of capitalist development, the emerging political class remained fractured—a fact that has been the bane of Eritrean nationalist politics, which have been as susceptible to external influence as they have been manipulative of foreign governments. A sociopolitical fissure also developed between Ethiopia and the Italian colony. When the decolonization of Africa began in the 1950s, Ethiopia laid claim to Eritrea not only as historically integral to the mainland but also as a natural outlet to the sea. Many Eritrean nationalists denied such a historical

connection and wanted a state of their own. The stage was set for one of the longest-lasting armed conflicts on the African continent.

Eritrean political parties with conflicting agendas or visions proliferated during the British administration, which replaced that of the Italians in 1941. They tended to organize along ethnic, religious, or regional lines, the main schism being between the predominately Christian highlanders and the predominately Muslim lowlanders. Ethnic, religious, and regional fears of subordination, exclusion, or domination were perhaps as critical as the strategic goal of finding a niche in the state—essential in the creation and allocation of material resources. In vying for state power, the rival parties championed either total independence, complete union with Ethiopia, or even Italian trusteeship. Their aspirations were often buttressed by historical, cultural, and emotional motives. After prolonged partisan squabbles, waves of terrorism, and international canvassing, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952 under a United Nations mandate as a semiautonomous, self-governing territory with legislative, executive, and judicial powers over its own domestic affairs.

It was a political arrangement destined to fail. The Eritrean democratic experiment posed a dangerous precedent for an autocracy incapable of imagining liberty for its own people. By shrewdly manipulating precolonial Ethio-Eritrean historical ties, a fissiparous nascent Eritrean nationalism, the changing regional political realities, and the polarized postwar world order, the Ethiopian government succeeded in preventing genuine decolonization in its northern neighbor. But it was clear that the political unity was tenuous: federalism was antithetical to Shewa's hegemonic vision of a unitary state under its domination. In contrast to monarchical absolutism in Ethiopia, the Eritrean constitution vested sovereignty in the people; Eritrea prided itself on a functioning, though still fledgling, multiparty political system and a free press, both of which were nonexistent in Ethiopia. In Eritrea, Muslims, who made up a good half of the population, enjoyed equal legal rights; in Ethiopia, though their numbers were only second to those of the Orthodox Christians, they were treated as second-class citizens. The imperial government's promotion of Amharic as the national language was in contrast with the federalist provision that recognized Arabic and Tigriniya as Eritrea's official languages. The economy was relatively more developed, with discrete propertied and working classes. In Ethiopia, where social distinctions were still regarded as natural, more than 95 percent of the population was shackled by feudal relations. The progressive destruction of the agricultural base due to colonial economic reorganization meant that the extent of social transformation and cultural dislocation in Eritrea was greater than in Ethiopia. Above all, Eritrean "territorial nationalism," though still feeble owing to internal rifts, had

grown to be a sturdy rival to Ethiopian state nationalism. When the Ethiopian state sought to subordinate Eritrean claims completely, the Eritreans resisted, first peacefully, then violently.

As might have been expected, the autocratic monarch began to dismantle the unwieldy federation soon after its formation by manipulating persistent divisions within the Eritrean political class. He acted against the prudent advice of one of the architects of the federation, Foreign Minister Aklilu Habte Wold. In 1956, the elected assembly was suspended and all political parties were proscribed, their significant leaders jailed, eliminated, forced into exile, or bought off with honors. Labor and other civic associations were also outlawed, open dissent was stifled, and the press was muzzled. Amharic was declared the sole official language and the only one to be used in public schools. Two years later, the emblems of the Eritrean state, the flag and seal, were discarded. The creeping annexation of the territory and systematic dismantling of its civic and political institutions reached their climax on November 14, 1962, when a biddable chamber meekly consented to the dissolution of the ten-year-old federation. Eritrea became an ordinary province in the realm of imperial autocracy. The General Assembly of the United Nations, which had voted the federation into existence on December 2, 1950, accepted its unilateral destruction in silence. The government of Ethiopia and the United Nations had committed a historic blunder. The autocratic regime entered the age of African nationalism by illegally annexing a semiautonomous territory that turned out to be its most relentless and irrepressible enemy.

Organized resistance to the nullification of Eritrea's constitutional relationship to Ethiopia was spearheaded by the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM), founded in 1958 by young Muslim men living and working in the Sudan. It operated clandestinely in the towns and cities, drawing the bulk of its membership from workers, students, and the nascent intelligentsia. The ELM's initiative in guerrilla warfare would be preempted by a rival movement that inaugurated the thirty-year war.[1] That war would spill over into Tigray, enormously complicating the state's efforts to deal with the Eritrean separatists.

The 1960s began portentously for Ethiopia, the political atmosphere in Eritrea being one of frustration and quiet anger. By dismissing the territory's frail democratic institutions, the autocratic regime had alienated most of the significant sectors of urban society—workers, intellectuals, students, and political leaders, including those who had vowed "one Ethiopia or death" during the struggle for independence. The rural population, particularly of the highlands, was relatively calm. The urban murmurs and stirrings were nonetheless sufficient to persuade some of the political dissidents to launch an armed struggle.

They were also encouraged by the "successful" revolutions of Algeria, whose mode of organization they would adopt, and of Cuba, whose leaders would train some of their fighters. Though much less violent, the insurgency would be far longer than the Algerian Revolution.

The Eritrean armed struggle was the longest in postcolonial Africa. It took the Eritreans so long to win not only because the Ethiopian central authority was stronger but also because they were internally weak. With a narrow geographic and social base, the nationalist movement was factious and militarily ineffectual during the first decade of its history. It took two full decades for it to coalesce and for a dominant, centralized, and focused leadership to emerge. Only when the movement gained wider popular support and built a strong military, and the central government suddenly grew weaker, was it able to achieve victory.

ELF: FORMATION AND FRAGMENTATION, 1961–71

The Eritrean insurgency began a year before the extinction of the federation. Nationalist mythology credits Hamid Idris Awate, a renowned former brigand, with igniting it on September 1, 1961. Although it was disenchantment with state functionaries that once again drove him into banditry, it is not at all certain that Hamid was motivated by political or nationalist aspirations.[2] He had no direct ties to the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which was founded in July 1960 in Cairo, Egypt, by veteran political exiles and which seems to have actually sparked the armed conflict. According to Ethiopian official accounts, it was toward the end of 1961 that a small force of the ELF attacked and ransacked a police post at Togurba, Haykota, in the Barka lowlands, setting off the armed rebellion that would pin down the Ethiopian army for the next three decades.[3]

From the beginning and for much of its duration, the Eritrean liberation struggle was riddled with contradictions and factionalism. The tensions and clashes were between old and new ideas, between the secular and confessional, between the rural and urban, between farmers and pastoralists, between the traditional and modern, between externals (exiles) and internals, and between tribalists and nationalists. The nationalists who started the struggle were united by a shared vision of separate statehood but were divided by sectarian loyalties and self-interest. The contradictions and attendant conflicts were played out mainly along ethnic, religious, and geographic lines, much like during the anti-colonial resistance that preceded the insurrection. They were often intensified by generational and ideological differences as well as by personal rivalries for control of the nationalist movement.

That a social movement dedicated to forging a distinct political identity could

be so fractured and often fratricidal in a country as small as Eritrea (124,300 square kilometers, an area the size of Pennsylvania), with a population of over a million at independence time, was one of the startling aspects of Eritrean nationalist history. The multiple contradictions and disputes frequently led to violent feuds, with inevitable results. The first murderous episode occurred in 1965, when the ELF nearly wiped out some fifty fresh fighters of the ELM, setting a pattern that would remain constant in nationalist politics. By the early 1970s, leadership of the movement began to shift into the hands of secular and radical elements fighting inside the territory, but to the last days of the insurrection Eritrean nationalism never really cohered.

Founded by men who were mostly Muslim and operated mainly in the predominately Muslim lowlands (Barka and Gash-Setit), the ELF closely identified itself with the Arab world for geopolitical, economic, and cultural reasons, calling itself Jebha ("Front" in Arabic). Religious affinity and realpolitik were what fostered the ELF-Arab axis. Since Ethiopia maintained a close relationship with Israel, it made sense for the ELF to appeal to Arab anti-Zionist sentiment. It equally made sense for Arab states to support an African political movement that appeared not only to challenge Ethiopia's sovereignty over a long stretch of the Red Sea but also to endanger the southern flank of the Zionist state. For the ELF's pandering to their geopolitical calculations, Arab governments reciprocated generously—politically, economically, and militarily—by providing funds, training, and diplomatic support. But the nationalist policy, clearly shaped by pressures and constraints, both external and self-imposed, inflamed ethno-religious divisions at home while providing the Ethiopian government with a useful weapon to further aggravate those differences and to isolate the movement within pan-African circles.

First, Emperor Haile Selassie used his prestige as one of Africa's elder statesmen and a founding father of the Organization of African Unity (OAU—now African Union), headquartered in his capital, to portray the Eritrean movement as an instrument of Muslim Arabs to undermine the unity of the oldest "Christian" sub-Saharan state, which alone had withstood and survived the onslaught of European imperialism. Second, a good half of the Eritrean population was Christian and spoke Tigriniya, not Arabic, the front's official language. The Ethiopian government resorted to prefederation divisive tactics to destroy the credibility and legitimacy of the ELF in the eyes of the Christians, many of whom in any case were wary of Muslim political intentions and fearful of Arab irredentism. Third, Christian rebels from the highlands, who experienced discrimination in the organization, also disliked the redirection of their African identity and destiny to Arab aims. These alienating policies and practices would

lead to the fragmentation and decline of an organization whose structure and activities smacked of warlordism.[4]

The loose, territorially based military organization of the ELF was conducive to factionalism, as it was vulnerable to piecemeal attacks by counterinsurgency forces. A near replica of the *wilaya* system of the Algerian Front for National Liberation (FNL), the four zonal divisions (later expanded to five) roughly corresponded to ethnolinguistic boundaries. The sectional leadership, made up of the commander, his deputy, and officers for political affairs, security, logistics, and health care, was drawn mainly from the zone itself, as were the bulk of the fighters. Whether intended or not, the structure strengthened age-old loyalties. The localized leadership easily became authoritarian, each zonal commander enjoying unsupervised power over his unit and assigned territory, from which he collected tax or exactions.

The relationship between the military wing at home and the political leadership abroad (in exile) was more personal than organizational. In principle, the field commanders were responsible to the Supreme Council of a self-appointed troika in Cairo—via the Revolutionary Command set up at Kassala, about twenty-five kilometers from the border—for looking after military matters on the ground. In practice, Idris Muhammad Adem, Idris Osman Glawdewos, and Usman Salih Sabbe were individually connected to their respective home districts through a clientelism and tribal allegiances. They were the ones who raised and disbursed the funds, each using his patronage powers to secure the allegiance of the command staff on his ethnic turf. The Christian highland section (the Third, then the Fifth Zone)—potentially the most important area because it was the most developed, contained half the population, and was the site of the main garrison—remained neglected for lack of a patron. The cronyism that tied the internals to the external trio helped to strengthen sectionalism, intensifying interzonal frictions. This naturally thwarted any effort to build a coherent and effective command structure or viable political institutions. Localism and the pursuit of personal power had the effect of undercutting collegial decision making as well as the forging of a truly nationalist movement. Any demands that the internals raised and any measures that the externals took in response were largely of a parochial nature. The ELF was condemned to wage a struggle that was nationalist in name but sectarian and homicidal in practice.

Political sectarianism—a replica of the segmented social organization of the lowland society—predictably impaired the ELF's military effectiveness. During the first five years of its existence, the front's combat force had grown to about two thousand, organized and operated in squads. Indeed, guerrilla warfare calls for small-scale and decentralized maneuvers, but not to the extent that zonal

commands work independently of one another and of the political leadership. Their inability to coordinate their activities made it easier for the state to confine them to the lowlands with a relatively small force. The government maintained only one brigade from its Second Division for the whole province, and the three battalions were busy guarding such strategic cities as Asmara and Keren as well as the Asmara-Massawa road, leaving the countryside to the police. What kept the guerrillas at bay was a counterinsurgency battalion of about fifteen hundred men, all Christians, trained by Israeli specialists at the edge of Dekemhare. Organized in 1965 at the governor's behest, it was known as "Commando 101," or "Kommandis," to the people. But its harsh measures were counterproductive in that they spurred public resentment. These highly indoctrinated men, unaccountable to the army command, regarded all Muslims, in particular the lowlanders, as potential enemies of the state.

Only when the front expanded its activities to the highlands did the government call on its regulars and so initiate the first counteroffensive. In 1966, the front established the Fifth Zone in the highlands to rally the Christian peasantry and to exact dues, collect supplies, loot arms, and weed out state officials and agents. The government's first major offensive, in March 1967, was a response to the increasing lethality of the rebel attacks. Two additional brigades were brought from Gondar and Tigray. After clearing the highlands, the troops swept through the lowlands, destroying villages, crops, and livestock and forcing the first exodus of refugees to the Sudan. The guerrillas' poor showing in this first real test created acrimony among them. In fact, a deputy commander of the Fifth Zone, Osman Hishal, executed twenty-seven of his fellow fighters, all of them Christian, for their allegedly lackluster performance. The crime drove many angry and frightened Christian guerrillas, including Osman's superior, Walday Kahssay, into the government's arms. The ELF had suffered the first of the major military and political defeats that would precipitate its breakup.

The years 1968–71 saw the ELF's simultaneous and paradoxical growth and fracturing. As it grew in size and proficiency, the front was torn by irreparable schisms engineered by disgruntled but talented and ambitious young men. Its survival was due to the government's inability or unwillingness to increase the size and tactical competence of an army faced with guerrilla warfare. To the existing divisive factors were now added a generational rift and ideological polarity. In 1967, thirty-three men were sent to China for six months of training. Among them were Isaias Afewerki, an engineering student who had dropped out of Haile Selassie I University to join the liberation movement in 1966, and Ramadan Muhammad Nur, who, following military training in Syria, had become commissar of the Fourth Zone. Cuba took another ten, including Ibrahim

Affa (a gifted former marine commando), in 1968. Upon their return, the men enhanced the front's combat capabilities but also intensified the interpersonal intrigues and feuds that plagued the organization.

Not even spectacular subversive acts on the national and international stages would mend the rift. Between late 1969 and early 1970, the ELF destroyed three Ethiopian Airlines planes on the ground in Western Europe and Pakistan, garnering widespread publicity, no doubt its purpose. In 1970 it was also responsible for the killing of Brigadier General Teshome Irgetu, commander of the Second Division, provoking the government to escalate the violence, driving hundreds of young men into the rebellion and thousands more into the Sudan without stemming the dissention and strife tearing the movement apart.

Nor would the front's modest internal reforms satisfy the young dissidents who called for the abolition of the zonal system, its replacement with a unified army, leadership in the field, and "a correct relationship between the people and army"—a familiar slogan of the Chinese Community Party. These young men were disillusioned with the incompetent, power-hungry, high-living, and feuding exiled leaders. Those who bore the brunt of the struggle, they argued, ought to be responsible for determining organizational matters and foreign relations. Many of them left the front only to regroup in several competing organizations. All efforts at rectification and unity were fruitless. In February 1973, three of the splinter groups merged to create what would officially become, in 1977, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), better known as *shaabia* ("popular"—in its Arabic abbreviation). Led by Isaias and Ramadan, the former political commissars who had formed a close personal relationship while in China, the new organization sheltered itself in the redoubtable mountains of Sahel, around Nakfa, a garrison town situated on a high plateau, successfully repelling one assault after another.

EPLF: SURVIVAL AND TRIUMPH, 1972–82

The EPLF immediately faced twin challenges, one from within. While the numbers were still in its favor and before its offshoot could consolidate its position, the ELF declared war on the EPLF in mid-1972. The EPLF was able to defend itself with arms mostly supplied by Libya, a newcomer to the scene. The "first civil war" ended inconclusively in 1974, affirming the existence of two hostile camps in the liberation struggle. While it was still in the midst of its struggle for survival, the EPLF was confronted with internal dissension that threatened to split it apart. Some veteran fighters had joined with more recent recruits in charging the leadership with authoritarian and coercive practices and complain-

ing of needless loss of life for lack of careful military planning and coordination. The leaders of the agitators were Musie Tesfamikael, a fighter since 1967, and Yohannes Sibhatu, who had joined the front in 1970 and soon become its director of publications and information. The main target of criticism was Isaias, who dubbed the group *manqa* ("bat"). By accusing them of "individualism," "subjectivism," and "destructive ultraleftism," Isaias succeeded in outmaneuvering, and engineering the execution of, eleven group members in August 1974.[5]

"This experience with dissident radicalism," one scholar remarks caustically, "no doubt contributed to the high degree of centralization and concern with security that later distinguished the Eritrean People's Liberation Front."[6] Arguably, the brazen act may have stabilized or even saved the fledgling organization from self-destruction, but it may also have aborted a new political culture of rational dialogue and compromise. It seems to have inaugurated instead a political culture of coerced consensus cloaked in the trappings of "national salvation." It may also have laid the foundation of cultism surrounding the much-vaunted charisma of Isaias. In short, the tragic event did not bode well for Eritrea and its people. The EPLF nevertheless continued to thrive under his iron-fisted leadership.

The Ethiopian Revolution transformed objective conditions in the country and shifted the balance in the dual contest for hegemonic leadership in Eritrea. At this point, the ELF may have had eleven infantry brigades to the EPLF's nine. Taking advantage of a weakened state, the fronts declared a temporary truce and opened a joint offensive in late 1976, virtually overtaking the entire province in one year. Only Asmara, Barentu, and the ports of Assab and Massawa remained under government control. The road between them cut, however, Asmara and Massawa were under siege. The hopes of a nationalist victory raised by the insurgents' achievements and fear of the Red Terror drove thousands of young men and women to the fronts, principally to the EPLF. As most of the new recruits were Christian, highland society was no longer peripheral to the conflict.

The success of the insurgents was due largely to government weakness, not their own strength. When a reorganized, expanded, and mechanized army opened a counteroffensive in 1978, they could not hold on to their territorial gains. They were driven back to the Sahel, the ELF suffering more casualties during the four months of fighting than the EPLF, which preserved its forces by making a faster strategic withdrawal. The fronts established a defensive line that stretched for four hundred kilometers from Barka in the west to northeast Sahel, across Nakfa, foiling three campaigns against them in 1979. There was a lull in the fighting in 1980–81, for the army was engaged in a major operation against the rebels in the east.

In August 1980, the uneasy peace between the fronts began to crumble, leading to what the Eritreans call the "second civil war," in which the ELF was decisively defeated, with help from the TPLF, exactly a year later.[7] Some of its fighters joined the winning side and those who crossed over into the Sudan (more than five thousand) were immediately disarmed but allowed to stay, boosting the Eritrean refugee population in that country.[8] Twenty years after its foundation, the ELF ceased as an effective military and political organization, though it never abandoned the struggle. By the mid-1980s, it had reconstituted part of its disbanded army and begun operations inside Eritrea, intermittently attacking the military and, whenever convenient, striking at its archrival from the rear in complicity with the national army.[9] A decade after its disassociation from the ELF, the EPLF emerged as virtually the sole political and military force in the province, beating back the two biggest operations (the "sixth" and "seventh" to the front) in 1982 and 1983. Five years later, it won a historic victory, the herald of the military regime's defeat and subsequent Eritrean independence. One cannot fully appreciate the front's success without noting its organizational structure and the dominant ideas that guided it.

ORGANIZATION, LEADERSHIP, IDEOLOGY

> The main form of struggle is war, the main form of organization is the army.
>
> —*Mao Zedong*

Organizational coherence, capable leaders and fighters, clarity of vision, dedication, discipline, and an ability to fuse the political and the military, or popular aspirations and military effectiveness, were at the heart of the EPLF's survival and ultimate triumph. The techniques of organization, mobilization, propaganda, and combat were all based on Mao's principles of protracted revolutionary war. The Eritrean revolutionaries invented nothing, but they were excellent improvisers. Like the Chinese and Vietnamese communist parties, the EPLF organized its members and supporters vertically and horizontally. The vertical setup involved the regular and irregular fighters, and it stretched downward through several levels to the villages, where its cadres created zonal administrations and mass associations to support the Eritrean People's Liberation Army (EPLA). These associations were organized through a combination of promises, most notably of land reform, and focused terror. Within the front there existed a Leninist vanguard party of secret cells, its members selected from among the fighters. Fighting with minimum resources and maximum resourcefulness, the EPLF's guiding tenets were egalitarianism and self-reliance.

Its centralized leadership was headed by a man generally described as sharp, articulate, resolute, implacable, charismatic, inspiring, and austere, someone not given to overstatement or ceremony but fanatically devoted to the cause. What is not as often stressed is that Isaias was also shrewd, stubborn, ruthless, manipulative, autocratic—a megalomaniac with totalitarian ambitions. Yet not even his most ardent critics could deny that, with extraordinary tenacity demonstrated over and over again in the face of many difficulties and setbacks, Isaias helped forge a cohesive nationalist organization out of a politically fractious society and led it to victory.[10]

The EPLF's basic organizational structure was typically Leninist. Adopted at its First Congress at Ruh (Sahel) in January 1977, it consisted of the Central Committee (thirty-seven members and six alternates), which elected from among its members the thirteen members of the Politburo, including the general secretary and vice general secretary. The general secretary was the popular Ramadan Muhammad Nur until the Second Congress of May 1987, when he was replaced and effectively sidelined by his deputy, Isaias Afewerki. Each of the Politburo members headed one of the eleven departments, the larger of which were subdivided into many sections. And each of the six zonal administrations, appointed by the Politburo, included at least one member of the Central Committee. At the Second Congress, the CC was expanded to seventy-one members, including six women (and seven alternates), while the Politburo was reduced to nine. All decisions were made by the CC and, when it was not in session, by the Politburo. A Standing Committee composed of the secretary (who acted as its chair), the deputy secretary, and the heads of the Political and Military committees, oversaw the day-to-day activities of the organization. Through sheer willpower, force of intellect and personality, manipulation, and ruthlessness, Isaias emerged, for better or worse, as the CC's undisputed leader.

Governed by the Leninist principle of democratic centralism, the EPLF was tightly and rigidly organized, in sharp contrast to the loose and fractious ELF. Two techniques ensured conformity, discipline, and order. One was the Leninist practice of criticism and self-criticism (*gemgam*), which was administered "for individuals and not for the front as a whole, and scarcely for its leaders."[11] *Gemgam* was a subtle but powerful weapon of institutionalized control of human behavior. It can be an indispensable tool for correcting defects and developing good qualities. When honestly applied, it can help prevent mistakes and cultivate openness, trust, and true comradeship. But it can also encourage secrecy, hypocrisy, insincerity, cynicism, self-censorship, and docility for fear of ridicule and humiliation in public sessions. *Gemgam* was thus a double-edged psychological instrument of control. The other one was a more coercive, widely feared

organ called *Halewa Sawra* ("Defense of the Revolution"), whose members ("hidden ghosts") were unknown to the fighters and cadres and answerable only to the men at the top. To protect the revolution from internal subversion and external infiltration, *Halewa Sawra* used written and unwritten codes of personal conduct and tight surveillance of its members. It was headed by the perspicacious and stern Petros Solomon. Isolation and public humiliation were the most frequently used methods to enforce discipline. The punishment for infractions varied from a mild warning, counseling, or reprimand to imprisonment in undisclosed isolated locations or hard labor, including digging salt on the Red Sea coast. The fate for the more defiant or unrepentant could be torture or liquidation. Through continual intense political work, abetted by tight control, the EPLF kept everyone in line. Despite the fear and intimidation, morale and discipline were extraordinarily high, desertions few, and, as Ethiopian official documents attest, defections even fewer.

The organization's interlocking security and political apparatus spread across Ethiopia and into the Sudan, where there was a large Eritrean refugee population and an ELF presence. Secret cells of supporters and a network of spies and informers gathered intelligence, raised funds, and recruited members. The EPLF used money, prized consumer goods, and sex to extract information from the hierarchy of Ethiopian and Sudanese military and civilian bureaucracies. Eritrean society was infested with all kinds of agents disguised as state functionaries, teachers, students, businessmen, bartenders, and prostitutes. Since the Ethiopian government used more or less the same means of counterintelligence, this was an Orwellian society in which every individual was a suspect and every whisper mattered.

The EPLF saw itself as a coalition of revolutionary intellectuals, workers, and peasants engaged in a struggle to liberate Eritrea from "Ethiopian colonialism." Inserted into this heterogeneous mass political organization as a shadow government was the Marxist-Leninist Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), to provide ideological guidance into a socialist future. Launched in 1971, the EPRP had its own structure—a Politburo, a Central Committee, and a cadre school—and was ensconced in the zonal administrations. Its members were drafted from among the "most committed, active, and ideologically sound" fighters. While this may have solidified the camaraderie among the chosen few, it should also have buttressed Isaias's position, for he was the EPRP's chairman. That it did not become a divisive factor in the nationalist movement is probably because its existence was a secret, known only to its members, and its operations were discreet. In any case, the EPRP's importance faded by 1987, when the front abandoned ideological absolutism for pragmatism, embracing pluralism and a mixed econ-

omy. The socialist vision that was central to the EPLF's National Democratic Program of 1977 was quietly scrapped with the dissolution of the EPRP in 1989, an event that coincided with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union.[12]

The other critical components of the EPLF's infrastructure were the mass associations simultaneously organized horizontally and vertically; the horizontal was a geographic organization by village, district, and subdistrict, and the vertical grouped peasants by occupation, generation, and sex. Party cells known as *wahios* crisscrossed the organizational structure, providing the cement. Since there is no armed struggle without popular support, the front mobilized the peasantry by setting up an array of associations organized territorially and by occupation, age, and sex in those areas where the state's presence was either nonexistent or nominal; wherever the state's administration was functional, they were organized clandestinely. The most important associations were those of farmers, women, and youths, each of which was represented in the zonal and district people's councils, assemblies known as *baitos.* Theoretically, though not always practically, the villages coalesced to form the highest unit, the assembly of the associations. They were established parallel to the front's de facto government but were more decentralized in order to ensure the continuation of mass support for the EPLA in the event that it suffered a military setback, resulting in the dismantling of its administrative structure. Each district association had its own officers in charge of various departments (economy, judiciary, education, health, etc.) and its own militia.

The population, though, never had any real power; the setup was intended to give them a sense of direct participation in the movement. At best, this was little more than what may be called guided or controlled democracy. Regardless, the associations were the EPLA's pillars in that they provided the bulk of its fighters, food, shelter, pack animals, guides, and intelligence. They spied on government forces and warned the EPLA when the army approached their villages. Peasants participated in the construction of roads and fortifications and invariably helped with the evacuation of the dead and wounded.[13]

The front reciprocated by providing social services in place of the state. In 1976 it began instituting land reforms that dovetailed with the sweeping actions of 1975. It offered health care through its "foot doctors" and infirmaries and administered its own primary schools, as well as courts to help settle local disputes in the "liberated areas." Such a reciprocal relationship was of course not always based on mutual understanding and free will. Noncooperation on the part of the population resulted in systematic harassment, social ostracism, and loss of property or even life. Peasants were all too often harshly treated by the Ethiopian army and the rebels for supporting the other side.

If the mass associations were crucial to the EPLF's long march to victory, a well-trained, disciplined, highly motivated, and versatile army was absolutely indispensable. From its foundation in 1972 to its crushing of the ELF in 1981, the EPLF built an extremely effective combat force first to establish itself as the dominant politico-military organization in the province, then to defeat the Ethiopian army. Its methodical recruitment, training, organization, and indoctrination, as well as combat tactics that stressed mobility, speed, and surprise, were derived from the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionaries.

Since the primary purpose of the armed struggle was victory in war, the EPLF was preeminently a military machine; but it was not militarist or militaristic, for political and ideological objectives dictated military actions. For this reason, the party's authority was supreme. To ensure that the gun was strictly subordinated to politics, as Mao sermonized, the EPLF maintained its political organization parallel to the EPLA at all levels. This does not mean, however, that there were two authorities or organizations staffed by different personnel, civilian and military. In the EPLF everyone was a fighter and the political and military powers were invested in the same organs or persons. Isaias was at once party and military boss. The front's main concern was political and ideological. Tasks were performed by its political commissars and party cadres, and it had no leaders whose sole responsibility was military. Without the subordination of the military to the political and of personal interest to the collective interest, armed activities and other military affairs would have degenerated into localized commandism, as happened in the first decade of the struggle, or into the predatory warlordism that devastated such countries as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia.

Forging "a coherent and disciplined force with a strong corporate identity" out of a fractured society was not at all easy.[14] It took punctilious political work to build a conscious, reliable, and efficient army. When individuals voluntarily joined the movement, they did so for a variety of reasons: youthful idealism, ambition, peer pressure, the mythic attraction of the mountain (Nakfa), fear of political persecution, economic hardship, revenge, or a deep sense of Eritrean nationalism. These diffuse and idiosyncratic sentiments were molded into a common nationalist perspective and commitment through a program of resocialization and politicization. By stressing national unity, the authenticity and legitimacy of the struggle, and the egalitarian ideas guiding it, the front fashioned an army of unquestionable political reliability and absolute loyalty, imbued with self-discipline and self-sacrifice.

Revolutionary awareness and zest were intertwined with physical toughness and tactical skill. Once enrolled, the young men and women went through a rigorous preparation for a stressful life full of hardship, even deprivation, in one

of the harshest environments in the world, where physical courage and moral stamina were requisites of daily survival. The training period for most recruits lasted an average of six months, later reduced to three. The training consisted of basic infantry combat tactics—shooting, camouflaging, ambushing, laying mines, and so forth. It required some literacy and longer training to operate heavy ordnance such as tanks and artillery. When all the drilling was done, the new combatants were assigned to the various units to begin an austere and dangerous life with only a gun, ammunition, and a knapsack in hand.

Their diet was paltry and their clothing meager. Food shortages were frequent, but there is no evidence of starvation. Most of the time the fighters survived on lentils and sorghum bread, or *kitta*, curiously called *indemnesh* ("how are you") Gondar.[15] Another item was a protein-rich mixture of maize, wheat, and other cereals called *gesgis* ("hurry") because it took only a couple of minutes to prepare.[16] Twice a day fighters cooked their own food in groups of five to eight. Food requisitioned was usually paid for, and care was taken not to anger the population with excessive demands. The EPLF, in fact, appears to have scrupulously observed some of the golden rules regulating the relationship between fighters and people that it borrowed from the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionaries:

Chinese:	Do not steal from the people.
	Be honest in your transactions.
Vietnamese:	All things of the people for the people.
	Do not take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses.
	Pay fairly for what you buy.
	Do not damage crops.
	Do not take liberties with women.
	Do not ill-treat captives.

The meager supplies of clothing were not conducive to hygiene. Typically, a fighter wore the same things for months on end, rarely washing them: a pair of tight khaki shorts, a shirt, a cloth (*netsela*) thrown over the shoulder. (The plastic sandals, or *shida* (Arabic), that were also part of this uniform inspired an Eritrean architect to design a statue that stands in Asmara and is striking for its originality and graceful simplicity.) Like the perennial malaria of the tropics, infestation with lice was a persistent problem. But the rigorous life of the fighter did not deter youth and peasants from joining, and remaining committed to, the struggle.

Starting with some four hundred men organized in squads, the EPLA had grown into a big fighting machine by the mid-1980s. The strategic mobile forces, made up of permanent units or brigades and divisions, were its main offensive

combat component. The smallest operational unit was the *mesre*, or squad, of 10–12 persons. Two squads made up a *ganta* (platoon, 45–50), three of which composed a *hayli* (company, 140–150), and four companies formed a *bottoloni* (battalion, 300–450). Until the mid-1980s, when it was surpassed by the division, the largest unit was the brigade of three battalions (1,000–1,500). Ordinarily, three brigades made up a division. Nearly a third of the EPLA's total force and 15 percent of its frontline combat units were women, a fact that revolutionized gender relations in that traditional, patriarchal, and hierarchical society.[17] Interestingly, women remained underrepresented in the leadership. There were only six in the Central Committee and none in the Politburo. Within the EPLA, none rose above platoon leadership.

The EPLA comprised many specialized units, which fought effectively by combining guerrilla and conventional tactics. According to Ethiopian military intelligence estimates, its size ranged from forty-seven thousand to sixty-five thousand. At the end of the 1980s, it was made up of six divisions, fourteen infantry brigades, four mechanized brigades, one commando brigade, one engineering brigade, one marine commando battalion, one reconnaissance battalion, and four militia brigades.[18] There were also the fedayeen (Arabic for "those who sacrifice themselves"), who specialized in sabotage, abduction, assassination, and information gathering behind enemy lines. The EPLA's intelligence section was capable of intercepting and decoding enemy messages using modern technological devices.[19] After 1987 the EPLA was led by a general staff headed by Sibhat Ephrem. Commanders wore no badges or insignia of rank, and even though command was centralized, unit leaders, with transistor radios in hand or tucked under their arms, enjoyed considerable freedom of action. For as long as the front remained on the defensive using guerrilla tactics, a premium was placed on decentralization and local initiative. Only when it moved to conventional offensives did command become more centralized.

The province was divided geographically into three zones of operation. The northern zone comprised the Sahel, Red Sea, and Keren districts; the southern encompassed Akeleguzay, Hamassien, and Seraye; and Barka, Gash, and Setit formed the western zone. Nakfa was the organization's nerve center. All the important command, logistical, and communication services were located there. In addition to a clandestine radio system and a hospital, there were clinics, infirmaries, training camps, repair shops, ammunition depots, supply warehouses, and cottage industries spread out across the Sahel, many of them hidden in caves or underground tunnels, Vietnamese style.

Mengistu Haile Mariam once wryly admitted that he bought mammoth amounts of expensive armaments only to deliver them to the "bandits."[20] In-

deed, the EPLA acquired, on the battlefield, much of the army's gear; airplanes seem to have been the only major items missing. Without this equipment and these arms, the insurgents could not have waged mobile warfare, the last phase of protracted revolutionary war. Since they never abandoned guerrilla tactics, however, the individual weapon remained the AK-47 (Kalashnikov), a fast-firing, low-cost automatic that withstood dust and water better than anything the West had to offer. And since the guerrillas were mobile, their equipment was light and portable; besides a rifle, clips of bullets, and a grenade, each carried a water canteen and a day's ration.

Although the EPLF was a voluntary organization, quitting it was practically impossible and there were instances of kidnapping and forcible conscription. Between 1979 and 1983, when the EPLF's survival was in peril, it abducted boys from local villages and refugee camps in the Sudan to shore up its manpower.[21] It also drafted children as young as ten from its own *Keyih Ambaba* ("Red Flowers"); these were mostly orphans who grew up in the front's custody, receiving rudimentary military training. The use of child soldiers was abruptly abandoned in the face of internal and external criticism.[22]

How did the fighters keep going in the face of so much deprivation, hardship, stress, and fatigue? How did they cope with the boredom, solitude, and homesickness? Did they have time for anything other than fighting, traveling, or digging trenches? Were there tranquil moments for reflection, love, and joy? Such forms of leisure as there were combined entertainment, propaganda, and education. A troupe of singers that included Senayit Debessay, Elsa Kidane, Tesfay Mehari (Fihira), and Tekle Kifle Mariam (Wedi Tikul), as well as actors, musicians, and dancers, periodically visited the army camps, front lines, and villages, putting on plays and musical shows, often accompanied by poetry readings. All of these activities extolled the justness and "sweetness" of the struggle, glorified the spartan life, praised the heroism of the fighters, and eulogized the martyrs while vilifying the enemy. They all attested to the certainty of "victory to the masses." *Dimtsi Hafash* ("Radio Voice of the Broad Masses") was another source of entertainment, information, and propaganda.

Individuals did a number of things on their own. A small group of men and women might sit in the shade of a tree or huddle near a bunker smoking and drinking sugary tea (which was universal), while one of them played the *kirar* (an instrument with five or six strings) or the flute. Soccer, volleyball, and other games were played as much for fun as for distracting the enemy.[23] The literate read the front's main organ, *Fitewarari* (*Vanguard*); theoretical, political, and historical tracts such as *Harbenya* (*Patriot*) and *Mahta* (*Spark*); and books (or cyclostyled pages from them) by revolutionary icons like Lenin, Mao, Che, and

Giap.[24] Some of the publications would pass from hand to hand until they were tattered and unreadable.

Above everything else, two psychological factors sustained the revolutionary spirit in the face of repeated tactical setbacks and unimaginable hardships. One was a transcendent comradeship. Separated from families, childhood friends, and familiar and protective neighborhoods, the rebels bonded for fellowship, support, and survival in a world where loneliness, fatigue, and death were daily experiences. No wonder their creed was that one does not leave a fallen comrade on the field of battle. Another factor was certitude with respect to their invincibility, the belief that they would outlast an opponent who lacked their conviction, motivation, tenacity, and patience. Strategists of protracted war since Mao have grasped that nothing bonds a revolutionary fighter to his cause more firmly than the conviction that he is going to win.

No matter how well equipped, skilled, or motivated, the EPLA might not have succeeded without the support of two groups of armed peasants who were responsible for the security of their hamlets and more. The *Zobawi Serawit* ("zonal armies") were trained, armed, and organized by the front to assist its full-time, seasoned fighters in combat or by harassing the army and hindering its maneuvers. These men were between the ages of sixteen and forty-five and could be drafted into the EPLA at any time. The most famous peasant fighter, who rose to a generalship, was Gabre Egziabher Andemariam (Wichu). Before joining the front, he had spent some time with the state police commandos. Minimally trained, lightly armed, and organized in groups of ten to fifteen, these village self-defense units, or people's militia, were rarely separated from their families or farms, nor were they directly involved in conventional warfare. Their duties included vigilant policing of their villages, information gathering, spreading antigovernment propaganda, eliminating the state's civil defense organs, and dismantling peasant associations. By night they would destroy small bridges, cut telephone lines, or plant mines for ambush. Such "destructive" activities forced the military to assign significant numbers of troops to guard vital installations and infrastructure.[25] The contribution of these auxiliary forces toward sapping the energy and morale of the troops cannot be overstated.

How were the Eritreans able to wage war for so long and with such success? The EPLF has always pointed to its guiding principle of self-reliance, but that is half the story. It is true that the front sought to maintain an outward stance of fierce independence by engaging in a variety of economic enterprises, some of them illicit. In the liberated areas, it operated its own poultry farms to feed its fighters and to harvest marketable products. It also manufactured medicines for some of the most prevalent tropical diseases, made the clothing and san-

dals for the army, produced crude explosive devices, and maintained many of its captured tanks and vehicles by scrounging scraps and wrecked hulks on the battlefields. Under a host of bogus personal and corporate names, it operated a fleet of trucks and taxis in Ethiopia, Sudan, and East Africa (mainly Kenya and Uganda). It smuggled consumer goods from the Middle East while taxing those engaged in contraband trade. Eritrean diasporic communities in Australia, the Middle East, Western Europe, and North America gave generously in the form of membership fees and contributions. Additional aid (and publicity) was obtained from the sale of videos and audiotapes about the front's political and military activities.[26] No matter how successful, however, these ventures were nowhere enough to sustain the insurgency.

No liberation movement has succeeded without a substantial infusion of assistance from outside. Revolutionaries in a resource-rich area like China, let alone a small, poor one like Eritrea, could not go it alone,. As Mao pointed out, "It is impossible for a genuine people's revolution to win victory in any country without various forms of help from the international revolutionary forces, and even if victory were won, it could not be consolidated."[27] The Eritrean insurgency was partly financed and armed by foreigners, not every one of whom consciously supported the revolution. Although the EPLA obtained the bulk of its arsenal from the Ethiopian army, it also received a variety of weapons from Arab governments, in particular Iraq and Syria. They were mostly smuggled through Port Sudan with the tacit approval of the Sudanese government, which also allowed its territory to be used as a safe rear base. The front's astute foreign emissary, Osman Salih Sabeh, was especially successful in raising funds in the Middle East until about 1977. Churches, communities, and international organizations in Australia, Western Europe (especially Sweden and Norway), and North America gave money and bountiful supplies of food and clothing, much of it channeled through the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) under the EPLF's auspices. It is obvious, then, that the other half of self-reliance was myth, but the myth was essential for self-respect and national pride.

This chapter would be incomplete without mention of the omnivorous camel, a permanent fixture in the struggle. "That grumpy but friendly animal was one of us. It was truly a fighter and its contribution to the struggle was immeasurable," remarked a former fighter.[28] Carrying supplies, weapons, and ammunition, hauling gallons of water, camels moved up and down the escarpment undaunted by the thin air of the uplands. Camels could thrive on thorns alone and travel two to three days without water, a scarce commodity in the Sahel. They moved by day and night, covering up to three kilometers an hour on flat terrain.

They gave abundant milk, meat, and dung for fire. A fighter-singer exalted his treasured companion:

> My camel, my dear camel,
> That moves by the fighter's side, carrying weapons.
> A lovable creature, our national treasure
> Labors day and night but grumbles not of fatigue.
> She traverses the wilderness without thirst,
> Thrusts ahead bravely, carrying precious supplies.
> Let a proper monument be erected,
> Let your heroic story be widely known.
> My camel is a fighter;
> She is the custodian of the secrets of our land.[29]

Indeed, the camel today holds an honored place in the psyche of the Eritrean people. It is represented in the seal of the state of Eritrea and on its currency, the *nakfa*.

The victorious armed struggle that transformed the camel into a national symbol was made possible by the TPLF, which the EPLF helped bring into existence. But they were reluctant allies, their history marked by ambiguity and betrayals that culminated in a destructive war seven years after Eritrea became a sovereign state. Let's proceed to the Tigrayan armed rebellion to see the political ideas and military issues that simultaneously united and divided the insurgent organizations.

3

The Victorious Ethnonationalists: Insurgent Tigray

ROOTS OF ETHNONATIONALISM

> What is so sorrowful is that, whereas there is a section that played a pivotal role in Ethiopian history and for Ethiopian unity, the conspiracy to weaken and divide Ethiopia is also hatched in that region [Tigray]. This is one characteristic of our country and it is unfortunate.

Mengistu was perpetrating a fraud. Much as he was in the habit of demonizing his Eritrean opponents as foreign agents or mercenaries, the president was now accusing Tigrayan dissidents of being unpatriotic. He was interpreting as anti-Ethiopianism the historical interregional, interfeudal, interdynastic, interclass struggles for power and for control of the peasantry's labor and meager surplus. Like their feudal forefathers, who time and again challenged their regional rivals, the modern ethnic entrepreneurs, or "cultural brokers," as they have been called, wanted to snatch state power from Mengistu. And they did. Mengistu should have noted carefully Gabre Hiwet Baykedagn's astute remark that no other people cared more for Ethiopia's welfare and safety than the Tigrayans. Gabre Hiwet's affirmation of Tigrayan patriotism was shared by some of the shrewd foreign observers of Ethiopian politics in the early 1940s, notably E. A. Chapman Andrews, a British intelligence officer. "Before the Italo-Ethiopian war," he remarked in a "Memorandum on Eritrea," "perhaps the keenest, most nationalistic and most patriotic among the growing band of educated young men around the Emperor were Tigreans." (Andrews added that "many of his best advisers and loyal servants are Eritreans.") Another fraud has been perpetrated by a segment of the Tigrayan "modern" elite that ascribes the territory's poverty to

"successive Shewan rulers." The best antidote to such hoaxes is history. So let's begin.

For more than eighty years—from 1890, when the Italians colonized Eritrea, to the outbreak of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974—Tigray remained an economic backwater in the empire-state. While Eritrea witnessed considerable economic and social progress in the half century of Italian colonial rule, Tigray was tethered to an archaic, decaying social order. Except for the twin asphalt roads the Italians built in the late 1930s, connecting it to Asmara and Addis Ababa, there had been no meaningful development, not even the construction of a single factory. Some mechanized farming was initiated as of the 1960s in the eastern and western plains but on a limited commercial scale. Between fifty thousand and a hundred thousand peasants worked for three to six months yearly at agricultural plants outside the province; these were Tigray's "half-proletarianized" laborers, who remained rooted in the rural economy. The region's principal exports, mainly to Eritrea, were skin and hides, chickens and eggs, incense and gum, sesame, and a few other agricultural products. Of the estimated population of two million in the 1960s, less than 3 percent lived in towns; the stratum of merchants, teachers, students, and civil servants constituted a tiny fraction of that. The population of the largest city, Mekele, the capital, was only forty-seven thousand.[1] There was no extensive economic disruption as in Eritrea. Few peasants lacked the material conditions of production, but landlessness was quite prevalent.

Tigray was overwhelmingly rural and abjectly poor. Spread across an area of roughly 102,000 square kilometers but mainly concentrated in the pleasant climate of the central highland area were peasants whose ancestors had cultivated the communally held land for more than two thousand years. These farmers tilled parcels of land rarely exceeding a hectare, using plows and draft animals to eke out a livelihood that bordered on mere subsistence. They lived in widely dispersed villages of mud huts with conical thatched roofs and wooden or stone fences, markers of their individuality. Unrestricted parceling of their farm plots on grounds of inheritance, as well as continuous cultivation of the plains, hills, and valleys, had denuded the land, in some cases almost irreparably. Except for the western lowlands, where the climate is generally inhospitable, and the southern zone, Tigray's topography is virtually treeless and water generally scarce.

The decline in subsistence was closely tied with the degradation of the land. Already by the late nineteenth century, the provincial peasantry was impoverished owing to a combination of scarce arable land, civil wars, and recurrent famines, conditions that one European traveler after another captured evoca-

tively.[2] Poverty was the result of not merely neglect by a nondevelopmentalist state but lack of resources. If the state shifted its attention southward, it was because most of the extractable resources were to be found there.

One major result of increasing poverty was migration. The physically able and intrepid went north to Eritrea and south as far as Harar and Jimma. Gabre Hiwet Baykedagn, with his characteristic eloquence, lamented the pitiable state into which his place of birth had fallen and the scorn to which its children were subjected. "Poverty has reigned in the land," he wrote, "and the youth have dispersed to the four corners of the land [earth] like leaderless bees." His people, he said, were derided for their poverty.[3] In both Eritrea and Ethiopia, Tigrayan became synonymous with destitution. Eritrea's elites were particularly crude in their stereotyping. Those Tigrayans who succeeded through education or sheer hard work were treated with bemused admiration, envy, and distrust. Like colonized people, some of them internalized the contempt in which they were held and sought redress through assimilation into the dominant culture, Amharanizing their names from Adhana to Adane, Hadush to Addis, Kahssay to Kassaye. No wonder Wallelign Makonnen thought that to appear or become Ethiopian (national) one had to wear the "Amhara mask." For some, though, the answer lay in self-affirmation through restoration of the past and through cultural resistance. The grounds for such resistance were established in the early stages of the historical evolution of the modern Ethiopian state.

The first Tigrayan intellectual to invoke ethnicity as a political factor was Gabre Hiwet, otherwise a passionate and earnest Ethiopian. Though critical of the provincial elite's tendency to place responsibility on Menelik for all the ills of their region, even he conceded, "In one respect, however, Menelik is to blame. He failed to regard the Tigrayans as his own people. . . . A king who is indifferent to whether the Tigrayans prosper or perish is bound to pay for it. . . . [Tigre] is the foundation of Ethiopia. And of all the peoples of Ethiopia, it is the Tigrayans who should wish the Ethiopian state a long life."[4]

Gabre Hiwet may not have anticipated it, but three generations later criticism sharpened and opposition to the political class became more strident, spawning the most important political and cultural movement to transform rural Tigray. There were two strands of thought. Menelik's misdeeds, some Tigrayan members of the Ethiopian intelligentsia argued, were a matter not merely of neglect but of intention to ruin the region by destroying its dynasty and unity. If not for Menelik's collusion with the Italian colonists to break Tigray up and his periodic military forays into the region, they claimed, Tigray would not have been so impoverished. Those who advanced this view glorified Aksumite civilization and history, to which Tigray was the direct and rightful claimant, and looked to

the recovery of its culture. They saw Tigray as Shewa's colony and predictably concluded that independence or national exclusiveness was absolutely indispensable to the region's material, cultural, and social renaissance. The separate identity and state they envisioned would have embraced the Tigriniya speakers of the regions to the north and south of the Merab, reviving the idea of a Greater Tigray entertained by some Eritrean elements in the 1940s and perhaps encouraged by British colonists. It gave birth to a fiercely irredentist organization called the Tigray Liberation Front (TLF).

Proponents of the other perspective, while largely sharing this aggrieved sense of history, focused on Ethiopia and its problems, arguing that Tigray's structural problems were inextricably tied to those of the rest of the country, as was its destiny. They argued that all rural Ethiopia suffered equally from the willful neglect of an absolutist monarchical state with pretensions to modernism. They debunked the idea that successive rulers from Shewa had deliberately brought about Tigray's ruin, and to rebut the notion that there was a direct correlation between economic marginalization and national oppression, they pointed to the comparable destitution of northern Shewa, heartland of the Solomonic dynasty. It was not that this group ignored the peculiar aspects of the Tigrayan predicament; rather, it saw Tigrayan identity and Trigray's past as important components of Ethiopian identity. Its understanding of ethnicity and territoriality was anchored in material conditions and class relations. Advocates of this view (including this author) joined one or the other of the multinational organizations, principally perhaps the EPRP. This basic difference remained an essential feature of Tigrayan political discourse until the rise of the TPLF and it would be resolved only through bloodshed. The TPLF, which had wavered between the two perspectives, finally and wisely abandoned the idea of independence and set out to reconcile the opposing views by proposing that self-determination was a right of the Tigrayan people (as it was of all "oppressed nationalities") but that separation was an option to be exercised only if the struggle to democratize Ethiopia failed. It has attributed its success to this "correct strategy," to a self-critical leadership and dedicated organization, and to a long-simmering national fervor driven by political, cultural, and economic grievances already enumerated.

A distinction must be made here between nationalism and ethnonationalism. Tigray was multiethnic, consisting of the eponymous and dominant linguistic group as well as the Agaw, the Afar, the Kunama, the Saho, and the half-assimilated Oromo, the Raya and Azebo. The Tigray made up over 85 percent of the total population, and what the organizers of the TPLF meant by nationalism, both in word and in action, was Tigrayan ethnonationalism. There was not

a single representative of any of the minorities among the founders and leaders of the TPLF. The organization was exclusively Tigrayan. None of the minorities' languages were employed to enhance their cultural or group identities. Self-determination meant self-determination for the majority.

The claim that Tigrayan group consciousness predates the rise of a modern state with its own paradigm of development and that the provincial revolts of 1943 and 1975 were concrete and interconnected expressions of that nationalism is also not tenable. Given Tigrayans' long history in a relatively compact territory with linguistic and cultural uniformity and their inheritance of a "glorious past," it is not at all surprising that they are the most provincial of all Ethiopians. But is regionalism equivalent to nationalism? Hardly. Tigrayans do not seem to have imagined themselves as distinct from others, particularly the Amhara, although as the descendants of Aksumite civilization the dominant social class of Tigrayan society was always conscious of its distinguished identity. Its continuing rivalry with the Shewan dynasty through the nineteenth century would have only heightened that consciousness. Indeed, there was an anti-Shewan sentiment on the part of the defeated provincial gentry, who tried to impart an ethnic element to the peasant revolt of 1943 known as Weyane. It is also undeniable that in the 1960s a section of the incipient petite bourgeoisie—mainly teachers, students, and civil servants—put considerable effort into reviving the Tigriniya written language and culture. That Tigrayan expressions of cultural identity were more evident than those of any of the other nationalities of the empire-state was due in part to the Tigrayans being the closest group, ethnically and culturally, and to their dynastic leaders having been the most vociferous rivals of the Shewan Amhara ruling elite.

Yet most Tigrayans, who were peasants, had little concept of their nationality. More than 90 percent of the population were illiterate farmers and pastoralists who lived in isolated villages, each governed by a backward tradition of the spoken word. It was a world without roads, schools, newspapers, or postal and telegraph services. The world beyond the boundaries of the village and its parish was another country. Given the limited contact peasants had with either the state or other ethnic communities, they had little awareness of a social identity or collective destiny that transcended their rural communities.[5]

There were at least four additional reasons for the slow crystallization of Tigrayan ethnonationalism. First, since the province was governed by direct descendants of the emperor Yohannes IV, provincial grievances were often against the nearest authority rather than the distant kings; as far as the peasants were concerned, the Amhara who controlled the state belonged to a different country. Second, extended rivalries between families, and the consequent district and

subdistrict divisions, were detrimental to the growth of Tigrayanism. Third, except in the southern and western extremities, there was no "foreign" absentee landlordism that might have fed and reinforced national antagonism. Finally, the rise of a petite bourgeois Eritrean nationalism that rejected its Aksumite ties and viewed Tigrayans as impoverished and backward hampered the growth of an all-Tigrayan consciousness. The TLF's contention that there cannot be a Tigrayan nationalism that does not incorporate its kin across the Merab appears to be historically and theoretically more sensible than that of the TPLF, which saw the Eritreans as a colonized people, with a different history and a distinct identity, deserving of their own state.

There was no nationalism before the growth of an educated urban intelligentsia, and no direct connection between the revolts of 1943 and 1975 motivationally, ideologically, or organizationally. Tigrayan ethnonationalism was nurtured in the heat of a revolutionary war waged by a new social stratum of urban origin, and the history of that war is largely its own history. The rebellion of 1943 was confined to one half of the province and it sought only to redress what appeared to the peasants as localized woes and miseries.[6] And the memory of Weyane was as divisive as it was unifying. It is astonishing that an ethnonationalist movement started not in the historic heartland of Tigray but on its eastern margins, among the Raya/Azebo Oromo, but that may not be as astonishing as that the Raya/Azebo and Wajirat, who instigated the revolt, remained largely indifferent or hostile to the "Second Weyane" (*Kala'ay Weyane*), as the 1975 revolt is called by its makers. Part of the reason was their bitter memories of betrayal; the other part was that the Raya/Azebo are ethnically and culturally different from the dominant group. That in 1975 they regained lands that had been confiscated by the prerevolutionary regime for their anti-state activities was yet another reason for their not enthusiastically embracing the movement. Another interesting aspect of the First and Second Weyane dialectic is that many, if not most, of the leading elements of the armed struggle were the children and grandchildren of those who opposed the 1943 revolt and took part in its brutal suppression or who stood aside until the winner was known. Where is the historical continuity of nationalist resistance? It did not matter. The TPLF was in search of a foundational myth and the 1943 uprising provided it.

The movement that began in 1975 was an outcome of the social contradictions created by a modernizing autocratic regime. It was a direct response to the unequal development, social repression, and cultural alienation that characterized imperial Ethiopia. Ethnicity was, in part, manipulated to serve the political and material interests of a new and disgruntled social group. To politicize and mobilize ethnic identity, this group evoked a history of conquest, incorporation,

and consequent "exploitation." The glory of Aksum and the heroism of the 1943 rebels, both symbolized in the TPLF's flag, were marshaled to soothe the pain of the present, to arouse the masses, and to validate the current struggle. Tigrayan self-awareness, which had become more pronounced subsequent to the Eritrean insurgency and the rise of a radical student movement, cohered in the wake of civil war. This is not to suggest that Tigrayan social identity was an artificial invention popularized and legitimized by armed conflict. It is rather to stress that the reasons for the emergence of a creative and manipulative social movement were to be found more in the material basis of a unitary state than in a primordial ethnic identification with notions of exclusion from state power and the resources it controlled.

The political success of the insurgent leadership lay in its ability to bridge the gap between its own political ambitions and the material needs of the population. In other words, the ethnonationalist movement was propelled to victory by a combination of the insurgent leaders' frustrated political and educational expectations and popular hopes for the abolition of socially repressive conditions. The irony of imperial educational policies was that they simultaneously promoted and thwarted the aspirations of Ethiopian youth. As the competition for education, jobs, and other economic opportunities intensified by the 1960s, the competitors deployed ethnic symbols to advance their material and political interests. They marshaled historical, ethnic, regional, and occasionally farfetched theories of colonialism to account for the people's deprivation and to legitimize the armed struggles in Afar, Oromia, Ogaden, and elsewhere that purportedly would inaugurate a new era of prosperity and equality. In this manner, the commissars who initiated the revolt were able to mobilize the Tigrayans across class and geographic boundaries.

Three things need to be pointed out. First, the TPLF was a byproduct of the Ethiopian student movement, and many of its leaders were inspired by the same idealistic and egalitarian ideas of social change. Second, the TPLF tapped into a powerful feeling of alienation among many of the modern sectors of society—the urbanites—from the central authority, which they saw as distant and unconcerned yet exploitative. Third, the above analysis does not devalue the centrality of language and culture as independent driving or motivating forces for such social movements; as the histories of Basque and Catalan nationalism in Spain attest, for instance, poverty or economic marginalization is not the only reason for the rise of autonomist or separatist nationalisms. Economic prosperity can be not only an antidote to nationalism but its springboard. That said, if political power and material entitlement were the Tigrayan and Eritrean insurgents' goals, it was war by which they attained them.

If we put aside the inevitability that historical events acquire when viewed in retrospect, Tigray was not in a revolutionary ferment in the 1970s. Indeed, the usual ingredients of revolt—poverty, oppression, alienation—were there, but not necessarily the subjective awareness of them. As the population expanded, land holdings per capita steadily shrank. There was also a steady decline in the total area of land under cultivation. Poverty was rampant, unemployment high, and official corruption ubiquitous. These depressing conditions had long existed and the peasantry had resigned itself to them since the violent suppression of the 1943 rebellion. Economic problems rarely explode into revolutionary wars without widespread political awareness. There is no evidence that there was any such social consciousness in Tigray. A revolutionary war arose from the organized will of a few radical urban intellectuals, not from the grievances of the agrarian population. It took sustained political work to harness and mobilize the peasantry. Ultimately, then, the decisive elements in the success of the revolutionary struggle were a committed and robust leadership, the active support of a mobilized population, the dedication and tenacity of the fighters, and the leadership's ability to make ethnic and territorial ties more attractive than class loyalty. Only by transforming provincialism into peasant ethnonationalism were the insurgents able to lead their movement to victory.

Although there were feuds and splits within the movement, there was nothing on the scale of those that characterized the Eritrean resistance. Tigray was more ethnically and religiously homogeneous than Eritrea. It also did not have the social fissures of urban Eritrea. Like all such nationalist movements, the TPLF conceived of itself as a unity of all social classes except for the "comprador bourgeoisie" and the "feudalists." The first was virtually nonexistent, and scarcity, not concentration, of land was the main problem of the Tigrayan peasantry. Ethnic and social homogeneity facilitated mass mobilization. The nationalists used strident anti-Shewan rhetoric and appeals to Tigrayanism, which they buttressed with historical memory of resistance; they also championed vague socialist ideals that stressed justice and self-reliance. Understandably, people were confused (although not distracted) by the socialist ranting since the insurgents and the revolutionary soldiers seemed to mimic each other.

TPLF: FORMATION AND SURVIVAL, 1975–78

The history of the TPLF can be divided into three phases. The first (1975–78) was one of formation and survival in a multisided conflict. The second (1979–87) was a period of consolidation and steady growth in the face of the many military campaigns waged to quash it. And the third (1988–91) saw a transition to

mobile warfare that led to total military victory in the province and subsequent seizure of state power.

A few years before the revolutionary upheaval, the national university in Addis Ababa had become a breeding ground for ethnically based student organizations. Two of them were the Political Association of Tigrayans (PAT) and the Tigrayan National Organization (TNO), which in about a year transformed themselves into the Tigray Liberation Front (TLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), respectively. They became deadly rivals, initiating internecine conflicts that involved two other organizations: the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU). They all arrived in the province at about the same time. They had not chosen Tigray because it was ripe with revolutionary promise. In fact, the province was remarkably tranquil. There were absolutely no signs of unrest.

The province was selected as a revolutionary terrain for two other reasons: its proximity to Eritrea and the fact that some of the prominent leaders of the EDU and EPRP were Tigrayans. None of the organizations had carefully studied the situation in the province or done significant preparatory political work. They went there believing that violence would unleash a hurricane that would quickly sweep away the fledgling military government in Addis Ababa. That idea—derivative of fascism—was an illusion.

The TNO, established in September 1974, abruptly transmuted itself into the TPLF in February 1975 when the TPLF hastily decided to start the armed struggle. The time and place for initiating the struggle were decided after only a few days of deliberation. "For more than a week," wrote one of its principal architects, "most of the TNO leaders . . . had been discussing and making preparations for *when, how and where to start the long-awaited war.*"[7] The haste was to prevent the other organizations from gaining ground in the home province. And the choice of Dedebit, a no-man's-land about sixty-five kilometers west of Indasilase, capital of Shire district, as the site of a new base was made solely on the recommendation of Gessesse Ayele, a man of fame and influence who had chosen to join the movement at a rather advanced age and under a new name, Sihul.[8] Relying on his renown and his intimate knowledge of the geographical and cultural characteristics of the lowlands, where he had once operated as a sort of social bandit, a group of eleven inspired, idealistic, adventurous, and ambitious men armed with a few old rifles, left Indasilase on the night of February 18, 1975, to launch the people's war they called the Second Weyane.[9]

They ranged in age from twenty to fifty-seven, but most of them were young. Sihul, the oldest, was a father figure.[10] Except for Sihul, his brother Berhane (Fitewi) Ayele, and Asghede Gabre Selassie, a former enlistee in the Ethiopian

army, all were university students and none had any military knowledge or been to the region before. It took them two nights to get to the sun-scorched hills of Dedebit. The bemused and suspicious villagers living nearby, who apparently had never heard about "the Tigrayan struggle which had been simmering for decades," would certainly have turned against them if not for Sihul's presence and wise arbitration.[11] It took lengthy and intense negotiations to win the people's consent and, more important, their support. And the more than forty men who had been sent for three months of military training with the EPLF returned safely in May, bringing with them Mehari (Mussie) Tekle, an Eritrean fighter of Tigrayan descent. He would prove a dynamic and inspiring military commander during the first critical year, earning the enduring love and esteem of his comrades.[12]

After six months of bargaining and politicization, a primary base of social support was established in the thinly inhabited wilderness of western Shire, and, but for lack of arms, the returnees were set to ignite "the long-awaited war." The EPLF had donated some guns and ammunition but far too little. To augment its supply, the TPLF ransacked the police station and the only bank in Aksum on New Year's Day, when the public and private security forces were distracted by the festivities. They got away with seventy-two rifles, lots of ammunition, and Eth. $190,000 (US $92,000).[13] The news of this audacious operation spread quickly for Aksum was on the Asmara-Gondar road between Adwa and Indasilase. As this verse reveals, it elevated morale and aroused unrealistic expectations for a quick victory:

> You, Tigray the beautiful,
> How firm is the Shewan hold on you?
> Well, this year will tell.[14]

It would be many years before the outcome of the simmering armed conflict between center and periphery could be known, but the struggle for "liberation" had begun in earnest. It would be tortuous, marked by internal discord, betrayals, desertions, and bloody skirmishes with other armed groups.

Between 1975 and 1978, Tigray was a hotly contested territory, the TLF, TPLF, EDU, and EPRP vying for power at either the local or the national level. All were opposed to the central authority and to one another. Following the demise of the old regime, the repressive organs of the state had been severely undermined and the civilian bureaucracy in Tigray nearly neutralized in the wake of its hereditary ruler's flight to the Sudan. It was into this near-empty political space that the armed rivals jumped, seeking to gain control. Suddenly, the people were trapped in the midst of political groups whom they did not know

but who wanted their cooperation and allegiance; to use the popular expression, the peasants were caught "between two fires" (*ab mengo kilte hawee*)—the state on one side and its opponents on the other.

The first clash was between the fronts representing the two faces of Tigrayan ethnonationalism. Both the TLF and the TPLF sought Tigrayan self-affirmation but in different and conflicting ways. The TLF's foolish objective was to establish an independent Tigray that would merge with the southern highland plateau of Eritrea to form a Greater Tigray at some indeterminate point in the future. This goal was based neither on close study of the economic and social realities in the territories nor on the expressed wishes of the two peoples. After initial vacillating between autonomy and independence (outlined in the so-called Manifesto of 1976), the TPLF sensibly settled on self-determination within a unitary but democratic Ethiopian state. The TLF apparently had no specific base; it operated in the Adwa-Agame area, close to the Eritrean border and in collusion with the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), whose field of maneuvers extended as far south as Sheraro in the western lowlands of Tigray. As the negotiations for amalgamation were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual distrust and subversion, they were fruitless. The TLF vanished from the scene following the brutal murder of its top leadership by the TPLF.[15] Defeating the other rivals was a lot more difficult. The first confrontation was with the monarchist party, the EDU.

The EDU was a counterrevolutionary force led by a triumvirate at the head of which was the former prince and governor of Tigray, Mengesha Siyum.[16] Initially known as *Ternafit* ("Unifier," or "Centralist" in Tigriniya), the EDU was supported by many governments opposed to the revolution. The United States and Saudi Arabia gave financial and quiet diplomatic assistance, and the government of the Sudan provided light and heavy gear, a radio station, and a rear base. The EDU's army was drawn from among Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan, migrant workers displaced from the nationalized commercial farms at Humera and Metemma, and destitute peasants from northern Gondar and western Tigray. After six weeks of rudimentary training in ground combat, the raw recruits were dispatched across the border with promises of monetary rewards, land, ample provisions, and an easy march to Addis Ababa. They were led by former officers of the Ethiopian army, Amhara and Tigrayan nobles, and bandits who knew the geography of northern Ethiopia well. An easy victory over a military outpost at Humera seemed to confirm the boasts of their leaders, who also berated the Tigrayan rebels, calling them *deki hirkam* ("children of whores").[17] That class arrogance may have led them to underestimate a rival who turned out to be clever and powerful despite initial setbacks.

More numerous and by far better equipped, the mixed group of warriors swept

into western Tigray, routing the young guerrillas in June 1976. Sihul was lost in the first encounter, at Adiabo, and Mussie in the second, at Chaamaskabat.[18] The loss of its trusted commanders was psychologically devastating to the TPLF, and those of fluid convictions and faint hearts fled, depleting an infant organization.[19] The EDU appeared unstoppable, but happily for the TPLF its overeager fighters made the mistake of attacking a well-fortified army unit near Indasilase. Battered, the survivors retreated to the Sudan, returning, however, with heavier weapons such as mortars and short-range artillery. The TPLF wisely changed its tactic to guerrilla warfare, striking in bands of as many as fifty. The switch was effective.

Lacking reliable logistic support or a cause more elevated than personal advancement, the EDU's men lost strength, direction, coordination, and discipline. They began to pillage, rape, and kill indiscriminately, alienating the terrorized peasants, many of whom were quick to shift allegiance to the TPLF. Its manpower growing, the TPLF slowly gained the upper hand, seizing more and more weapons from its opponent. After many more encounters, it succeeded in pushing most of the EDU's fighters across the Tekezze into Wolkait and from there into the Sudan by the end of 1978.[20] The party of monarchists and counterrevolutionaries was permanently ejected from Tigray early that year.[21] Scores of die-hard supporters remained in the towns and a few hundred fighters resisted in Gondar until the final days of the military dictatorship.

Before the TPLF was done with its deadly rival on the western front, however, it was pressed hard on the eastern front by the EPRP, the other multinational but revolutionary party. Founded in 1972 in Berlin and with two dozen men trained with the help of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) in Lebanon, it established a guerrilla base at Assimba, in the northeastern Agame district of Tigray, in 1975.[22] What made Assimba particularly attractive was its mountainous terrain, its proximity to southeastern Eritrea, where the EPLF, a supporter then, was dominant, and the fact that two of the party's stalwarts, Tesfay Debessay and Zeru Kihshen, were from the area and had secured the undeclared support of Fitawrari Tesfay Tessema, a notoriously rebellious person highly influential among his people, the Irob.

The essential differences between the EPRP and TPLF were carryovers from the Ethiopian student movement. The EPRP maintained that "narrow nationalism" was divisive, whereas a unified struggle under the guidance of a "proletarian" or Marxist-Leninist party—that is, the EPRP—would lead to the eradication of both class and national oppression. The TPLF, on the other hand, insisting that, even though national oppression was an aspect of class domination, it was the paramount contradiction of the times, called on all nationalities

to wage a similar struggle in their own "national" territories. A voluntary alliance of these national organizations would democratically reconfigure the national state. The TPLF demanded that the EPRP vacate the Tigrayan national territory, to which the EPRP retorted that it was its right to struggle everywhere in the country, including, of course, Tigray. It advised the TPLF to abandon its narrow outlook and join the national struggle as its junior partner. Halfhearted negotiations led to a dead end, for each side demanded more than it was willing to concede. Using evasive language, each made pledges it had no genuine intention of keeping. The TPLF was understandably stalling until it thwarted the threat on its western front and dealt with its own internal discord. The stage was set for another bloody confrontation and an enduring legacy of embitterment.

It is impossible to establish who exactly fired the first shots. Indeed, the parties have continued to argue the point. It appears, however, that the EPRP may have been spurred by the TPLF's double bind to strike at a time it thought propitious. It made a dramatic tactical miscalculation. Scattered clashes escalated into major encounters at Ayga and then Sobaya on February 23, 1978. The TPLF was immediately driven out of Agame but stemmed the tide in Adwa. It brought some of its battle-hardened fighters from the west and, in a fierce counterattack, routed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army (EPRA) at Bizet and then Inticho on March 23, chasing it back to Assimba, which the TPLF captured after a battle that lasted five days.[23] About fifteen EPRA fighters made it to Gondar and more than five hundred crossed into ELF-controlled parts of Eritrea. Their automatic weapons were confiscated, and, after a forced stay of five months under unpleasant conditions, the men and women were freed. Many chose to flee to the West through the Sudan, while a good number proceeded to Gondar to join their comrades still committed to continuing the struggle. Although subsequent squabbles led to further splits and desertions, the EPRP did not desert the terrain of armed struggle until its total defeat at the hands of the EPRDF in 1991 in Gondar and Gojjam.[24]

The TPLF established its exclusive claim to the province by tooth and claw. Government indecision was a helpful factor. Preoccupied with the twin threats of Somali aggression and Eritrean insurgency and distracted by "anarchism" in the cities, the Derg paid insufficient attention to the TPLF until the end of the 1980s. Even after it crushed the Somalis in 1978, it remained fixated on Eritrea under the correct but illusory assumption that the Tigrayan rebellion would not survive without the Eritrean resistance, for the two were inextricably tied. As Mengistu would later ask rhetorically, "What would happen if Tigray becomes independent? What could Tigray do as long as we kept Eritrea?"[25] The problem was that the military could not defeat the Eritreans. Insurgencies are most

vulnerable at the formative stage, but the government never seriously tried to exploit the schism between the warring parties or even the serious rift within the TPLF. Meanwhile, the insurgency established itself firmly among the populace from whom it became impossible to supplant or uproot them.

It is noteworthy that, at a time when it was being nudged by its opponents, the TPLF faced its first serious internal crisis, which threatened to tear it apart. That it remained intect was due to quick and merciless suppression of dissent. According to the official narrative, the main cause of the rift was localism. In an ironic twist, members from the eastern districts—that is, the children of the instigators of the First Weyane—complained of being excluded from or underrepresented in the leadership of the Second Weyane. They were accused of fabricating a problem in order to create chaos that would have crippled and possibly destroyed the movement.[26] The unofficial view alleges that localism was concocted by the leadership itself (a) to deflect criticism of the lack of democratic process, (b) to quash the idea that merit, not loyalty, should be the sole criterion for selection or promotion to the various organizational departments, and (c) to silence the call for punishment of an individual whose cowardice led to an aborted operation at Adwa and the consequent death of a fighter.[27] Whatever the case, twenty-eight of the dissidents may have been executed and twelve pardoned after they recanted, according to state intelligence.[28] The suppression of internal disputes may have guaranteed the continuity of the movement, but it had a dilatory effect on democratic process. Populist democracy yielded to elitist centralism.

GROWTH AND ASCENDANCY, 1979–89

The TPLF used the hiatus between the end of the triple armed conflict and the start of "search and destroy" campaigns by the government to consolidate its new base at Sheraro, to reshape its organizational structure, to build up its combat force, and to expand its social base. High in the order of things was the need to become more self-reliant so as to lessen the burden on the agrarian population. That goal became more achievable in the new location. Sheraro is located about 120 kilometers off the main road in the lowlands of Shire. It is a broken land of hills, cliffs, and plains that stretches for up to thirty kilometers from north to south; the climate is hot but the soil comparatively fertile. In the 1960s, the state and a few entrepreneurs had pioneered mechanized farming there, but the promising experiment was prematurely disrupted by the revolutionary crisis. The front resuscitated the area's economy by reclaiming the cultivable land to produce cereals such as corn and sorghum as well as cash crops, especially sesame.

And following its organizational conference in 1979, it reorganized the province from four command zones into three, stretching its political and military activities into neighboring regions. There was no shortage of manpower. The Red Terror had driven thousands of urban youth into its protective arms, and there was an influx of peasant recruits in the aftermath of the front's dazzling success over its rivals.

Despite claims to the contrary, peasant reaction to the revolt was neither spontaneous nor pervasive. Rural response actually varied from passive to active support or opposition. Popular mood continually oscillated. Most peasants wished to be left alone, but they were swayed by the shifting balance of forces like the wise Chinese bamboo tree that bends with the prevailing wind. They frequently found themselves squeezed between two unattractive forces. There is irrefutable evidence that peasants complained of being harassed or punished by both sides. The guerrillas accused them of informing for the army, which was even crueler in punishing them for allegedly abetting the rebellion. Villagers saw their property destroyed and their women ravished by ill-disciplined soldiers. Only when they were certain of protection would peasants openly support one side or the other. Not until the mid-1980s did the majority of the rural populace rally behind the front.

The rebels used two contradictory approaches to arouse, politicize, and mobilize the peasantry: persuasion and intimidation. The preferable method was continuous dialogue and a promise to eliminate national, class, and gender inequalities, to provide the basic necessities of life—schools, roads, health clinics, potable water, food—and popular self-government.[29] The rebels also resorted to subtle exploitation of the peasants' justified hostility to authority and their frustrations and ambitions. The rebels' message was simple and direct: Tigray was poor and undeveloped because of its historical domination, suppression, and exploitation by Amhara rulers from Shewa and their local feudal collaborators. Without breaking the chains of subjugation, it was impossible to end poverty and restore national dignity. An autonomous Tigray would be able to determine its own destiny freely and collectively. Under the dedicated leadership of the TPLF, they added confidently, "We shall develop our Tigray and bring it to prosperity even with our bare hands."[30] The rebels took to heart Mao's saying "Where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish itself." The most effective way to convey a simple message to a largely illiterate population was to use posters, cartoons, and drama. When such calibrated indoctrination did not persuade, psychological coercion, social exclusion, and even terror were applied.

The manipulative techniques varied from the simple and crude to the sophis-

ticated and cruel. All too frequently sexual stereotypes were used to humiliate, anger, or force acquiescence. Three examples help to illustrate.

- In a brief drama a dejected poor woman is sitting in front of her dilapidated hut. Her son of about fourteen asks why she is so mournful. She tells him that his father was brutally killed by the Derg and exhorts him to avenge his death by joining the people's struggle. She hands him his father's gun. The response is predictable. The boy accepts the rifle and kisses his mother goodbye to thunderous applause. This spectacle was made into a video and widely circulated both at home and abroad.
- A woman holding an infant appears on a platform and challenges her husband to come take their child, for she is joining the front. Kalashnikov in hand, she promises him they will meet again after liberation. Visibly embarrassed, the husband obliges, and the audience erupts in an orchestrated show of approval.
- Young female fighters in khaki shorts, with automatic rifles slung across their shoulders, encounter a group of young boys whom they chide by saying, "You are still at home with your *mothers* while the girls are fighting out in the fields with the *men*?" Their manhood questioned, these malleable teenagers, it was hoped, would flock to the movement in shame.[31]

Ostracism, coercion, and violence were other means of mobilization. Ambivalent, reluctant, or wavering peasants were warned sternly that they "could not hope to live in a land liberated with the blood of others." The intent was to make them feel guilty for abjuring the struggle and fearful of the future. Those suspected of sympathizing with or supporting the Derg, the EDU, or the EPRP were often excluded from communal activities and shunned by their parishes. Unscrupulous priests scolded or even excommunicated them for allying with a "godless government" and abandoning their "own children." The more belligerent were not only excluded from the community and the land redistribution process but subjected to merciless vilification as unpatriotic Tigrayans. Some were secretly murdered.[32]

With its mass base consolidated and with five years of combat experience, the TPLF was well prepared to wage a people's war. From 1980 to the end of 1987, the TPLF was on the tactical offensive and strategic defensive. Its focus was on self-preservation by diminishing the government's initiative and hindering its sweeps. By remaining defensively active, the insurgents sought to lengthen the period that state forces themselves had to remain on the defensive so that war weariness would take its toll on their morale. All the while, the rebels fortified

their strategic base, expanded their zones of operation, kept building their combat and supporting forces, mobilized, organized, and politicized the population, established shadow administrative structures, and set up units or committees of production in the areas under their control.

Their basic operational tactics conformed to the classic requirements of guerrilla warfare. Adhering fairly strictly to Mao's principles, they avoided the adversary when he advanced in strength, harassed him when he rested, attacked him when he looked tired, and chased him when he retreated in haste. In other words, they sought to wear him down by denying him any respite. Their tactical maneuvers depended on speed, surprise, flexibility, and evasion. They employed few fighters, changed camp every night to avoid detection, and aimed for maximum success with the lowest possible risk and with the least difficulty in disengaging. Light portable weapons were key. The guerrillas fought a war without frontiers, moving in small groups of thirty to forty at a speed twice that of the regular troops, forty to sixty kilometers a day, mostly at night. They avoided large concentrations for fear of air strikes, especially from the terrifying MI-24 helicopters. Because of their constant movement and surprise attacks, the guerrillas seemed to be everywhere and nowhere. Although ubiquitous, they were hard to locate as they so easily blended into the civilian population.[33] Like the EPLF, they depended on the camel for transport but also on the donkey and especially the mule. Like the camel, the mule can navigate hilly, craggy terrain carrying more than a hundred kilograms, and its food needs are very simple. Northern Gondar was its natural habitat.

The rebels relied on accurate, timely information, secrecy, patience, their intimate knowledge of a landscape that generally did not lend itself to mechanized warfare, the support of the people, their incredible hardiness and stamina, and an extraordinary talent for improvisation. Camaraderie was strong: fighters saw to one another's needs, sometimes risking their lives by throwing themselves before a grenade to save a comrade or volunteering to clear mined fields.[34] These were people who had subordinated their individual ambitions to the common goal of the movement and there were few cracks that the enemy could take advantage of. Skillful marksmen with the ability to hit targets at more than five hundred yards, they were fearless in retrieving their wounded. They attacked the army at vital, vulnerable points, exploiting the slightest gaps in its formations with superior forces and lightning speed. They usually lured or forced the army into dispersing its forces, which they then attacked, or they engaged it on battlefields advantageous to them. The front would move units back and forth and between points to give the impression that its force was larger than it actually was. This was a common tactic.[35]

So was ambush, convoys of tanks and trucks being easy targets on the winding roads. The guerrillas constantly harassed the army with surprise assaults against small bodies of men and isolated detachments or garrisons. The regular fighters or their auxiliaries would blow up a bridge or create an avalanche at a narrow spot to stop a convoy and then would send salvos from high ground to confuse the enemy before descending to kill and loot. The two all-important roads and supply lines running through the province were frequently disrupted in this manner, though not without a price. It appears that, although care was taken to minimize losses by avoiding superior forces, using vegetal or human camouflage, dispersion, and entrenchment, there were times when high casualties were tolerated for what seemed impossible missions or small victories. All said, however, by constantly harassing and assaulting, the guerrillas were able to instill fear in the soldiers, who did not know where and when they would be attacked.

The guerrillas' most effective technique, and one dreaded by government forces, came to be known as *qoretta* ("splitting").[36] *Qoretta* was a combination of the traditional Ethiopian mode of envelopment and Chinese and Vietnamese tactics of annihilation. Whether the operation was carried out on a small or large scale, it was a highly coordinated undertaking. When the target was a convoy, a unit of company size would bypass it and station itself at a carefully chosen place, camouflaged to block the convoy's movement at the right moment. On both sides of the road, at a distance of several hundred yards, several units would be positioned with concealed weapons. Another unit would be in the rear to prevent retreat or the aid of relief reinforcements. As the convoy was stopped by the forward unit, its main force was simultaneously attacked from the flanks and split up, its soldiers, in the confusion, often fighting one another. Casualties were retrieved, spoils (weapons, ammunition, food, clothing) were seized, and the assailants withdrew rapidly to a prearranged meeting point. They called this last maneuver *hijum* ("flocking" in Arabic), obviously a local version of the Chinese "swarming."[37] It was a technique the Vietnamese used against the French and then against the Americans, to deadly effect.

The operation was more complicated when the target was big and stationary. Normally, bands of fighters moved as close to a target as possible without risking exposure. They were dispersed into four groups. The first, as small as a platoon and armed with grenades or explosives, infiltrated enemy lines to hit and neutralize the command post. The second, equipped with heavy ordnance like automatic and recoilless rifles and mortars, was positioned to cover the retreat of a successful operation. Then two other groups, on guard to delay enemy relief attempts, would either simultaneously attack from the flanks or converge on a

narrow front to overwhelm the garrison. The reserve would cover the assaulting force with fire and wait to facilitate a retreat.[38]

Through such tactics, the TPLF was able to stymie the campaigns of suppression that began in earnest in 1979. These large-scale operations waged by several regular brigades or divisions at a time did considerable damage to the movement but failed to extinguish it. On the contrary, the rebels waxed in strength and influence after each thwarted offensive. By the TPLF's reckoning, nine such offensives were mounted between 1980 and 1988.[39] The Raza operation (the "first" to the front) and the Red Star campaign ("seventh"), however, were directed not against it but primarily against the Eritrean resistance. Strictly speaking, therefore, there were only seven punitive operations. The last and biggest of them led to the Shire fiasco in 1989, a watershed event that is narrated in chapter 9. Here a brief account is provided of how the first operation to extirpate the movement at its base was aborted. It took eight years for the TPLF to move from tactical to strategic offensive.

Operation Sheraro commenced on February 12, 1980. Its objective was to dismantle the entire infrastructure of the TPLF at its center in Sheraro. Four brigades with total manpower of over seven thousand were assigned to the task under the overall command of Colonel Tariku Ayne, commander of the Seventeenth Infantry Division. In accordance with a plan of action prepared by Tariku himself, the Thirty-fifth and Thirty-seventh Mountain Infantry Brigades, codenamed "Red Knife," moved on the left flank toward the River Sur, where the front had a subsidiary organizational base. The Thirty-eighth Mountain Infantry Brigade, or "Red Sword," departed from Adidaro on the right flank; right behind it was the 115th Brigade as reserve. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Merdassa Lelissa, they advanced for two weeks, in excruciating heat, across the rugged landscape. Many of the soldiers were barefoot and in tatters and lacked water. But meeting little resistance, the soldiers were generally buoyant; they were confident total success was within grasp. It was not meant to be.

Having ransacked and completely burned the clinics, offices, supply stores, living quarters, and cottage factories at Sur, the soldiers departed for Sheraro on February 25. But already the rebels had led the residents away to a safer place. Sheraro was empty; the soldiers found only three men, two of whom were shepherds from Hamassien, Eritrea, who had gone there to graze their cattle and were not of much help as to the whereabouts of the rebels, who had established new positions on strategic heights along a fifteen-kilometer front line to the northeast and southwest of Atserga. There the TPLF had arrayed an estimated four battalions of regular fighters and one battalion of auxiliaries. With no intelligence about them, the army made a tactical determination that led it to a blind

alley. On the twenty-sixth it moved into an open field, its sides without natural cover. Suddenly, the rebels sent rounds of fire from their secure encampments. The army was caught completely off guard. Fierce fighting began at 12:25 local time. After four hours the army rapidly dissolved; none of the four brigades under Merdassa were able to maintain any degree of order or discipline as they retreated. They had suffered heavy casualties: 117 dead, including three battalion and three company commanders, and 292 wounded, including 11 officers. Although they (over)estimated rebel losses at 380 dead, they captured only two wounded guerrillas, one of whom died in custody, and one rifle.

According to an investigative committee chaired by Brigadier General Mulatu Negash, inspector general of the army, a number of factors contributed to the defeat: difficult terrain; lack of air support; a breakdown in the chain of command that resulted from the disruption of communication caused by inoperative radios; the festering feuds between Tariku and the political commissars and between Tariku and Brigadier General Regassa Jimma, commander of Task Force 508 and chief coordinator of the Northern Command; and the removal of Tariku from his post of command just a day before the start of hostilities.[40] The lingering animosity between the two commanders would cause an even greater defeat eight years later in Eritrea.

Sheraro would not be threatened again, in part because the front relocated its base farther to the west and in part because the government was preoccupied in Eritrea and eastern Ethiopia from 1981 to 1985. But the sweeps in Tigray never ceased; only the intensity decreased. For instance, there were forays across the province in 1983 and 1985, but they achieved little.[41]

In the early 1980s, the government organized a special counterinsurgency force called the Zendo ("Dragons") composed exclusively of Tigrayans, many of them defectors from the TPLF. Numbering about two thousand, the force was based at Ila, five kilometers north of Mekele. The Dragons knew the people, the language, the culture, and the terrain of the province, served as reliable spies and guides, and fought alongside the troops until 1991. They were attached to the Sixteenth Division, the 119th Brigade of which was composed mostly of the Dragons, who had their own musical troupe. To confuse the population, they dressed much like the guerrillas and behaved like the traditional *nech lebash* ("plainclothesmen"), who were notorious for causing rural discontent and rebellion in the 1940s and 1960s. From time to time they received stipends, but their greatest reward was the right to loot and to seize livestock. They confiscated sheep, goats, and even cattle and burned the hamlets of those suspected of harboring or supporting the rebels. By terrifying the people, the Dragons increased the front's popularity and the regime's unpopularity.[42]

The continuing pressure from the Dragons and troops was largely inconsequential, but 1981 to 1985 was nevertheless a period of tribulation and multiple challenges for the TPLF; it overcame these challenges with characteristic patience, hard work, and determination. Besides the continuing government offensives, the front faced three crises: an overwhelming famine, a costly quarrel with the EPLF, and factionalism within, about which more will be said later.

Tigray had not seen famine on such a scale and with such devastation in five generations. Nearly two-thirds of the province was ravaged by drought between 1983 and 1985, and the problem was aggravated by war. Of its three million people, thirty-six thousand perished from starvation, eighty-nine thousand permanently resettled in southwestern Ethiopia, and a third were persuaded—some say coerced—by the TPLF to migrate temporarily to the Sudan; this move was dictated by the groundless fear that the government was trying to kill the fish by draining the water—that is, through resettlement.[43]

Two factors complicated or worsened the plight of the people by hampering relief efforts by foreign governments and international organizations such as the United Nation and NGOs. Under the pretext of preventing it from falling into rebel hands, the government prescribed that all aid be channeled through its own agency, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). This notorious ploy diverted food so as to feed the government's army or to sell it at prices unaffordable to those who needed it most desperately. The other obstacle was the EPLF, which took a no less vile measure to disrupt the flow of aid to the province.[44] There had been a falling out between the two insurgent organizations. It began with the TPLF's criticism of its Eritrean counterpart. Politically, it challenged the democratic credentials of the EPLF, which it alleged did not recognize the right of minorities to self-determination; after all, Eritrea, like Ethiopia, was multiethnic, composed of nine linguistic groups, all of them with the right to self-determination. From the point of view of armed struggle, the TPLF accused the EPLF of straying from the principles of people's war by becoming militaristic and rushing to engage in conventional warfare. Finally, it charged the EPLF with ideological bankruptcy for failing or refusing to denounce the role of the Soviet Union in Ethiopia as "social imperialism."

The EPLF's furious reaction can only be described as inhumane and diplomatically shortsighted. It retaliated by denying the Relief Society of Tigray, established in 1978 as an adjunct to the TPLF, safe passage through Eritrean territory to Kassala, Sudan. To gain the attention of the world, which had ignored it, the EPLF also burned sixteen UN, five Catholic Relief, and nine private trucks carrying aid to Tigray. Its antihumanitarian action earned it global infamy. The TPLF's access to Radio of the Masses was also terminated. The front's

response was equally emphatic. It mobilized tens of thousands of peasants to construct, using no more than axes, hoes, and their bare hands, an alternate road to Gedarif, on the Sudan border.[45] Within a week trucks were bringing in tons of food to hungry Tigray, winning thousands of hearts and minds. Not only did the TPLF establish a reliable supply line, but it also relocated its primary base, a decision probably made subsequent to the military's unsuccessful assault on Sheraro. Its relationship with the EPLF remained hostile until early 1988, but the armed confrontation many had anticipated with trepidation or glee did not occur.

The new base was located in the area between Dansha and Dejena, to the north of the Angereb and to the south of the Tekezze River. The hub of the front was Dejena, a strategic spot on the edge of the Kaza River in the district of Wogera. It was a well-watered stretch of land with fertile plains ringed by imposing mountains and gigantic ravines. More than half the population spoke Tigriniya and a considerable number of the other half were bilingual (Amharic and Tigriniya). The people were well known for their dissident culture. They inhabited a peripheral zone where all kinds of outlaws ordinarily sought refuge but into which state officials were loath to venture. The people famously loved guns. It was there, for instance, that the American M-16 assault rifle came to be called Imiye, or "Mother-16." The region was remote, isolated, and comparatively inaccessible to the military. From both the topographical and the cultural point of view it was an area far easier to defend than to conquer. By rallying the rebellious populace, the TPLF securely established its main command and training center, its logistical and supply depots, a hospital with a dispensary, schools, a radio station, offices with printers and copying machines, and a maintenance garage, all dispersed and mostly camouflaged.[46]

By occupying Dejena, the TPLF became more self-sufficient. With ample rainfall and rivers like the Tekezze, Angereb, Kaza, and Arina and their tributaries, northern Gondar had always been a surplus-producing region, the surplus exported largely to Eritrea. With its farms in Sheraro and Raya/Azebo added, it is believed that the front's total cultivated land exceeded 160,000 hectares. Drawing on its experience at Sheraro, the front began producing a variety of cereals and other crops on a much larger scale. It cultivated sorghum, wheat, maize, lentils, sesame, and fruits and vegetables such as papayas, tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, onions, and lettuces. It exported some of these, plus incense, livestock—especially sheep and goats—butter, and honey to the Sudan.[47] The new dusty road had become a vital route for these agricultural products and for all sorts of other supplies, such as sugar, kerosene, medicines, household utensils, and smuggled weapons. The TPLF collected taxes from merchants using the

exit and entry points. By becoming fairly self-supporting, the organization was able to ease the burden on the impoverished peasantry of the Tigrayan central plateau. It could not have chosen a better location.

Once again, the TPLF had beaten the odds with grit, ingenuity, and persistence. Undaunted by a devastating famine, the EPLF's vengefulness, and the government's punitive expeditions, it replenished its forces and built a fairly large and well-fitted, efficient army between 1985 and 1987. At the so-called Fighters Congress of February 1976 there were only 170 members, and in 1978 the front had only three battalions, mostly made up of students. Ten years later, the rebel army had grown to seven divisions of at least fifty thousand regular fighters—25 to 30 percent of whom were women—armed with a variety of small and heavy weapons.[48] Many of the female guerrillas had proven themselves first-rate fighters, and a few had risen to company-level command. With such spectacular growth, the TPLF had brought the entire province and northern Gondar, including Wolkait, Tsegedie, Beyeda, Janamora, and parts of Wogera, Dabat, Debarq, and upper Armacheho, under its control.[49] As of the end of 1987, it was engaged in mobile warfare, confining the military to Mekele. The front went on to win a dramatic victory in early 1989, an event that foreshadowed the disintegration of the army and subsequent end of the dictatorship. Its phenomenal success, like that of the EPLF, rested on a combination of a proficient organization, capable leadership, ideological zeal, good fighting skills, and mass mobilization drawing from an odd amalgam of peasant nationalism and communism.

ORGANIZATION, LEADERSHIP, IDEOLOGY

> The mountains of the land are our fortresses.
> Revolutionary zeal is our sustenance.
> Our weapons are from the enemy.
> Our resolve is in our cause.
> Our strength is in the people's army.
> Our pillar is the revolutionary people.[50]

These slogans eloquently describe the nature of the armed struggle—its theoretical and practical weapons. In its structure and nomenclature, the TPLF was largely a replica of the EPLF, its mentor. There were no substantive differences in the generic elements of the insurgent movements—organization, leadership, ideology, networks of popular support, methods of combat, techniques of propaganda, and foreign support. In both organizations the army was central to the

struggle but the party was supreme, demanding absolute conformity, fidelity, and acquiescence from its cadres, who were constantly indoctrinated in the name of political education. Both groups strictly adhered to the principles that there can be no battle without reliable intelligence and overwhelming superiority and that the civilian population, the key to success, is to be treated with care and respect, and prisoners with leniency. One reason their movements were structurally so similar is that most of the leaders of the TPLF were trained by the EPLF; none had been abroad for training.

But the two groups were not identical. As the TPLF acquired more practical experience fighting on its own terrain and within its own social and cultural milieu and as it became better acquainted with the revolutionary experiences of others, especially the Chinese and Vietnamese, it drew its own inferences. One significant difference between the organizations was in their leadership. Both were highly centralized but the leadership of the TPLF was more collegial, whereas the EPLF's has been dominated by Isaias from the outset. No individual has been as idolized or venerated as Isaias. In the TPLF there was no cult of personality—certainly not until after the Eritrean-Ethiopian war (1998–2000) and the subsequent crisis (the third) in the organization, when Meles Zenawi became its dominant figure, elevating individuals to the leadership or removing them pretty much at will.

As the organizational setup of the TPLF was the same as the EPLF's, there is no need to describe it again, except to say that the front's Secretariat, or Organizational Congress, was formed on February 24, 1979, at Mayabay. Of the twenty-five Central Committee members only one was a woman, and the eleven Politburo members were all men. The Secretariat was a small, exclusive, and therefore cohesive group. Sibhat Nega was its chairman from 1979 to 1983 and again from 1983 to 1989. His qualifications were a baccalaureate degree in the arts, seniority, and maturity. He was known for his shrewdness, patience, imperturbability, and steadfastness. Building consensus through artful persuasion and arm twisting and by presenting the conflict unambiguously as one between Shewa and Tigray, he was able to guide the movement through some of its tumultuous times. At thirty-nine he was the second oldest when he joined the movement, whose members' average age was twenty. Whereas the others addressed one another affectionately as *bitsay* and *bitsiti* ("comrade"), Sibhat was an exalted *aboy* ("Papa") to most of the fighters.[51]

Who were the other leaders? Who chose them and using what criteria? What special qualities were expected of them? One internal document throws some light on these questions:

- Has unshakable trust in and commitment to the organization.
- Is self-assured, fierce, and unwavering, ever prepared for martyrdom.
- Is visionary, clear-minded, a person who rejoices in the struggle.
- Is devoid of intellectualism, elitism, militarism, and pseudo-professionalism.
- Puts the people's interest above self-interest.
- Subordinates self to party centralism and believes in criticism and self-criticism.
- Steadfastly opposes antiorganizational behavior and deleterious social practices.
- Is skilled in handling and resolving social contradictions.
- Values comradeship above friendship and does not discriminate for petty or selfish interests.
- Thoroughly understands the nature of the enemy and serves the people first.
- Takes a principled and firm stand on critical issues and does not shirk responsibility.
- Serves as a shining example to others by readily and cheerfully accepting hardship and sacrifice.[52]

These were ideal qualities, of course, and only a few could have met the stringent criteria. Such people were discovered in the course of the struggle through a screening process that was not entirely impersonal or objective. All of the leaders had at least an elementary school education and some were university dropouts, including gifted premedical students like Meles Zenawi and Siye Abraha. Most of them had a high degree of competence and resolve. It was a disciplined, devoted, and self-assured body that operated largely by consensus. Some members of that elite group were there not by merit alone, however. In the Ethiopian cultural landscape of cunning and deviousness, one had also to be a smooth operator, subtle and supple, to promote oneself—that is, to be circumspect and capable of playing individuals or cliques off against one another, the revolutionary spirit of camaraderie notwithstanding.

Theoretically, the Organizational Congress chose the CC members, who in turn chose the executive body, or Politburo, the general secretary, and vice secretary. In practice, the assembly acted a rubber stamp, for the officers were nominated (approved) by a small and self-perpetuating group. Not a few of these men were close relatives or were connected through a web of intermarriages like the monarchical dynasties of the past. Democratic centralism ensured that real power resided in a small clique of men.

This cohesive body faced its second internal crisis at a time when the front was preoccupied with famine and a dispute with the EPLF. Political and ideo-

logical differences with regard to the peasantry and its role in a socialist revolution, military strategy, and relations with other opposition groups had been brewing since 1983. These differences were exacerbated by an internal struggle for power. Finally, in July 1985, a political party, the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT, or Malelit) was formed under the chairmanship of Abay Tsehaye, a member of the TPLF's CC and Politburo, a man respected for his intellect, knowledge of Marxism, dedication to the movement, ability to arbitrate internal disagreements, and decency—qualities that even his critics do not deny.[53] Ideologically and organizationally, the MLLT was much like the EPLF's EPRP, but unlike it the MLLT was openly known to all members of the front. It was from within the TPLF that the "reliable communists" were drafted into the party and organized in cells of five members. The MLLT had twenty-nine CC and six Politburo members. The same individuals controlled both the party and the front, but not all CC members were bona fide members of the party.

The objective of the party was to serve as a "vanguard" of the nationalist struggle for liberation and socialism. It advocated "the formation of a unitary multinational Marxist-Leninist party of Ethiopia," an idea it had bitterly opposed ten years earlier. Why the change? With an eye to state power, the party wished to outflank the EPRP (not to be confused with the EPLF's EPRP), the front's ideological enemy. Anti-imperialist, antifascist, and anti-Zionist, the party was committed not only "to spreading Marxism-Leninism throughout the world" but to opposing "all branches of revisionism (Khrushchevism, Titoism, Trotskyism, Maoism, and Euro-Communism."[54] That was an awful lot of enemies and goals, but mercifully this ultraleftist posturing was quietly abandoned six years later when the front seized state power. Such radical shifts in politics are called "principled realism," "practical idealism," or "political pragmatism." In any case, the factionalism that marked the Party's formation led to the eclipse of two of the TPLF's founding fathers, paving the way for Meles Zenawi, who, by force of intellect, will, and wiliness, would dominate the nationalist movement as no other person ever did.[55]

Meles Zenawi's rise to power was methodical and crafty. He seems to have known what he wanted and how to get it. Since 1979, when he became a member of the CC at the First Organizational Conference, Meles had been systematically charting his way to the top. First, he created a large, loyal, and adoring following by heading the school for cadres. Then he used his position as deputy head of the political committee (one of the four powerful committees, along with military, economic, and external relations) to expand his base and exert wider influence. His ambition was realized in 1989, six years after the Second Organizational Conference of May 1983, when he was elevated to the chair-

manship of both the MLLT and the TPLF, replacing Abay and Sibhat. Although Abay and Tewolde Wolde Mariam were equally respected as "theoreticians" and Siye Abraha, head of the TPLF's military committee and minister of defense (1991–95), may have been more charismatic and just as forceful, none of Meles's comrades had his immense intelligence, political acumen, extraordinary command of languages (Tigriniya, Amharic, and English), and rhetorical brilliance. Little surprise he became their most effective spokesperson, deftly steering the ethnonationalist movement to victory.

Meles has nearly all of Isaias's outstanding qualities but few of his flaws and shortcomings. Both are men of intelligence, conviction, and unbridled ambition. Fiercely independent, both are a remarkable blend of talent and resolve. They are articulate but low-keyed public speakers; neither is nearly so colorful as Fidel Castro or the late Samora Machel of Mozambique, and neither possesses Julius Nyerere's wit and poetry. Both also lack the sophistication of Amilcar Cabral, who articulated a subtle theory of liberation and is perhaps Africa's only original revolutionary thinker. They are superb purveyors of borrowed ideas, not generators. Despite their political longevity, neither Meles nor Isaias has given us an analysis of their respective revolutions that is remotely comparable to Cabral's analysis of the Guinean revolution that he so ably led until he was eliminated by Portuguese fascists. Nevertheless, Meles appears to be engaged in what promises to be a fruitful critical reassessment of the "developmental state."

There are also glaring dissimilarities between Meles and Isaias. With his imposing physique and good looks, Isaias would have been star material anywhere but chose to be a liberation fighter. An indomitable warrior, the man is a bundle of contradictions. To his admirers and devotees, he is selfless, single-minded, combative, tenacious, forthright, modest, honest, simple and informal, but dignified, a great freedom fighter with a stainless reputation. To his detractors, Isaias is a bully—insular, conceited, arrogant, disdainful, rigid, and imperious. Meles, who is shorter, has a less overbearing appearance. He is courtly and more formal. He is also amiable, deliberate, flexible, and scholarly. A master of the pithy remark, he is quick at rebuttal. Whereas Isaias seems to have a special gift for falling out with even those who mean him well, Meles is exceptionally skilled at mobilizing his supporters and isolating his enemies. Though generally calm in appearance and measured in speech, Isaias can be volatile. He is markedly more stubborn (some may say principled), less savvy, and less stable than his Ethiopian counterpart, who must be one of the most pragmatic of revolutionaries. Isaias's flaws are serious, refractory, and potentially harmful. Meles is steady, perspicacious, and unerring in his command of politics. He has earned a reputation as a shrewd politician who charms and cajoles even as he threatens or schemes so

as to bring others around to his view. His success seems to lie in his ability to appeal simultaneously to principle, politics, and self-interest—though not necessarily in that order. Although he can be priggish, often indulging in sermonizing monologues, Meles is a consummate listener as well as a perennial learner.

The prominence of these two remarkable leaders should not distract from the larger stories of two tightly knit organizations composed of tens of thousands of men and women willing to make the utmost sacrifice for their cause. The TPLF's pillars were the army and the people. The army drew its fighters initially from the schools and then from a destitute peasantry. Reasons for becoming a fighter ranged from frustrated nationalism to poverty to the simple desire to upset the status quo of patriarchy and social hierarchy. Some rebels were compelled by a higher mission and will to power, driven by a quasi-millenarian zeal. Many were undoubtedly motivated by the questionable belief that Tigray had been mistreated or trampled on by Shewan rulers. Many others found themselves trapped in a particular moment of history: they were driven by the killing machine of the Red Terror. Joining the TPLF also allowed them to steer clear of the military draft and remain near their families. In underdeveloped, impoverished regions where even the prospect of jobs was almost nonexistent and a sense of oppression and despair pervaded people's lives, such a movement provided succor and a purpose that young men found nowhere else. For poor, undereducated, jobless youth, becoming a rebel may not have seemed the worst option. And in the macho world of peasant Tigray, the possession of a gun boosted one's sense of manhood and status while it frightened or intimidated others. It is difficult to say how many were swayed by propaganda that glorified the heroism but ignored the pathos of war. For the peasants who came to constitute the bulk of the fighters escape from rural toil and poverty was the primary motivation. When the Derg prohibited the hiring of wage laborers but offered no alternative sources of employment, it created a reservoir of potential recruitment for the TPLF.

Once enrolled, the men and women were subjected to a systematic process of politicization that celebrated class and gender equality, loyalty, and compliance. They were conditioned to sacrifice all personal interest, to obey orders, to adhere to strict secrecy, and to abstain from sexual relations. This last requirement was repealed in 1985. The techniques were *gimgema* ("evaluation"), revolutionary propaganda, and military education. The ideals and demands of the revolution were continually communicated in the cadre schools and at training centers and through the front's main organ, *Weyeen* (*Revolt*), and other publications, Dimtsi Weyane ("Radio Voice of the Revolution")—perhaps its most powerful propaganda weapon—and a theater troupe.[56] Popular singers like Iyassu Berhe,

Abebe Gabremedhin, and Abrehet Abdu brought drama, melody, and verse to entertain and praise the fighters, lift their spirits, glorify the struggle and their fallen comrades, and condemn and ridicule the enemy. When political education through the commissars, propaganda, and self-criticism were not sufficient to keep the fighters in line, there was always recourse to the *Halewa Weyane* ("Defense of the Revolution"), "whose shadow was everywhere and whose long arms were merciless," according to a former member of the front.[57] The punishment for repeated serious offenses was psychological and physical torment, confinement in dark underground bunkers known as *hidmo*, or even death. Many fell under the front's axe, especially in the early years of the struggle.

Although fear was paradoxically a motivating factor, it was the abiding conviction of the validity and legitimacy of the struggle that kept the men and women going. Through constant coaching, indoctrination, and self-criticism, they were turned into faithful, zealous, staunch fighters able to withstand long sweaty days and chilly nights, unremitting hunger and thirst, and ever-present mosquitoes and leeches.[58] The insistence on absolute loyalty to the revolution, total obedience to the leadership, and personal honesty also meant that those who prevailed in the organization were the most subservient. That was the down side of centralism.

Submissive or not, TPLF fighters were as well trained, disciplined, and resolute as those of the EPLF. Basic training (*taaleem*), which was also designed to condition recruits to extended periods of hunger and fatigue and to instill genuine esprit de corps, took three to six months and up to a year for specialized skills like engineering, demolition, rocket launching, communications, and intelligence. The army was a tightly controlled, disciplined force but without a rigid hierarchical command structure. Commanders wore no marks of distinction, although they may have enjoyed some special small privileges. Theirs, too, was a frugal life. Their food and clothing were as meager as, and nearly identical to, those of the EPLF. The territory was divided into three regions—western, eastern, and southern—and the regional commanders were given full autonomy over tactical matters. The CC decided policy but did not run the battlefield. Tactics were flexible, operations patiently and rigorously planned and implemented with the utmost secrecy. Not even the fighters knew about operations until the last moment. Mistakes were constantly evaluated and corrected. Much like the EPLA, it was a nimble, light, and lethal army efficiently led by a remarkable group of talented and resolute men.

Hadush Araya exemplified those qualities. Born in 1955 at Adinebreed, in western Shire, he completed high school in Adwa but failed the national college entrance examination. Hadush was looking in vain for a job in Addis Ababa when

the revolution broke out. He joined the TPLF in 1975 as Hayelom ("Overpowering") and quickly distinguished himself as a man of courage and toughness of mind. He went from company to division commander, becoming a member of the military and central committees. His exploits are the stuff of legend. On February 5, 1985, for example, he led a group of fighters who attacked the main prison at Mekele in the early evening, setting 1,099 prisoners, most of them political, free without a single loss of life, although they killed sixteen prison guards and wounded nine soldiers.[59] The successful Agaazi operation was a huge morale booster that attracted many impressionable youths to the front and enervated the regime.

Hayelom was much loved and respected by his comrades for his ability, dynamism, fearlessness, selflessness, and generosity. One female fighter adoringly described him as an incomparable fighter, at once brotherly and fatherly. To another female comrade, Hayelom was "a small man (he was about 5′ 5″) but with a lion's heart and voice." My own impression, formed in the course of a three-hour interview in 1994, was of a bright, articulate, immensely self-assured, calm, and genial man of sincere modesty.[60] He had his critics, too; some faulted him for being reckless with other's lives, but he never spared his own body, which was so riddled with shrapnel that his comrades referred to him as the *menfit* ("sieve"). Yet there is no question of his universal popularity. No other fighter had such a mystical bond with his comrades and the people. The other person who cast a near-magical spell on the popular psyche is General Samora (Muhammad) Yunus, the current chief of staff, whom Hayelom described as "good-natured, humble, generally reserved, but tough as nails."[61] Samora is not only the first four-star general but also, and perhaps more importantly, the first Muslim four-star general in the history of the modern Ethiopian army. Revolutionary Ethiopia has come a long way indeed!

Hayelom served as MOND's chief of operations from 1991 to 1996. That brave man, who thrashed so many other brave men with his strong arm, was tragically gunned down on February 14, 1996, by an assailant whose intentions remain unknown.[62] He was posthumously promoted to major general and buried at Adinebreed, his place of birth, where a modest statue has been erected in his memory. The Holeta Military Training School has been also renamed for him. It does not include the special technical training center, which still bears the name of General Mulugeta Buli, killed by the conspirators of December 1960.

The guerrillas that the Hayeloms and Samoras led were supported by several self-defense groups whose organization and function were patterned on those of the EPLF. These were the *Kibrit* ("Matches") and *Sheeg* ("Torches") of Weyane, groomed since childhood, and the village militia called *Weyenti* ("Rebels"). The

first two were sufficiently trained and equipped to take part in combat as they performed many tasks that overlapped. They were the eyes, ears, and shields of the TPLF; they acted as police, kept tabs on bandits and criminals, "weeded out" and punished "collaborators and spies," and hunted down deserters or defectors from the front. True to their name, the Matches dismantled peasant associations, destroyed public installations, spread antigovernment propaganda, and carried out sabotage behind enemy lines and in nearby towns, creating alarm and insecurity. The Torches monitored and controlled people's movements in their villages and between villages, helped the Matches provide security, gather intelligence, recruit new fighters for the movement, prevent the dissemination of hostile propaganda in the "liberated" areas, and promote adult literacy. Both groups fought alongside the regular fighters in their own areas. Official estimates of their combined size ranged from four to five thousand. There were about forty-five group members in every subdistrict.[63] Depleted units of regulars were brought back up to strength by levying drafts from these forces.

Their services were augmented by the zonal or village militia. These were organized by the civic associations—farmers, women, youth—in groups of sixty and may have numbered as many as twenty thousand at one point or another. Lightly armed, the militia served as porters, or "transport corps," informers, and guards. They also fetched food and water and retrieved the dead and wounded whenever the guerrillas fought in their neighborhoods. They were useful in gathering information, deceiving and harassing troops, concealing weapons and supplies, and intercepting or cutting off government supply lines.[64] Then there were the children of the revolution, the *Segenat* ("Greens"), between seven and thirteen years of age. They were to the TPLF what the Red Flowers were to the EPLF. Until they became physically mature enough to join the Torches, the Matches, or the regular fighters, they served mainly as couriers and supply carriers behind the front lines. The underground agents in the towns provided intelligence, supplies, and sanctuary. The commitment of these adjunct forces helped engender among the peasants deep loyalty to the movement.

Those peasants were organized, politicized, regulated, and armed. The organizational structure stretched from the village to the district, both horizontally and vertically. The front began setting up civic associations of self-defense and production by occupation, sex, and age in 1978 at Sheraro and Zana. By 1984 there were 2,007 of them in its three administrative regions.[65] Technically, any person over sixteen was eligible to vote and to be elected to the *baitos*, or people's councils. In practice, only those approved by the front could hold office. And it preferred those who had "demonstrated an unfaltering commitment to the struggle, were willing to correct mistakes through criticism and self-criticism, did not feel

superior to others on the basis of social, ethnic, religious, and sexual distinctions, made genuine efforts to eliminate backward ideas and social customs, and were fully devoted to the eradication of illiteracy."[66] One would assume that the affiliated associations in the diaspora—Sudan, where there were more than sixty thousand refugees, the Middle East, Australia, Western Europe, and North America—were also led by such individuals, who were able to act, however, with greater independence and freedom. In reality their main functions were to spread the front's political propaganda, collect membership fees, and raise funds through solicitation of charitable organizations and a variety of cultural activities. They were willing messengers. Siyum Mesfin, one of the TPLF's founders, oversaw its external affairs until 1991, when he became Ethiopia's minister of foreign affairs, distinguishing himself as a suave and crafty diplomat.

If the people's councils were "organs of popular power," they were also instruments of control.[67] On the surface they were autonomous bodies with authority to run their own affairs, to freely institute educational and economic programs, to redistribute land, and so on. In reality, nothing was undertaken without the consent and approval of the higher authority, the front.

Several factors hobbled democratic practice. First, the exigencies of war imposed constraints on internal democracy, which was subordinated to the overriding goal of military victory. Second, people had had little or no experience of democracy, except in peripheral communities like the Wajirat, Raya, and Azebo, which were in any case rather lukewarm toward the insurgency.[68] The result of the mixture of an authoritarian tradition and Leninist centralism was antithetical to democracy. Ideological absolutism does not easily lend itself to genuine open discourse. Who can argue with people who see things with messianic certitude? Overzealous and insufficiently versed ideologues tend to lead through simple assertion, disputation, repudiation, and attack. There would be free debate within the front, in accordance with the communist or Leninist principle of "inner-party democracy," until a consensus was reached that every member had then to live by. Contrarian ideas were entertained but generally not tolerated.

The alliance between self-styled Marxist commissars and illiterate peasants was never an equal one. Ideas always dominated over numbers. As Marx tartly noted, peasants, who are usually segregated from political life, tend to depend on others for representation, and "their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them."[69] The guerrillas were good students of Mao, who taught them how to handle "contradictions among the people and with the enemy." Contradictions were to be resolved through persuasion and coercion, and the use of force to achieve liberty posed no contradiction to either teacher or student. The masses were transmitters of information

from below and the commissars passed orders from above. The leaders would have everyone express their views and would then firmly impose their own will. Nevertheless, as John Young correctly observes, for a people shut out of politics for centuries, direct involvement in the process was a big step forward; the lively open debates in the councils and other gatherings sponsored by the front and the ability to have a say in the selection of their officials gave the peasants a sense of participation in their future.[70] They felt empowered enough to embrace the movement.

But not everything they did was spontaneous or of their own free will. There was a lot of manipulation and coercion involved. Partly through inducements and partly by intimidation, the front mobilized thousands to build no less than five hundred kilometers of roads that connected the various regions with one another and with Eritrea and the Sudan. Likewise, it used massive amounts of unpaid labor to excavate a series of caves at Adigezaati, in the vicinity of Hagereselam, a hilly town on the Adwa-Tembien road fifty-four kilometers east of Mekele. Not easily detected from the air, the caves served as shelters and the main headquarters of the Politburo during the last days of the armed struggle. In July 1994, I visited a group of these caves. Invisible until one got there, they were located on an extremely rugged, rocky landscape to the northeast of the town that slopes down into sharp valleys and escarpments. The three caves, separated by about ten meters, consisted, if I remember correctly, of seven rooms about ten meters high with cement floors. They served as bedrooms, an office for the chairman, and a conference room complete with chairs, a large table on which military maps were still spread, a telephone, table lamps, shelves, and a small library. Outside was a shower. Compared with the accommodations that ordinary fighters endured, these caves can only be described as fairly comfortable, and they signaled the wide gulf that would separate the groups once they got to the cities, particularly Addis Ababa. The facility was guarded by Zeru Hailu, a middle-aged man and a forgotten veteran of the Ethiopian-Somali war of 1977. He told us that there were similar caves on the southern side and that it would have taken us about four hours by foot to get to the front's clandestine radio station.[71] Willingly or not, the masses were the pillar of the movement in nearly all its activities. But for ultimate victory the front relied additionally on other political forces.

Independence was out of the question, but an organization that had been waging an exclusively ethnic struggle could not hope to seize power in the multinational state of Ethiopia all by itself. In the face of rapidly changing national and international conditions, the TPLF made a strategic change. That change entailed the establishment of a united front with existing political movements

operating in the neighborhood to the south, a tactical reconciliation with the EPLF, and a precipitous abdication of Marxism and its adulterated version in the "thoughts" of Enver Hoxha of Albania, who had rejected Soviet and Chinese communism as unorthodox and heretical.

The first objective was realized in 1986 with the establishment of an alliance with the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM). Founded in November 1980 by deserters from the EPRP, the EPDM had grown steadily as a multinational movement under the tutelage of the TPLF in northern Gondar and Wello.[72] However, in what can only be described as extraordinary political acrobatics, the EPDM ethnicized itself by becoming the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) in 1991. It claimed to represent the newly formed Amhara state, which it has dominated since 1995. A similar relationship was struck with the Afar Liberation Front (ALF), headed and directed by Sultan Ali Mirah from Jiddah, Saudi Arabia. These ties enabled the TPLF to spread its tentacles into the neighboring provinces, to obtain unimpeded access to the salt mines of Berhale in the Danakil depression, and to frequently disrupt the economic lifeline between the port of Assab and Addis Ababa. Vainly trying to counter the TPLF's activities, the government organized an Afar counterinsurgency force called Ugugumu that was much like the Zendo of Tigray.[73]

When the TPLF and the EPDM formed the coalition of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1989, they also minted two political groups called the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Ethiopian Democratic Officers' Revolutionary Movement (EDORM). The designated organizers were deserters, defectors, or prisoners of war from the army. The appointed leader of the OPDO was Taye Tekle Haimanot of Illubabor, who adopted an authentic Oromo name, Kuma Demeksa. He was recommended by the EPLF, whose prisoner he was. One of the principal organizers of the officers' group was Colonel Asamnew Bedanie, deputy commander of the Seventeenth Division when he was captured by the TPLF on March 27, 1988. Both men had a talent for survival and self-promotion.[74] As the EPDM was intended to counterbalance the EPRP's influence, so was the creation of the surrogate OPDO meant to countervail the OLF. The OPDO had exclusive control of the new state of Oromia until the general elections of 2005, when at least two opposition parties surfaced to contest its monopolistic hold. Without an ethnic base, the EDORM was dissolved soon after the EPRDF seized power, but useful officers like Asamnew were retained in the new army.

Ultimately, victory was not even conceivable without some kind of military cooperation with the EPLF. Contacts that had been terminated in June 1985 were renewed in March 1988 in Khartoum, Sudan. It was this cooperation that

led to the successive victories at Af Abet and Shire and eventual triumph in 1991.

This section has shown how, by integrating the political, military, social, and psychological and by constant learning, the Eritrean and Tigrayan insurgents were able to vanquish an opponent who enjoyed numerical superiority but lacked strategic coherence and the guerrillas' adaptability. The next chapters will analyze the rise and fall of the Ethiopian Revolutionary Army, which precipitated the termination of military rule and the simultaneous breakup of the state.

4

The Vanquished Revolutionary Army: Birth and Evolution

War is politics, and the army is the instrument of this politics.

—*Leon Trotsky*

It is the state of the army, of competing armies, not of the working class, that has determined the fate of twentieth-century revolutions.

—*Barrington Moore Jr.*

In all states there is a close connection between the man who prevails with the spear and the man who presides with the scepter, but in Ethiopia he is likely to be the same man.

—*Ernest W. Lefever*

Revolution and war were twin causes of the grand-scale militarization of the Ethiopian state. The social consequences of the changes were felt more sharply among the agrarian population, the largest segment of society. The revolutionary government's fixation on winning the wars required the mobilization of resources on a vast scale. Military imperatives dictated agrarian policies and the state's exploitative relationship with the peasantry. No village or community escaped the never-ending demands for men and resources. Even if the new structures of power and the coercive economic policies did not directly help the insurgencies, they sufficiently eroded the relationship between the people and the state as to shift the balance against the armed forces, which had serious problems of their own. Whatever happened at the rear had consequences at the front and

in the end they were lethal. An analysis of the military's structural and organizational attributes is necessary for an adequate understanding not only of its defeat but also of the insurgents' victories. The story of successful insurgencies cannot be written except in counterpoint to the story of the state's structural weaknesses and the army's disintegration, and vice versa.

THE IMPERIAL HERITAGE

The new leaders of revolutionary Ethiopia inherited a substantial military apparatus, the largest in black Africa except for South Africa's. It consisted of the Imperial Ethiopian Army (IEA) of 37,700 men, which was about 91 percent of the total national defense forces of 41,500 (including the air force, the navy, and several auxiliaries).[1] The IEA was modern and fairly competent but underequipped for war.[2] It was organized into four divisions, including the Imperial Bodyguard (First Division), each with 8,000–12,000 men. It had five artillery, two tank, two mechanized, two motorized, and two engineer battalions, an airborne company, an armored company, and signal squadrons.

The makeup of the volunteer army roughly mirrored the multiethnic society. Most of the enlisted men came from poor rural homes because the army provided a steady income and the promise of social mobility and old-age pensions—all beyond the dreams of an indigent peasant. Healthy males between the ages of eighteen and thirty were recruited from across the country and welded into a group with a common value system and shared identity. Geographic mobility provided a sense of a homeland that was far larger than the villages they left behind. Besides the school and the market, the army was the most homogenizing and integrative institution. Although the situation began to change by the mid-1960s, few soldiers had any education. They could not read a newspaper or write their own letters, but they were imbued with a strong sense of patriotism and loyalty to the king and state.

The Imperial Ethiopian Air Force (IEAF) was one of Africa's best. Comprising bomber, fighter bomber, fighter ground attack, fighter, reconnaissance, and transport squadrons, it was a small force of only 2,569 men and forty-three combat aircraft, but its capabilities were unsurpassed in the region. The training school for officer cadets, drawn from among the best high school graduates, was located at Dabre Zeit (Bishaftu), fifty kilometers south of Addis Ababa. The school was also the force's main air base and workshop; it was self-contained and nearly self-reliant for maintenance, including overhauling of aircraft and electronics.[3] With American assistance, the air force had grown to become the envy of Ethiopia's neighbors. Although Ethiopian pilots had never had air-to-air

combat experience prior to the Ethiopian-Somali war, they liked to compare themselves to their far more technically proficient Israeli counterparts, amongs the best in the world.

The Imperial Ethiopian Navy (IEN), the third branch of the military, was the smallest and least significant. It was Ethiopia's acquisition of Eritrea and the fact that 98 percent of its external trade was dependent on sea traffic that induced the government to create a naval academy at Massawa in 1955. The academy's four-year curriculum, which combined military science and liberal arts, was designed by Norwegians, who provided the bulk of its trainers and technical advisers through the 1960s, after which they began to be replaced by Americans. Successful cadets, selected from among high school seniors, were commissioned sublieutenants and earned a degree in naval science. Like the air force, the navy was an elitist institution with a firm sense of identity. The primary function of the 750 seamen was to safeguard the country's coastline, ensure the safety of traffic in home waters, and prevent smuggling of contraband goods.[4] Given its size, the navy's impact on the country's military capacity was quite limited. Its high profile was largely due to the fact that it was headed by Rear Admiral Iskendar Desta, a grandson of the emperor who was executed in 1974.

Management of the armed forces was the responsibility of the Ministry of National Defense (MOND). It was headed by a minister and a chief of staff, both appointed by and responsible to the emperor, the commander in chief of the Imperial Armed Forces. The organization consisted of the three service branches and many specialized departments for operations, intelligence and security, personnel, finance and budget, logistics and equipment, transport and construction. The chief of staff, who headed the Council of Commanders, later changed to the general staff, was in charge of the centralized command and control of the armed forces and of the development and execution of military policies pertaining to strategy and operation. In peacetime, he oversaw manpower development, training, mobilization, and tactical coordination of the armed branches in mock exercises. He also developed contingency plans for war or defense. Under the supervision of the chief of staff, each of the three services designed and planned the manning, training, equipping, and supplying of its units and subunits.

Outside the purview of MOND were several paramilitary forces that augmented the regulars. Of these, the *Fetno Derash*, or Emergency Police (EP), was the most important because it combined the functions of the police and the army. Its creation reflected the government's increasing preoccupation in the 1960s with domestic unrest. Originally organized to control urban strikes or riots and to quell rural unrest, it was later developed with Israeli assistance into a counterinsurgency commando unit of seven thousand men.[5] The EP helped

foil the coup of 1960 and was extensively used in the early phase of the Eritrean uprising. City rioters and bush rebels dreaded it equally. Interestingly, while it squelched dissent at home, the EP provided training to liberation fighters from elsewhere on the continent. Its most prominent trainee was Nelson Mandela, who, by his own account, received two months' "strenuous" drilling in 1961 at Kolfe, Addis Ababa, the EP's main headquarters.[6]

The Territorial Army was a sort of reserve force like the National Guard of the United States, but much less professional. Its enlistees were poorly trained, poorly armed, and poorly paid. When drafted somewhere between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, each man received three months of training, a rifle, and a uniform that was issued annually along with an allowance of Eth. $45. Draftees remained in their villages working on the land, reporting to their centers once a year for two months of drills. They could be called by the provincial governors for duty at any time, usually for the suppression of rural protest, which was rare.

The militiamen, summoned from the rural population whenever needed, had no centralized command; rather, they were called up by the provincial governors to assist in hunting down bandits, resolving communal conflicts, and suppressing local revolts. Self-armed and unpaid, they were entirely dependent on billeting, a privilege they flagrantly abused by engaging in pillage, thereby inflaming the very situations they were supposed to help stabilize. Fellow peasants feared and abhorred them.

So it seemed, and the Americans believed, that the Ethiopian state had the military capability to control domestic unrest and deter outside threats. But there could be trouble if the two coincided, as they did in the 1970s. In fact, the military situation was rather precarious. By the late 1960s the government knew that Somalia's ground forces had attained qualitative superiority over its own and began pleading with the Americans to help eliminate the alarming gap. In 1970 MOND submitted its supplication to the government of the United States: "A large part of the Ethiopian military hardware has become obsolete whereas Somalia has received a constant supply of modern Soviet equipment. For example, Ethiopia's M41 tanks are so old that spare parts for them are unobtainable. But the Somali army is armed with modern Russian tanks and armored personnel carriers which give it greater mobility and fire-power. Somali preponderance is both quantitative and qualitative. Ethiopia is at present hopelessly outgunned—and, if one may coin an expression, 'out-tanked.'"[7] Postrevolutionary events proved that their claims were true and their anxiety was justified. The Ethiopian armed forces were inadequately equipped to deal with internal and

external challenges simultaneously. The imperatives of war hastened their extensive reorganization.

THE BIRTH OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY

No other state institution was as transformed by revolution and as burdensome to society as the military, and no event expressed more poignantly the failure of the regime's nationalist and centralist policies than the military's collapse, which precipitated the country's dismemberment. Between 1974 and 1991 the Ethiopian revolutionary armed forces grew tenfold, consumed more than half the national budget, or about 18 percent of gross national product, and still failed to preserve the state's territorial integrity, one of their main functions.

The revolutionary army, or *Keyu Tor* ("Red Army"), as party cadres referred to it, was the successor to the imperial forces. Executions, purges, and desertions notwithstanding, the imperial army did not disintegrate like the czarist army in 1917 or the Iranian armed forces in 1979. And unlike the Ethiopian Revolutionary Army (ERA), the armies of the Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran were very different from their predecessors. Although the Bolsheviks initially planned for a voluntary people's militia, they created the gigantic Red Army, which was centrally controlled by a party of civilians, the Communist Party. In Iran, the huge military apparatus of more than 400,000 men that the shah had built collapsed in the popular uprising. When it was reconstituted in the face of foreign aggression, a countervailing force called the *Sepah* was created out of the armed neighborhood committees. It became the nucleus of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, an important component of the new Islamic armed forces controlled by the clergy.[8] In Ethiopia, there was no such structural breakdown. The old was not disbanded but significantly expanded. The basic structural and functional organization of the armed forces was retained and their direct management continued to be the responsibility of MOND, largely staffed by former officers of the imperial forces.

There were two major changes, however. First, the Ethiopian Revolution was led by soldiers who also revolutionized the army. This was not so much a case of an army taking power as a case of a cabal of officers and NCOs taking over the army. The intervention of the ranks shattered the principles of military hierarchy and professional cohesion. From the outset the interventionists were against all high-ranking officials, military and civilian. The Derg never represented the military's corporate interests even though it stemmed from the military. There was a lingering tension between the junior officers and NCOs holding high po-

litical positions and the senior officers who were subordinate to them in violation of the conventional rules and norms of military hierarchy.[9] The imperial and revolutionary heritages clashed continually because of the generational, educational, and political differences within the officer corps. These entangled relationships were later exacerbated by the injection of party politics.

Second, the military was transformed from a pliant tool of an autocratic state to a political force, at once controlling and supporting the state. The army became, as in Algeria, "not merely a government, but also an armed party, with continuing claims on resources and on the way power is distributed within the state."[10] In terms of civil-military relations, this marked a shift from personal absolutist rule to praetorian autocratic rule. The first is characterized by the exclusion of the military from politics by a civilian authority that is distinctly autocratic, of the kind found in pre-1974 Ethiopia. In praetorianism, the military arrogates state power to itself, in effect becoming the ruling elite.[11] This form of autocratic military rule is personal and tyrannical, allowing little or no political space for civil society—Ethiopia's exact experience. The repression of all political activity through terror demobilized any part of the society that remained within the state's reach. In times of war, dissidents were either in the bush or in exile.

The challenges facing the revolutionary leadership were numerous, but none was more urgent than upholding national unity and none more formidable than constructing the envisioned socialist order. At stake was the indispensable task of devising a politico-military strategy capable of winning the escalating civil wars, blocking Somalia's territorial ambition, but also leading the revolution to success. The basic question was whether victory in war would guarantee the success of the revolution or whether the triumph of the revolution would ensure victory in war. It soon became apparent that the two goals were inseparable, but an effective double strategy became less and less feasible. Winning the wars became the government's top priority, and it was frequently forced to adopt ad hoc measures to address rapidly changing conditions in the Horn of Africa. In the process, its revolutionary goals became distorted and some were discarded altogether. The overall outcome of its strategy and policies was a huge increase in the number of men in arms and a prodigious militarization of the state-society. Therein lay the dictatorship's strengths and weaknesses. Through a highly centralized system, it was able to mobilize society on a scale unprecedented in the country's history, but its coercive and exploitative policies alienated the same population whose support it needed to succeed against its multiple enemies.

Reorganization of the military occurred in three stages that corresponded with the rise, consolidation, and demise of praetorianism, a process characterized by

continual inner friction and conflict. The first phase (1974–78) was marked by internal crisis, decline, then revival and growth of the armed forces. Condemned as "reactionary" and "class enemies" of the revolution, a good number of worthy officers were killed, purged, imprisoned, or prematurely retired. There are no exact figures but as many as a third may have been eliminated or excluded during the first three years of political turmoil. The inevitable effect was to disorganize the high command. To make matters worse, the United States discontinued arms deliveries to Ethiopia in 1976. These events occurred against the backdrop of a deteriorating military situation on the northern and eastern fronts. The pressing military needs and the growing ideological affinity with the socialist world prompted a radical shift in Ethiopia's international relations and a hasty reorganization of the defense forces. The closure of the United States's Kagnew military base in Asmara and the expulsion of all its military personnel from the country in 1977 marked the eclipse of US hegemony in Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian-Somali war of 1977–78 inaugurated a new epoch of Soviet patronage and dominance. The hallmark of the second phase (1978–85) was an extensive reorganization of the forces and their training, operational methods, and weapons system, the introduction of obligatory military service, and the institutionalization of people's militias and local civil defense units. Despite continuing growth, the armed forces and their irregular supporters became less and less effective in the third phase (1986–91). Severe shortages of officers and technicians, a steady decline in revolutionary zeal and morale, combined with mounting popular disaffection, created a crisis in the whole setup of controls. The troops suffered a series of setbacks and then vanished.

The first major reorganization took place in 1977 on the recommendation of a study group chaired by a capable chief of staff, Major General Gizaw Belayneh.[12] The committee found the armed forces lacking in manpower, combat readiness, weaponry, and logistics. The four divisions were uniformly trained, equipped, and clothed with little regard to geographic and climatic variation. Supply depots were far from zones of conflict or potential theaters of war, and efficiency was hampered by a slow-moving bureaucracy. Overall, the military was woefully ill-equipped for the expanding guerrilla warfare in the north and insufficiently mechanized to deter aggression from the east. Even the air force had problems: it had no expertise in photoreconnaissance and only 64 percent of its combat aircraft were fully operational. The navy was in a worse situation. with an aging fleet too expensive to maintain and only four patrol boats fully functional. The report of October 1976 was comprehensive, sober, and somewhat alarming.

Its major proposal was that, in light of the country's varied topography, the

lack of transport, and the magnitude of armed threat, the regional distribution of the infantry be reorganized geographically and functionally into five regional commands, each in charge of two or more provinces. Their headquarters would be Addis Ababa, Asmara, Awassa, Harar, and Jimma. The Northern Area Command would be responsible for the security of Eritrea (Assab excepted), Tigray, and Gondar and would be trained and equipped for protracted mountain warfare. The Eastern Area Command would be a highly mechanized and mobile force specially equipped for desert warfare. New airfields and underground command posts were also contemplated in its sphere of command, Hararghe. Though mainly responsible for Harar and Bale, the Eastern Area Command was to work in coordination with the Southern Area Command, in charge of Gamu Gofa and Sidamo. The strategic importance of this region cannot be overstated: the third industrial zone, it was also one of the gateways to the sea. The Central Area Command would be in charge of the provinces of Shewa, Arsi, Gojjam and Wello, all of strategic significance from the military and economic points of view. Shewa was one of three principal industrial zones and, along with Arsi and Gojjam, the country's granary. Wello was the passage to Assab, seat of the command's advance headquarters. From there, the force was to safeguard the port of Assab as far north as Tio and the road connecting the port with Addis Ababa, one of the country's three economic arteries. The Western Area Command, with its headquarters in Jimma, would be responsible for the provinces of Keffa, Illubabor, and Wellega. The report revealed that of the total sixty-five infantry battalions required for the reorganized national defense forces, thirty-eight were already in place, and of the total 74,877 men required for the three branches, 49,178 men were in active service. The estimated total cost for building, training, and equipping was 785,046,301 birr (US $382,949,410), of which 674,797,945 ($329,169,722) was already earmarked.[13] The government accepted the report without reservation and quietly began to implement its recommendations.

The basic features of the new organizational structure would remain, but the size of the combat forces and the amount of armaments proposed were made obsolete immediately by fast-changing conditions in the region. Already in 1976, the government had abolished the different salary scales for the specialized services and instituted a uniform system. And with the help of Israel, the Fifth, or *Nebelbal* ("Flame"), Division, a paracommando counterinsurgency unit, was created, an improved police commando unit was incorporated into the army as the Eight Division, and a small women's army corps was trained at Holeta, mainly to provide logistical support to the combat troops. Bigger changes in 1977 led to a greater concentration of power in the hands of a single authority

for dealing with problems relating to the organization of the rear and to supply of the front. The changes marked the triumph of the idea that, if the spreading and impending wars were to be won, all of the national resources needed to be placed under centralized control.

Spiraling violence in the cities, intensifying conflicts across the country, and the coming war with Somalia made such centralization and further reorganization essential. They also necessitated the adoption of a new weaponry system in light of shifting international alignments. The number of area commands was increased to six with the formation of the Northwestern Area Command. The armed forces were placed under the National Revolutionary Operations Command (NROC), established on August 29, 1977, by Proclamation 129; it replaced the Revolution and Development Committees (RDC) founded a year earlier by Decree 115, mobilizing militias regionally and coordinating operations against all "reactionaries." On the old chart, each regional command had its RDC to prepare for general mobilization, organize means of transport and production, and supervise and coordinate the work of military and civilian authorities. The NROC's powers were far more sweeping. There were no parallel or competing authorities. Besides organizing a new people's militia, the NROC was to direct and coordinate the activities of the police, the armed forces, and all their ancillaries. It could commandeer state, public, and private resources and utilities for the "national cause." The penalty for opposing or attempting to obstruct its mission ranged from five years' imprisonment to death.[14]

The NROC was made up of the chief of staff, the heads of the service branches, the chief of police, representatives of the PMAC and POMOA, the council of ministers, and the official associations of workers, peasants, youth, women, and patriots. It was headed by a twenty-eight-member council under the chairmanship of Mengistu Haile Mariam. Five months after the formation of the NROC, the government set up the Supreme Military Strategic Committee (SMSC) to map out a counteroffensive strategy in the Ogaden, to direct all counterinsurgency operations, and to upgrade the technical capabilities of the armed forces. The committee included seven Ethiopians, eight Russians, and three Cubans. The chief of operations was Colonel Mesfin Gabreqal, an Eritrean by origin and a graduate of Sandhurst, the British military academy.

Somali aggression, not the hurried mobilization of peasants against the northern rebels the previous year, put Ethiopia on the course of militarization. Henceforth, there would be a regime of compulsion to conscript, tax, and requisition. Already, the government had drafted as many as 300,000, perhaps half of whom were trained at Tatek ("Be Girded") camp, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, with the assistance of Cuban instructors. Following a spectacular parade by about

100,000 of these draftees, the newly formed Second and Fifth Militia Divisions were dispatched to the eastern front with gear provided by the USSR. This was the First Revolutionary Liberation Army. it fought well in the Ogaden and won. More than half the soldiers were transferred to the Second Revolutionary Liberation Army in Eritrea in 1978 to join the First and Fourth Militia Divisions while the Third was sent to Tigray. Thousands of the militias were thus absorbed into a significantly reorganized and reequipped army whose size had grown to eight divisions of about 140,000 by 1979.[15]

One of the aftereffects of the war was the Sovietization of the military in nearly all spheres. Its organization, its weapons system, and some of its nomenclature were adopted from the Russians, although the lower rungs remained essentially the same as in imperial times. The corps and task forces (*gibre hayil*) were introduced by the Russians. An infantry division, the basic tactical unit since the imperial era, was made up of between eight and twelve thousand soldiers; the fifteen-thousand-strong division in Eritrea was an exception. The size of a corps varied considerably among regions and even within regions, ranging from fifteen thousand in the south to forty thousand in the north. After 1978 the task force became the basic unit of operation. It was established for specialized tasks and was normally organized around a mechanized battalion supported by a helicopter squadron; typically, it consisted of three brigades, one of which was mechanized and supported by a tank battalion. In early 1990, or a year before the military's dissolution, the Ethiopian ground forces comprised four revolutionary armies organized as task forces, eleven corps, twenty-four infantry divisions, and four infantry mountain divisions, reinforced by five mechanized divisions, two airborne divisions, and ninety-five brigades, including four mechanized brigades, three artillery brigades, four tank brigades, twelve special commando and paracommando brigades—including the Spartakiad, which became operational in 1987 under the preparation and guidance of North Koreans—seven BM-rocket battalions, and ten brigades of paramilitary forces.[16]

Two new components of the ground forces were the strategic and tactical reserves. The first consisted of three mechanized infantry brigades stationed at Tatek, one tank and one artillery brigade at Adama (Nazareth), ninety kilometers south of Addis Ababa, one paratrooper brigade at Dabre Zeit, one BM P-1 battalion and one BM-21 battalion, and separate medical, communication, combat engineering, and patrol companies.[17] The tactical reserve units of mechanized and commando brigades were stationed at several strategic points like Azezo (Gondar), Wukro (Tigray), and Mayhabar (Eritrea). Special units such as engineers, communications, logistics, and radio-technical were the mainstay of the rear units that maintained transport lines and provided health care, food, cloth-

ing, and other essentials. The rear services, in effect, were the link between the combat forces and the civilian economy.

These specialists and others were trained or retrained at some twelve institutes and schools, many of them incorporated within a single multifunctional complex. Whereas the new Hurso Military School in Harar trained and commissioned second lieutenants for the infantry, the Arba School in the same province provided crash courses in a variety of fields but mainly in combat tactics. The Genet Military Training Center at Holeta was enormously expanded to house the Staff and Command College, the Mulugeta Buli Technical School, and other units specializing in armory, artillery, logistics, combat engineering, communications, transport, health, administrative management, reconnaissance and surveillance, and maintenance and repair of weapons and vehicles. The training varied from skill upgrading for NCOs to advanced technical education lasting six to nine months. One session in each of the schools would be attended by groups of fifty to two hundred.

The instructors were Ethiopians, Russians, Cubans, and East Germans. There could have been as many as a thousand Russians, five thousand Cubans, and four hundred East Germans between 1978 and 1988. Although the Soviets were the dominant partners, all assisted MOND in the control, direction, supervision, and coordination of its activities and in the development and maintenance of its infrastructure, repair facilities, training centers, depots, airfields, naval bases, and military hospitals. While the East Germans were heavily involved in the development of the internal security agencies in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), and the Cubans in medical, training, and garrison duties, the Russians were very much embedded in the entire military establishment. They had technical, logistical, and political advisers for each of MOND's service branches, main departments, area commands, and political affairs. "The military advisers to socialist Ethiopia" were headed by three successive "acting chiefs."[18] Their relationship with the public was cold and at times hostile. The Soviet advisers were widely resented for their high-handedness, condescending attitude, stinginess, and greed.

The two other main branches of MOND also underwent quantitative and qualitative changes. The air force's manpower rose to 11,318 and its tactical organization consisted of three fighter–ground attack regiments, two fighter-bomber regiments, three air defense regiments, one fighter-helicopter regiment, one transport-helicopter regiment, three training squadrons, one counterinsurgency squadron, and five missile regiments. The air force's ground headquarters remained at Dabre Zeit, the site of Air Base 1, the principal training center and maintenance workshop; Air Base 2 was located in Asmara and Air Base 3 in Dire

Dawa. Additional air bases had become operational at Bahir Dar, Goba, Gode, Gambella, Harar, Aksum, and Mekele. Smaller airstrips and helicopter pads were built in many other places. The air force trained its pilots, electronics and photoreconnaissance technicians, engineers, navigators, weapons specialists, and communications operators at Base 1 and abroad; of those trained outside the country, the largest number went to the USSR, which was the air force's main supplier of weapons and planes. Throughout the wars, the air force operated as the principal tactical arm of the infantry by transporting troops and supplies and providing firepower.[19]

The navy expanded from 750 to 4,750. It was significantly reorganized to provide logistic and tactical support for land and amphibious operations by deploying underwater, surface, and air forces. It consisted of five squadrons of rocket, motor torpedo, surface, motor, and reconnaissance boats and a marine commando unit. The bulk of the officers, seamen, technicians, and marines were trained at the Naval College and Naval and Maritime Training Center, both at Massawa, while some were sent to the USSR and East Germany for advanced training. The naval bases at Massawa and Assab had ship repair facilities. The commando force was trained to defend the strategic ports, naval institutions, and nearby islands and to assist in counterinsurgency missions by carrying out reconnaissance and tactical assaults from sea to land. Naval ships were used to ferry large numbers of troops and vast quantities of material. Between 1975 and 1981, for example, the navy transported over sixty-one thousand men, eighty-six thousand tons of food and armaments, thirty-six thousand tons of drinking water, and over two thousand tanks and personnel carriers.[20]

The military was still voluntary and represented a cross-section of the population, whose inner contradictions it reflected closely. Its ties with society were multifaceted, inseparable, and indissoluble. But, as in former times, most of its ranks came from homes of extreme poverty, and there were more of such men and women than the military could absorb, train, and support. With a per capita income of less than US $100, this was a depressingly poor country. A chance encounter I had with a young man in 1994 illustrates the economic underpinnings of soldiering. As I was walking along the main street in "downtown" Dabre Markos, Gojjam, a pleasant-looking person of about twenty-two approached and offered to "dust off" my shoes. He was a shoeshine boy with a high school education. In the course of our enlightening conversation, I asked if people were happy that the wars were over. His answer was as categorical as it was disconcerting. He mused, "Sir, what good is peace without bread and water? The army provided both. So, from a realistic view of my generation's circumstances, I would say war is better. I would have preferred soldiering to shining shoes."[21]

To glance at the society is to appreciate his point. Between 1964 and 1986 the country's population increased by roughly 300,000 annually, a growth rate of nearly 3 percent—higher than the 2 percent economic growth. Young and poor, the country was a huge reservoir of untapped manpower. For instance, in 1975–82 slightly less than 50 percent of the total population was between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four, and four to five million males ages fifteen to forty-nine would have been considered physically fit for armed service.[22] The rate of unemployment for the economically active population may have been as high as 40 percent. The roots of the unemployed were the lower classes—rural people displaced by landlessness, war, and famine, school dropouts, or students who failed to pass the national high school exit examination. Many of the young and spirited craved the uniform and sought adventure, but for most it was the paucity of better alternatives that drew them. Of a group of 477 enlistees, only 33 had joined the army for noneconomic reasons like "love of the army's masculineness," "fascination of war," "revenge," "hatred of the enemy," and "escape from the Red Terror." With absolutely no prospects of employment in a stagnant economy, men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five rushed to MOND. The basic requirements for enlistment were eighth-grade-level literacy, fluency in Amharic, physical fitness, and a successful oral interview. Competition was fierce. Rank determined salaries, to which were added increments based on service and position. The basic monthly pay of a private in the army was 177 birr (US $86), a paltry amount by Western standards but the equivalent of what a semiskilled industrial worker earned.

Even though the entire society was the base of recruitment, the Amhara and Oromo constituted the largest ethnic pools, both for privates and for officers. Ethiopian names can be misleading, for individuals in the embryonic social groups tended to adopt typical Amhara names to ease discrimination in employment, education, and state institutions or to improve political and economic opportunities. Nevertheless, a review of the rosters of the officer corps reveals that more than 65 percent of colonels and over 80 percent of generals were of Amhara extraction, much as in the times of monarchical absolutism.

A decade into the revolution the makeup of the defense forces had significantly changed, strengthening pluralism and raising the stakes on citizenship. Volunteers continued to join the armed forces in large numbers at least until the early 1980s and the government retained the militia system, yet its military needs became insatiable. It introduced conscription, giving substance to the notion of "a nation at arms." Regulars, militiamen, and conscripts constituted a sort of a people's army defending a revolutionary state at war. What more authentic way to affirm citizenship than to protect the identity and "sanctity" of

the national state and the even more abstract idea of a nation? That was the new revolutionary myth.

THE PEOPLE'S MILITIAS AND NATIONAL CONSCRIPTS

By introducing these methods of enlistment in the defense forces, the state withdrew a significant portion of the adult male population from productive economic activity, increasing the burden on the peasantry, particularly on women, but also bringing about a social transformation. The upheavals of revolution and civil war had made Ethiopians unusually mobile, not just physically but also in social and occupational terms. Peasants had become soldiers and workers. Some of the mobility was temporary, but many occupational and social positions proved to be more permanent. In the long run, the new policy of mobilization was instrumental in transforming peasants into citizens.

MOND's rationale for organizing the militias was adumbrated in a memo to the government of the USSR: "The relative vastness of the Ethiopian territory and the threat which counterrevolutionary forces pose against economic, political and related targets, among others, has [*sic*] made it necessary to establish in each administrative unit and township territorial militia formations manned fully by those members of the population capable of military service. As these formations will be deployed alongside the regular armed forces in time of need, it has been found appropriate to organize them as light infantry units with independent formations of regional strength."[23]

The militia system was not entirely novel to the country. In premodern times when there was no standing army, the peasant was at once a producer and a fighter. In peacetime he worked on the land and in times of war he became a warrior. Drawing on this martial heritage and on the experiences of socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union and Vietnam, the PMAC issued Decree 71 in 1975, calling for the formation of people's militias in all regions in order to "safeguard the revolution." The initial purpose of the militias was to help maintain security by enforcing decisions of the tribunals of peasant associations and by protecting collectivized property and state farms. Industrial workers had to raise 8 percent of the labor in their respective plants. Although workers' and urban dwellers' associations were required to provide set quotas of recruits from among their members, the militias were preeminently rural organizations that were integrated into the apparatus of coercion for multiple purposes and at low cost. Local communities or associations that recruited them were largely responsible for their subsistence. At least in theory, the militias were not completely divorced from civilian life. As they combined production and combat, one of

their slogans was "A rifle in one hand and a hoe in the other, we shall defend the motherland."

There were four types of militias, differentiated functionally: zonal militias, settlement people's militias, people's militias, and guerrilla fighters.[24] All of them were organized under the motto "Let every Ethiopian stand guard in the defense of the revolutionary motherland." The zonal militias were organized from squad to battalion and trained for two months in civil defense—shooting, surveillance, patrol—mainly on weekends and holidays. They were lightly armed to help public security forces maintain the peace in their own villages, towns, and zones, but they could be used on cross-border missions. They were to guard state farms, electricity and telephone systems, bridges, dams, and so on, and to help the army by transporting supplies, protecting its rear, and monitoring rebel movements. Who was eligible? All those under forty who believed strongly in the revolution, in national unity, and in the equality of nationalities, who understood the psychology of their people and the class struggles being waged, and who were willing to serve, mentally and physically fit, and known by local party and civic organizations for their revolutionary work and commitment.[25] In practice, anyone who appeared healthy was drafted, and coercively. The militias were led by what were traditionally called "chiefs of the brave" (*ya gobez aleqa*).

As of 1985 new settlements were established in the southwestern regions for uprooted peasants. Each unit had to provide its own protection by raising a settlement militia. After two months of rudimentary training, recruits were organized from the squad to the brigade level, a brigade typically comprising 1,785 men.[26] Their main responsibility was to maintain security, control civil unrest, and punish criminal behavior like theft, vandalism, and delinquency. What was not mentioned was their main function: to make sure that nobody escaped and that the settlers remained off-limit to all rebels. Besides overseeing the consolidation, growth, and productive activities of their community, they had to assist in the control or management of disasters like "flooding and bush fire." The men could also be drafted into the zonal or people's militias. If not provided weapons by the government, they had to arm themselves with anything available, "even spears and swords." Most were actually armed with an assortment of old rifles and sticks (*dula*).[27]

The guerrilla fighters were also organized in the mid-1980s as a desperate response to the deteriorating military situation. Unable to defeat the rebels with conventional forces, the government tried to outmaneuver them by adopting their tactics and mode of organization. The guerrillas were trained to infiltrate, raid, ambush, capture prisoners, create havoc in the enemy's territory, and then melt away.[28] These local counterinsurgent forces were, of course, deployed in

the main centers of insurgency, and the most notorious of them all were the Dragons of Tigray.

Of the four categories, the people's militia was the most important. It operated pretty much like the regulars but without their benefits.[29] The service began with the disastrous Raza operation of 1976 (part 3), and it remained in place until 1991, following the successful campaign against the Somalis in 1977. It was an obligatory service of three to six months by men age eighteen to fifty. They were recruited according to population size from all over the country, trained for two to four months, and equipped with automatic rifles, mortars, antitank weapons, and RPG-7 shoulder-fire rockets. They were organized in divisions and subdivisions, each with departments for logistics, intelligence, communication, propaganda, and political education. There were twenty-four officers from the army in each brigade and thirty-two in each division; below the battalions, leadership was normally left to the "chiefs of the brave" because there were not enough officers to go around. The militiamen always fought in close coordination with the regulars but without regular pay. They received a monthly allowance of 20 birr, precooked and canned food, cooking oil, tea, sugar, and, when available, a few kilos of flour. As they marched to the fronts, the men sang in chorus:

> I cherish no higher yearning
> Than to sacrifice myself for Mother Ethiopia.[30]

In truth, their highest yearning was to evade what they regarded as a pernicious obligation.

Despite increasing demands on the population, the military continued to lose ground to the rebels, making recruitment more difficult. Extraction, military defeat, and public frustration went hand in hand. In 1988, out of 425,564 call-ups only 235,212 showed up, and in 1990, when the total quota was 900,758, only 260,323 eligible draftees reported to their centers. In 1979 there were 97,250 men in the people's militia; by 1989 the numbers had reached rock bottom (32,970).[31] The main reason seems to have been both political and economic: as the state's relationship with the masses became increasingly impaired, popular attitudes toward military service became negative, with every eligible person finding ways to avoid it. Peasants were more wiling to serve in their own locality. They dreaded the separation from family, farm, and village and the possibility of death away from home. The government tried to thwart evasion through threats: that the dodger or deserter would forfeit his right to land, that his personal property would be confiscated, that his family would be denied legal protection, and that he would be subject to excommunication by the Church, even though the government itself was antireligious. Those who continued to obey the law did

so out of fear of punishment and hope of joining the army, where benefits were considerably higher than rural incomes and where, in the event of death, beneficiaries were guaranteed some sort of allowance.

The militarization of state-society was pushed to another level with the introduction of national conscription. Conscription has been a controversial subject since its inception. In the late nineteenth century some celebrated European intellectuals hailed it as universalizing citizenship and distributing death more evenly among the population. Even Friedrich Engels saw it as an equalizer, promoting socialism. The Ethiopian government hardly entertained such vague egalitarian notions when it introduced obligatory service; for it, conscription was a matter of military necessity, as it has always been for others. The decision to adopt conscription stemmed from "a conviction that fighting and winning a war requires a mass of trained recruits and an efficient system to call them up and employ them rapidly."[32] It was also intended to expand the base for the reserves and to facilitate the production of skilled, disciplined, and politically conscious manpower for the socialist economy. Of all the obligations the regime imposed on society, none was regarded as more brutal and none was more abhorred than conscription. It was the most compelling manifestation of the coercive relationship between state and society. Yet there was little open resistance to it.

In June 1983, Decree 239, establishing the Military Commissariat and Civil Defense under the Ministry of Interior, was issued, and one month later the national Military Service Proclamation followed. The commissariat's responsibilities included mobilizing, registering, and assigning men eligible for military service to training centers, where MOND took over.[33] The new law made it obligatory for all able-bodied males between the ages of eighteen and thirty to serve in the military. There was a large pool of eligible men. In 1984 more than five million (5,194,293), or 24 percent of the total population of 42,616,876, were males between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four, at least half of whom may have been eligible for military service.[34] It seems that about 750,000 males turned eighteen each year until the end of the war; even if it is assumed that only a third of them were fit for service, their numbers would have been more than sufficient to meet the yearly quotas, which never exceeded 120,000 in any one call-up. For the first round, 2,524,372, of whom 830,015 were women, had registered.[35] There were a total of seven scheduled call-ups from May 1984 to November 1988, two each in 1985 and 1988. Each campaign was named for the year it was carried out ("Project 84" or "Project 88-A" and "Project 88-B" or "88-1" and "88-2," in the event that recruitment was conducted in two consecutive sessions or periods). Methods and terms of recruitment were the same for the whole society, but administration was variable.

Quotas were established for villages, towns, and cities, and conscription was conducted by lottery. Peasant and urban dwellers' associations were required to submit lists of eligible men to subordinate organs of the commissariat, which then administered the screening. The terms of service for recruits were six months' training, followed by two years of active service and reserve duty until the age of fifty. Conscripts were seen off and welcomed with fanfare, at least during the first three rounds. The two moments were turned into festive occasions with patriotic speeches and songs, music, and traditional dancing, all to impress on current and future draftees the importance of national service. After the third round the festive sendoffs and receptions faded, the public mood having changed to indifference and resistance.[36]

The inductees were trained at four centers: Tatek 2 (Tolay/Illubabor), Tatek 3 (Didessa/Wellega), Tatek 4 (Meslo/Bale), and Tatek 5 (Birsheleko/Gojjam). Tatek 1 of Addis Ababa was of course the oldest. Training consisted of all basic military knowledge and skills, as well as political education. The standardized curriculum for all centers was prepared and administered by the Main Department of National Military Service (MDNMS). Each center was headed by a colonel whose staff included the security, logistics, and political officers and trainers, mostly NCOs (sergeants). Instruction consisted of individual and squad infantry tactics, antiguerrilla tactics, fortification and camouflage, reconnaissance, marksmanship, attack-defense, digging foxholes, grenade throwing, laying land mines, use and maintenance of weapons, military discipline, intelligence, politics, and sports. According to one memorandum, emphasis was given to weapons maintenance and construction of fortifications because "a soldier will be able to defeat his enemy only when he is equipped with, and is capable of maintaining, a reliable weapon and when he is able to defend himself against enemy fire by digging trenches."[37] Inductees were put through a punishing routine of forced marches, sometimes with heavy loads, and long-distance runs.[38] Although the requirements were the same for all centers, after the first two batches of men the amount and quality of instruction seem to have varied not only from one center to another but also from one training session to the next at the same center. This was because the availability and quality of trainers were variable; shortage of qualified personnel was a continuous problem. The program was hampered by insufficient arms and equipment, food, and clothing. Live ammunition for target shooting was frequently unavailable. The barracks were inadequately equipped, lacking clean water, electricity, and toilets. The mess facilities were barely adequate, the cooking was bad, and the diet was poor and monotonous. In 1986, sixteen conscripts died from bad food in one center alone.[39] The men were often exposed to yellow fever and other tropical diseases

because the centers were located in the lowland parts of the country. Poor sanitation led to outbreaks of dysentery, to the spread of typhoid, cholera, and tuberculosis, and to infectious worms and parasites. Health care was atrocious, with a chronic shortage of medicine and soap. Clothing was of poor quality and woefully inadequate. Brutality was common, with drill sergeants spitting on, insulting, and beating trainees with impunity even for minor offenses like complaining of homesickness.[40]

Upon completion of their training the conscripts were assigned to the various branches and departments of the armed forces, the border guard, and the forces of the interior. Whether one became a fighter at the fronts, a marine, a missile man, or a radio technician depended not only on one's level of education or technical qualifications but also on one's political reliability and on nepotism. Most, of course, became combatants, while the rest worked as radar crewmen, radio operators, electricians, drivers, sentries, clerks, and junior instructors at the training facilities following specialized training at their units. The conscripts were not allowed to marry while in service. Home leave was given for exceptional reasons like the death of a parent or chronic illness. The monthly allowance was 19.50 birr. Rations were the same as those of the regulars.

How many men were conscripted and from which social and ethnic groups? It is impossible to give exact figures because the official documents are incomplete or inaccurate, and frequently both. For instance, the number of men drafted in the first round, May 1984, was variously recorded as 45,157, 46,835, 47,335 and 47,884.[41] Each of the training centers accommodated ten to fifteen thousand trainers at a time, and that would give a minimum of 280,000 and a maximum of 420,000 recruits if all operated at full capacity. But that was never the case, and Birsheleko was not opened until 1987. According to one report, 181,327 men were conscripted in five sessions. That report adds that 43,935 were drafted in 1988–89, but it does not indicate that the sixth round was really a remobilization of the first two batches of men, who had been demobilized on schedule.[42] Another report gives a grand total of 507,082.[43] It does not tell us, however, exactly how many were recruited during each campaign after the first one. And I saw no records of the irregular call-ups of the late 1980s. My own rough calculations show that some 330,000 men may have been conscripted between 1985 and 1988, and that means over half a million men could have served from 1984 to 1991.

Class and geography were determinant factors in service. Men were drawn from all classes, regions, and ethnic groups, but overwhelmingly from the poor families of the southcentral regions. Their average age was twenty-two. Very few were recruited from the contested provinces of Eritrea and Tigray; the total con-

tribution of each province to the second, third, and fourth batches were 1,150 and 870, respectively.[44] During the same period Shewa (excluding Addis Ababa, with 10,632) produced 14,747 conscripts, Sidamo 10,603, and Wellega 10,707.[45] A 1986 follow-up study of 43,356 conscripts (of the enlisted 46,835), showed that 23,606 (54 percent) were students, 16,121 (37 percent) peasants, 1,994 (5 percent) civil servants, and 1,637 (4 percent) self-employed. The literacy rate was high: only 7,036 (16 percent) were illiterate or semiliterate. Of the total, 316 were college students, 16,733 were high school students, and 19,273 were enrolled in elementary school at the time of conscription.[46] Of the 40,000 conscripted in December 1986, nearly 12,000 (30 percent) had high school educations and 26,000 (65 percent) primary educations. The illiteracy rate for the seven campaigns may have hovered between 5 and 20 percent.

The obligatory universal service was neither universal nor equalitarian in practice. It reinforced social inequalities. The conscripts were men not resourceful enough to circumvent it. Deferments were granted to heads of households, physicians, teachers, university students, and the clergy. Physical disability or serious medical problems were the only grounds for exemption. Nevertheless, quotas were frequently arbitrary and selection discriminatory even within the eligible social groups. Economic or class inequalities, nepotism, and bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency made universal service cumbersome and fairness impossible. Educational and health deferments were certain ways to avoid service. The use of deferment loopholes and outright bribes led to a manifest sense of unfairness. That the rich and well-connected evaded service is indisputable. The thoroughness and fairness of medical examinations were often suspect and at times entirely lacking.[47] While some eligible men became permanent students, wealthy families with political connections were able to get deferments for their children by sending them overseas to study.[48] People paid large sums, sometimes in foreign currency (US dollars), to get the release paper known as Form 2.[49] Or parents would have their sons marry at sixteen or even fifteen and then give them some property—a restaurant, a kiosk, a taxi cab—thereby exploiting the provision in the law that exempted men who were sole providers for their families. If and when drafted, they were invariably assigned to the rear echelons to avoid combat. "Children of the rich go to Bole; children of the poor go to Tole [Tolay]," peasants rightly observed.[50] That the scales were heavily tipped against the poor was well known to the leadership. The president himself acknowledged: "What we call national service does not operate honestly and truthfully. It is children of the poor, those who cannot stand and resist, who are sent to [the war fronts]. It is the same in the army. This society demands honesty and truth. What we have is a revolution that benefits and fattens the

few while demanding sacrifice from the majority. All this will alienate us from the people."[51] It did. The minister of defense likewise admitted the inequalities: "Four to five children are being drafted (from one household) to the National Service. Those drafted are mostly from the oppressed people. This needs to be corrected."[52] It was not corrected.

Resistance to the law was pervasive though not overt. The poor used the "weapons of the weak." Not only was conscription unfair but, for teenagers, suddenly leaving home and family with no guarantee of safe return was terrifying, and they used every trick they could to avoid it. Hiding and flight were the most common methods of evasion. Families tried to shelter their sons by constantly moving them from place to place during the mobilization period. In extreme acts of desperation, mothers lay down in front of buses or trucks bearing their children away or kept wailing and beating their breasts, both signs of mourning. Some men feigned muteness and deafness or mutilated themselves by chopping off their trigger fingers, damaging their ears, or pulling out teeth. Thousands of young men emigrated to the neighboring countries of Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and far beyond. Probably to thwart desertion, the training schools were located in remote places; still, the rate of desertion remained high. Conscripts often disappeared at points of departure or at rest stops on their way to the centers; some attempted to escape by jumping off buses or trucks. Death was often the result. The service was so hated that few wished to remain in any of the services upon completion of their obligation. In 1986, when the first group of men were demobilized, less than 1,500 (barely 4 percent) of the nearly 43,000 conscripts wanted to stay—less than 500 in the army and close to 1,000 in the police.[53]

The scale of conscription and militarization was thus extensive. MOND's statistics are always subject to question, for they were distorted by a large number of short-term enlistments and a good deal of duplication. Nobody will ever get an exact count. Subsequent to the war with Somalia, the government built its coercive apparatus according to three five-year plans but did not survive long enough to see the third. On the tenth anniversary of the revolution, the country's military stood at 224,500, short of the first five-year plan's (1981–85) target of 347,000.[54] However, from 1974 to 1984, more than 360,500 had served in the military, with attrition of about 30 percent.[55] An intelligence report claimed that in 1974 one adult male in every 500 was a soldier and in 1986 one in every 900.[56] At the end of 1989, Ethiopia had, at least on paper, a defense force of 519,790 including 373,782 regulars, 73,809 militia, and 72,199 conscripts—a phenomenal growth of 1,300 percent in a decade. During those sixteen years of military rule, 1,124,973 men and women (roughly 3 percent of the total population) had

served. Of these, 1,043,532 were in the army.[57] The rest were distributed among the air force, navy, and forces of the interior (territorial, coast, customs, and prison guards). The expansion was so massive that there does not seem to have been a complete inventory of manpower. "Despite continuing efforts," admitted an exasperated officer, "it has been impossible to keep an accurate account of our manpower."[58] The discrepancies and inaccuracies have little bearing on, and should not detract from, the fact of militarization. How many perished? Thousands died, leaving dependent spouses and grieving parents, relatives, and friends. Many who survived were wounded or disabled and they carry visible reminders of the conflict for the rest of their lives.

Wartime deaths in Ethiopia were from combat and illness, but no exact figures exist. If it is hard to ascertain the correct number of people who served in the armed forces, it is even harder to know how many of them died or suffered permanent disabilities or bodily injuries. The data on illnesses and mortality are too skimpy for meaningful statistical analysis. According to MOND, over 400,000 (36 percent) of its combat personnel were killed or unaccounted for during the years 1974–90.[59] If indeed the Second and Third Revolutionary Armies suffered over 110,000 casualties in just one year (1988–89), then MOND's figure is quite plausible.[60] The EPLF has claimed that, between 1974 and 1991, it killed 195,620 and wounded 180,287 Ethiopian troops, but it has created confusion by adding 103,682 "dead and wounded" without explanation. Its claim that it had 33,895 prisoners is not, however, contested.[61] Its own losses are estimated at 65,000 to 70,000 persons.[62] The TPLF has acknowledged that it lost 50,000 of its fighters. All the other armed groups appear to have suffered barely 5,000 losses, according to the fragmented figures provided by MOND.[63] So, if it is assumed that 400,000 soldiers, 125,000 insurgents, and 300,000 to 500,000 civilians (excluding those who perished in the famine of 1984) were killed and maimed, it is quite likely that the country's total human loss could have been between 800,000 and 1 million, or about 2 percent of the total population, which grew from 34 million in 1974 to 46 million in 1986.[64]

For many of the survivors the mental and physical scars are deep and lasting. In Ethiopia in 1991, there were between 40,000 and 45,000 in institutional centers, and in Eritrea there may be some 20,000 invalids with varying degrees of physical impairment and mental disorder.[65] It is hard to say for certain how the immobilized and crippled live or are being cared for, but their status cannot be good, for the medical facilities and social support systems in these two poorest of countries are woefully inadequate. How about the thousands of families with wounded psyches? Families were torn apart, with one son serving in the army, another serving with the insurgents, a third tending the farm, and those

brothers were sundered by larger issues, such as ideology or loyalty. Although most families remained intact, some sent as many as six sons and lost them all. I met two mothers in Adi Abun (Adwa) and Aksum, each of whom had lost two sons. In Asmara, I heard stories of three families who lost five sons each. One of the couples locked their house and vanished without a trace. How does one measure the loss, devastation, and grief of these parents?[66] How does one heal the physical and emotional scars of the limbless and the blinded and of the raped and tortured women, some of whom were ostracized by their communities for "shaming" their husbands?

Then there are the uprooted and displaced. By the government's own account there were 870,000 Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan and Saudi Arabia alone, most condemned to a life of degradation and third-class status.[67] When the émigrés to the rest of the world, particularly the West, are added, the figure in all likelihood exceeds one million. Never before have so many Ethiopians "voluntarily" left home, most perhaps permanently. War also forced millions to migrate to the cities and towns, where they lived in urban anonymity but without ever escaping poverty.

The overall impact of the wars was devastation, grief, stagnation, and impoverishment. Toward their closure the wars were costing the country more than a billion birr a year, or 50–60 percent of its operational budget and nearly half of its annual deficit. The state amassed weapons of destruction the price of which far exceeded its capacity to accumulate capital. War making had thwarted economic growth and social transformation by shifting enormous resources from investment, trade, and human development to the military.

MEANS AND COST OF WAR

The mobilization of so vast a number of men extensively upset the nation's economic and social order without increasing the military's capacity to prevail. During the years 1976–91 the Ethiopian government continually imported tons and tons of armaments to fight its external and domestic enemies. The longer the civil wars, the greater the need for arms, because part of what was imported was destroyed in combat and part of it was seized by the rebels. Also deepening was the strategic dependence on foreign sources. The economic and social costs were high and the political consequences severe because the military expenditures took away funds from much-needed programs for improving the living conditions of the population.

We have a good picture of the diversity, quality, and quantity of tools of warfare the Ethiopians used. Almost everything the war machine consumed was

purchased from outside, and it consumed a lot at a cost that was exorbitant for a country that could not even feed its own people. By making arms obtainable on credit, the Soviets helped prolong the wars, further impoverishing the country. Many countries, including Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Yugoslavia, and North Korea contributed to Ethiopia's military arsenal, but the bulk of it came from the USSR, either through procurement or outright grant. The Soviets began refitting Ethiopia's military in 1977 by selling much of what the revolutionary soldiers needed or wanted to acquire—from water canteens and pistol holsters to T-62 tanks and MiG-23 fighter jets. It appears that between 1977 and 1991, Ethiopia purchased and obtained in excess of 300 aircraft and helicopters of various types and function, 17 vessels and fast boats, 1,700 tanks, 2,975 armored personnel carriers, 4,000 combat vehicles and trucks, 41,740 light and heavy machine guns, 1,172 cannons, 3,915 mortars, 14,738 antitank and 1,605 antiaircraft guns, 400 rocket launchers and missiles, and 1,551,400 assault rifles.[68]

Unsurprisingly, the rapid acquisition of so much military equipment placed severe constraints not only on the national economy but also on the operational effectiveness of the forces. The Ethiopian military procured armaments that probably far exceeded its changing tactical needs and that its forces were never sufficiently skilled to operate and maintain. Of course, the military did not get everything it wanted and what it obtained was not always what it wished. The more advanced tanks and war planes remained off limits, and some of the weaponry was not suitable for the country's terrain and environment. Some of the weapons and equipment performed less than optimally. The commander of the navy, for instance, curtly informed MOND that a medium-size warship his department had obtained in July 1983 had many defects: its communication tools were neither original nor familiar to the naval technicians trained in the USSR; it lacked a system for cold drinking water; the air conditioner was old and inadequate; and the instruments essential for flood control had been removed but not replaced. Sometimes, the military received war materials that were far in excess of its requisitions or that it had little or no use for. Given the nature of the theater and the type of warfare, it probably needed fewer tanks and more helicopters, fewer air defense systems and more reconnaissance, transport, supply, medical, and maintenance units and facilities.[69]

Nevertheless, the military's persistent and costly problems were chiefly related to its lack of a repair and maintenance system and of qualified specialists. From the outset, the Soviets kept a tight logistic grip on all forces, deliberately restricting the supply of spare parts and ammunition. The massive inflow of weaponry outpaced the military's capacity to upgrade its existing facilities and

to train specialists and technicians. Maintenance tools, equipment, and backup machines were few and inadequate. Repair manuals were in short supply and usually incomprehensible. Manuals in English were rarely provided and, when they were available, there were too few to go around. Equipment that could easily have been repaired on the field and at depots were discarded or left to rust. The defense minister would unashamedly write to the Soviet ambassador in Addis, "Because of the shortages of vehicles for logistic support, i.e., for towing of artillery guns and for transporting repairable weapons to maintenance centers, we have not been able to make full use of available weapons systems." During my travels in the north, I saw rusting tanks, trucks, and armored cars all along the roads, but, it was not until I visited the junkyards on the outskirts of Asmara and at Azezo, which the Eritreans appropriately called "cemeteries of tanks," that I had some sense of the enormous numbers of weapons imported and destroyed. Neglected and fast-deteriorating roads contributed to the wear and tear on vehicles and trucks; inattention to vital infrastructure was attributed to economic difficulties.[70] But the difficulties were, to a large degree, caused by the disproportionate amount of resources defense was consuming. So much carelessness, slovenliness, and extravagance in such a depressingly poor country. There was little serious effort to ensure the maximum economy of forces and resources or to achieve maximum results with minimum expenditure of forces. The real problem lay in the military's utter dependency and in the astonishing lack of professional discipline and accountability in the mobilization, management, and utilization of valuable resources. Much too much equipment, logistical support, and strategic commodities like gas, oil, and lubricants were squandered. The uneconomical use of resources was compounded by brazen theft and embezzlement.[71]

Poor maintenance and heavy loss of equipment in combat necessitated constant resupply of weapons, which, in turn, entailed a constant need for spare parts that were costly and not always promptly delivered though urgently needed. While spare parts and accessories for tanks, BTRs, BRDMs, trucks and vehicles, garage equipment, and tank recovery were continually imported, engines for airplanes, helicopters, and ships, as well as frames for aircraft, were periodically sent to the USSR for overhaul and repair. There were frequent delays in the delivery of both purchased and repaired articles, each side blaming the other for the red tape.[72]

Overhaul and repair was a recurring problem. The system was time-consuming and not cost-efficient. "A considerable number of Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters," lamented MOND, "have now become due for overhaul . . . in the USSR. . . . It is now over six months since the first 8 Mi-24 engines were shipped for repair.

. . . We have now more than 13 MiG-21 aircraft engines, 21 Mi-8, and 20 T-55 engines that need repair."[73] A major obstacle was MOND's payment problems:

> One of the major reasons for the low level of operational readiness of some of the weapons systems in our inventory is our inability to generate the necessary cash to purchase services and spare parts. These mainly refer to the overhaul of Mi-8 and Mi-17 helicopters and engines in the USSR and the purchase of spare parts for generators which are not covered by state credits. . . . It can be recalled that the cost of overhaul of 8 Mi-8 helicopter was granted on credit in 1983, with full cooperation and understanding of the country's economic problems which existed then. Since the present economic situation has become even worse than what it had been when the previous request was granted, we once again request the assistance of the Government of the USSR to include the overhaul cost of Mi-8 and Mi-17 helicopters . . . in the 60 million rubles credit granted in the Agreement of July 4, 1985. Even though most of our generators are supplied through GED, their spare parts are being delivered to us on the basis of cash payment. . . . We request the inclusion of the [sale] of the generator spare parts in the credit payment facility."[74]

If the Ethiopians had had their own repair depots, as in imperial times, they would have spared themselves these indignities and exploitative relations. They were dependent on foreigners for the assemblage, maintenance, and repair of most of the heavy armaments they imported. This raised the total cost even though the purchase contracts show that arms were, for the most part, bought at 50 percent discount.[75] MOND constantly appealed to the Russians to help it develop its own maintenance and repair shops, as the Americans had done before them, but to no avail, for that would have reduced the margin of profit. By having their own facilities, the Ethiopians would have slashed repair costs by up to 50 percent. To illustrate: in the USSR it cost US $142 to repair an engine of an APC and $304 to repair that of aircraft. The same items could have been fixed for US $57 and $182 at home.[76] Yet, the Soviet bureaucrats kept twisting the arms of their Ethiopian counterparts to convince them that they were getting the best deal possible.

The minutes of an Ethiopian-Soviet meeting in Moscow indicate how exploitative the relationship was between a producer who enjoyed monopolistic control of the Ethiopian market and his very unhappy but hapless client.[77] Here is part of a conversation that took place at one of the meetings:

> Admiral Grishen, deputy chairman of the Foreign Economic Relations Committee of the USSR: "You have asked for 12 Mi-25, 10 L-39 and MiG-23 ML. We cannot provide them."

Major General Fanta Belay, commander of the air force: "Of the 25 Mi-24 helicopters we have, half of them will expire this year and the other half next year. You have offered us 19 Mig-21s, but we have enough of those. Our problem is a shortage of pilots. Moreover, we know that the L-39 training plane is produced in Czechoslovakia but we are required to buy it from you."

Admiral Grishen: "MiG-23 ML is out of production and the Foreign Economic Relations Committee has no funds to reinstate it. . . . The idea of setting up a repair shop for Mi-8 and Mi-17 helicopters [in Ethiopa] will not suit you from an economic viewpoint. You will be better off to have them repaired in the USSR."

General Fanta: "The Antonov 12 we have will be out of service by 1989."

Admiral Grishen: "The Antonov 12 will function for five years. It is a good plane, especially in mountainous areas."

General Fanta: "We have assessed the quality of the plane and it falls short in our part of the world."[78]

The minutes abruptly end here, perhaps because of the tone of conversation.

Fanta's brave face seems to have irked an impolite and imperious Russian officer, but without affecting his salesmanship. At the end of all the bargaining, the Ethiopian soldiers sealed an arms deal worth 455,000,000 rubles (US $136,500,000)—that is, 50 percent of the 910,000,000 rubles actual value of the special equipment—at 3 percent per annum payable in ten equal installments during the period 1991–2000.[79] By 2000, the soldiers would have spent US $4,832,681,082 and of that amount only $314,289,693 would have been disbursed outside the USSR.[80] A poor country had been chained to one industrial market with little room for maneuver.

War was devouring the country's scarce resources to the neglect of the economic and social sectors. Between 1976 and 1985, military consumption rose to an average 11 percent of GNP, exceeding total state nonmilitary expenditures. In 1978–83, the military's average daily expenditure was 2.7 million birr; it rose to 4.2 million birr in 1984–88. During the three consecutive years 1989–91, more than half the national budget was earmarked for defense. In 1974, MOND's budget was less than 110 million birr, or about 18 percent of the total government budget, but it had climbed to 900 million birr (44 percent) by 1988 and 2.3 billion birr by 1991.[81] When the military lost power in that year, it had accumulated a foreign debt of about 19 billion birr (US $9 billion), more than half of which was eaten up by MOND. During 1974–91 the combined total budget allotted for education, health, agriculture, and industry was barely half that for national defense.[82] Despite its disproportionate consumption of national resources, the military lost. The main reasons for its defeat are analyzed in chapter 5.

5

The Vanquished Revolutionary Army: Defeat and Demise

It is quite obvious that the revolutionary soldiers did not lose for lack of men and weaponry. To appreciate why they lost we need to look at three interrelated issues. First, there was the contentious relationship between party and army. By introducing the triangular command, the party undercut troop unity and effective control. Second, government economic policies and political structures may not have strengthened the insurgencies but they indubitably weakened the state. Third, the military had its own serious internal weaknesses, which made it extremely vulnerable to ever vigilant and opportunistic enemies.

STATE, PARTY, ARMY

> The army is that school where the party can instill its moral hardness, self-sacrifice, and its discipline.
>
> —*Leon Trotsky*

When the party is morally limp, eschews self-sacrifice, and lacks discipline, the army is in serious trouble. That was precisely the case in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia had the distinction of moving from a no-party political system to a single-party one.[1] Party and state goals were inseparable in the new order and the two authorities were fused, with the military playing a dominant role. The trinity, in turn, was controlled, in rather Stalinist fashion, by one person. The chairman and general secretary of the party, the head of state, and the commander in chief of the armed forces was a lieutenant colonel who wore the imperial insignia of a field marshal. In spite of the revolutionary disruptions, there was marked institutional continuity and nowhere was it more apparent than in the symbols of state.

And nothing could possibly have been more undemocratic and antipeople than a vexed synthesis of an autocratic heritage, military commandism, and Leninist centralism.

Eric Hobsbawm avers that the relevance of Marxism-Leninism to countries like Ethiopia was merely instrumentalist: it provided "a recipe for forming disciplined cadre parties and authoritarian governments." The Ethiopian government was authoritarian, no doubt, but the party cadres were hardly disciplined, because they lacked the ideological conviction and commitment of orthodox Marxists. As for Leninism, Hobsbawm observes that organization rather than doctrine was the chief contribution of Lenin's Bolshevism to changing the world.[2] What the Ethiopian revolutionary soldiers copied from the Soviets was the Leninist mode of party-state organization, its centralist and coercive features. The new communist party monopolized power, crushing all manifestations of dissent from below.

The organizational setup of the WPE was typically pyramidal; the principles and methods of organization were quite similar to those of all other communist parties.[3] The National Shengo (Congress) was the highest, or supreme, constitutionally elected body, with about two thousand representatives. Despite the constitutional provisions that gave it sweeping powers (articles 62–63), the Shengo was little more than a decorative institution. Its members were elected for five years, having first been nominated by the party. The deputies thus elected were really representatives of the party and, even more so, of the chairman/president. The Shengo met once a year for a few days, not to legislate so much as to passively listen to speeches and reports and then ratify policies and decisions handed down by the party's Central Committee (CC) with little deliberation, let alone dissension. It was a rubber-stamp parliament much like its predecessor. Its workings were pro forma.

On paper, the two powerful party organs, both of which were chaired by the party boss, Mengistu Haile Mariam, and in both of which the military was prominently represented, were the CC and the Politburo. Congress selected members of the CC, who, in turn, elected the Politburo, the general secretary, and the party secretariat. Of the 136 full members of the CC, only one was a woman and thirty were military officers; six of the eleven Politburo members were from the military. The CC, which was nominally responsible to Congress, met twice a year, and contrary to what was stipulated in the party apparatus and to popular perception, it was not all-powerful in decision making. The chairman made it clear that the Politburo, which met weekly, actually determined and executed policies in all areas: "In my personal role and of all the responsibilities bestowed on me by history, I have given the utmost attention to the country's unity, the

revolution's safety, and the Derg's cohesion. Now, I give priority to party unity and worthiness, because all other basic matters are decided by and subordinated to it. The core of it all is the Politburo."[4]

The secretaries of the CC were chosen by the Politburo and each secretary chaired a commission whose activities he reported to the Politburo. There were eight such commissions: Justice, Administration, and Defense; Organizational Affairs; Ideology; Economic Affairs; Foreign Affairs; General Service and Finance; Nationalities; and Central Control. The head of Ideology, Shimeles Mazengia, was also the editor of *Serto Ader* (*Worker*), the party's flagship publication, with weekly circulation of about 180,000. The Politburo exercised the powers and functions of the CC when the CC was not in session, which was for most of the year.

The Secretariat managed internal party affairs and coordinated the Politburo's work by channeling all policy decisions and administrative matters to the relevant commissions and committees of the CC and by overseeing party and government appointments. Its role in policy making was minimal although its membership overlapped with that of the Politburo. All its members were full-time party officials who had large staffs of employees, organized functionally.

All administrative regions had a committee headed by the first secretary, a full-time party functionary. The exact roles of the secretaries were not clearly defined, but there is no doubt that they enjoyed more power than the administrators and political commissars; that was the public perception. Each territorial committee was supported by a legion of cadres, whose numbers varied from three hundred to twenty thousand (in Shewa).[5] Two-thirds of the party's twenty-one thousand hard-core cadres received their political and ideological education at the Yekatit '66 School.[6]

No one stood a chance of joining any of the three important organs of the party without the approval of Mengistu and his alter ego, Legesse Asfaw, head of Organizational Affairs. Individuals were selected less for their ideological convictions or political integrity than for proven loyalty to Mengistu, who had come to rely more and more on a core of trusted friends and associates. None were closer and more trusted than the trio of Legesse Asfaw, Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, and Gabreyes Wolde Hana. The last two were fellow travelers from Holeta. While Tesfaye was from the ground forces headquarters, the others joined the Derg as representatives of the Third Division in Harar. They were pals Mengistu knew more intimately in less pressing times, men who played and drank with him and stood by him during the bloody factional days of the Derg. So far as I know, only Mengistu and Legesse belonged to all three party organs and to the Council of State, which acted as a standby for the Shengo. Mengistu was chairman of all four and

Legesse was the secretary of the Politburo. Mengistu had the power to decree emergency laws and to appoint or dismiss ministers and generals. With fairly effective political machinery in place, he was more powerful and autocratic, in both theory and practice, than the emperor he replaced. What he lacked was the emperor's mystical aura and enigmatic personality.

Typically, the Marxist-Leninist party that he led was highly centralized, with orders flowing from top to bottom through the Secretariat, via the commissions, down to the local committees. These committees ensured that all party work was correctly and honestly implemented. Democratic centralism was the organizing principle, and what it meant was that the individual was subordinate to the organization, the minority to the majority, the lower level to the higher level, and the entire membership to the Central Committee. In practice, centralism heavily outweighed democracy, and criticism was really a means of tighter control; it was total submission and no CC accountability. Whereas orders were transmitted from top to bottom, information was relayed back from the lower echelons. In theory, mistakes were to be corrected through regular rigorous self-evaluation and all members would be held accountable for their actions or any violation of party rules. In the real world, no one would dare find fault with or blame the leaders, who seldom if ever admitted mistakes.

Party organs paralleled state institutions but the two were never completely separate or equal. They were fused functionally, and the party was hegemonic. Party hegemony was ensured through control of key government appointments, both civilian and military, and through edicts and guidelines jointly formulated by the CC and Council of Ministers. The parallel networks of full-time party functionaries and full-time officials of the larger governmental apparatus were inextricably interlinked. The various commissions of the CC paralleled the various state ministries and directorates at the highest tier of the structure, each supervising broad responsibilities. The Politburo contained full (and alternate) party members and government officials. The Council of Ministers was headed by a prime minister who was a Politburo member, and virtually all senior ministers were party and CC members. Some individuals held more than three positions in the party-state matrix. State officials who were party members therefore received directives from two sources of authority, but primacy was given to those of the party.

This interlocking system was duplicated throughout the two structural hierarchies. State policies were devised jointly by senior party and government representatives. There were also many overlapping organs of control, such as the party's Control Commission and the Intelligence and Security branch of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which spied on each other as they spied on society

at large. Party cadres were placed in the government's bureaucracy to make sure that party directives were dutifully obeyed and carried out. Basic-level or primary organs of the party were established in the workplace and in civic organizations—such as trade unions and associations of peasant and urban dwellers, women, and youth—to politicize, mobilize, and recruit members for the party. These organs were seen as the bridge between the party and the people. Ideally, they were expected to oversee the party's activities and to broaden its base, where people at the grassroots level would be consulted on all matters affecting their lives. The party's base, however, remained narrow—less than 1 percent of a population of 46 million. There were 134,104 members, of whom 25,414 were candidates. Of the total, 24,151 were in the armed forces and another 3,332 in the police. Slightly less than 12,000 (11,912) were women. Twenty-three percent were in Shewa (13,279), plus 17,168 in Addis Ababa. Members were vertically organized in cells of three to five.

Who joined the party? A candidate needed the support of three current members. Those who joined were self-seekers, careerists, social climbers, as well as individuals who earnestly believed in the basic ideals of communism. State and government officials joined the party primarily to protect or advance their careers; the red membership card was seen as a symbol of social status and, according to one soldier, a key with which one could open the door of power and privilege.[7] The ultimate means of control over people's lives was a vast system of political patronage.

It would be a mistake to see the WPE as monolithic, disciplined, coherent, and tightly controlled by Mengistu. In the official minutes of the CC and Politburo, one does not detect serious tensions and disagreements in the leadership, but monolithic unity was a myth, for the party was quite undisciplined, factional, and corrupt. The strong sense of discipline and cohesion that is one of the main features of communist parties had frayed. In 1988, Comrade Endale Tessema of the Central Control Commission, in his biannual report to the CC, disclosed that the party's code of revolutionary behavior was being corroded by multiple violations, which had increased by 32 percent since its formation, and that these violations could only be managed, not eliminated. Nepotism, embezzlement, favoritism, and even criminality were rife throughout the party apparatus, from the territorial to the basic-level organizations. Between February 26 and August 19, 1987, there were 744 cases of disciplinary transgressions, resulting in the expulsion of 320 persons (109 members and 211 candidates) from the party; 37 percent of those expelled were in the armed forces. Endale also noted a new trend of voluntary withdrawal from the party: during the same six-month period seventy people had withdrawn.[8] At another meeting, Mengistu specified some of

the transgressions: "There are those who embezzle funds raised by civic organizations, break up families for sex, expropriate cars, intimidate people in bars with guns, and profit from the red card."[9] The political implications were not lost on him: "These are the thieves who give our party and government a bad name. To me, they are no different from the bandits who fight us."[10] The party became the butt of popular jokes. The people ridiculed the hypocrisy of the "communists": "In the day they wear khaki, and at night they feast on mutton and whiskey."[11] The minister of defense, Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, a man of mediocre ability and not of the fiercest convictions, was sharply critical of the party: "The bureaucracy has taken over the party; love for the party has faded. Today, it is an instrument for personal gain rather than for higher purposes. Who are those whom we have drafted into the party? They are our friends, schoolmates, tribal associates, and the wily. The party must be purged."[12] There was much truth in his exhortation, and yet he in fact was guilty of nearly all the "sins" he recounted. Had the unthinkable purge he so boldly recommended been carried out, Tesfaye ought surely to have been the first casualty, for he was blatantly corrupt and incompetent. By 1990, the situation had become so desperate that Mengistu lamented that "comradeship and unity are on the wane."[13] His exasperation came to the fore at a Politburo meeting ostensibly convened to decide the political fate of one of the Derg's enduring members, Fikre Selassie Wogdaress: "As of recent years, we have talked diplomatically. Few speak from the heart or participate in our deliberations for good or bad. . . . But there is no one quite like Fikre Selassie, who sits idly and quietly. One time, he sat here reading a magazine. . . . He is not antirevolutionary or a criminal, nor is he conspiratorial. . . . But he is unstable and even rude. . . . He is being expelled for disciplinary reasons also."[14]

The façade of monolithic unity was fracturing as defeat quickly approached. Before the Politburo meekly acquiesced to his decision, Mengistu had already dismissed Fikre Selassie, a CC and Politburo member and the prime minister, from his positions; he was "honorably" retired. Why were party members as significant as Fikre Selassie reluctant to speak out openly and candidly or to take part in discussions of matters directly related to the institutions and organizations they led? Fear? Fatigue? Defeatism? Perhaps a mixture of the physical and psychological. What is clear is that the party was not as cohesive or as disciplined as it appeared to be. Although open dissent was remarkably rare, the time of accepting orders without question had passed and Mengistu no longer imposed his will on members of the party. The center was cracking. The party unity brought about by war and the muzzling of internal debate had disintegrated. For most, allegiance to the party had been a question more of wartime discipline and careerism than of ideological conviction. Once the need for discipline was gone

and privileged access to the state was severed, many left the party.[15] The party's discord, especially toward the end of its life, was nowhere more apparent than in the Ministry of National Defense (MOND), the largest and most expensive of all the state organizations as well as the party's principal instrument of control.

Relations between MOND and the WPE were dichotomous and multifaceted. At its simplest level, the relationship appeared to be an interlocking of two distinct organizations. But, in fact, the military was viewed and treated as an instrument of party and state authorities, with supreme loyalty to the first, which meant to the chairman. Three organizations were directly involved in the management of the armed forces: the National Defense Council (NDC), MOND, and the Main Political Administration of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MPA). All policy matters were determined by the Politburo, reviewed by the NDC, and implemented by MOND under the watchful eye of the MPA. A degree of interchangeability existed between the three organs, since some officials held concurrent responsibilities for military, political, and governmental affairs. It may even be suggested that the political and military leaderships were consolidated into one because the central figures in the WPE were all soldiers. It is true that management of the armed forces was MOND's responsibility, but Mengistu, parroting Mao, liked reminding the men in arms that the party controlled their guns and that the control was "absolute, direct, and complete."[16] Here then was a situation where the party was not merely in command of the gun, as it held it in its own hands. Fidelity to the party was nothing but total submission to the soldier leading it.

The NDC was a linear successor to the imperial National Defense Advisory Council, but with more muscle because its head was the party boss. It was composed of party-state, civilian, and military officials, all CC and some Politburo (or alternate) members, including the ministers of defense and interior, the chief of the political directorate at MOND, and, of course, the general secretary, who acted as its chairman. The NDC operated like a subcommittee of the Politburo although it was technically a state organization. It formulated policies and issued directives pertaining to national security, the development and maintenance of the forces, and the management of war. The NDC had no permanent staff and relied on the Secretariat for the paper trail. It met four or five times a year unless military conditions at the war fronts warranted emergency sessions. There were many such sessions, particularly toward the end of the 1980s.

Perhaps more important than the NDC were the two vertical hierarchies in the party-military dual relationship, in which the party apparatus imposed a system of control and indoctrination on the military. The MPA, headed until 1988 by one of Mengistu's confidants, Brigadier General Gabreyes Wolde Hana, was

the transmission belt between the party (the political center) and MOND (the military establishment).[17] It was responsible for the propagation of party ideology and for guidance of the armed forces in all their affairs, political and military, including even combat. All of MOND's services and departments were conjoined with it through the apparatus of committees, cells, and activists. There were committees at general headquarters in each of the six sector or area commands, down to the company level. Cells and activists operated at the lowest platoon and squad levels. Party control was ubiquitous, indoctrination incessant though superficial. The party's domination was evident but true believers were few. The dual relationship, therefore, was never smooth or harmonious, but it was fairly stable. There were continual rivalries and disagreements over political and military priorities; after all, though party and CC members, most of the senior generals had been career officers since the imperial era and despised communist politics. There were tensions between territorial secretaries and military-government officials and between commanders and political commissars in the parallel hierarchies. Despite the ongoing discord, there was marked stability and continuity in the dual relationship until 1989, when many senior generals conspired to remove the general secretary of the WPE and commander in chief. The coup failed and most of the conspirators were killed, further weakening the war machine and speeding up the collapse of both party and army.

The duality was far less harmonious at the regional, provincial, and local levels, particularly in the war zones, where commanders and commissars were frequently at odds. This hurt the army badly.[18] The organizational structure that came to be known as the triangular, or triple, command was ill suited to a political culture that tended to cultivate mistrust, chicanery, and intrigue. The structure was composed of three officers who differed markedly from one another in age, education, experience, and rank. The commander was ordinarily far older, higher in rank, and more experienced, but he frequently lacked the political vocabulary and skills of his junior partners, the political commissar and the security officer, both of whom were selected for their socialist persuasion and loyalty to the WPE. In theory, the trio was expected to work in harmony, each officer performing specific tasks. The commander was responsible for all operational matters, and the commissar for political affairs—controlling and coordinating party organizations down to the company level, spreading party propaganda, and keeping troop morale high. Through his teaching of Marxism-Leninism, the commissar was to ensure among the troops a general respect for discipline and fidelity to the party. The security officer was the other leg of the triangle. He belonged to a select personnel group from MOND that was responsible for the officers' upkeep but did not directly control their activities; that was the MIA's

responsibility. The security officer had manifold tasks, including census registration, monitoring internal travel, border patrol, protection of economic plants, and counterintelligence. His main responsibility was nonetheless espionage within the armed forces, a task that overlapped and competed with MOND's Main Department of Military Security. He had his own reliable clandestine network of spies and informers to control or suppress "counterrevolutionary" behavior and to stem enemy propaganda and infiltration.[19] In practice, the structure proved unwieldy and divisive, and no one was more disruptive than the commissar.

The generational and educational differences, the wide gap in rank, and membership in the party or lack of it encouraged mutual disdain, jealousies, and competition. The rivalry between the commander and the commissar was particularly intense because all orders had to be cosigned by the two officers. Though lower in rank, the commissar was responsible not to the commander but to a higher commissar to whom he sent his own confidential reports evaluating the commander's political reliability and military worth. There were two reasons for the constant bickering and infighting. First, the commissar's duties were so imprecisely or ambiguously stated as to permit him to involve himself in matters that were within neither his purview nor his competence. He frequently usurped the power of the commander—to whom he felt superior, especially if the commander was a non–party person—by intervening in operational matters (but shirking responsibility for failure). Second, the incompatible temperaments, the disputed responsibilities, and the imperative to make urgent decisions under stressful combat conditions produced constant strain and sharp personal clashes, which the commissar invariably won because of his party affiliation. Too often commanders who were not party members were reluctant to make prompt operational decisions even when circumstances called for them. The marked distinctions between commanders and commissars, and between commanders who were party members and those who were not, were harmful to the army's esprit de corps, undermining its professional cohesion and functional competence.

The vast majority of my informants believed that the commissars were one reason for the army's defeat. Captain Tarekegn Almaw described the triple command as "a structure that undermined discipline, command, and control, destroyed the self-confidence of commanders, promoted divisiveness, devalued and squandered time, eliminated a sense of responsibility, wasted intelligence, promoted self-interest, and gave priority to political loyalty over military duty and performance."[20] Brigadier General Getaneh Haile not only concurred with

Tarekegn's summation but concluded that the new system of command was the most crucial reason for the army's defeat. He saw the defeat at Af Abet, which was triggered by the rivalry between a political commissar and a commander, as the best evidence.[21] In his view, that debacle was the prelude to the army's collapse. In 1988, Mengistu himself admitted that "the existing relationship between commanders and political commissars is very dangerous and worrisome. It is at the core of our difficulties, with potentially disastrous consequences."[22] He could not have been more candid and correct, but he did nothing to fix the problem.

Though pompous and presumptuous, the commissars knew little of Marxism. The WPE had many talented and dedicated agitators, polemicists, and organizers, but hardly any thinkers or theoreticians with deep knowledge of what they preached. Speeches were tendentiously adorned with quotations from the "great Lenin," but these banalities had little correspondence to the everyday life of the soldiers and the toiling masses. Actually, the Derg's Marxists were notably unoriginal and inconsistent in their political views. This is evident in the official minutes of the Politburo, in which one vainly searches for any Marxist analysis of war and peace, the single most critical issue that preoccupied its political life.[23] Out of 447 respondents and interviewees I contacted, only 43 held views about political education that could be considered mildly positive. They thought that the political commissars, especially those trained in East Germany and the USSR, were sufficiently knowledgeable about Marxism-Leninism. Nevertheless, the vast majority of respondents viewed Marxism-Leninism as little more than tired slogans and clichés about counterrevolutionaries and anti-people elements and about class struggle (*ya medab tigil*) and the dawn of the communist utopia. One corporal best expressed the general sentiment: "Political education was predictable, redundant, extremely boring, and utterly unenlightening. To tell you the truth, it made me hate Male [Marxism-Leninism], especially those who advocated and taught it without really knowing it."[24] Fanatically dogmatic and extravagantly ambitious, the commissars compounded the embellishments of the defense forces. When these internal weaknesses combined with public discontent, they spelled political and military disaster.

The revolutionary state's capacity to mobilize society was extraordinary. Despite escalating wars, it set out to reorganize the rural population, professedly to improve their lives. Its intentions were dubious, and the results harmful both to itself and to society. In the end it became captive to its ill-timed and ill-implemented policies—and the captive fell prey to its deadly assailants, the insurgents.

THE STATE UNDER SIEGE

> Indeed, a strong rear is always the decisive factor in a revolutionary war.
>
> —*General Von Nguyan Giap*

> Authoritarian social engineering is apt to display the full range of standard bureaucratic pathologies.
>
> —*James C. Scott*

> To tell you that we have the people's support is to mislead you.
>
> —*Alemu Abebe*

About a decade after passage of its historic land reform, the government instituted policies that it advertised as developmentalist and integrative—and completely harmonious with its socialist goals. Even if its intentions were genuine, in actual practice it made a bad situation worse. Instead of advancement there was regression and instead of prosperity there was pauperization. Three policies that provoked contradictory reactions and are critical to this study were resettlement, "villagization," and centralized control of the economy. Critics denounced the policies as cynical counterinsurgency measures that combined with surplus extraction. They were aspects of the whole and the whole was the regime's strategy to win the wars.

Were the policies indeed cynical counterinsurgency? In what ways did they affect the ongoing wars? How did they shape popular sentiment? If the sentiment was negative, as indeed seems to have been the case, did it translate into support of the insurgencies or opposition to the regime? In the initial stage, there were varied popular perceptions and reactions, and opposition to the policies or programs did not automatically result in support of the regional rebellions. But cumulatively the outcomes grew indisputably harmful to society as well as to the government. This conclusion is supported by the government's own evidence. The programs intensified social disharmony, degraded the environment, and eroded the regime's legitimacy and social base. Although General Giap was speaking about the importance of the rear for insurgent movements, his observation holds true for states or governments as well. What army can win without the support of its people? To win at the front, a regime must safeguard the rear with economic, social, and psychological incentives. By contrast, the "socialist" programs of the Ethiopian government created conditions of deprivation and silent grassroots discontent that undermined its war efforts. The structures of

power and government policies provided openings for challenges from below and undermined the basis on which the reigning order claimed legitimacy for itself. The official propaganda of a contented people solidly behind the state and the party was a charade. Nearly three-quarters of the infantry started life as peasants and the peasantry was far from content. Peasant feelings toward the regime ranged from sullen acquiescence to outright hostility

Perhaps the least harmful was the resettlement program, because it directly affected a relatively small proportion of the total population, which was mainly drawn from three regions. Resettlement as a response to economic and social pressures precedes the revolutionary regime by nearly two decades. It was never inspired by Marxist notions of social change and development or theories of counterinsurgency. In its origins, resettlement, as the transfer of people from one place to another on a mass scale, was never a response to famine, climatic changes, deteriorating ecology, or demographic problems.[25] And there was nothing intrinsically evil or inhumane about resettlement. Given the specific demographic distribution in Ethiopia, it must be seen as one of the necessary measures to deal with land scarcity and poverty. In 1984, 42 million of the country's 46 million people lived in 44 percent of the total land mass—that is, seventy-five persons per square kilometer; in the lowlands, it was 8 persons per square kilometer. A good part of the northern plateau has been severely denuded, in some places almost irretrievably, and can no longer provide subsistence for the people who live on it.[26] The pressure on the land can only partially be lifted through resettlement.

The problem with the revolutionary government's policy was that it was overambitious, ill timed, and brutal. When the policy was inaugurated in November 1984, the government envisaged the relocation of 1.5 million people, whose numbers were expected to grow to 7 million in succeeding years had unforeseen events not intervened. The hallmarks of the program were haphazardness and inhumanity. The seven sites for settlement were randomly selected by Mengistu and Legesse Asfaw. No ecologists, agronomists, horticulturalists, economists, or anthropologists were consulted, and no consent from either the resettlers or the host populations was solicited. Everything was done whimsically and by fiat.[27] Between 1984 and 1986, 594,190 people were hastily, forcibly, and pitilessly uprooted from the cool, dry highlands of Shewa, Tigray, and Wello to the hot, wet lowlands of Gojjam, Illubabor, Kefa, and Wellega, at an estimated cost of 767 million birr (US $374 million).[28] The settlements were to serve as models for the new society, a society of self-supporting and surplus-producing collectivities. Expectations were high because the sites looked pristine, lush, and fertile.[29] The outcomes varied among the settlements but were generally disappointing.

The settlers could not easily adapt to their new environments, and as many as 33,000 (5.5 percent) may have died from hunger and tropical diseases, especially malaria. Relations between hosts and settlers were cool and frequently hostile. Inasmuch as the northerners were taken south by force or the threat of it, southerners were told to contribute food, material, and labor toward establishing the settlements. These demands stirred deeply ingrained memories of conquest and cultural subjugation, of land alienation and labor exploitation. Both settlers and hosts felt cheated, and the settlers' desire to leave was overwhelming. At least 84,000 (14 percent) of them were believed to have escaped, either by slipping over the border into the Sudan or by trekking back to their home provinces. The disenchantment was pervasive: only 31 percent expressed satisfaction with the new conditions of life, 20 percent saw no change at all, while 49 percent said life was worse than before emigration.[30] Half expressed the wish to return to their places of origin if conditions permitted. Meanwhile, vast areas of forest had been destroyed to clear the land and to provide wood for building and fire. The damage to the environment was so extensive that an alarmed investigative body warned sternly that, unless corrective measures were immediately taken, the settlements would soon look like the barren regions the communities had left behind.[31] Overall, the picture was dismal.

How about the military dimension of resettlement? Did it make a difference in the ongoing civil wars one way or the other? Mengistu's resettlement policy had components of counterinsurgency, according to its critics. A former official of the Ethiopian government directly involved in the program has alleged that one of Mengistu's objectives was "to depopulate rebel areas in order to deprive the guerrillas of support."[32] Others, such as Survival International, have also written that the main goal of the resettlement policy may have been "the destruction of grass-roots support for these movements."[33] Such interpretations are highly suspect as to motive and cannot be sustained. If Mengistu's goal was to kill the fish by draining the sea, to use Mao's metaphor, isn't it amazing that no people were removed from Eritrea, the core of resistance? And why would it be necessary to displace people from Shewa, where there was scattered banditry but no insurgency? As for the population transplanted from Tigray and Wello, it was too small to have made any meaningful difference in the balance of military forces. The other assumption has been that one of the policy's goals was to establish buffer zones or fifth columns against rebel movements. It is true that some of the settlers were drafted into the militias, most of them "armed" with sticks to frighten hapless communities and to beat "troublemakers." Most settlers wanted to abscond, not to fight. They were, to the contrary, targets of the OLF, EPDM, EPRP, and TPLF. A sensible if cruel counterinsurgency strategy would

have established what are known as strategic hamlets within the insurgent regions rather than have compelled people to leave their home villages and settle in large-scale self-defense communities. This was indeed one of the objectives of villagization, to which I will return in a moment.

The government's ill-considered program, however, became a useful propaganda tool for its armed opponents. In the struggle for hearts and minds, the rebels used the gruesome testimony of escapees who portrayed the settlements as grim prisons or concentration camps where people were kept against their will and forced to work under extremely inhospitable conditions. Half-famished peasants in Tigray and Wello found the narratives so credible that they began to avoid even the "feeding camps," from where many of the resettlers were apparently carted away, and established or strengthened bonds with the rebels.[34]

If resettlement turned out to be counterproductive, villagization, another contentious scheme, was even more damaging politically because it alienated the very people it was supposed to have benefited, and on a much larger scale. The rationale for villagization—which, like resettlement, was carried out at a time when parts of the country were hit by severe drought and consequent famine—was a two-edged policy successfully implemented in Bale, the largest but least populated province. It began as a resettlement of people displaced by the Ethiopian-Somali war of 1977–78 as well as from state farms. Resettlement prevented them from being accessories to the OLF, SALF, or WSLF, which operated there. Between 1978 and 1980 the population of 1 million was relocated to "protected" villages. With the loss of the mass base of their support, most of the guerrillas moved to the neighboring provinces, chiefly to Hararghe. The government followed them with a well-coordinated campaign that combined search-and-destroy sweeps with confinement of the rural populace to protected hamlets (see chapter 7). It worked so effectively that villagization was adopted as a national policy in 1985, but only its social component was prominently featured.[35] It received a further stimulus from the Tanzanian *ujamaa*, a political creed that sought to bring about state-sponsored modernization at an accelerated pace by mobilizing the rural population.[36] The only difference was that the Ethiopian experiment had a security component; as one commentator has observed, "The pattern of compulsory villagization in Ethiopia uncannily resemble[d] that of Russia in its coerciveness and Tanzania in its ostensible rationale."[37]

Villagization was presented as an integrated package of development through the collectivization of labor/production and capital accumulation. Besides being politically and socially integrative, villagization was seen as an effective device with which to harness and control peasant labor and increase agricultural production for the collective good as well as for the state. The assumption

was that only collective agriculture would enhance productivity and diminish inequalities. It would transform backward, fragmented, and poor Ethiopia into a coherent and progressive society enjoying the basic services and amenities of modernity. The state's plan was to provide the rural population with artesian wells, schools, clinics, roads, electricity, and telephone service by amalgamating displaced homesteads occupying varying ecological zones and encompassing varying modes of production into villages of five hundred families. By the time the program expired in early 1988, it had reconcentrated about 14 million members (40 percent) of the rural population, leading one scholar to remark, "Villagization provides the most striking evidence of the revolutionary regime's capacity to reorder life in the countryside."[38] But reordering fell far short of transforming society.

The implementation of the policy varied from region to region but the norm was force, not negotiated consent. There was little psychological or logistical preparation. By and large, villagers were simply ordered to tear down their dwellings, pack up, and move to designated places at specified times. Since the price of refusal was verbal abuse, beatings, confiscation of animals and implements, and, in extreme cases, forfeiture of access to land, people grudgingly obliged. The process entailed considerable hardship. Families and their animals had to travel long distances carrying their meager belongings, often to find themselves in unsuitable surroundings far removed from their farms, pastures, wells, and places of worship. They themselves built the fortified villages, which were guarded by militias screened by party cadres. Life in the clusters was regimented and mobility severely restricted, with residents unable to leave or reenter without authorization. Villagization, like resettlement, was socially disruptive; it destroyed age-old horticultural techniques and social practices, as well as damaging fragile ecosystems, without delivering the promised services. A few gravel roads and bridges were built by the army here and there, in part for its own use. Some villages got piped water, electricity, flour mills, and shops. But nothing that was built was sufficient to mitigate the hardships imposed on the peasantry.

State-spurred modernization turned out to be a grand illusion, partly because of bureaucratic callousness and incompetence. The party and the government were unable to address, let alone resolve, the growing contradiction and sharpening conflict between the economic and social demands of the peasantry and their own bureaucratic and autocratic methods. The result was mass distress and disenchantment. "Villagization," wrote a keen observer, "marks the disappearance of the autonomy conferred by land reform, and may lead to the very rural opposition which it was partly intended to prevent."[39] Whatever opposition there was, it was sparse and unorganized. People expressed their resistance to

villagization mostly individually and in nonconfrontational ways like shunning official gatherings and celebrations, chanting hostile slogans at communal festivities, not working, or furtively breaking implements on collective farms. Some helped the rebels in the neighborhoods in a variety of ways. The program was uniformly disliked; there is no starker illustration of its unpopularity than the speed and manner in which peasants "devillagized" rural Ethiopia in 1991, soon after the fall of the dictatorship.

The authoritarian state did much more to estrange society and earn its fury. A captive peasantry was subjected to numerous legal and extralegal exactions, and the state had overwhelming power to enforce compliance. The onerous demands came in the form of taxes, fees, levies, requisitions, and the appropriation of agricultural output without fair compensation. The legal tax obligation of every peasant household was 40 birr, but in practice people were continually forced to pay considerably more. Producers gave for the upkeep of the militia, for the war, for development, for membership in the civic associations, and to fill the pockets of bribe-seeking bureaucrats and party personnel. Mengistu acknowledged that Ethiopia had become "a country of endless contributions that in turn will hurt us. Much is being asked from the farmer."[40] He did nothing to alleviate the peasants' plight and his inaction hurt the party, government, and army badly.

That was not all. By controlling domestic trade, the state deprived rural workers of the fruits of their labor. State exploitation was realized through the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC), an agency established in 1976. The initial primary purpose of the AMC was to protect the urban population from unscrupulous merchants by stabilizing the domestic market at a time of political crisis—or, more specifically, by putting a lid on the price of consumer products. As of 1979, however, the AMC was no longer a mere regulator but the state's chief agency of surplus extraction for capital accumulation and the provision of the cities and the armed forces. The military leadership soon realized that its ability to defeat the insurgencies was inextricably bound up with its capacity to procure from the peasantry, in particular from the surplus-producing regions, food supplies for the army and the cities. The consequences proved harmful to everyone. Not only did grain supplies dwindle but the agrarian policies further impoverished both rural and urban Ethiopia. All the goodwill the revolutionary soldiers had earned following the land reform of 1975 was squandered. The agrarian policies of "war communism" were intensely resented and peasant-state relations deteriorated markedly.

The AMC was the principal buyer and distributor of agricultural surplus at officially determined prices that were far below market rates. It was not that

the state had eliminated the "free" market and private trading but that it used them as an adjunct. The agency's control and management of this business was made considerably easier by the fact that the marketable agricultural surplus was drawn mainly from three regions—Arsi, Gojjam, and Shewa—and that it was directed to a few major cities of political significance, most notably Addis Ababa, Asmara, and Dire Dawa. The agency bought perhaps as much as 7 percent of the total 16 percent marketed food grain and channeled it to consumers through the urban dwellers' associations while using a large portion of it to feed the army. It was obligatory for state farms and producers' cooperatives to sell all their output directly to the AMC. Traders were required to sell in Arsi and southern Shewa everything they purchased, and they were barred altogether from wholesale trading in Gojjam. As for individual producers, quotas were set for all regions at all administrative levels, which were then broken down into smaller quotas for households, service cooperatives, and peasants' associations.[41] It would have been foolish to suppose that such a complicated system of surplus appropriation involving such an array of organizations could have operated efficiently, let alone fairly. How could it have been any different from the entire corruption-riddled, inefficient state-party apparatus? Power created opportunities for individuals to acquire all sorts of privileges but also to illegally profit and prosper.

The system of quota allocation was widely open to abuse. The hierarchy of bureaucrats and officers of the peasants' associations used it for personal benefit, to reward relatives and friends, or to punish enemies. Regardless of the region, the ultimate victim was the producer. Brigadier General Meles Haile, a Derg and CC member and a party representative in south Gondar, seems to have understood the situation when he said, "Once the quotas are imposed on the peasants' associations, the farmer has to submit his share whether or not he has harvested teff. To meet his obligation, he is often forced to sell his goats or sheep and then buy the teff in the market. As a result, the people's respect and affection for the leadership and love of their country have slowly been eroded. The peasant has embraced the enemy in the hope that conditions will be better under him."[42]

Discontent abetted insurrection. Disgruntled peasants invariably vented their anguish and resentment in verse like this:

> They asked for contributions, we gave contributions.
> They asked for children, we gave children.
> They asked for cereals, we gave cereals.
> Please, friends, give counsel
> Before they also expropriate the land.[43]

The MIA lamented that, despite the major sacrifices the population had made in the continuing struggle, it had "witnessed defeat instead of victory, impover-

ishment instead of growth, administrative abuse instead of justice, and conflict instead of peace. . . . It is no longer a secret that its support for the government, which it holds accountable for its miseries, has withered."[44]

The government and party were fully aware of the producers' disaffection and the potential political ramifications, but there was no consensus on how to deal with it, despite the urgency. These extended quotations from a Politburo deliberation lay bare the mindset of the leaders, including their anxieties:

> Comrade General Secretary [Mengistu Haile Mariam]: Ninety percent of the land belongs to farmers. Ninety percent of the population are farmers. Whatever this social sector does, its economic organization and productivity will determine Ethiopia's fate. . . . The organization of the farmer, the transformation of his material condition, and the growth of agricultural productivity are all tied to Ethiopia's transformation.
>
> Nevertheless, I have no evidence that supports the farmer's alleged complaint about social exploitation or about the system's posing a threat to his existence. His main complaint is that the government does not deliver industrial products whenever he needs them. It is a problem of our inability to satisfy his demand. What the farmer asks for is a stronger relationship with the government, not its replacement by traders. Let's be clear about these two issues.
>
> I remember the time when we bought an average of five million quintals. Today, we are purchasing an average of three or two and a half million. I am not sure that this constitutes 2 percent of the country's total agricultural output, nor am I certain that we have collected a cup of grain from every Ethiopian farmer. And the 2–3 percent mainly comes from state farms. Is our disagreement about principle or reality? If we have hurt the farmer, let's see the proof.
>
> We should nonetheless admit shortcomings. Quotas are imposed regionally for Gojjam, Arsi, and Shewa. This is done without knowing or assessing the farmer's exact output. Quotas are sometimes raised or reduced on the basis of personal whims and relations—to benefit friends or to hurt enemies. Prices fixed by the government are often changed by the administrative hierarchy for its own benefit. All this is not legal. The system should not be criticized but those who abuse it ought to be punished. Rather than try to destroy each other and in the process hurt the farmer and arouse his anger, the government and the private sector should harmonize their activities in the "mixed economy." . . . Be it in supplying the industrial sector, the consumer, or the external market, government representatives are busy accumulating wealth and property. What is lacking is governmental control and efficiency.[45]

Comrade Shimeles Mazengia (head of the Commission for Ideology): We have been blamed for resettlement and villagization—the party, the govern-

ment, and the leadership, without exception. The other issue is the connection between the purchase of cereals and the delivery of merchandise. It is my view that people are grumbling not about the principle per se but about insufficiency. Agricultural marketing, however, is a different story; there is much corruption in that organization. It has bothered me for some time now that this business is not managed "universally, equally, and effectively." It is not fair to impose disproportionate obligations on Gojjam simply because it is surrounded by the Abay or on Shewa because it is close to Addis Ababa. Do we have to wait until Gojjam revolts or should we correct the situation? The government purchases 3–5 million quintals of the total 70 million quintals produced in the country. Should we not ask what the "political cost" of this might be? The AMC has a bad name. It asks the farmer to bring teff even if he has to purchase it. Quotas are set illegally. This needs to be "reexamined."[46]

Comrade General Secretary: I wish to add that . . . it is not only the producer but also the consumer who condemns us. It is the traders, the primary beneficiaries, who spread false information because they want both the farmer and the industrial sector to sell their products directly to them.[47]

Comrade Fasika Sidelel (head of the Economic Commission): It should be realized that we buy only 2.5 million quintals out of a total of 70 million quintals. This really won't starve the farmer. . . . What we deliver today is mainly for educational institutions, prisons, and the army. Just feeding the army has become very difficult. Government shops and distribution centers are empty, but private shops are full. Those who sell the essentials to them are government and service employees, the majority of whom are thieves.[48]

Both the preceding comments and an assessment of the Ethiopian economy and its social implications by MIA in 1989 make it abundantly clear that the government's agrarian policies were thoroughly disastrous.[49] The government's efforts to promote collectivism and the peasantry's integration into the socialist state through the regulation of the market economy and the formation of cooperatives were stymied by a backward culture, an underdeveloped infrastructure, particularly transport, an unwieldy price system, the contraction of agricultural surplus and productivity of labor, and a decline in domestic industrial output. Shortages of food grains, goods, and services, in turn, led to a flourishing informal or parallel economy. The net effect of the policies was collective social leveling, or the universalization of poverty and the fabulous enrichment of a few entrepreneurs as well as top state and party functionaries. War exhausted the country and impoverished the population, but it enriched a tiny group of army contractors, speculators, and plunderers. The nationalization of land, the

collectivization of agriculture, and the monopolization of internal and external trade, failed, as in the Soviet Union, to thwart "the personal accumulation of money and its conversion into private capital."[50] Whether in the formal or informal sectors of the economy, market relations bolstered acquisitive tendencies and deepened social differentiation. Paradoxically, most of Ethiopia's current millionaires made their money during, and despite, the "socialist" revolution.

Under "war communism," the gaps in income distribution widened. The poor became poorer, profiteers grew rich, and criminality flourished. War is perhaps the only business in which profits are reckoned in gold and dollars and losses in lives and human suffering. War communism reduced the vast majority of ordinary citizens to penury but it also feathered the nests of a network of powerful cliques. It was high living for a few and misery for just about everyone else. A small number of state and party officials made big money through racketeering, procurement of inflated contracts with MOND and its affiliates, commissions and kickbacks on expense accounts, and bribes for military exemptions. Shimeles Mazengia, a Politburo member, acknowledged the profiteering and venality but was coy about how to deal with it; he told his colleagues at one of their weekly meetings that "there is corruption but one does not burn down a house to kill a bug. This problem has to be handled carefully and methodically."[51] The time for such halfhearted measures had long passed, and the entire power structure would be swept away in scarcely two years.

There was an unmistakable connection between war and social regression. Since the wars drained more than half of the national budget, precious little was invested in agriculture and industry. The economy grew at an annual rate of 4 percent during the years 1977–82, but growth declined markedly, to less than 1 percent, in 1982–88. The official explanations were the escalating civil wars, the worst drought in living memory, diminishing foreign exchange earnings, scant national savings, and lack of investment. The national savings rate during the years 1978–86 averaged 3 percent a year (declining from 13 percent in 1974 to 4 percent in 1990)—compared with Tanzania's 9 percent, Kenya's 15 percent, and Niger's 13 percent. The rate of investment during the same period never exceeded 11 percent a year, or was less than half that of those other three poor African countries.[52] The country's foreign exchange earnings kept declining for most of the 1980s. In 1986, it was 579 million birr; it had fallen to 165 million by 1988 and to 100 million by 1989. Ethiopia's inferior industrial products could not compete in the international market, and the prices of its primary products were unstable. For example, earnings from coffee, the country's main export, declined from 510 million birr in 1989 to 322 million the following year.[53] Fluctuations in the prices of primary products and dwindling foreign exchange

hampered economic growth. Both the productivity of labor and the scope of agricultural production deteriorated. Food production per capita declined by 2 percent. State farms underproduced largely because of poor management, and individual farmers lacked the incentive to be more productive given the tenuous security of their lands, unfavorable market prices, and aggressive exactions. A stagnant agriculture could not provide supplies for food manufacturers or for home factories producing goods like textiles, and conditions were made worse by the decline in foreign exchange and the prevalence of theft and fraud. Of the 405 industrial plants, 200 were state owned; all of them operated below capacity and at a loss. Many were closed. Of the 40 plants in Asmara and Massawa only 6 functioned, and that was because they catered mainly to the army's needs.[54]

Economic stagnation in the agricultural and industrial sectors resulted in ongoing imbalances between state revenues and expenditures. The government spent more than it collected from exports, taxes, tariffs, and contributions. Capital expenditure rose from 680 million birr in 1974 to 2.9 billion birr in 1984. Sixty-two percent of the deficit was financed with foreign aid (24.8 percent) and foreign loans (37.4 percent). Domestic banks lent the other 32.2 percent.[55] In 1989, the deficit was 1,880 million birr.[56]

Scarcity was pervasive and corruption rampant, and the two were interlaced. Both rural and urban poverty had significantly increased since 1974, with people scrambling for goods and services beyond their reach. Particularly hard hit were urban groups largely dependent on state salaries and pensions. Wages stagnated, and people lined for hours to buy the basic necessities of life—more often than not to find the shelves bare. Government workers who had lived well on 450 birr a month before the revolution found themselves working second and third jobs to survive. The clothing they wore (known as *salvajo*) was largely secondhand from abroad. Although it is hard to believe, evidently a number of working women and female university students engaged in "hidden prostitution," mostly in places known as *sekreto* (the secret ones). As more and more families became destitute, homelessness among children also increased.

All this was aggravated by unchecked abuses in every branch of state and government institutions. The dishonesty of high and minor officials alike led to the unfair distribution of foodstuffs and basic necessities. Bribes were required to conduct almost any public business, whether it was finding a place for a child in school, getting electricity, or installing a telephone line. Corruption was especially blatant in the Agency for the Administration of Rented Houses. where officials took advantage of the severe shortage of housing. Prospective tenants paid a fee known as "key money" (*ya kulf*), and the practice was as universal as it was illegal. Sometimes officials would collect money from up to five individuals

for the same key. One enraged soldier-physician killed two such venal officials in 1988 and successfully escaped from prison in 1991.[57]

In the midst of destitution and suffering there was wealth, much of it acquired through a flourishing informal economy. The entrepreneurs, usually connected to people with political clout, were not engaged in production; they merely recirculated goods mostly obtained through smuggling or contraband.[58] Kassa Kebede, a Politburo member, put it plainly: "The revolution has bred many traders . . . and, as I see it, most of them are contraband traders. Today, millions are engaged in illicit trade [*ayer bayer*]. The manifestations of wealth so accumulated and the material culture of those who possess it are so at variance that they can only be described as laughable. On the other hand, there are those who do business legally, and to leave the market to its own devices may enhance their efforts and increase their contribution to the growth of the national economy. Would this mean that what we have done so far was wrong?"[59] With his rhetorical question, he seemed to call for the unfettering of the market, which was anathema to Mengistu. A goodly amount of what the entrepreneurs acquired was procured from state shops through the complicity of greedy officials and kleptocrats. This was an alliance of party and state functionaries and gluttonous merchants milking a half-starved cow. Part of the money was siphoned into offshore accounts and part of it was invested in homes, cars, and other goods. The nouveau riche went abroad for medical treatment and sent their children to Western Europe and the United States while those of the poor died or were injured at the war fronts. They were mostly intellectually lazy, creating little of their own but mindlessly imitating the worst features of Western consumerism and narcissism. They bought tasteless jewelry for their wives and mistresses, and some mistresses were even rewarded with cars or their own bakeries or restaurants.

The "miserable" did not carry their yoke silently. There was resistance ranging from the individual to the collective, from the peaceful to the violent, and from the legal to the criminal. Except in regions where peasants openly supported insurgencies out of ethnic loyalty or because they preferred the rebels to the soldiers they so bitterly detested, rural people abjured violence. There were no revolts like the French Vendée against the Jacobins in 1793. Their tactics, which were individual and unorganized, included work slowdowns, cheating, or flight. Their counterparts in the cities employed similar methods until the late 1980s. Mengistu was still in denial: "I say this not to comfort you . . . but the people, including the peasantry, are with us. . . . Please bear in mind that it is the petite bourgeoisie that complains about cars, gas, education, and other things. This social stratum has never been with us; it is not now and never will be."[60]

This is an idiosyncratic reading of history. Without the radical intellectuals, small merchants, and junior officers, there would never have been a revolution. The petite bourgeoisie initiated and guided the revolution, including the insurgencies. All the revolutionary leaders, including Mengistu himself, were from that shapeless social group. Hard times had fallen, however, on all classes, and they had turned against the regime. Blue- and white-collar workers expressed their dissatisfaction through absenteeism, lack of compliance, theft, deception, and avoidance of responsibility. With the abandonment of socialism in March 1990, civic engagement went from hidden to open. Workers began to demand the right to elect their own leaders and to form unions free from government control. They demanded annual wage raises, work garments, shoes, and soap and refused to render free labor to the state. There was fear that these protests, which first surfaced in Addis Ababa, would spread elsewhere and then coalesce into a national workers' strike, but by then the state had atrophied.[61]

In a country where unemployment was very high, some criminality was unavoidable. Social delinquency was directly related to inequalities and deprivation. Some of the demobilized conscripts, idle high school and even college graduates, and disabled veterans organized themselves into gangs (with names like Bombard, Ranger, Black September, The Hyenas, and The Lions of Kiera) to rob and loot and to generally unnerve officialdom. Some engaged in drug trafficking and gang rape, contributing to an atmosphere of instability and lawlessness. The government tried in vain to minimize their antisocial activities by banishing them to remote areas or locking them behind bars.[62]

It was momentary unrest at Addis Ababa University in 1988 that appears to have particularly disturbed those in the government. What began as a protest against bad food turned political. The government's overreaction stemmed from the history of student politics in the country, and Mengistu left no room for compromise: "What has occurred in the university is a new phenomenon since the outbreak of our revolution. It requires close attention. We know where student activism leads. . . . Antirevolutionaries will quickly exploit it. Right-wing forces constitute the majority there. Even those who appear to be with us are so mainly for a living. There are secessionists, Pentecostals, and other believers. . . . If they are trying to test our constitution, well, it is for the law-abiding. Our position is firm. We shall not be compelled to do anything because students threw stones."[63] There was a similar event the following year and the president was just as belligerent: "In my view, if leniency is shown to students, they will not stop. Therefore, the situation must be eliminated without hesitation. What is surprising is that those who participate in these politics are children of high officials."[64]

Students had been one of the catalysts of the revolution, and now they had become signposts that the decadent dictatorship had reached an impasse. Party and government were divorced from the pressing concerns and needs of ordinary people. They lost whatever legitimacy they might have had when the soldiers proved utterly incapable of dealing with the immense social problems their economic policies had created. And despite his public face, Mengistu was deeply troubled by the ominous signs: "It will be our end," he confided to his comrades in the Politburo, "should the men in uniform and the workers desert us. That all others have forsaken us is not in doubt."[65] He was completely correct. Workers were nearly in open revolt and the soldiers were demonstrating their unhappiness by deserting in substantial numbers. It was the combination of the public's estrangement and the army's frustration and internal weaknesses that ensured the end of Mengistu's dictatorship. What exactly were the weaknesses?

THE DEATH OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY

> The army is a copy of society and suffers from all its diseases, usually at a higher temperature.
>
> —*Leon Trotsky*

> No army, however, can be more democratic than the regime which nourishes it.
>
> —*Leon Trotsky*

On the second anniversary of the revolution in February 1975, Mengistu Haile Mariam made a public declaration that would haunt him for the next sixteen years: "I can assure you, with absolute confidence, that the northern army [Second Division] will take care of the few traitors who, with clubs obtained from cowards, have organized an insurgency in the northern part of the country."[66] The "traitors" were Eritrean rebels, of course, and the "cowards" were most certainly their Arab supporters. It was a euphoric utterance by an inexperienced young officer whose understanding of the nature of the Eritrean resistance and people's wars was sadly inadequate but whose personal prejudices toward Eritreans and Arabs were deep and lasting. Even more mystifying was an assessment of the military's capabilities by his chief security officer ten years later. "Today," trumpeted Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, "our joy is immense because we have been able to build an impregnable and reputable defense force of high revolutionary discipline, spirit, and tactical proficiency, a credit not only to revolutionary Ethiopia but also to our continent."[67] The swaggering could have easily been

dismissed had it not been serious. True, the forces had grown astronomically, but their rapid expansion had increased the magnitude of their organizational and social problems while undercutting the leadership's ability to deal with them. It was also true that the forces had highly capable field commanders like Demissie Bulto, Merid Negussie, Tesfaye Habte Mariam, Tariku Ayne, Hailu Kebede, Biruk Dejene, Kassaye Chemeda, Kebede Birru, Legesse Abeje, Araya Zeraay, Behaylu Kindu, Teshome Tessema, Sereke Berhan, and Halefom Alemu, to mention a few, and troops that fought gallantly and with fierce determination until about the late 1980s, when they began to lose ground. They were weakened by splits and frictions, fatigue, and deteriorating morale and discipline.

In 1991, the current minister of defense of Eritrea, Lieutenant General Sibhat Ephrem, made a perfunctory remark that sheds light on how victors write history. "As intellectuals," he said, "they [the Amhara] have the best people in Ethiopia, but they are not very good fighters." Granted, the Amhara constituted the bulk of the officer corps, but they did not fight alone, for the Ethiopian army was ethnically heterogeneous and it gave the Eritreans a good fight. That it took thirty years for them to win says as much about the Eritreans as it does about the Ethiopian troops. Either the Eritreans were less competent or the Ethiopians were superior or, at the very least, as good fighters as their northern counterparts. Actually, the adversaries were equally matched in valor and skill. The reasons for victory or defeat were far more complex than Sibhat's ethnocentric and one-dimensional view. Mengistu and Legesse provided a glimpse of the major causes for the deepening crisis that had strained command relationships. Though smelling defeat, both argued for the continuation of the wars. In his oration, Mengistu presented himself as standing between the anvil and the hammer, so to speak, but he was generally optimistic and never accepted the slightest responsibility for the military quandary:

> Common understanding, though crucial, has become difficult to attain. It is important that you not despair because you feel the people have forgotten or abandoned you. . . . Conditions are not permanent. There will be change and development. That is the law of nature. . . . Even now the people support us, and the army is fighting. We have logistics and equipment that meet our needs. . . . The threat does not come from the bandits only, however. The fear is not just that the bandits may seize Keren or assault the army at Shire. It is possible that those who give from their wages and the producers' cooperatives that donate for the army's rations could rise up. We are faced with huge problems. Economic, social, and administrative matters concern us deeply. We worry about finance, foreign earnings, productivity, and internal matters

of the party. What does it matter if everyone says they are Ethiopian? While we get hurt, many rejoice, and when we succeed, many are saddened. This is the internal war. . . . There is much that cannot be said here, but I want you to understand me.

Above everything else, you should respect one another. The chain of command must be respected. We have to cohere before we can destroy the enemy. When I say we have to have unity, I mean you. Hopefully, I am not wrong in saying that what we see is everyone exaggerating the faults of others and everyone trying to trip or destroy the other. There are external enemies, too. We are in the midst of all these difficult conditions. It has been said that the troops do not execute plans. But who is really responsible? The troops? Why did we take drastic measures against some commanders? Because it was discovered that every one of them was profiting from the soldiers who die every day.

The bandits, too, have many problems. They beg or scavenge for everything, but they fight despite the lice and leeches on their bodies. By contrast, what is being spent on the army has no precedent in the country's history. True, the enemy has supporters and the physical environment does not favor us. To buttress our capabilities by correcting mistakes, it is essential that we have unity of purpose and true love of country. Unless we understand and support rather than undercut one another, it will be impossible to meet the challenges. Some commanders talk to one another when here but do not salute or greet one another in their departments. But they occupy key and decisive positions. This is the source of our problems. . . . I do not think that we can walk again should we let Eritrea go and Ethiopia disintegrate. To sum up, be self-confident.[68]

Legesse Asfaw reiterated the president's histrionics. Seemingly sensing an interminable fall, he presented a somber and rather intriguing picture of the brutal realities:

Both internally and externally, the times are not good for us. We have said and done many things, particularly following the setbacks of 1987 and 1988. We asked [the people] to give their children and to eat once if they were eating three times a day. . . . The army has put all its trust in the party and this government. We have to feed and clothe the troops, deliver the gas, munitions, and bombs, hospitalize the wounded, and bury the dead. To do all this we need to produce at the rear. We need foreign earnings. We need to manage the industrial sector better. . . . Is this all the responsibility of one person, the party, or the government? Do we realize what will happen to us if things are not set right? Must not our beds and pillows have thorns [to prick us]? This is the biggest worry. The problems we face are not only at the war fronts but in

> the whole country. . . . It is the farmers who fight on both sides. This is an open secret. The only difference between them and us is that we have added some from the working class.
>
> We must be attentive to the forces behind the internal enemy. The bandits' strength does not emanate from our weakness. I say this because I know all too well that we have never been lethargic when it comes to national unity. Can anyone with a brain doubt what the situation would look like today if this government were led by *democratic civilians*? Those behind the bandits are those who have always coveted our land and water. This party and this government have inherited an intractable problem that was worsened when we added revolution to the contentious issues of land, soil, and water. Our burden quadrupled. . . . The war is not limited to the north. Nor is it between two armies. The war is national, and that is the crux of the problem.[69]

Legesse's and Mengistu's perorations were responses to remarks by some of the top brass at a meeting of the Defense Council eight months after the first major debacle in Eritrea. Both men appear to have been particularly irked by comments made by Major General Merid Negussie, chief of staff, and Major General Aberra Abebe, chief of operations, in an atmosphere of extraordinary tension. Following an assessment of the military situation in Eritrea by Major General Demissie Bulto, Merid interjected. "So far as I know, we do not know the exact overall situation of our own armed forces, let alone about the enemy. We do not know about the climatic conditions in Eritrea. We do not know correctly about the army's operations. Had the large army we have fought better and had we known and planned carefully, the outcomes would have been quite different." The chief of operations aired his own misgivings: "Why have the people abandoned us? Other than being quick to criticize, they seem to have no concern for what happens. . . . Can a soldier who comes out of this society fight well at the front? How is it that the troops are being chased by the bandits? This army lacks training and really does not deserve the name. . . . As I have observed, we use rocket launchers and mortars without restraint, but I wonder if a thousand shots kill even two bandits. . . . The planes are not effective either because the bandits are well protected in their caves and encampments. Unless we use some kind of tear gas, we will not be able to drive them from their hideouts. . . . We must seize the upper hand by making significant organizational changes lest the bandits evict us from the key and decisive positions we hold."[70]

The rancor between an embattled but obdurate commander in chief and his officers prosecuting the wars was real and soon resulted in a complete rupture. No one contested that the situation was perilous, but the disagreements on the causes for it were fundamental. Contrary to the president's assumptions,

the generals held that the people had deserted the regime and that the army's quality was poor, as was its leadership, implying that the commander in chief himself was not beyond reproach. They told him what he did not want to hear and earned his irritation. To deflect their skepticism, Mengistu sounded upbeat, though he, too, was deeply worried about the unfolding reality on the ground. This reality was extremely grave. While beseeching the officers' understanding, Mengistu chided and scolded them for being divisive, unprofessional, and defeatist. Even though the army was on the retreat, he ordered at least three successive major operations for an objective that had been repeated ad nauseam since 1978.[71] Mengistu was a prisoner of his own certitude and delusion. Only a major victory could have revived the spirit of 1978, but that had eluded the army. The decline in morale appeared irreversible, whereas the opponent's will to fight remained high.

The causes for the demoralization and eventual defeat of the armed forces were profound, elemental, and multidimensional. They paralleled the steady impoverishment, disillusionment, and bitterness of the workers and peasants. After all, the army embodied all of society's contradictions. An overburdened peasantry that was abused by corrupt state and party apparatchiks was systematically but nonconfrontationally subverting the government's policies, from conscription to control of the economy. This political behavior was bound to have a deep impact on the army, since most of the recruits were drawn from the rural population. The army's structural weaknesses reflected wider and deeper problems of a society that was in a state of flux, uncertainty, misery, and pain.

Fighting a revolutionary war is difficult enough under the best of circumstances, but it is ruinous if an army lacks good organization, purposeful leadership, internal discipline, an efficient intelligence and logistics system, vigor, and patriotic enthusiasm and if it stresses quantity over quality. When fed and led well, the Ethiopian soldier fought well, and indeed, between 1977 and 1985, he fought with patience, energy, endurance, and patriotic ardor despite harsh conditions. He fought the hardest and endured the worst. What seems to have sustained his morale was the camaraderie that soldiers share in war and, more important, the utter conviction that the state's identity was at stake. As Major Paulos Fida, a prisoner of the EPLF, so fluently expressed it, "We thought we were fighting for the integrity of Ethiopia, for an idea, for the nation's mysterious wholeness."[72] Even the hurriedly assembled militias distinguished themselves in the war of 1977–78 by fighting tenaciously, much as the first two groups of national conscripts would fight in the mid-1980s. By 1986, that spirit had begun to wear off in the face of repeated failures.

The operational history of the Ethiopian military is one of improvisation,

mainly because the armed forces were forced by incessant civil wars to grow too quickly. Rapid expansion caused difficulties with social cohesion, development of officers, training, and discipline. These difficulties seriously degraded the army's ability to fight effectively. As the wars dragged on with no prospect of victory, confusion, skepticism, disillusionment, incompetence, and defeatism intensified. A growing number of soldiers began to question the causes and goals of the wars. Disobedience and desertion escalated. These problems may in any case have made success unlikely, but they were extreme enough to make rebel victory a virtual certainty.

A dysfunctional leadership riven by divisions, jealousies, and rivalries that may have been tolerated or even encouraged by the supreme commander out of hubris and self-interest crippled the armed forces, worsening the plight of the soldier. The structure of the high command proved unsuitable to conditions of civil war, in part because the commander in chief held a grip on all strategic and operational matters, depriving field commanders of independence and initiative. In the absence of constitutional limitations or constraints, military policy became an emanation of his will. The legislation that regulated the organization of the military was enacted virtually on the eve of war with Somalia and out of necessity vested immense powers in the commander in chief. Those powers were reinforced and expanded with the formation of a party. Fortuitously placed for a difficult job at a critical moment in the country's history, Mengistu nonetheless turned out to be a bad commander, lacking strategic imagination and vision. A good supreme commander has no business second-guessing his wartime officers, but Mengistu tried to direct all operations, from strategic campaigns to tactical engagements. Pivotal decisions were made not by the commanders on the scene but by an arrogant and stubborn man a thousand miles away. Rather late in the game, Alemu Abebe, head of the Commission of Central Control and a member of the so-called gang of four, opaquely told the chairman: "I see you, either alone or accompanied by two or three persons, flying from place to place. Perhaps that is what a leadership under stress has to do. It is proper to be at the sites and make correct assessments. However, I do not believe that your rushing around alone would be sufficient . . . to reverse the situation."[73]

Mengistu's fatal flaw was his habitual inclination to act almost entirely on the basis of his personal feelings, ignoring input from seasoned officers and evidence that ran counter to his prejudices. His calculations were frequently based on Pollyannaish optimism. The consequences, as would be demonstrated in the campaigns of 1982 and 1989, were disastrous.

Another major weakness of the man was his total reliance on a coterie of loyal but not necessarily able aides and true believers. These advisers and assistants

were generally incompetent, lazy, and corrupt, and no officer exemplified these shortcomings better than the minister of defense, Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan. He was the wrong man for such a critical position at such a momentous and tumultuous moment. A graduate of Holeta, the minister was a man of modest intellect who had no core beliefs of his own, only a set of postures that he tailored to his boss. Appointed to the ministry principally by virtue of his status as one of Mengistu's closest puppets, he held his position until 1988, when he was removed to become emergency administrator of Eritrea. As his chief pursuit was pleasure, Tesfaye was frequently disengaged from the day-to-day operations of his ministry, preferring to womanize, play cards, and drink, usually with four of his favorite military and civilian friends. His tenure at MOND was marked by an abysmal absence of serious strategic thinking.[74]

Tesfaye personified the structural deficiencies in the officer corps, which remained unresolved or uncorrected. The splits and frictions in the high command were the result of sharp political, professional, and generational differences. Officers retained from the imperial army tended to be older, better educated, and more conservative politically. Men from the Harar Academy and former members of the Imperial Bodyguard looked down on Holeta, even though Mengistu and Tesfaye were among its graduates. The classic rivalries were between Generals Regassa Jimma (Bodyguard) and Tariku Ayne (Holeta) and between Aberra Abebe (Holeta) and Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam (Bodyguard). The first was one of the reasons for the disaster at Af Abet in 1988, and the second resulted in Aberra's fatally shooting his rival following a failed coup in which Aberra was one of the conspirators. The political differences between party and nonparty members of the armed forces were just as lethal. As the party lost touch with the ordinary people, the influence of party members on the rank and file declined. Hence the constant struggle of the commissars to maintain the party's hegemony even if it meant undercutting the commanders' authority and the army's effectiveness.

The professional integrity and solidarity of the armed forces was further damaged by the widespread belief that a small cohort of senior generals managed MOND's affairs in their own interests, manipulating pay, promotion, awards, and retirement. The departments of procurement, construction, and transport in particular were blamed for plundering the ministry, the recipient of the largest share of the national budget. Theft was rampant, with food, gasoline, and other war materials diverted to the black market. It was not unusual for officers to pad their rolls with deceased or fictitious persons in order to draw additional pay. "There is a festering problem at MOND," the president politely observed of the pervasive corruption. "It is in the management of finance in transport and ad-

ministration. Shortages are persistent but the reasons are not explained."[75] The war economy was a bonanza for well-placed personnel in the organization. It was a system in which codes of conduct were conveniently disregarded or violated, promotions were arbitrary, favoritism was rife, and corruption was endemic. It is no wonder that the organizational dysfunction at the top was felt throughout the hierarchy and was importantly responsible for the defects and instability that pervaded and weakened the armed forces.

The armed forces suffered dreadfully from incompetent leadership—men occupying positions for which they were not fit—and from lack of adequate training, regular provision of basic rations, and medical care. This in turn affected morale and discipline, undermining the solidarity between commanders and their troops, on the one hand, and the ties between the army and the party and regime, on the other. Mengistu and MOND continually bemoaned the shortage of officers, the lack of qualified reserves, the troops' low level of technical competence, and the overstretched army's inability to man nonmilitary targets. Constant growth and the creation of new divisions, task forces, corps, and armies since 1978 required more and more officers, but supply could not cope with demand. Beginning in 1984, shortages of officers in most combat units exceeded 52 percent and an average of seventeen thousand lieutenants were unavailable with every passing year. Efforts to deal with these problems led to unfortunate compromises in training and promotion that rendered the midlevel leadership functionally unfit. More schools were opened, and the training period for lieutenants was reduced from one year to six months and then to four months in the last years of the conflicts. But the problems remained and vacant slots were filled by massive promotions of NCOs. Under these circumstances, officers and troops never acquired more than rudimentary skills, and whenever their ill-led units achieved success it was largely due to traditional soldiering skills and innate courage.[76] All enlisted men—regulars, militia, conscripts—suffered from a justified lack of trust and confidence in their leaders. The ad hoc measures designed to offset the deficit further damaged the military organization. They undermined training and discipline, reduced combat effectiveness, and spurred desertion.

The decline in morale and discipline was matched by a decline in supplies and the general welfare of the men in arms. "An army walks on its stomach" is a military maxim. In other words, a hungry army does not fight well and is disposed to looting or fleeing. Soldiers had to contend with diseases, brutal climatic conditions, and scant supplies, frequently having to build the dusty roads they marched on. One of the main purposes of a controlled economy was to feed, clothe, and shoe the army, and indeed much money and effort were expended,

but logistics remained one of MOND's weak points. Rations—which mainly consisted of *besso* (oatmeal-like prepared barley), canned *zigni watt* (beef stew), macaroni, bread, sugar, tea, canned milk, and jam—clothing, medicine, and fuel were never sufficient and, when available, were rarely delivered on time.[77] It was not unusual to see soldiers in tatters or in civilian clothes. Each soldier received two pairs of uniforms and boots a year and one field jacket and a blanket every two years, regardless of weather conditions. There had been little change since imperial times. "The Ethiopian soldier is one who sleeps on stone, is often hungry and thirsty, and does not receive medical treatment," confessed MOND's inept chief.[78] His boss reinforced the general's sentiment: "The duration of the wars has badly affected the army. Many have died. The army pays in blood but has received no benefits from the revolution. It is other social groups that have benefited. Many are those whose houses have been closed, their children scattered. Many have not seen their children or set foot in Addis Ababa. But for how long will they remain in foxholes listening to the music of bullets? We have not even been able to deliver medicine and supplies."[79]

Yet, he added, "the Vietnamese relied on small rations to run an army of four million. If necessary, we will have to do the same."[80] The military's slogan, "We shall produce while fighting and fight while producing," was never translated into practice in part because there was no relief from combat. Another reason was that tens of thousands of men were used to guard factories, power plants, airfields, depots, long and precarious supply lines, vital bridges and junctions, towns, and "strategic" villages. The army was stretched to its absolute limits. Unsurprisingly, Ethiopian soldiers, like all other soldiers who have found themselves hungry and miserable, helped themselves to the peasants' property—grains, crops, and livestock—or deserted or defected. At times, they sold their weapons and munitions, which found their way to the rebels. Selling one's arms or pillaging represented disobedience to authority and the erosion of discipline. In February 1988, the minister of the interior reported two incidents to highlight the growing problems: "The killing of fellow soldiers and civilians is on the rise. On Meskerem 26, 1980, Wodajo Wanjo shot himself with an automatic gun after killing eight civilians and wounding another eight in the city of Asmara. Unstable, he was enraged when he could not find his lover. And Private Tsegay Ayele destroyed lives and property by throwing a bomb following an altercation in a restaurant."[81] Two years later, MIA reported: "In previous years, the people in the regions of conflict aided our forces by providing food and water, removing or hiding their dead and wounded, serving as guides, and even supporting them in combat. Sadly, this healthy relationship is being eroded. Some of the reason is that the army kills, beats, and robs peaceful civilians. It violates sacred customs

and beliefs: girls are raped and wives dishonored. The troops have aroused the fury of a peaceful and friendly population through adultery, drunkenness, and debauchery and by killing one another. The bandits have exploited this. There have been instances of civilians aiding them in harming our troops."[82]

Atrocities were committed, and, according to its opponents, there were few villages where the army did not brutalize the peasantry. The army became a scapegoat for the hardships and sufferings of the populace, which the soldiers themselves had largely shared. War is a hellish business in which both nobility and savagery are displayed. The Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci captured it well: "Alas, nothing reveals man the way war does. Nothing so accentuates in him the beauty and ugliness, the intelligence and foolishness, the brutishness and humanity, the courage and cowardice, the enigma."[83] It is often forgotten that soldiers are humans with deep emotions who carry burdens and responsibilities that civilians don't. Sometimes—mostly under combat stress and particularly when comrades are suddenly lost—individual soldiers or tight-knit platoons take their anger and pain out on innocent people. Men, women, and children are gunned down, their bodies often horribly mutilated or burned. Horrific crimes were committed during the thirty years of war, in which it was nearly impossible to differentiate guerrillas from noncombatants. In comparison with others, though, it is astonishing how restrained Ethiopian troops were. But there is no denying that villages were indiscriminately bombed and civilians killed and that the frequency of such bombings increased as the military lost ground to its enemies.

The problem of indiscipline was serious. The security officer of Corps 604 described the chaos and loss of authority at the Shire camp on the eve of the "great failure": "Soldiers brought women to the barracks and even slept with them in the trenches. These women got as close as they could to the command center and radio station. Peddlers roamed around inside the fortress, selling cigarettes. This must have contributed to the leaking of intelligence."[84] The officer could not have been wrong in his conclusion, since it was well known that the rebels, both the TPLF and EPLF, used peddlers, priests, shoeshine boys, and prostitutes as spies and informers. One prostitute was responsible for the death of her lover, a highly regarded security officer in Asmara, Eritrea.

As discipline and the will to fight continued to slump, desertion accelerated, thinning the ranks and raising the odds against success. There seems to be a pattern in military conflicts—that as demand for manpower increases, desertions rise, forcing the army to lower its standards of enlistment and recruit more and more of the unstable members of society (like vagabonds and criminals), who are far more likely in turn to desert. Agitated by low wages, severe conditions,

and homesickness, members of the peasant militias, more than regulars and the last groups of conscripts, were inclined to escape if not released at the expiration of their "contracts." And by 1986 conscription had become indiscriminate, with beggars, vagabonds, criminals, and even invalids scooped up in churches, in marketplaces, at school entrances, at public gatherings, at weddings, or along roadsides. Traditionally, this practice was known as *afessa* (sweeping up). These men, who were forced to fight against their will and with only a vague understanding of the civil wars, were horrified to see "brothers slaughtering brothers," and they took to flight at the slightest provocation. "If it is my duty to be conscripted, then it must be my right to abscond," they reasoned. "This year life will be with the Weyane or Shaabia."[85] Not only did their stories of the horrors of military life discourage others from voluntarily enlisting, but their despondency and desertions slowly infected the regulars, who also began to slip away. The army was coming asunder at every seam.

War weariness was perhaps the paramount reason. The indecisiveness of the campaigns increased cynicism, frustration, a sense of doom and gloom. Pay was irregular, delays were common, and deductions for families were sometimes pocketed by dishonest officers who also occasionally sold supplies.[86] Although every soldier was entitled to twenty-eight days of leave, most remained in fortresses, camps, and trenches for years and years without seeing their wives and children. The psychological impact of separation from loved ones for so long must have been unbearable. The system of decorations and awards that could be bestowed on individuals and units in recognition of deeds of valor was seen as tainted. Some felt, with justification, that they had been unfairly denied promotions, raises, or awards, and they were angered by accelerated promotions of those who did not merit them. Injuries and sickness were commonplace but facilities woefully inadequate. There were never enough physicians, nurses, or beds, and medicine was always scarce. The prime minister informed the Politburo in August 1988 that hospitals in Addis Ababa were so overcrowded with wounded soldiers that service to civilians was restricted to the most critical patients only.[87] For all these reasons and more, soldiers, including political commissars and brigade and division commanders, deserted or defected, taking with them priceless information that enabled the rebels to achieve dramatic successes in 1988 and 1989.

The rate of desertion was never known, since accurate records were not kept by all units. MOND's records showed that 10,361 men deserted between 1982 and 1989, but the minister himself gave 20,000 (5 percent) as a more plausible figure.[88] Even his estimate was probably low, since according to my informants thousands were deserting every day in the late 1980s.[89] The problem grew so

alarming that the deputy chief of staff, Major General Siyum Makonnen, ordered that those soldiers who deserted from the TRA and were then released by the rebels be carefully identified and executed in front of their units.[90] What these officers did not appreciate was that desertion was one manifestation of the fast-deteriorating relationship between the people and the government. Desertions reflected not only the soldiers' demoralization but also a similar evaporation of civilian commitment to the cause; the army is only an imprint of society.

Objections to the war were demonstrated in ways other than desertion. More and more men avoided combat, at times engaging in collective defiance. Some feigned sickness, inflicted permanent injuries, or killed themselves. In March 1988, the commander of the ground forces, acknowledging that as many as 30 percent of the men in the SRA wounded themselves to avoid combat, ordered that punishments be meted out.[91] Both Mengistu and the defense minister also urged corporal punishment for those who retreated or fled: "We are in a revolution and we should be pitiless. . . . We have sent out directives that those who run should be shot from the rear. This is the only solution." The president added, "I have also said, 'Kill to make them fight.'"[92] The otherwise thoughtful and frequently incisive Fasika Sidelel echoed them: "In war there cannot be questions of civil rights."[93] And when the situation became even more desperate, Mengistu exhorted: "Soldiers do not run away if commanded by ruthless officers. War demands ruthlessness. The [rebels] fight with conviction and determination. . . . Revolutionary spirit demands that we move on by using the sword remorselessly."[94] The seriousness of their malevolence became clearer to me when I saw the skeletons of Massawa. On May 3, 1994, at 1:15 p.m., I came across gruesome testimony to the horrors of war at a place called Hintlbo, a few kilometers outside Massawa. Human remains, mostly skulls and limbs, were stuffed in wooden ammunition crates. I counted forty of the crates, piled on top of one another and side by side. The holes in the skulls were evidence that countless army men were executed during the battle of Massawa. The crates, which also contained boots and socks, were kept inside a temporary shelter. They should have been treated with greater respect and housed in a better location. They deserved to be retained for a war memorial so that they would serve as one of the sordid lessons of war for generations to come.

Mengistu never asked why his own soldiers lacked motivation and determination. Sometimes desperate situations call for desperate measures, but in this case such measures were futile. The crueler the leaders became, the higher the desertions and the greater the resistance. In 1990, deserters, defectors, and prisoners founded the EDORM under the auspices of the TPLF to struggle militarily and politically, the same year, the commanders of the services, the chief of staff, and

many other high-ranking officers, on the heels of their defeat at Shire, failed in their attempt to remove Mengistu from power and rescue the military from total collapse. Mengistu retaliated in the only way he knew: he killed most of them, expediting the army's annihilation. There was little else the military could do to change the course of history and avert disaster.

Two other major weaknesses greatly contributed to its failure. Intelligence is always disputable and often wrong. Ye, it would be unusual for commanders to make strategic decisions, operational plans, or even tactical maneuvers without it. Military leaders need to know their opponent's capabilities—the size and organization of his combat forces, his weapon systems, his relation to the people, his knowledge of the terrain, and so on—as well as the psychological makeup and overall combat readiness of their own troops. MOND gathered such vital information through two overlapping and competing agencies: its own Department of Military Intelligence and MIA's Department of Military Security and Safety. There were problems in the gathering, interpretation, and utilization of the massive amount of information these agencies provided. In their rush to deliver first, they submitted conflicting and confusing evidence, often forged or falsified. Every so often, tactical decisions were made on hubris and bad information. And when intelligence was accurate, it was at times callously ignored or discreetly tucked away because it contradicted conventional wisdom or personal wishes. Or it was not used as needed, leaving commanders deprived of initiative and coordination. It was not uncommon for details of an operation to be withheld from those conducting it until the last minute. Without good and actionable intelligence, the military frequently failed to capitalize on its technological advantages.[95] On the other hand, the insurgents were keen in both collecting information and acting on it quickly. To get information, they penetrated the military organization, including perhaps, if one believes Mengistu, the presidential office.[96] Nothing, it seems, was beyond their reach. And unlike the military, they rarely squandered organizational secrets.

"To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence," muses Sun Tzu. He seems to suggest that war is really about convincing the enemy (and his supporters) that he is defeated, a goal achieved through propaganda and psychological warfare. For rural and illiterate societies like Ethiopia, the radio is the only source of national and international news and commentary. Both the government and the insurgents used it to blame, discredit, and harass each other, to sustain the revolutionary élan and sense of mission of their cadres and troops, and to win and keep the support of the populace. Even the government acknowledged that its opponents used the radio more effectively. "We have difficulties," admitted Mengistu, "in the war of propaganda. They [the rebels] have

disarmed the youth. . . . Our radio transmissions do not reach Eritrea and Tigray. We have not been able to make our tribulations known to the people."[97] The minister of defense expressed similar concern: "Our enemies have used prestigious newspapers and the international mass media to wage anti-Ethiopian propaganda. By contrast, no propaganda and counterpropaganda work is being done on our part."[98] Mengistu insisted that more needed to be done, including using Soviet assistance to jam the rebel radios. Although he did not realize it, he was living on borrowed time, for conditions on the war fronts were changing fast.

The leadership also debated whether to publicize events as they happened. Fasika Sidelel proposed that at least cadres be informed about the fall of Af Abet as a matter of party privilege, but Hailu Yimenu, another Politburo member, adamantly disagreed: "We chose not to publicize the casualties of the Ogaden war. . . . The level of consciousness of our people is low and they get perturbed quite easily. To inform them of our setbacks is to arouse greater anxiety. Our casualties may be comparable to those of the Iraq-Iran war and to make them public would create a commotion. The cadres, too, should not know about them."[99] It is difficult to appreciate what the fuss was all about since news of the events was being broadcast by both the EPLF and the TPLF. It was generally believed that more people tuned in to those organizations' stations than to Radio Ethiopia. The government had lost the trust of its people and no amount of propaganda would have had any effect on public opinion.

After seventeen years of warfare both the society and the army it fed were exhausted. Propaganda that belied the grim reality and urged sacrifice of a people who felt they had sacrificed too much already could not have altered the outcome. Persistent efforts to boost troop morale were worthless. An ill-trained, ill-clad, ill-provisioned, ill-disciplined army was no longer a match for skilled, dogged foes fighting on their own ground. Since 1987—and especially after the fall of Af Abet—the terms of battle had largely been dictated by the insurgents; the troops were fighting at a tactical and strategic disadvantage. But the reasons for defeat were preeminently political. As Lieutenant Amare Mamo Setie rhetorically put it, "How could an army that had no civil rights and no freedom to express its feelings and concerns have won the civil wars?"[100] Although the norm in conventional armies is for soldiers "not to reason why" but "to do and die," the young officer made a pertinent point: in a civil war all his comrades should have known its causes and objectives. This was possible only in an open society where ideas circulated freely and the government was not immune to criticism. Ethiopia was a closed society fettered to a vicious dictatorship, and the army could not have been "more democratic than the regime which nourished it."

And both the regime and the army were divorced from society. Master Sergeant Itaferahu Worku, a highly decorated female (militia) veteran of the wars in the Ogaden and Eritrea, articulated the feelings of nearly all my informants and perhaps most Ethiopian troops: "We did not lose the wars. The revolutionary government did, because it was no longer revolutionary and patriotic enough. Power corrupted our leaders. They became too self-interested and forgot their national mission. They lost touch with the people, who then denied us the support we needed most to win."[101] Even Alemu Abebe, one of the hard-liners in the Politburo, agreed: "We know that a war the people do not support is futile."[102] He and his comrades should have heeded Sun Tzu's counsel much earlier: "Do not fight a war if the people do not support it." The abysmal disorganization at the fronts was only a reflection of the deep popular disenchantment and turmoil at the rear. The front could not hold without the rear.

It was a long march from the Ogaden to Dabre Tabor and Massawa—from thrilling victory to total humiliating defeat. As the following chapters will show, the common sense of purpose and shared suffering that bound the society and the army against a foreign aggressor in the Ogaden had evaporated by the mid-1980s in the midst of ferocious civil wars. That is, as the revolutionary ideals and promises remained unfulfilled and poverty and misery increased, popular sentiment turned against a regime mired in social and economic crisis. And the Maoist insurgents were too clever at exploiting the structural and situational problems their Leninist opponents had so ineptly created. By losing the revolution from above to the revolution from below, the soldiers also lost the civil wars.

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Part Three

Battlefield Ethiopia

FROM RAZA TO RED STAR AND BEYOND

> War is not a chess game but a vast social phenomenon with an infinitely greater and ever-expanding number of variables, some of which elude analysis.
>
> —*David Galula*

Ethiopia was a battleground for three decades, without respite. Except for one major engagement with an outsider, it was all domestic violence—civil wars between centrists and separatists or autonomists. For four years following the political cataclysm that began in 1974, the fledgling revolutionary government was hard pressed from both within and without. To the Eritrean insurgency were added numerous ethnoregional and ethnonationalist uprisings throughout the country. Few would have wagered on the survival of the state as it veered toward dissolution. But by the middle of 1978, it had successfully restored central authority by eradicating its armed urban opponents and repulsing a Somali invasion with timely and extensive help from the socialist world. Fired up by the dual victory, the revolutionary soldiers fought vigorously but vainly to subdue the regional insurgents. Year after year until the 1980s, the same scenes repeated themselves: one side would take the initiative, capturing a town here or a village there, only to be checked by the other, which in turn lacked strength either for pursuit or for a decisive victory.

The counterinsurgency strategy of the military evolved gradually, passing through several phases, each mainly, but not exclusively, a response to the failure of the previous phase. It began with the clumsy Raza operation, continued with the elaborate operations of Lash and Red Star, and in effect ended with

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the ruinous Adwa operation. Since by 1980 northern Ethiopia had become the epicenter of the escalating civil wars, most of the fruitless campaigns were waged against the Eritrean and Tigrayan insurgents. Except for two or three successful operations, every strategic initiative ended in disaster and unacceptable losses. Every defeat led to the further demoralization of the troops while pumping up the will of the rebels.

Initially, the new rulers had little or no notion of the exact nature of guerrilla warfare. They seemed to have believed that they could wipe out the regional revolts with sheer numbers. Operation Raza of 1976, though foolish, was sinister in conception, as it was in practice. By mobilizing some 176,000 peasant warriors from Tigray (69,000), Gondar, or Begemedir (35,000), Gojjam (35,000), and

Wello (22,000), they unrealistically hoped to obliterate the Eritrean resistance (and, along with it, the Tigrayan rebellion) in barely six weeks (May 9 to June 18).[1] Eventually, not more than 100,000 militia were raised and only 40,000 were trained—perfunctorily, in the space of two weeks. Except for the one thousand Simonovs that the government provided, the recruits were self-armed with mostly obsolete rifles (like Alpinis, Wetterlys, and Sniders). Without logistical support but given promises of land (in a region notable for its scarcity) and booty, the ill-informed and poorly organized warriors were dispatched along five entry points to Eritrea like a wave of vultures (hence the name "Raza") to repel "Arab invaders" and eradicate their local collaborators.[2] The overseer of the operation was the Derg's second vice chairman, Major Atnafu Abate, and the field commander was Lieutenant Colonel Getahun Tekle Mariam. Although this motley collection of riflemen was led by regular officers, no attempt was made to integrate them into the army. The rebels took them by complete surprise at the border. Hundreds were killed in the slaughter and hundreds more perished from hunger and thirst on their way back. However, the claim of twenty-five thousand casualties is unsubstantiated and probably untrue.[3] At least six hundred fighters were taken prisoner by the Eritrean rebels.[4]

The dreadful result of the ill-conceived Raza campaign prompted a painful awareness that gigantic efforts would be required to deal with the entrenched guerrillas. Consequently, the government reorganized its forces soon after its victory over the Somali state in 1978. MOND deployed the Second Liberation Army, consisting of eight newly created task forces. With their primary headquarters at Mekele, the 87,000 men assembled for the operation were equipped with 155 tanks, 180 mortars, and 24 BMM missiles and backed by fighter jets and supplies sufficient for six months. The task forces (501, 502, 503A and B, 505, 506A and B, and 508) set off from Gondar and Tigray and marched into Eritrea relatively easily. The offensive, coordinated with assistance from Soviet military advisers, began in mid-June 1979; in less than five months the rebels were driven from the areas they had occupied since 1976.[5] In fact, the whole province had been recaptured except for the rebel stronghold of Sahel. It became impossible to dislodge the rebels from their last refuge.

Meantime, the army turned its attention to the several rebel organizations operating on the eastern front. With the exception of one, these were young and they frequently quarreled among themselves as they fought the regime. That made their suppression easier. In just three months in 1980, the military reclaimed much of the region, although it did not completely eliminate the rebels. The relative success of Operation Lash prompted an even larger campaign against the Eritrean rebels in 1982. Operation Red Star was the largest

and best-organized multifaceted offensive ever carried out by the government in Eritrea. Its aim was to destroy the EPLF at its base. However, the operation turned into a disaster for the regime and a critical victory for the insurgents. The military assembled most of its troops at Nakfa and there suffered most of its casualties, losing nearly eleven thousand soldiers in the single most costly encounter of the thirty-year war. The government lost face and army morale declined. This failure was a turning point in the armed conflict that would eventually determine the face of the Ethiopian state. Never again would the army come so close to crushing the EPLF.

Its survival assured and with quantities of weapons captured at Nakfa, the EPLF overran the northern outpost of Alghena in 1984, amassing additional ordnance. The following year, it captured the strategic town of Barentu, 237 kilometers west of Asmara. Between the fall of Barentu in 1985 and the fall of Af Abet in 1988, the army prosecuted three major campaigns, but only Operation Red Sea succeeded in recapturing Barentu, its main goal. This success, in turn, led to the execution of Operation Bahre Negash, whose objective was the seizure of Nakfa. It failed. The initiative then shifted unalterably to the insurgents.

Taking advantage of an internal split in the army, the EPLF stormed the key fort of Af Abet, never to relinquish it again. Stung by the debacle, the military modified its counterinsurgency strategy, turning its primary attention toward the insurgency in Tigray. It was a fateful maneuver. After a good start, the operation miscarried, leading to the defeat of the Third Army at Shire. This setback further demoralized the army, causing a wave of confusion and dismay that resulted in the catastrophic defeat at Massawa. After Massawa, the outcome of the wars was never in doubt. The army fought bravely at Dekemhare and in the interior, particularly in Gondar, but these were the last gasps of a dying organization.

I have selected the battles of the Ogaden, Nakfa, Af Abet, Shire, and Massawa because they were the most pivotal events of the revolutionary wars. The first was an interstate war—actually between two self-proclaimed socialist countries and thus between comrades of the Horn. It saved the country from falling apart, altered regional and international alliances, and gave rise to a highly militarized state. This victory, the consequent upsurge in patriotism, and the rise of a gargantuan military machine persuaded the young leaders that they could win against their domestic enemies, too. Annihilating the "bandits," their favorite sobriquet, became their obsession—and their downfall as well. To their dismay, the northern guerrillas proved invincible. The EPLF repulsed a far-ranging, multifaceted assault on its primary base, ensuring its survival and indeed that of the TPLF. Had Operation Red Star succeeded, there would not have been insurgent victories at Af Abet, Shire, and Massawa, the three battles that decisively

tipped the scales. Af Abet, Shire, and Massawa heralded the defining defeat of the Ethiopian military. Together, they broke the military, political, and public will to continue with the wars. The skirmishes that followed were merely the denouement of civil wars that had dragged on destructively for thirty long years. These momentous armed engagements cumulatively led to the death of the revolution from above and the triumph of the revolution from below. How this extraordinary history unfolded is the subject of the following chapters.

6

Ogaden: "Socialist" Neighbors at War

War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.

—*Karl von Clausewitz*

Revolutions almost invariably encourage external meddling that seeks either to smother or to shield them. They cause sudden dramatic shifts in interstate relations, in wider international alliances, and in regional power balances. During one of the tenser periods of the cold war, the world witnessed two such episodes in the span of three years in the Indian Ocean littoral: Somalia's aggression against revolutionary Ethiopia in 1977, followed by Iraq's invasion of revolutionary Iran in 1980. The outcomes were starkly different. With resources to match those of its enemy and with the duplicitous help of the United States, Baathist Iraq was able to avoid total military defeat. The war ended in a draw. Poor "socialist" Somalia was less fortunate: abandoned by its powerful ally in the midst of war, it suffered the dire consequences of its ill-considered action. Its military dictator, Siyad Barre, grossly miscalculated that the Ethiopian government was so enfeebled by internal crisis that it would choose to disengage from the Ogaden. The Ethiopians saw Somalia's invasion as an affront to the nation and a bitter test of the revolution. They were determined to defend both. They proved more tenacious, and his own generals proved less competent, than Barre had anticipated. Military defeat marked the postponement of a nationalist project of self-affirmation through irredentist unity. International alignments changed dramatically, with Ethiopia cementing a new relationship with the USSR and Somalia shifting to the West, particularly the United States.

Without provocation and in validation of Karl von Clausewitz's dictum that

war is the extension of politics by other means, the Democratic Republic of Somalia in mid-1977 invaded Ethiopia, a country five times its size and ten times more populous, to realize a dream that had eluded its leaders for seventeen years: the annexation of the Ogaden, a first step toward the creation of a Greater Somalia coextensive with the Somali people in the Horn of Africa. The invasion ignited a major war of attrition that involved many external actors and brought the Somalis very close to attaining their strategic goal. For the Ethiopians, who were in the midst of a political cataclysm, military defeat would have cost them about a third of their territory. It might also have precipitated not only the fall of the still-fledgling government in Addis Ababa but possibly also the defeat of the Ethiopian revolution and the dismemberment of the country. Because of a serendipitous confluence of forces and events, however, Ethiopia averted catastrophe and turned the tables on the aggressor. A massive intervention by socialist countries enabled the Ethiopians to crush and repel the invading army, which never fully recovered. Ethiopia emerged as the most militarized and powerful state in the Horn of Africa.

Why did the Somali irredentists take on such a perilous gamble? The political situation in Ethiopia in 1977 and the state of the country's military could not have been more alluring. First, though the Ethiopians had a clear numerical advantage in fighting men (47,000 to 35,000), they were at an overall technical and tactical disadvantage in the air and on the ground.

The Somalis outnumbered the Ethiopians in mobile battalions, tanks, combat aircraft, artillery, armor, and armored personnel carriers (APCs). Not only were the Ethiopians far more poorly equipped, but much of their weaponry was outdated and inferior. Somalia had nearly three times as many tanks—250 T-35s and T-55s, which had bigger guns, better armor, greater range, and more maneuverability than Ethiopia's aging M-41 and M-47s—and twice as many APCs. Ethiopia also lacked Somalia's ground-to-air missile capability. The underequipped army was spread thin, since some of its best units were tied up in the north. Along the entire border with Somalia there were only four infantry brigades (one of them mechanized), two tank battalions, two artillery battalions, and three airborne battalions. Somalia reportedly had twenty-three motorized and mechanized battalions, nine tank battalions, nine artillery battalions, and four airborne battalions.[1]

Second, the new government in Addis Ababa was beset by murderous power struggles at the center and multiple revolts on the periphery. The country already was teetering toward dissolution, and the military's resources were fully stretched. Insurgents had captured most of Eritrea, while Afar, Oromo, and Tigrayan rebels were causing havoc in their respective areas and beyond. The

Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) was engaged in armed combat in northwestern Ethiopia. Ethiopia's hard-pressed army had lost many of its most able and experienced officers, who had been purged or dismissed following the outbreak of the revolution. To cap it all, the United States government had cut off the supply of arms to its former client state, whose armed forces it had helped build and equip, on grounds that the new leaders had flagrantly violated human rights. It must have become all too obvious to the Somali leaders that the Ethiopian central authority and its army had been so gravely weakened by revolutionary upheaval, internal rivalries, purges, and ethnic uprisings that it could not withstand a full-scale invasion by a well-equipped army. It was a moment not to be missed and they seized it with relish.

Although the Somalis were able to snatch the initiative by making good use of their mechanized forces, they ultimately failed to achieve their aim for two reasons. First, the Somalis had planned for a short war without carefully balancing means and ends. When the expected did not happen they quickly run out of options. They had an arsenal of Soviet weaponry, but their command and logistics systems were inadequate. Second, by taking advantage of those defects and their own numerical superiority, the Ethiopians were able to drain the Somalis and win. Still, it was external interventionists that tipped the balance in their favor. Ethiopian patriotic ardor and firmness held the Somalis to a virtual standstill, but Cuban and Soviet assistance undeniably broke the impasse, ensuring Ethiopia's victory.

IRREDENTISM AND STATE MAKING

> Our misfortune is that our neighboring countries are not our neighbors. Our neighbors are our Somali kinsmen whose citizenship has been falsified by indiscriminate boundary "arrangements." We speak the same language. We share the same creed, the same culture, and the same traditions. How can we regard our brothers as foreigners?
>
> —*Abd ar-Rashid Ali Shirmarke, prime minister of Somalia*

The 1977 war between Ethiopia and Somalia is known as the Ogaden war precisely because the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, known for its arid grandeur, was both the main cause and the main site of armed conflict. Approximately 200,000 square kilometers in size, the Ogaden is mostly desert; only thorn vegetation thrives and underground water is the main source of life. Except for the fertile belts along river basins, where limited sedentary life exists, it is a bleak,

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barren landscape of flat-topped hills and arid plains that slope southward from the Harar plateau (elevation 2,000 meters) and stretch to the Somali border, where the elevation drops to 500 meters. To the west, the Ogaden is bounded by the Webi Shebele River, which separates it from the agricultural region of Bale, believed to be the cradle of the Oromo people and inhabited in the southern parts by Somalis belonging to various clans. The Ogaden itself is inhabited exclusively by a Somali population that comprises many clans, the dominant one being the Ogaden, which gave the territory its name.

Soon after its establishment in 1960, the Somali state sought to wrest the Ogaden from Ethiopia on ethnic and cultural grounds, as its prime minister, Ali Shirmarke, enunciated. What the Somali irredentists called Western Somalia extended almost as far as the Awash River, embracing the whole of Hararghe—where two of Ethiopia's largest cities, Harar and Dire Dawa, are located—as well

as large portions of Bale and Sidamo provinces. The Somalis' claim belied the multiethnic composition of the area, in which the Somali are a distinct minority. Apart from the Ogaden proper, Somalis are confined to the northern lowlands of Hararghe, mainly the Dire Dawa district, and the southern lowlands of Bale. In the midst of the Oromo majority also live clusters of Harari, Afar, Argobba, and Amhara peoples.

Even though the Somalis made their claim on the basis of ethnicity, economic interest also lay behind their expansionist impulses. With its rolling plains and lush valleys watered by numerous rivers and ample seasonal rains, Hararghe is one of Ethiopia's richest agricultural regions. There some of the country's staples such as teff, barley, wheat, and coffee are cultivated and its finest cattle are raised. Hararghe is also home to the stimulant called *qaat*, or *chat*, quantities of which are annually exported to Djibouti and to some Middle Eastern countries. The pivotal railway linking Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, with Djibouti, to which Somalia also lay claim, passes through Hararghe. It is a variegated area dotted by mountain chains, the more imposing of which are the Amhar, which rise in the center of the plain between Harar and Jijiga. The Marda Pass, which cuts through the mountain range, is a fortress of great natural strength with enormous military significance. It is this vast and scenic stretch of land that the Somali state wanted to appropriate. During the first decade of its independence, Somalia had stirred up political unrest inside Ethiopia and even instigated an interstate armed conflict in 1964 in which its own army was badly mauled. The invasion that began in July 1977 and ended in March 1978 was the culmination of those frustrated adventures in state making.

THE SOMALI OFFENSIVE

> The chief characteristic of the offensive battle is the maneuver to outflank or envelop, and therefore to gain the initiative as well.
>
> —*Karl von Clausewitz*

The Somali state executed the war in two stages, much as the Ethiopian general staff had anticipated. By early 1975, MOND was persuaded by its own intelligence that Somalia was fully prepared to wage war against Ethiopia. The assault was expected to begin soon after the Somali president, General Muhammad Siyad Barre, completed his tenure as the eleventh chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in June of that year. It was believed that before Somalia committed its regular forces it would use accessory forces—peasants from south-

eastern Ethiopia, whom it had already trained and armed for guerrilla fighting.[2] That is exactly what happened.

The Mogadishu regime probably was under no illusion that auxiliary forces by themselves would defeat the Ethiopian army and "liberate Western Somalia," which roughly corresponded to a third of Ethiopia. Rather, the use of guerrillas appears to have had a dual purpose: to pressure Ethiopia into negotiation while wearing down its troops, who would then be attacked by Somali regulars at a suitable time should the talks fail. The strategy worked well. But by choosing to wage a creeping war in the hopes that the government in Addis Ababa would fall from internal tensions and contradictions, the Somali leaders seem to have let the strategic element of surprise slip out of their hands. And their tardy blitz lacked boldness, decisiveness, and tactical imagination.

Evidently, the Somali state had been training and organizing dissident peasants from eastern and southern Ethiopia ever since the collapse of the 1963–68 revolt in Bale, which Somalia had partially inspired and sustained. In early 1975 the state reactivated the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), which had led the rebellion. The WSLF was organized into three commands, each falling under regional Somali army leadership. The northern command was placed under the authority of the Twenty-sixth Command at Hargeisa, the central was under that of the Twenty-first at Dusa Mareb, and the southern command was accountable to the Sixtieth Command at Baidoa. The commands were divided into six divisions, each with its own zone of operation and each zone roughly coinciding with a subclan division. These were the Ahmed Gureh (named for the leader of a rebellious force that overran the Christian Kingdom in the sixteenth century), El Tire ("Revenge"), Dufan ("Storm"), Denkebed ("Strangler"), Dersene ("Steadfast"), and Horyal ("Vanguard"). The supreme commander was none other than the Somali minister of defense, General Muhammad Ali Samatar.[3] Each division was provided with portable weapons such as mortars, rocket launchers, and heavy machine guns, and most of the fighters were equipped with AK-47 assault rifles. Even though the bulk of its arms supplies came from Somalia, the WSLF was also engaged in illicit activities to supplement its resources. It exported incense (myrrh), traded in contraband goods, and levied tax on livestock exported to the Middle East via Somalia. Secret associations known as *gode* ("axemen") served as intermediaries between the guerrillas and the populace. They transmitted information about the army, collected provisions for the fighters, and gave religious justification to the insurgency.

About six months after the first incursions by the WSLF, the Mogadishu regime founded the Somali-Abo Liberation Front (SALF) under the leader-

ship of some veterans from the 1960s rebellion. It was composed of Oromo and Somali elements and fought mainly in Bale and Sidamo, each of which was subdivided into operational zones. The front fought under the supervision of the southern command, but perhaps because of the Oromo dimension the SALF appears to have had greater autonomy than the WSLF, with which it was often at odds for political and territorial reasons.

The goals of the fronts were not at all clear. Whereas the WSLF wavered between full independence and autonomy within a unified Somalia, the SALF had no overall strategy. The SALF's formation was undoubtedly intended not only to conciliate Oromo sensibilities but also to counteract the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), an ethnonationalist movement that had begun operations in the provinces of Bale and Hararghe and whose territorial claims overlapped with those of the Somali state. What distinguished the WSLF and SALF fronts from most other contemporary liberation movements was their lack of autonomy; both organizationally and logistically they were in the grip of a foreign authority. The administrative organs they possessed were merely designed to give them a veneer of independence. Trained, armed, organized, and otherwise supported by the Somalia state, the fronts were ancillaries of the Somali army.

How many armed men were there? The Somali side has not revealed the fronts' strength and it probably never will. Ethiopian official sources are speculative but precise in their estimates. One source indicates that by July 1977 some 39,450 fighters had entered Ethiopia, half of them going to Hararghe and the other half to Bale, Sidamo, and Arsi. During the war 34,000 more were added, raising the total to 63,200.[4] If indeed there were nine divisions and assuming that each division contained 5,000 to 7,000 fighters, then the estimate appears to be roughly accurate. Some close observers believe, however, that it is more likely the numbers did not exceed 45,000.[5] The men were equipped mostly with AK-47 assault rifles but also possessed heavy machine guns, grenades, and rockets.

Guerrilla warfare began almost simultaneously in the north and south in the early months of 1976, and by the end of the year it had spread throughout Hararghe and into southeastern Bale and Sidamo. Partly arid scrubland and partly mountainous and wooded, it was terrain with which the fighters were thoroughly familiar and whose inhabitants were regarded as friendly. Infiltrating from several points in the Somali republic, the guerrillas moved swiftly across vast plains and rugged hills. Wherever they went, the guerrillas dismantled the state's apparatus by destroying government offices and systematically attacking the thinly spread police and civilian administrators, forcing most of them to flee to the nearest garrison towns. Those who could not do so in time suffered, many losing their lives.[6]

Popular support was neither ubiquitous nor undisputed. The pastoral/nomadic Somali population of the lowlands universally and enthusiastically embraced the fighters. The various clans, who had historically felt alienated from the Ethiopian state, strongly identified with their own eponymous state because of ethnic, religious, and economic ties.[7] But as the guerrillas penetrated into the non-Somali-inhabited uplands, popular support began to diminish. In response, the guerrillas changed their tactics of mobilization. Whereas the WSLF was welcomed warmly by the Ogadenees and the Hawiya of Bale, the SALF's appeal to ethnic and religious sentiments fell mostly on deaf ears. It failed to rally Oromo peasants, who saw little reason to take up arms against a government that had just abolished the tenancy relations that had oppressed them for nearly a century. Lacking the incentives and means to mobilize the peasantry and its resources, the SALF resorted to the use of terror, including press gangs, torture, and wanton destruction of property. Through its brutal actions, the front thus alienated the very people it sought to liberate. Violence against Christians, most of whom were Amhara settlers, was particularly appalling and both fronts were to be blamed. As tribal and religious passions overrode political or ideological beliefs, the rebels engaged in wholesale looting, pillaging, and the killing of innocent people.[8] One of the reasons for this savagery was to frighten the settler community into flight. As 1976 came to a close, the rebels, through propaganda and terror, had established domination over a sizeable section of Ethiopia's eastern rural population. Moreover, they had achieved this with little or no coordination of their activities—they sometimes competed for territory, men, and booty, their rivalry kept in check only by the authorities in Mogadishu.

Except for the towns sitting on vital routes and intersections, by early 1977 the rebel fronts were in control of the Ogaden and most of the Bale-Sidamo lowlands, although control meant little more than the absence of effective Ethiopian authority. They had achieved this through hit-and-run tactics, battering the Ethiopian army at its weakest points and then melting away into a largely supportive or sympathetic populace. Such tactics undermined the will of the troops and drove them into their bunkers and camps, thereby conceding land, people, and the initiative to the guerrillas. The army was confined to the garrison towns, many of which were under siege. Although every attempt to storm a garrison town invited devastating firepower from the defenders, travel between the towns became quite hazardous; military and civilian vehicles could not move without armed escorts that often fell into ambushes or were hit by land mines. One such ambush occurred on February 11, 1977, near Horakelifo (between Degehabur and Jijiga), where twenty-five soldiers and officers were killed, another twenty-four wounded, and several armored cars and trucks destroyed. At about the same

time, an entire contingent of police was wiped out not far from Filtu.[9] By disrupting communication and supply lines, the rebels caused frequent transportation delays and shortages in the camps. Civilian casualties, especially along the 105-kilometer (65-mile) road between Harar and Jijiga, also increased dramatically.[10] In addition to sapping the morale of the troops, guerrilla actions were aimed at sabotaging the national economy. In the summer of 1977, the fighters destroyed several important bridges and on June 1 they blew up the rail linking the Ethiopian capital with the Red Sea port of Djibouti. This vital economic artery, which normally carried over 40 percent of Ethiopia's exports and 50 percent of its imports, was put out of commission until August 1978.

The die for war was cast when the Somali leaders chose to escalate the fighting sharply by throwing in their regular forces.[11] On June 13, 1977, roughly 5,000 soldiers crossed the border for simultaneous attacks on selected targets in the province of Hararghe.[12] The soldiers had removed the insignia from their uniforms in order to disguise themselves as guerrillas. But they were readily distinguishable because the guerrillas were, as one journalist noted, "dressed in rags for the most part."[13] Toward the end of the month the towns of Degehabur, Dire Dawa, Kebridehar, Gode, and Warder were pounded with mortars and rockets. The attackers were beaten off, however, after suffering heavy casualties. At Gode alone, they may have lost as many as three hundred of their men, including the brigade commander and his deputy.[14] This event marked the beginning of the shift from guerrilla to conventional fighting. Soviet and Cuban efforts had failed to persuade the Somalis to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Fidel Castro traveled to the region and, at great risk to his reputation, naively proposed a federation consisting of Ethiopia, Somalia, and Southern Yemen. Siyad Barre, who appeared supremely confident of his historic mission and destiny, defied him. The socialist solidarity that had bound Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Somalia foundered. The Somali people (and Ethiopians as well) would pay a high price for the folly of their leaders.

In practice, if not by design, this phase unfolded in three stages. The first stage saw the rapid Somali conquest of the lowlands. Stage two was marked by assaults against the cities and towns on the Harar plateau. Determined Ethiopian resistance led to a stage of stalemate that was broken by the intervention of exterior forces—and the defeat of the Somalis.

If the aborted June offensive was intended to cause panic and flight, it failed dismally. If, on the other hand, it was a probing operation, it may well have encouraged the Somali leaders to embark on their most ambitious project by revealing that the Ethiopians had inferior firepower and static defenses and that they had laid too few mines.[15] Consequently, the Somali leaders seem to

have set a timetable that turned out to be delusory. As one analyst observed, "Somalia had managed to build up a substantial stock of ammunition, spares, and weapons, enough for approximately six months of fighting."[16] In these six months, the Somali leaders hoped to smash the Ethiopian military and to capture the territory they so coveted. Although some of their calculations may have been accurate, they badly underestimated the Ethiopian will to resist, as well as the fickleness of international relations. Ethiopian resistance, despite initial shocks, turned out to be much stiffer than the Somalis expected, and Somalia's socialist allies abandoned it at the critical hour.

All armies have or are supposed to have contingent plans of self-defense. Haunted by the specter of invasion, the ministry of national defense initiated a comprehensive defense plan designed to rebuff attacks on all fronts and then enable the armed forces to take the offensive. There was, however, a terrible incongruence between means and ends.

Ethiopian military strategists had anticipated that in the event of war Somalia would wage a two-pronged offensive, although they could not tell whether its main assault would cross first from the north or from the south.[17] The distance between Harar and Hargeisa is only 270 kilometers and Jijiga, a town located at a crossroads, is the strategic gateway to the major urban and industrial centers of eastern Ethiopia. The strategists had calculated that, by capturing that important territory, Somalia could more easily cut off the Ethiopian troops in the south-central plains. To prevent its ability to do so, the Ethiopians had kept their main force, which included the only mechanized brigade of the eastern front, at Jijiga.[18] The Somalis were apparently aware of this, for they chose to attack massively first in the south and east. Their strategy had several advantages. First, it was easier to replenish their forces since the Somalis maintained their main reserve and supply depots in Mogadishu. Second, it was tactically easier to capture or disable the province's second major airfield, at Gode, because of its proximity to the border. Third, Ethiopian garrisons there were located so far from one another that they were vulnerable to tactical surprise and piecemeal attack by mobile forces. And finally the populace in the southeastern sector was less loyal to Ethiopia than its counterpart in the Dire Dawa–Harar–Jijiga triangle.

The Somali invasion began, according to Ethiopian official documents, on July 13, 1977 (5 Hamle 1969), at 0300 hours, and not on July 23, as has been commonly held. The Somalis enjoyed considerable superiority in numbers and weaponry; they deployed several mechanized divisions and the bulk of their fighter planes against four underequipped brigades led by Lieutenant Colonel Yilma Gizaw, described as "competent, courageous, and inspiring" by a fellow officer.[19] With only light artillery and antitank guns for protection, Ethiopian

troops were at a serious disadvantage. Somali tanks rolled speedily westward, penetrating 700 kilometers into Ethiopia and seizing 350,000 square kilometers of territory, achieving a strategic depth. Their initial advantage derived from their superior mobilization arrangements as well as superiority in tanks and armor. They emphasized an offensive strategy based on seizing the initiative and exploiting the surprise factor. The pattern of their attacks consisted of massive infiltrations or forays across the front lines and intensive artillery barrages, combined with mechanized attacks and bombing raids.[20] They failed, however, to press straight into the Ethiopian vital positions and were unable to destroy the means with which the latter resisted. What began as a war of movement crumbled into a war of positions punctuated by wild, devastating pitched battles that constituted little except ruin and slaughter. For a plan built on speed, maneuver, and decisive forces coming from several directions, any hitch that slowed down the assault could cause serious problems, including defeat.

Ethiopian resistance ranged from feeble to fierce. Although most of the units retreated in disorder before the advancing enemy troops, a few fought tenaciously under conditions of extreme stress before they, too, were overpowered. Only at Dire Dawa did they hold their ground. It appears that between July 13 and 16 three Somali motorized battalions slipped through the Aysha front, mostly by night to avoid detection. They attacked the city on July 17 at 0430 hours. Dire Dawa was defended by the Twenty-fourth Nebelbal ("Flame") Brigade, the Fourth Artillery Battalion, and the 752nd Battalion of the Seventy-fifth Militia Brigade, which had arrived by air two days earlier. With the backing of the air force, these forces were able to throw back the attackers at a cost of seventy-nine dead and eight wounded versus twice as many Somali casualties. The same day the Seventy-ninth Militia Brigade and a platoon from the 219th Nebelbal Battalion were dispatched to Gode to reinforce the Fifth Infantry Brigade, which had been battered by artillery and air bombardments since July 13. But they could not save the garrison, which fell into Somali hands on July 25 at 0600 hours. Without adequate tank or artillery support, the defenders were virtually wiped out; only 489 of the 2,350 militia fighters made it to Harar and the rest were unaccounted for, most presumed captured or dead. This was the deadliest encounter of the month. The Ninth Brigade at Kebridehar resisted as hard as it could before retreating to Harar in a state of disarray, having refused to take up new positions. According to veterans of the war and MOND itself, it was the Eleventh Infantry Brigade at Degehabur that fought most bravely, enduring withering fire from the air and ground until the end of the month, when it was ordered to withdrew to Jijiga.[21] As Delo, Filtu, and Elkere fell with little fighting between July 30 and August 8, the Somalis appeared well positioned to achieve

their goal; only Dire Dawa, Harar, and Jijiga stood in their way. For the next six months they tried to seize those precious prizes, but victory eluded them.

To stem the tide of Somali victories, the Ethiopian eastern command made some organizational adjustments by dividing the unoccupied parts of Hararghe into two operational zones (*qetena*) under the leadership of Colonel Mulatu Negash. (According to some sources it was Aberra Haile Mariam.) The Third Division, or what was left of it, and the Fifth Militia Division, which arrived there on July 28, 1977, were to defend all the territory from Harar, the provincial capital and command headquarters, to Jijiga, the seat of advance headquarters, while facilitating the movement of troops and supplies between the two points. The area between Harar and the Awash was assigned to the Second Militia Division and one Nebelbal battalion. In addition to ensuring the safety of Dire Dawa, their headquarters and the army's primary depot, they were to protect the rail and motor road from the city to Aysha in the northeast and to Awash in the west. The Third, or Eastern, Air Command under Colonel Fanta Belay was to assist by carrying out reconnaissance, intercepting and bombarding the enemy, and transporting supplies and other essentials in emergency situations. The paramilitary groups, including the police and the People's Revolutionary Guard (PRG), were to serve as ancillaries.[22] Given the odds against them, they fought well, achieving good results.

In mid-August, the Somalis launched the second stage of their three-stage offensive. The first target was Dire Dawa, a vital industrial city of about seventy thousand people. It is probable that as many as two motorized brigades, one tank battalion, two artillery battalions, one air defense battery, and one BM-13 battery were deployed in what turned out to be a disastrous operation.[23] Opposing them were the Second Militia Division, the 201st Nebelbal Battalion, the 781st Battalion of the Seventy-eighth Brigade, the Fourth Mechanized Company, and one platoon of the Eightieth Tank Battalion, with only two tanks. On August 17 the Somalis moved in from the Harewa side to the northeast of the city by night, as they had done in July. They probably knew that the bulk of the Ethiopian force was deployed to the southeast, toward Jeldesa. Having lost three tanks to land mines along the way, they struck by land and air the following day at 0430 hours. At first the battle went badly for the Ethiopians because they were caught by surprise; they had expected the assault to be directed against Jijiga.[24] The 871st Battalion fought doggedly for several hours on the Shinile hilltop overlooking the city but was eventually forced to withdraw to the airport. The attackers followed and by 1500 hours they had closed on the city, which they began hitting with rockets and artillery, causing panic and confusion among the population. A Somali tank unit was able to press through and temporarily put the country's

second major air base out of service; the air traffic control was destroyed and as many as nine planes may have been disabled while on the ground. A gas station near the airport and other fuel tanks went up in flames, and the cement, cotton, and meat factories nearby suffered partial damage. For the next twenty-four hours the defenders would be fighting under dreadful conditions. In a desperate effort to prevent the fall of the city, the command brought in militia reinforcements, tanks, and BRDM guns from Harar. The paralysis that had set in gave way to patriotic rage and fervor.[25]

The Ethiopians rallied and launched a bold counterattack. The fighting was intense and both the militia and the Nebelbal proved their mettle. There were individual acts of bravery as well, like that of Second Lieutenant Mitiku, who climbed onto the top of a tank and hurled a grenade at his opponent before he was cut down by a sniper.[26] But it was really the Ethiopian air force that broke the Somalis' resolve, by destroying sixteen of their T-55 tanks. Flying from the Dabre Zeit air base to the south of Addis Ababa, some four hundred kilometers away, Ethiopian pilots in American F5s outmatched their Somali counterparts, piloting Soviet MiGs, in the dogfights. Soon they took total control of the air, relentlessly pounding the enemy while boosting the morale of the ground units and the civilian population, which participated in the drama by providing food and water for the fighters and by caring for the wounded.[27] At the end of the day the attackers ran out of steam and fled, leaving a trail of equipment that included tanks, armored cars, rocket launchers, artillery pieces, and hundreds of rifles and machine guns that were proudly put on display by the victors.[28] Henceforth, the city was never seriously at risk. According to one participant in the war, this was the "second Adwa" for the militia, the first being Ethiopia's victory over Italy in 1896.[29] As Adwa was the fruit of a mixture of tactical brilliance and luck, the spectacular achievement at Dire Dawa was due to staunch Ethiopian resistance and Somali irresolution.

The Somalis had suffered a major setback, for the fall of Dire Dawa could have jeopardized the safety of the Ethiopian troops to the east. They might not have succeeded in starving those troops into submission by cutting off their supplies, but the Somalis certainly could have made the situation very difficult. Moreover, victory there would have given them control over the Dire Dawa–Djibouti transport lines, which would probably have been sufficient to strangle the Ethiopian economy. From Dire Dawa one could more easily impede traffic along the Awash-Assab road, imposing severe strains on the military as well as the economy.[30] So it was a sweet victory for the Ethiopians. The Somalis were defeated because they failed to capitalize on the defenders' tactical errors and

did not strike with a massive armor thrust before the Ethiopians could concentrate sufficient forces for the counterattack. Coordination of the Somali infantry, tanks, and aviation was poor. Not only were there too few infantrymen but reinforcements were not brought in speedily when the tide turned against them. It has been suggested that the main reason for failure was interference from Mogadishu, not ineptitude.[31] If the speculation has any merit, then the general leading the operation should have resisted the order or resigned—as Napoleon observed, "Blind obedience is due only to a military command given by a superior present on the spot at the moment of action."[32] In any case, the Somalis had bungled their greatest chance to win a crucial victory, and the failure was one of organization, not of an individual.

Undeterred by their defeat at Dire Dawa, the Somalis turned against Jijiga, the third-largest provincial town, in the third and final phase of their stymied offensive. Even though on July 27 an Ethiopian police commando unit had been driven out of Tugwajale, a small border town only sixty-five kilometers east of Jijiga, a full-scale attack against the town did not take place until the third week of August. The delay no doubt had given the Ethiopians time to strengthen their defenses by bringing in another mechanized brigade and by deploying some of their best troops in the area. The Tenth Mechanized Brigade had positioned itself at Aroresa, Sebulberol, a high ground about five kilometers north of Aroresa, and at a midpoint between Jijiga and Kebribeyah, in anticipation of the attack. The town itself was guarded by the Ninety-second Mechanized Brigade. When the Somali forces attacked the Aroresa fortification on August 21, they found it impregnable. Solidly entrenched and using heavy artillery, the Ethiopian troops halted the enemy's advance, but not before a forward unit protecting the Jijiga-Kebribeyah road had taken a severe beating. Skirmishes continued for another week, during which time the garrison town of Neghele, in Sidamo, was successfully defended against repeated attempts to capture it.[33]

The first half of September saw a series of attacks and counterattacks, and Jijiga changed hands twice. Jijiga became the site of one of the bitterest struggles of the war, with both sides grimly determined to hold it. The Somali assault on the town was preceded by several days of bombardment, and on September 2 the Somalis attacked with great force, using MiGs, tanks, artillery, and rockets. The Ethiopians were heavily outnumbered and outgunned; discipline and cohesion unraveled and mutinous soldiers, along with their families, abandoned the town and retreated to Adew and Karamara. Outsiders were blamed for the misfortune. In disbelief the army would claim that "it has been confirmed that many of [the Somalis'] tank specialists were Arabs."[34] The victors entered Jijiga,

looted shops and bars, and ransacked government offices. The Somali residents received them with jubilation; as for their non-Somali compatriots, most of them deserted the town in terror.[35]

Fearing the deleterious effect that Jijiga's surrender would have on the army's morale, Mengistu flew to Harar and led the counterattack himself.[36] It was a daring personal act but of little consequence militarily. Those suspected of leading the mutiny were bayoneted as cowardly and antirevolutionary elements, and then the troops were regrouped and led back to recapture the town. They carried out a two-frontal attack against the occupying Somali army from the west and north of the town. The Somalis reportedly "suffered heavy casualties" and many of their tanks were destroyed. They evacuated the town, which the Ethiopians recaptured on September 5. But the operation's success was fleeting. Jijiga remained sufficiently within the enemy's artillery range to be bombarded all night long. At dawn the next day, the Somalis returned, considerably strengthened and ever more determined; the town was nearly encircled and the chairman found his way to Adew, from where he was flown back to Addis Ababa on the September 7. The troops he left behind resisted fiercely, but short on heavy artillery and without air cover, they faltered again. The Fourth, or Geset, Artillery Battalion, which had been recalled from Humera in early August, arrived too late to make a difference; its long march had been delayed by the rainy season. The destruction by enemy fire of the newly installed radar at Karamara (five kilometers west of Jijiga) on September 12 also hindered the air force's effectiveness.[37] The Somalis were thus able to break through Ethiopian lines, completely overrunning the defenders, inflicting heavy casualties, and capturing vast quantities of light equipment. Many of the seventy-five tanks and seventy-one APCs lost since the conflict began were destroyed in this battle.[38] With mounting confusion came the inevitable headlong retreat to the next line of defense, at Karamara. Jijiga fell on September 12 (2 Meskerem), the third anniversary of the revolution, and would remain in enemy hands for the next five and a half months. In hot pursuit, the Somali forces drove the retreating Ethiopian troops beyond the Marda Pass, which they then occupied without a fight.

The epic defeat at Jijiga has often been attributed to dissension and discord within the armed forces. That explanation is only partly true. There were indeed two types of friction that adversely affected the operational competence of the Ethiopian armed forces in the initial stages of the conflict. The first was within the regular army. Many soldiers did not approve of the Derg or its policies, and some of them were affiliated with the various opposition political organizations that eschewed military rule. They encouraged infighting and sedition, which, as in Jijiga, at times resulted in mutiny.[39] The second conflict was between the regu-

lars and the militiamen. Even though they fought and fell in the same ditches for the same causes and objectives, the combatants were treated differently and unequally. The regulars received larger and better rations, and their monthly paycheck was four times fatter than that of the militiamen. The preferential treatment was a constant source of bitterness and acrimony, which inevitably affected discipline, morale, and esprit de corps. Discipline was often very low, as an exasperated commander of the Second Militia Division reported: "Rather than prepare for the next action, men take to looting. They move around without permission and slap the enemy's insignia on their own outfits or even wear his uniform. They are not mindful of the proper use of water and fire. Out of self-interest they forget their primary mission. An army without discipline and a farmer without tools are one and the same. Those who display the behavior of fifth columnists are not useful to the revolution. Those who fail to comply with revolutionary discipline . . . must be eliminated. In order to uphold discipline, revolutionary slogans must be replaced with revolutionary action. I say, let us restore order either through fruitful consultation or appropriate punishment, or else it will be an endless war."[40]

It is clear that disharmony contributed to the army's initial setbacks, but it is wrong to ascribe the loss of Jijiga to a seditious group; the defeat was primarily due to the imbalance in firepower. As Lieutenant Colonel Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, commander of the eastern front and member of the NROC and later minister of national defense, admitted in a communiqué to the commander in chief, it was simply beyond the unit's power to prevent the capitulation of Jijiga. Yet mutinous soldiers were condemned to death in the wake of the defeat. The executions were probably intended to serve as a warning to other prospective mutineers.

The Somali conquest of the pass, which the Ethiopians had placed at the center of their defensive strategy, was not at all expected and the news was naturally received with consternation. This can be seen in a sensational exchange of telegrams between Mengistu and Tesfaye Gabre Kidan. On September 12, at 2045 hours, Tesfaye wired this message to Comrade Chairman Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam:

> (1) We have abandoned the saddle [code name for Karamara] and are now at Adew; (2) we are to destroy the bridge in the middle of the saddle; (3) we will assemble and talk to the troops; (4) we have planned to make a tactical withdrawal; (5) send large quantities of 16–30 [*sic*] tomorrow. Urgent response requested.

The message was received at 2130 hours and Mengistu sent his reply at 2245:

> (1) Today sufficient manpower, strengthened with tanks, is on its way from Harar; (2) one brigade is being flown from Addis Ababa to Harar; (3) many tanks are on the move by land from Addis Ababa to the province; (4) the force will travel by day and night; (5) the requested 16–30 will be made available immediately and continuously; (6) the saddle should not be relinquished at all. If there is any other problem, let me know right away so that necessary measures can be taken.

At 2355 Comrade Tesfaye responded:

> (1) The saddle has been abandoned; (2) at this hour the saddle is under their control; (3) the army is out of control; (4) it is impossible to wait until said force arrives; (5) to respect order I will stay until the end of my life; (6) everything is beyond our capability.

On September 13, at 0130 hours, Mengistu demanded confirmation of the pass's capture:

> So the necessary decision can be made, urgently request confirmation of the occupation of the saddle by the enemy.

The confirmation arrived at 0225 hours:

> Karamara is in the hands of the enemy; our troops have refused to obey me and we are on the march.[41]

Under the circumstances, the losses of Jijiga and Karamara could not have been avoided. Yet they were crushing psychological blows to the Ethiopians. From a strictly military standpoint, it was the army's darkest hour, for what remained between the town and the provincial capital were defeated battalions and a few weakly defended fortifications. In the eternal search for scapegoats, these setbacks were immediately blamed on "fifth columnists"; a dozen officers and NCOs were subsequently executed by firing squad on September 13 for conspiring with "anarchists" opposed to the war—that is, political organizations of the Left but mainly the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP).[42] Their execution did not spare the commander of the Third Division rebuke by his superiors. In a terse communiqué that same day, Mengistu told him that the surrender of Karamara would leave a black mark on the army's history. Mengistu instructed the commander to remove the stain by setting up a permanent defensive line at Kore, fifty-one kilometers east of Harar, and by regaining the pass. Any person who left his position without order was to be shot on the spot.[43] The division duly established its advance headquarters at Kore and held the front line

until the start of the counteroffensive nearly five months later. But recovering the pass was simply beyond its capability.

At this juncture, the government was compelled to call for a general mobilization while it made some organizational changes in the eastern command. Between September 14 and 21, the National Revolutionary Operations Command (NROC), chaired by Mengistu, issued eight "directives" (*memria*) for a national mobilization with the slogans "Revolutionary motherland or death" and "Everything for the war front." The first directive was a passionate appeal to the people, particularly those in the war-affected areas of Dire Dawa, Jijiga, and Harar, to stand behind the armed forces in defense of the country and the revolution. The second directive called for the return of retired soldiers under sixty. In conjunction with this directive, the NROC devised a new operational plan called "Awrora" for the eastern command, which was now redivided into the Awash, Dire Dawa, and Harar subsectors. Operation Awrora was to foil Somalia's strategic intentions by defending the two cities, the crucial bridge of Awash, and the Awash-Assab and Awash-Harar motor roads and by reopening the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway. The hope was that the command would also mount a counterattack to regain all the territory up to and including Jijiga.[44] It was a forlorn hope, for the force was not equipped for such action. However, it did resist as best it could. In the second half of September, the Somali advance weakened rapidly owing to overextended fronts, bad weather, difficult conditions, and perhaps exhaustion. The defenders fell back to their camouflaged dugouts, and reinforcements began to arrive. The Somali blitzkrieg had ended and the phase of attrition had begun.

The next five months were spent in inconclusive fighting, with neither side able to break the stalemate. Fighting was intense, dogged, and slow, frontal assaults ending in bloody failures. Only toward the end of the war did the Somalis prosecute two major offensive operations simultaneously. In retrospect, this seems to have enabled the Ethiopians to concentrate on one front line at a time and to move their reserves wherever and whenever they were needed. The longer the war went on, the more the balance of forces shifted in favor of the Ethiopians.

There was a lull in fighting for a week following the fall of Jijiga. The Somalis apparently used the interval to fortify new defensive positions along the Daketa Valley by digging extensive trenches, laying mines at critical junctions, and demolishing at least three key bridges. By wasting time, though, they lost the initiative. The Ethiopians used the reprieve to regroup their defeated troops, bring in fresh units and more weapons, and construct hillside bunkers.

Then the Somalis opened a pincer movement, one from the north toward Dire Dawa and another from the east toward Harar. It appears that their main aim was to capture Harar first and then to link with the northern force at Dire Dawa. Therefore, they concentrated on smashing the eastern front line by advancing from Karamara and Fik. Although the Ethiopian defense line position was still highly unfavorable, it took the Somali army more than seven weeks to unhinge it. There were several reasons for this. Both the size and combat effectiveness of the Ethiopian troops increased with time, and between the end of September and the beginning of October, the Soviets provided Ethiopia with substantial arms, including aircraft and tanks. And, as the militiamen gained more combat experience and became more familiar with their Soviet weapons and with the environment, new specialized units, including paracommandos, were trained at Tatek and sent to the war front as reinforcements. Most of the troops fought with extraordinary spirit. With its dominance of the skies, the Ethiopian air force proved most effective in its support of the ground forces. The arrival, in late September, of two (southern) Yemeni armored battalions (code name Comrades 03) considerably boosted Ethiopia's firepower. With their help, the first tank division equipped with T-34s became operational in October. Whereas Somalia had the feverish support of the population of the lowlands, its forces were now in hostile territory. The highland population, especially the settlers, mostly opposed the Somalis and supported the Ethiopian men in uniform in every conceivable way, from scouting and guarding crossroads and strategic heights to portering and fighting. As the Somalis moved deeper into unfriendly areas, their overstretched lines grew more vulnerable to interdiction and disruption. Last but not least, it was far easier to defend the mountainous and broken terrain than the flat lowlands against a mechanized enemy.

For four months, from the third week of September to the end of January, the Somalis did all they could to capture Harar. They nearly surrounded it from the north, south, and east. Twice, the fall of this city of forty-eight thousand, the seat of Ethiopia's premier military academy, seemed imminent. But it did not succumb, partly because Somali operational maneuvers lacked speed and decisiveness and partly because the Ethiopians fought so tenaciously. The Somali army tried to entrap and annihilate a large Ethiopian detachment occupying a bulge that expanded from Harar southeast toward the town of Kore. It had mustered a large force for that purpose; at one time or another during the operation, this force may have comprised as many as five motorized infantry brigades, a tank brigade, an artillery brigade, a commando brigade, and two or more guerrilla brigades.[45] They were resisted by the Third Division, which had been reinforced by the Seventy-fourth Mechanized Brigade, the Second Tank Battalion, the 219th

Nebelbal Battalion, the Fourth Air Defense Battery, two battalions of veterans (021 and 023), and several battalions of the PRG.[46] For two months, the Somalis repeatedly attacked frontally with tanks and artillery. However, they encountered embedded antitank guns and artillery and failed to rupture an opening with one concentrated force. The Ethiopians, from their entrenchments, repelled one assault after another, foiling every outflanking movement as well. Their first severe test occurred on September 18–19, when they fought from 1700 to 0730 hours without yielding any territory. A strong Somali attempt to outflank the Ethiopians from the rear by cutting off the Ninety-second Mechanized Brigade at Gursum also failed. A series of pitched battles followed in which the combatants slugged it out for control of Mt. Dalcha, a few kilometers south of Kore. That strategic point changed hands several times before the Ethiopians secured it on October 17. Somali casualties may have exceeded two thousand, whereas Ethiopian losses were characteristically and imprecisely described as "considerable."[47] The Somalis made one more strong attempt to retake Dalcha by storming it on the October 19, only to lose 219 more men, some of whom were later described by the Ethiopians as Sudanese, and two MiG-17 fighters.[48] Hostilities continued intermittently thereafter but without altering the situation.

The Somalis had fought fiercely to win by sheer numbers and firepower, but they utterly failed to puncture the Kore front. Two units in particular played a critical role in checking them: the Fourth Artillery Battalion, which the Somalis had tried and failed to put out of action, and the Seventy-fourth Militia Brigade, which was described as the most motivated unit. "Upon its arrival in Harar," reads the ministry's citation, "the Seventy-fourth Brigade fought with such high spirit that it set an example for the other brigades. Although it crushed the enemy forces with its revolutionary arm in all the battles it fought, it also suffered severe casualties. A new brigade that bears its name has been reconstituted and is now in service, for history does not forget its sacrifices."[49]

With their efforts at Kore thwarted, the Somalis switched their attention to Kombolcha, Babile, and Fedis and began striking at the weakest point. The area running from Kombolcha to Jarso had been left virtually undefended, as the police had managed to ward off the guerrillas who constantly attacked the towns. When a Somali regular force was detected heading toward Jarso, thirty-five kilometers northwest of Harar, the command rushed off the Kagnew Brigade, which was constituted hurriedly on October 23 through the amalgamation of the Seventy-sixth and Ninety-sixth Brigades (from Werwer and Fedis, respectively), plus one 105 mm battery from the Third Artillery Brigade. While fighting intensified there, the Somalis attacked the Babile front, which was being defended by the First Task Force.[50] The task force's initial setback was blamed on

"anarchists" associated with the EPRP, who were accused of killing "many progressive and able officers and NCOs," thus disabling the force.[51] By eliminating, or weeding out, those "defeatists," the task force was able to regain its cohesion and consolidate its position at Abusharif following bitter fighting on November 11–12. Somali losses were estimated at 250–300 killed and 400–500 wounded.[52] Once again the Somali advance was stalled, an event that may have pushed the Mogadishu regime to take a precipitous action; it severed diplomatic relations with Cuba and expelled the Soviet military mission of eighteen hundred men on the thirteenth, thereby burning its bridge with much of the socialist bloc without getting the hoped-for aid from the West. It was a fateful decision: within two weeks a massive Soviet airlift of arms into Ethiopia began, and some of the expelled Soviet personnel were transferred to Ethiopia.

Meanwhile, the situation on the Kombolcha front had deteriorated dangerously for the defenders. On November 16, the Somalis bombarded Jarso with massive artillery, and a panic-stricken contingent fled to Kombolcha and Harar; a fraction of the contingent remained behind to destroy valuable hardware before repositioning itself at Mt. Hablo, only a kilometer from the town.[53] Reinforcements were intercepted on the way and the unit itself was decimated on the eighteenth. Two truckloads of supplies and two 105 mm guns were lost to the enemy, who hurried toward Kombolcha, sixteen kilometers northwest of Harar. The town was defended by the units that had retreated from Jarso, plus some fresh supporting elements. The battle of November 24 had raged for only a short time when the defenders fled toward Harar, Alemaya, and Hameresa, leaving Kombolcha open to the attackers. One stubborn unit persisted and saved the town with the support of the First Paracommando Brigade (FPB), dispatched from Shashamene under Lieutenant Colonel Tesfaye Habte Mariam.[54] The entry to Kombolcha had been effectively blocked.[55]

The Somalis did achieve some success in piercing the Fedis front, which had been weakened by the relocation of the Ninety-sixth Brigade. The two paracommando battalions (Sixty-one and Sixty-two) and the 501st Brigade of the PRG, supported by an artillery battery with 105 mm guns and a platoon of M-41 tanks, had resisted for a week before bending to the opponent. On November 4, for instance, they fought a fierce battle that lasted from 0900 to 1800 hours; their losses were forty-five killed and thirty wounded.[56] In subsequent engagements, however, they lost substantial ground—including the critical Mt. Hakim, which overlooks the city from the south—and Harar was in serious danger of being taken. By the twenty-first they had retreated to within three kilometers of the city. Alarmed, Colonel Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam spoke with Mengistu and requested that BM-21 rocket launchers be sent immediately from Kore. The

chairman and his advisers, suspecting that the attack was a ploy to divert attention from Kore, denied the request. Instead, the Second Paracommando Brigade (SPB) was flown from Addis Ababa on the twenty-second, and its arrival in the nick of time averted potential disaster, preventing not only the fall of the city but also the possible envelopment of the bulk of the Ethiopian force in the bulge.[57] The attackers were thrown back to Fedis, twenty-four kilometers southwest of Harar, where they would stay until January. The SPB established itself at Mt. Hakim. By failing to attack with greater force, the Somalis missed an opportunity as they had in Dire Dawa.

Dire Dawa was never as threatened as Harar during the third phase of the Somali offensive. Fighting there was sporadic and indeterminate, and the standoff gave the Ethiopians some breathing room to strengthen their units in that sector. They organized the Second Task Force, which comprised the Third Division and several supporting units that were deployed along the Shinile, Jeldesa, Hawale, and Harewa lines. With the delivery of Soviet arms in late October, the balance had begun to shift in Ethiopia's favor, and the task force was confident enough to take the offensive. On November 18, for example, the Somalis were attacked on the Harewa-Jeldesa fronts, losing a large quantity of heavy and light weapons. In their counterattack five days later, they regained some ground but the Ethiopians held them off. They tried again at the end of the month, only to lose 150 men, 19 PRGs, and 120 Kalashnikov assault rifles.[58] That silenced their guns for a while, during which time the Ethiopians were able to make air strikes against border towns in northern Somalia. Clearly, the tide had already began to turn in their favor before the Soviets and Cubans entered the fray.

The level of fighting dropped in December, perhaps because the Somalis were busy replenishing their combat forces; meanwhile, they were being overtaken by political events. The Soviet Union, whose military personnel the Somalis had expelled in mid-November, began massive arms deliveries to Ethiopia, decisively tilting the balance. In the course of six weeks, from December to mid-January, they shipped large numbers of MiG-17 and MiG-21 fighter bombers, T-54 and T-55 tanks, Mi-6 and Mi-8 giant helicopters, BTR-152 APCs, BM-21 rocket launchers, Sagger antitank missiles, heavy mortars, 155 and 185 mm artillery guns, air defense weapons systems, a variety of infantry vehicles, automatic rifles, tons of munitions, and the BMP-1, a devastating "highly mobile armored vehicle with a 73 mm gun, antitank missiles, and heat-seeking antiaircraft missiles," which the Somalis named the "moving castle." Worth about a billion dollars, the arms shipments were roughly comparable in volume to the arms the Soviets delivered to the Arabs in 1973 and to the People's Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA) in 1975.[59] The Ethiopian defense forces, swollen by the de-

ployment of a hundred thousand newly trained troops, were wholly outfitted in new gear; about thirty thousand of them, dubbed the "First Revolutionary Liberation Army," were sent to the eastern front. By contrast, the Somali military, which the Soviets had trained and equipped with full knowledge that it might be used against Ethiopia, was running short of manpower, supplies, and spare parts. There were indications that the Somalis had begun forcible conscription as early as October.[60] By November, Somalia was shopping in Europe and Asia for a variety of items ranging from lubricating oil and bazookas to jeeps and trucks. Most of its needs were supplied by conservative Muslim regimes, notably those of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, and Pakistan.[61]

Soviet aid was not limited to hardware; the USSR also sent more than a thousand military advisers and technicians (Comrades 01). Some of the senior officers, such as General Grigory Barisov and Lieutenant Colonels Andrei Filatov and Semyon Nezhinsky, had been principal advisers to the Somali general staff only a few weeks earlier. They brought with them, of course, intimate and thus invaluable knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the Somali military. The Ethiopians put this knowledge to good use.[62] Along with the Soviets came regular Cuban troops (Comrades 02); starting with a few hundred in December, they grew to three thousand by January and eighteen thousand by February, more than half of them ferried in from Angola.[63] Headed by General Arnaldo Ocha, a soldier of great distinction, they came with their own full gear, including armored cars and T-62 tanks, mainly of Soviet production. The Somali regime had gambled by expelling the Soviet and Cuban professionals; now there was no one to compensate them for the loss. If there was any truth to Ethiopian claims that the Somalis were being assisted by troops from Pakistan and Arab countries, it was no doubt blown out of all proportion.[64] The Somalis stood almost alone against an international colossus.

THE ETHIOPIAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE

> The transition from the defensive to the offensive is one of the most delicate operations in war.
>
> —*Napoleon Bonaparte*

The invading army was exhausted and demoralized, the situation favorable for a full counterattack. The Ethiopians were now ready for a spirited counteroffensive with superior weapons and tactics. In January the Derg set up the Supreme Military Strategic Committee (SMSC), composed of Ethiopian, Russian, and Cuban officers, to map and direct the campaign. The SMSC was led by Gen-

eral Vasilii Ivanovich Petrov, first deputy commander of the ground forces of the USSR, a combat-hardened veteran who had helped organize and train the Somali military. The chief of operations was Colonel Mesfin Gabreqal. The SMSC established its command post at Dire Dawa. The operation was painstakingly planned and well directed. Its key elements were surprise and massive artillery barrages followed by infantry and/or mechanized attacks, standard Soviet assault tactics.

The counteroffensive was preceded by a Somali gambit to seize Harar on January 22. The Somalis began by blasting the town of Babile with mortars and rockets from Hill 1692, apparently to deflect Ethiopian attention from the bigger maneuver.[65] At 1530 hours, several infantry brigades backed by a large number of tanks and artillery advanced toward the city of Harar in a pincer movement from Fedis to remove the SPB from Mt. Hakim, while a second force launched an attack from Ejersa Gore to destroy the troops entrenched at Kombolcha and to cut off those at Kore from the rear.[66] They fought for six hours with little interruption, and Ali Berke Tucho, a militiaman, was later credited with having played an especially valorous role, helping raise the morale of his unit by infiltrating and destroying three enemy tanks. That was enough, the report said, to create confusion within the enemy ranks.[67] The fighting was over by 1400 hours. This was really the only operation that was executed with great force, but it came too late. In an integrated ground and air resistance that for the first time involved Cuban soldiers, the Ethiopians pinned the attackers a few kilometers from the city. While a battle of tanks raged on the ground, jet fighter bombers strafed the enemy's rear and lines of communication. The Somalis were routed with casualties perhaps as high as three thousand, the largest Somali loss in a single action since the conflict began six months earlier. Their plan to capture the provincial heart by encircling it was completely frustrated. This was a turning point in the war, for the Ethiopians immediately moved from defense to offense. In their counterattacks from January 23 to 27, the Eleventh Division and Cuban armored brigades regained all the territory as far as Fedis, the first town of significance to be liberated. In the process, they captured fifteen tanks, many APCs, forty-eight artillery pieces, seven antiaircraft guns, a cache of infantry weapons, and several munitions depots.[68] From there on, the Somalis would be forced to abandon most of the land they had occupied.

Without allowing the Somalis any respite, the Ethiopian-Cuban juggernaut launched a series of short, sharp thrusts from several directions against the main Somali lines from Dire Dawa and Harar, enveloping enemy units one after the other. One, equipped with tanks and armor, moved out from Dire Dawa across terrain that was suitable for a mechanized infantry. This campaign began on

February 1 with an attack on Hawale, south of Dire Dawa, by an artillery battalion—evidently a feint designed to draw the enemy's attention away from the main line of action to the north. It worked. The following day at 0700 hours, the Ninth Division, spearheaded by Cuban tank and artillery shock troops, outflanked and, with air support, attacked the Somalis at Harewa from the rear. The defenders were taken completely off guard and hastily abandoned the town "without even eating their freshly cooked food."[69] Jeldesa, the most strongly fortified town, was likewise outflanked, and its fall on the fourth accelerated the counteroffensive. The defeated troops fled toward Anonomite, leaving behind forty-two tanks, some of them intact, many APCs and BTRs, and over fifty artillery pieces of various sizes.[70] The Somalis were pursued by the Seventy-fifth Militia Brigade, the 201st Nebelbal Battalion, and the Sixty-ninth Mechanized (Militia) Brigade, which had joined them from Erer. They converged at Jarso on the ninth with the First Paracommando and 102nd Mechanized Brigades of the Tenth Infantry Division, which had surged from Kombolcha under the command of Colonel Desalegn Abebe. Thus, between February 5 and 9, the Somalis had been evicted from the small towns of Milo, Anonomite, Belewa, Chinahasan (Chinaksan), Ejarso Goro, and Gursum and, by February 15 were driven across the Felana River. Subsequently, the Ethiopians captured Tugwajele, well positioned to prevent reinforcements from Hargeisa and to deny an exit to troops fleeing from Jijiga.[71] A third infantry column supported by air and armored cars pushed the Somalis out from Fedis and, by skirting Kore and the Kramara mountains to the left, moved southward to cut off the Jijiga-Degahabur motor road. In the face of this string of defeats, the Somali regime publicly acknowledged for the first time that its armed forces were engaged inside Ethiopia and called for a general mobilization; actually, the forcible induction of men had been going on for some time.[72] The call would have little effect on the eventual outcome of the conflict.

The clearing of the strategic heights to the west of the Amhar mountain range made possible the concentration of forces that would destroy the main Somali detachment in one decisive engagement. There were two major obstacles for the advancing Ethiopian and Cuban troops to overcome. The first was to capture the Marda Pass, the only access to Jijiga from the west, and the second was to overrun the elaborate system of embankments and ditches the Somalis had erected, as well as to avoid the extensive land mines they had buried to fortify their defense lines. It took the genius of the SMSC under Petrov to surmount the obstacles and annihilate the Somali army with as little sacrifice as possible. Instead of mounting the costly frontal assault the entrenched Somalis had fully expected, the strategists chose to outflank the defenders. The task was entrusted

to the Tenth Division, whose backbone was a Cuban armored brigade with more than sixty T-62 tanks. At daybreak on February 15, the unit bypassed the heavily defended Marda Pass and took a long detour by way of Arabi, proceeding to the Shebele pass some fifty to sixty kilometers to the north. It took Arabi on February 17, lost it on the twentieth, but regained it on the twenty-fourth. The Somalis put up strong resistance at Grikocher but lost it on the twenty-eighth.[73] These victories cleared the path for the Sixty-ninth Militia Brigade of the Fifth Militia Division, under Colonel Yirgalem Tekle Haimanot, to join the task force at the town of Lewenaji, another site of fierce fighting that resulted in one more Somali defeat. From there on, the march to Jijiga was spearheaded by the Sixty-ninth Brigade, to which the Cubans paid glowing tribute: "Marching on foot, the brigade filtered into the mountain range by way of the towns of Lewenaji and Gololcha . . . and in a bold move turned south, then east, advancing over muddy terrain in torrential downpours, along difficult, narrow, and dangerous mountain trails armed with tanks, artillery, and armored infantry vehicles, to arrive with its forward units on the other side of the mountain range on February 28."[74] The Ethiopian commendation was no less laudatory: "This brigade has demonstrated extraordinary enthusiasm and gallantry. . . . What is so astounding is that its numbers had dwindled, due to high casualties, to about 500 when it reached Jijiga. Undeterred by this, it moved around Jijiga, along with Comrades 02, and brought the Kebribeyah-Aroresa road under control. It was one of the units that seized Degehabur. The Sixty-ninth Brigade has come to occupy a special place in history because of the unique role it played in the red drama."[75]

Among the casualties were two brigade commanders; one of them was Major Tibeso Gobeto, who left twelve children fatherless.[76]

The task force followed suit, using humans, mules, and donkeys to transport essentials over the marshy broken terrain, smashing and rendering useless all Somali defensive arrangements. Somali infantry, tank, and artillery units defending Jijiga counterattacked furiously but were beaten off, with the loss of fourteen tanks. Subsequently, while Somali attention was fixed on the western front, the attackers airlifted in giant Soviet Mi-8 helicopters, men, tanks, and stockpiles of munitions and fuel behind the lines of the defenders, who were pinned down by unremitting air strikes. The task force linked up with the airlifted units on a plateau northeast of Jijiga, setting the stage for the final assault on the strategic town. The allied forces brought a crushing air and artillery bombardment down upon the garrison prior to overwhelming it with massed tank and artillery attack. Then, while the Tenth Division and its supporting units struck toward Jijiga, the Seventy-fifth Infantry and First Paracommando Brigades "moved in a southerly direction through the mountains to capture the Marda Pass" on March 4.[77] Har-

geisa and the port of Berbera, where the Soviets had maintained a naval and missile base before their ouster the previous year, were subjected to bombing raids, possibly to prevent Somali reinforcements. The six Somali brigades trapped in the garrison fought for three days with great bravery against overwhelming odds. With no air cover and with supplies desperately short and tank strength perhaps little better than 50 percent, they had no option but to withdraw; had they not retreated, they might have been surrounded and wiped out.[78] Already they had probably lost as many men as a brigade. Ethiopian casualties were light, apparently the result of sound employment of superior technology.[79] The main reason for such a swift victory at such small cost in life and equipment was that the attackers surpassed the defenders both strategically and tactically. On March 5 (26 Yekatit) at 0900 hrs, the commander of the Tenth Division, Colonel Desalegn Abebe, proudly rehoisted the Ethiopian flag in the city.

With the liberation of Jijiga the war was practically over. Mengistu was naturally buoyed by the recapture of Karamara and Jijiga. Mortified by their loss six months earlier, he saw their retaking as part of the international proletarian struggle and inevitable victory. In a communiqué commending the eastern command for its contributions, he wrote:

> The Somali army and its collaborators took advantage of the class struggles we are waging for equality, peace, and socialism to invade our country, violating its sovereignty and honor. You have made enormous sacrifices to liberate our eastern lowlands and Karamara and Jijiga, so valuable in the continuing struggles on the eastern front. . . . This is a major lesson to all those who have been bragging about the death of Ethiopia. . . . Our revolution will break out from the snare laid by imperialism and its lackeys. As I send this message, I vividly see the bright road to socialism and feel great pride and happiness. This is the first, not the last, of our victories. This struggle, this just war, this revolutionary spirit must continue until we are completely freed from reactionaries. Your pillar, the Ethiopian people and true progressive forces of the world, will always be at your side. This is a victory not only of the Ethiopian people but also in the struggles of the workers of the world.[80]

Regardless of its international significance, the battle of Jijiga was the culminating event of the war. The Somalis were on the run and it would take just three weeks to restore Ethiopian sovereignty over nearly all of the occupied areas. The Ethiopians began attacking from three directions. The going was rough, with exhaustion and the simmering heat taking their toll on the men, who almost invariably walked for hours along with the armored units without sufficient water or medicine. Members of the Sixty-eighth Brigade lost control at one point and

consumed the water reserved for the vehicle batteries and even broke radiators for more.[81] Twenty-nine of the men succumbed to dehydration.[82] The Eighth Infantry Division lost thirty-two of its men under similar conditions.[83] The army was also desperately short of clothing, leading one soldier to complain, "The uniform and boots provided for a year are not even adequate for four months. So men are forced to walk barefoot and even without clothing; their feet are often swollen and oozing." Nevertheless, with victory in sight, morale remained high and the march eastward proceeded. On March 8, an armored column of the Third Division and the Third Cuban Tank Brigade easily captured Degehabur, about two hundred kilometers south of Jijiga. To the west Somali troops unexpectedly put up stiff resistance against the Eighth (formerly the Fifth) Division, which made a parallel advance from Babile toward Fik, a town that commanded the southern edge of the plateau. One of the Ethiopian units, the Ninety-fourth Brigade, was so badly mangled at Abusharif that its wounded commander, Major Bekele Kassa, killed himself rather than risk capture. That did not halt the division, which, supported by a Cuban artillery battalion, drove 150 kilometers to Fik on March 8. By then it had become clear that the Somalis could not hold out for long and few were surprised when President Siyad Barre announced the unilateral withdrawal of all his troops, who were trekking home across the Ogaden in small, disorganized bands, much like the Ethiopians seven months earlier. The tables had turned. The Fourth Division, which had set out from Agoba, near Neghele, and had seized Filtu on the eighth, entered Delo, 245 kilometers to the southeast, on the twelfth at 1125 hours. That same day, the Third Paracommando Brigade broke into Kebridehar, and the Sixty-ninth Brigade triumphantly entered Kelafo at 1800 hours on the thirteenth. With the Twelfth Division's seizure of Imi and Elkere on the sixteenth and seventeenth, respectively, Bale and most of the Ogaden were liberated.[84] On March 23, Addis Ababa declared that the last frontier post had been regained, marking the official end of the war. The announcement was not entirely accurate, however, for Somalia still controlled Geladin, Shibalo, Mustahil, Ferfer, and several other towns, an area that amounted to nearly a third of what it had seized in July–August 1977. It would take another major offensive to reclaim these areas.

The regime hurriedly turned its attention to Eritrea, with the motto "Our victory in the east shall be repeated in the north."

THE GLORY OF VICTORY AND THE AGONY OF DEFEAT

Was Ethiopian victory and Somali defeat due primarily to Soviet and Cuban intervention, or did other intrinsic factors influence the eventual outcome of the

war? Without doubt, external interference decisively shifted the balance of forces on the battlefield during the last two months of the conflict. While incompetent leadership contributed to the Somalis' failure, the Ethiopian victory came down to a question of numbers and technology. With the arrival of eighteen thousand Cuban artillerymen, tank crews, and pilots, who undertook many of the dangerous combat tasks during the counteroffensive, and about fifteen hundred Soviet military experts, who brought with them a vast quantity of arms, the Somalis stood absolutely no chance of success. That Cuban-Soviet assistance was instrumental in both their defeat and their expulsion is therefore incontrovertible.[85] Yet the Somalis were ultimately prevented from achieving their strategic aim by the Ethiopians, who fought them to a deadlock for six grueling months. By stabilizing the front on their own, the Ethiopians turned the situation in their favor. In essence, they won by not losing. Resoluteness was their main asset but they did benefit from the vacillation and bungling of the Somali high command.

The Somalis were poorly equipped to win a protracted war. The fact that the war had dragged on for six months before the Soviet and Cuban intervention speaks to some fundamental strengths and weaknesses of the adversaries. There is no tangible evidence that the Somali soldiers were less competent or courageous than their Ethiopian counterparts. As a matter of fact, both Cubans and Ethiopians who met them on the battleground admit that they were "tough and fought bravely."[86] Ethiopians speak admiringly of Somali agility and skill and especially of the dexterity of their tank specialists. As an Ethiopian sergeant remarked to me, "If one were to combine the Ethiopian air force with the Somali tank units, one would have created Africa's dream army."[87] In the end, the Somalis were defeated in part because of Ethiopian tenacity and in part because their country had neither the resources nor an effective plan for a long war. Given the enormous demographic disparity between the two countries and the vastness and variation of the contested terrain, Somalia could have won the war only through a blitzkrieg. In any major military operation, speed is as important as firepower. The Somali army was well equipped and highly mechanized, but the blitzkrieg the Ethiopians had feared did not occur. Somalia lacked speed and maneuverability to press the attack, even as it attempted to stretch its enemy's supply lines to the breaking point while gobbling up tracts of territory.

It is true, of course, that the Somalis swept easily through the Ethiopian front lines and the friendly lowlands but got stalled when they reached the hostile highlands. There the blitz dissipated and the struggle turned into a war of attrition that the Somalis could not possibly have won; after all, the Ethiopian population was ten times larger than that of Somalia and just as fiercely patriotic. As René Lefort observes, "Somalia had easily won the initial sprint, but lacked the

staying power with which to win the long distance race."[88] As the war dragged on, the Ethiopians were able to bolster the eastern command from its peacetime strength of one poorly equipped infantry division to seven well-armed divisions, while Somalia's manpower became overstretched and undersupplied. The Somalis might have been ready for a short mobile campaign of up to six months, but they failed to win the war in that time as they had hoped. Instead, the conflict turned into a contest of attrition in which the manpower and spirit of each nation was tested to the limit. The longer the war dragged on, the wearier the Somalis became. They also had logistic and leadership problems.

It soon became apparent the Somalis had overstretched themselves logistically fighting some seven hundred kilometers from home. An invading army does not fight with resolve without continual replenishment of food, ammunition, and troops. As the combat zone was deep in enemy territory, the supply and communications systems of the invaders became vulnerable to disruptions by Ethiopian airmen and paratroopers, and the provisions for supply and reinforcement were entirely inadequate.[89] If the Somalis had limited themselves to seizing the Ogaden, they might have won at least a temporary military victory.

Instead they were overconfident and lamentably led. Incompetence and arrogance contributed in no small measure to their failure. Their leaders did not have a well-considered strategy adaptable to the unexpected turns of war. As the preceding narrative shows, the coordination of war plans was never near adequate, and although the generals had a range of options, none was fully exploited. No attempt was made to disrupt the Ethiopian defense system through airborne assaults. And instead of exploiting mobility to encircle Ethiopian defenses, the Somalis futilely tried to break the enemy's strongholds by assaulting them head-on, incurring unacceptable losses. They had difficulty pinpointing the Ethiopians' vulnerability; rarely did the Somalis attempt to overstretch the Ethiopian forces by creating havoc at their rear before they could build fresh defensive lines or by undertaking swift, deceptive maneuvers on their flanks. Only by maneuvering from the enemy's rear could the Somalis have managed to disrupt the Ethiopians' communications, supply, and means of operation. They never attacked concurrently at several points along the war front in order to make it difficult for the Ethiopians to guess where defensive reserves would be needed most. The Somali army was trained by the Soviets, and a common Russian tactic has been to fight deep at the enemy's rear; they failed the test. The Somalis did repeatedly attack the enemy's weak points, but invariably with insufficient force; they were terribly weak at concentrating physical power and firepower on the decisive point and at maintaining the initiative. It is plausible, for instance, that with more force and speed they could have captured Dire Dawa in August; that

would surely have changed the whole complexion of the war. At the very least, it could have reduced the capacity of the Ethiopian air force, which they had come to dread. One wonders why Somali strategists did not try to destroy the road running from Addis Ababa to Dire Dawa or at least the important bridges between Awash and Dire Dawa and between Awash and Assab—one of the two most important ports—or to hamper the air force by putting its main base at Dabre Zeit out of service.

All modern wars have been fought on the ground by infantry and mechanized troops, and the Ogaden war was no exception. But aircraft also have become fixtures in contemporary warfare, often determining the outcome, as in the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. Aircraft were also a decisive component in the Ogaden war. Without the air force, the Ethiopians most likely would have lost the war. Even though the Somalis had more fighter bombers (fifty-three to the Ethiopians' thirty-six) during the first five months of the war, their aeronautical corps was outclassed by the Ethiopian air force. Not only did the Ethiopians achieve near-absolute control of their own skies, but they were able to penetrate Somali airspace and strike as far away as the port of Berbera. According to MOND, between July 1977 and June 1978 the air force flew 2,865 sorties, punishing Somalia's armored crews and destroying nine MiG-17s and eighteen MiG-21s in the dogfights and another six inside Somalia itself.[90] These feats have been credited to the superiority of the American F-SEs over the Soviet MiG-17s and MiG-21s. This may be so, but machines are operated by human beings. The Ethiopian air force had a history of thirty years behind it to Somalia's fifteen. Ethiopian domination of the air had perhaps to do more with training, technical skill, and experience than with the mere possession of a superior machine. The air force operated exceptionally effectively as a coherent unit under Brigadier General Haile Tilahun. And some F-5A and F-SE fighter jet pilots, most notably Colonels Amha Desta and Techane Mesfin, Lieutenant Colonel Legesse Teferra, and Major Bezabih Petros played a key role in foiling Somali objectives. Legesse Teferra—who piloted an F-SE—became an aviation legend by shooting down two fighter jets and destroying four more on the ground, as well as by putting the airport at Hargeisa out of operation before he was hit by a ground-to-air missile and captured. He was kept in solitary detention in Mogadishu until 1988, when he was released in the exchange of prisoners. Legesse was then promoted to brigadier general.[91]

Another major weakness was the Somali failure to see war as a part of politics. Enunciating Clausewitz's maxim, Lenin remarked that "war is part of the whole [and] the whole is politics." The Somalis gave hardly any serious attention to the nonmilitary components of the conflict. Their strategy was driven by the hope

that their massive armed thrust would either force the Ethiopian government into a humiliating negotiation on their own terms or cause its fall and the consequent collapse of the army. Both assumptions proved wrong, yet the Mogadishu regime did not have an alternative strategy. Simply stated, the invaders failed to outthink the enemy by flexibly adapting their battle designs and tactics to local conditions. Further, they placed themselves in a disadvantageous situation by severing ties with the Soviets and Cubans, whose extremely punishing reaction they seem not to have anticipated.

There was still another strategic miscalculation. To the Ethiopians' surprise, the invaders greatly underrated two critical factors: the depth of Ethiopian patriotism and the popularity of the revolution. Somali aggression inspired civic patriotism, which the government skillfully manipulated for popular mobilization under the guidance of the NROC.[92] The patriotic zeal was such that the factionalism that had undermined the military in the early stage of the revolution quickly disappeared once the invasion threatened both territorial integrity and sovereignty. Hundreds of veterans returned eagerly to the battlefield despite their distaste for the haughty young military rulers. The militiamen, though unskilled and inexperienced, turned out to be remarkably tenacious; the resolve and bravery with which they fought must have astonished not only the Somalis but also their own leaders. The militiamen were inspired by dreams or hopes of social justice and a transformed world. Many of them were from the southern regions, primary beneficiaries of the land reform legislated in early 1975. There was much at stake for them to defend the gains of the revolution as well as the territorial unity of the country. With their patriotic and revolutionary enthusiasm, they helped halt the enemy from undermining both.

The Ethiopians won the war but not the peace. Skirmishes with the defeated but stubborn Somalis, who still contested a large piece of Ethiopian territory, continued for another three years. Moreover, the WSLF and SALF reasserted themselves, reverting to guerrilla warfare, under the auspices of Mogadishu, of course. It took a major counterinsurgency campaign to defeat the guerrillas in 1980–81 (see chapter 7) although small-scale resistance continued until the mid-1980s.

What was the cost of the war? It is impossible to answer this question with any degree of certitude because official Somali information is unavailable and what is available on the Ethiopian side presents many discrepancies.[93] One document from MOND gives 5,532 casualties, another 5,137, and a third 6,650 as the number of Ethiopians killed during the eight months of fighting. A total of 20,000 casualties does not seem too high given the duration and intensity of the hostilities.[94] Of the dead, 160 were executed for a variety of reasons ranging from

cowardice and attempts at desertion or self-mutilation to sedition, and of the 3,799 soldiers missing in action, 1,362 were categorized as deserters. In 1988, 229 Somali prisoners of war were exchanged for 3,544 Ethiopian prisoners of war in Mogadishu. A total of 119 prisoners died in captivity.[95] The Cuban dead numbered 163; I have not seen exact figures for fallen Yemenis but have heard numbers ranging from 60 to 100. Of course, in this war, as in every other, nobody really knows how many civilians were killed or wounded. The civilian population was caught between two fires that must have consumed a good number of them along with some of their property, but we have no clue as to how many and how much. What is incontestable is that both Ethiopian and Somali troops committed ghastly crimes against civilians; both killed, crippled, raped, looted, and indiscriminately bombed villages, destroying lives, food, and livestock. Nearly half a million people were uprooted, most of them temporarily migrating to Somalia.[96]

The hardware that Ethiopia purchased from the Soviet Union was worth over a billion dollars, much of it bought on credit. The estimated cost of equipment and logistics the country lost is given as 283,219,970 birr (US $138,156,083).[97] But the inventory contains many items, including sixty-four tanks, for which no estimates were provided; it is thus plausible that the total cost was in excess of 400 million birr, or $200 million. When the computation takes into account the closure of the railway, which must have robbed the country of an enormous amount of its foreign earnings, and the extensive disruptions in agricultural and commercial activities, it is not hard to imagine that Ethiopia's losses were far greater than these numbers would suggest.

Somalia committed perhaps the greatest strategic blunder in its short history of political existence in 1977. The scale of the disaster was as great as the ambition that led to it. Somalia took advantage of the political tumult in Ethiopia to settle a long-standing dispute with its neighbor by force, provoking a war that the irredentist state was ill equipped to win according to its own timetable. Its generals proved unequal to the task, its meager resources soon became overstretched, and its aeronautical corps were overwhelmed by the Ethiopian air force. Moreover, the Somalis seriously underestimated both the potential of (Ethiopian) nationalism for popular mobilization and the capriciousness of international relations. They were surprised by the Ethiopian will to resist, as they must have been by their own diplomatic blunders, which cost them the friendship of much of the socialist world.

It is astonishing that an armed conflict that started in a desolate corner of Africa developed into the continent's largest war—a war directly involving the

USSR, then a superpower. This is surely one of the riddles of the cold war era. Whatever the Soviets' interests and calculations, their intervention in the Horn's crisis was as dramatic as it was extensive.[98] It outraged the Somalis, who had been tied to the USSR for fifteen years. It also alarmed the West and its allies in the region, especially Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, because it seemed to herald a new era of confrontation in northeastern Africa and the Indian Ocean littoral. What left the Somalis and Western strategists dumbfounded was the speed, efficiency, and scale with which the USSR armed the Ethiopians to vanquish an army that they themselves had trained and equipped. The war destroyed existing alignments and forged new ones but did not seriously upset détente, as it was feared it would. The long-term impact was on the warring countries themselves.

The war had enormous repercussions for both Somalia and Ethiopia. The Ogaden debacle fatally wounded the regime in Mogadishu and may even have been the catalyst in the demise of the Somali state. Defeat provoked widespread disillusionment and discontent, which, in turn, led disgruntled elements in the army to mount an abortive coup just a month after the retreat from the Ogaden. Subsequently, a dozen men were executed and many more fled the country to join or found clan-based opposition organizations to which the Ethiopian government was only too happy to lend support, to counterbalance Mogadishu's backing of the WSLF and SALF. Neither the state of emergency declared in 1980 nor the reprisals would intimidate the otherwise fractured opposition, which by the end of 1990 had gained the upper hand. In January 1991, Barre was driven out of Mogadishu. Upon his flight, the military and civilian bureaucracy collapsed and the Somali state ceased to exist.

Somalia's ambition for territorial aggrandizement was blunted, but the Ogaden problem remains. Wars create opportunities to alter conditions that led to them in the first place; this war did not. The invasion was almost universally welcomed by the Somalis of eastern Ethiopia, who cherished the eight months of occupation as liberation. The Ethiopians regained the Ogaden but not the permanent allegiance of the territory's inhabitants, tens of thousands of whom fled to Somalia for fear of reprisals by the Ethiopian army. Today, despite the unprecedented autonomy granted them by the new federal structure, political organizations like the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) clamor for self-determination, a euphemism for independence and eventual unity with other Somalis. They believe, perhaps rightly, that the extinction of the Somali state is a transitory, not a permanent, phase in the rugged process of state making. Somalia lives in the popular imagination. The prospects for conflict have only diminished, not disappeared.

On the Ethiopian side, military victory cemented the Ethiopian-Soviet alliance with the signing in Moscow, in November 1978, of a twenty-year treaty of friendship and cooperation. This restored national pride, improved the tarnished image of the army, and saved the country from possible fragmentation. From a long-term perspective, the significance of Ogaden may be better appreciated in relation to Adwa. The political and territorial integrity of the Ethiopian state has been challenged more than once in modern times—in 1875, 1876, 1896, 1935, 1977, and 1998. These challenges are pivotal events in Ethiopian history, but none is as indelibly etched in Ethiopian historical memory as the Italian invasion of 1896 and the invaders' defeat at Adwa. Only Adwa is memorialized in the arts and celebrated annually as a national event. The revolutionary government drew upon this official mythology to mobilize the public against the Somali invaders. It frequently invoked the "heroes of Adwa" to build morale among its troops. Was the failed Somali invasion of 1977 any less threatening to the survival of the state than that of the Italians eighty-one years earlier? What if the Ethiopians had lost in 1896? The country would certainly have shared the fate that befell the rest of Africa—colonial rule. It was political independence, not the state's integrity, that was at stake. Indeed, when the Italians briefly (1936–41) occupied the country, they maintained its territorial unity. And what if the Somalis had won in 1977? They would have seized a big chunk of Ethiopian territory. The face of the Ethiopian state would be quite different from what it is today; worse, the state could have disappeared altogether. What this means is that the victory in the Ogaden was perhaps more important than the much-celebrated victory of Adwa. Yet Ogaden has hardly entered popular memory. But why? Several reasons can be suggested.

First, since it was the only decisive military victory against European conquests on the continent, Adwa gives Ethiopians a unique sense of pride and self-identity that other Africans are supposed to lack. Second, whereas the successful defense of independence at Adwa was solely an Ethiopian affair, the Somalis were vanquished with massive foreign assistance; the alien element may have tarnished the notion of national glory, diminishing the event's significance in popular memory and history. Third, sensitivity to the sensibilities of the ever-restive Somali segment of the Ethiopian population may have discouraged its emotional evocation and ritualization at the national level. Fourth, Ogaden is not given space in popular memory perhaps because it is associated with a regime that committed heinous crimes against its own people.

More immediately, the Ogaden victory consolidated military dictatorship. It seems a truism that war generally leads to a greater concentration of power in government hands and often to the violation of civic and human rights. This

certainly was true in Ethiopia. The Somali invasion, coupled with the revolts all across the country, made the strong reassertion of state authority a pressing matter. At the time of the invasion, Ethiopia's military was in disarray; during and after the war, it was rebuilt and hugely expanded. The early success of the Somalis, as well as of the insurgents and counterrevolutionaries, made the defense of both the revolution and the country urgent, which also meant the suppression of the democracy and freedom achieved by the revolution. The Ethiopian-Somali war increased the state's repressive capacity under the exclusive control of Mengistu, who was now portrayed as a supernationalist and a decisive person. It is thus possible to hypothesize that the military dictatorship was in part a product of contingent historical circumstances. Emboldened by its success in the east, the more secure dictatorship set out to eradicate the revolts in the north. The young revolutionary soldiers, who had only the vaguest idea of the essential differences between conventional and guerrilla warfare, believed that their victory against a foreign adversary could be repeated against their domestic foes. Convinced that the campaign would be short, they turned their attention and the full weight of the rebuilt army to the Eritrean insurgency. It eluded and finally buried them. It was far easier to mobilize the populace against a foreign enemy than against domestic insurgents who used unconventional methods of war to exhaust and defeat conventional forces.

7

Nakfa: "Even the Mountains Fought"

INSURGENCY AND COUNTERINSURGENCY

> There is hardly any glorious enterprise in war which was not achieved by endless effort, pains and privations; and as here the physical and moral weaknesses of human nature are ever disposed to yield, only a great strength of will, which manifests itself in steadfastness admired by present and future generations, can conduct us to our goal.
>
> —*Karl von Clausewitz*

Victory against Somalia did not usher in national cohesion and social peace; on the contrary, by 1980 Ethiopia was gripped by escalating civil wars. The government, which had emerged enormously strengthened militarily following the Ogaden war, sought to suppress one, then another revolt in a series of sweeps and campaigns. These efforts were unsuccessful. Then in 1980 and 1982, respectively, it waged major offensives against the "eastern irredentists" and "northern secessionists." Operation Lash by and large achieved its aims, but Operation Red Star, which appears to have been inspired by the first, was a military disaster. The eastern rebellion was defeated because it was still in a state of infancy, was fragmented, and was more vulnerable to external manipulation than the older, more cohesive, and militarily more redoubtable Eritrean insurgency. In a cold test of wills the Eritrean guerrilla fighters, shielded by their mountain fortresses, not only held the offensive to a stalemate but also went on to win total military victory.

Red Star marked the apogee of the Eritrean conflict, divulging the scope, intensity, and cost of the civil wars. The state mobilized the bulk of its armed forces

and resources to storm Nakfa, the hub of the insurgents, and to put an end to the Eritrean resistance. Valiant efforts by the Ethiopian forces to achieve that goal—which, it was hoped, would ensure the country's integrity—were thwarted by an equally determined and resilient foe who adeptly combined guerrilla and conventional tactics. This was the battle that made the EPLF and began the unmaking of Ethiopia.

The new counterinsurgency strategy that the state adapted to deal with its armed opponents in its eastern and northern peripheries was modeled on the "total strategy" first enunciated by the French general André Beaufre. Beaufre posited that since all warfare is a clash of two opposing wills the side that causes the psychological or moral disintegration of the other will triumph. He expanded Clausewitz's idea of *will* by proposing that, in order to win in counterinsurgency wars, the whole society has to be included in the "dialectic of two wills."[1] His social laboratory was Algeria, where as a zonal commander, he succeeded in defeating the guerrilla fighters in the eastern Constantine area by combining ruthless military action, intensive psychological warfare, and economic and cultural reforms.[2] Beaufre's theory was further elaborated by those who argued that, since revolutionary warfare is essentially the mobilization of the rural masses, a counterinsurgency strategy could succeed by using the guerrillas' techniques and tactics of struggle in reverse. If the insurgents activate and rally the people by appealing to their economic and political discontent, then the counterrevolutionary strategist could win not by military might alone but also by redressing the people's grievances and attending to their material needs. In the words of the American ex-colonel John J. McCuen, "a governing power can defeat any revolutionary movement if it adopts the revolutionary strategy and principles and applies them in reverse to defeat the revolutionaries with their weapons on their own battlefield."[3] He had no problem if mass control entailed harsh action so long as it was taken decisively and quickly.[4] David Galula, a former French officer with extensive experience in counterinsurgency warfare, also conceded that, although coercion may be unavoidable, it ought to be minimized since it tends to alienate the populace, without whose support victory is impossible.[5] Even though the incumbent government could not conceivably remove the social and political reasons for the insurgency, experience from Africa, Asia, and South America has shown that the guerrilla fighter could indeed be defeated with his own weapons.[6]

Yet Robert Taber argues that "the counterinsurgent cannot win by imitating the insurgent," precisely because their tasks are diametrically opposed. "They are dissimilar forces, fighting dissimilar wars, for disparate objectives." The insurgent's objective is primarily political, but his adversary's main solution is mili-

tary. Whereas the counterinsurgent seeks to preserve the status quo by offering palliatives for social ills, the insurgent works and fights to dismantle it forcibly. The counterinsurgent responds with even greater force that does not spare the civilian population, thereby alienating it. Still, Taber admits that the counterinsurgent could win militarily in "a revolutionary situation," but only by localizing the suppression campaign. The counterinsurgent's "military campaign must be sweeping, continuous, and cumulative in its effects. Either he clears the country of guerrillas or he does not. If he does not, he continues to lose."[7]

It can fairly be assumed that Ethiopian strategists and tacticians were, to varying degrees, influenced by these theoreticians. Their military response to the insurgencies was buttressed by administrative and economic reforms as well as by psychological warfare (propaganda and indoctrination). A modest attempt was made to capture the hearts and minds of the populace, so as to undermine the insurgencies' appeal, by reaching out to local leaders, helping rebuild civic institutions, rebuilding infrastructure, and providing jobs. The two suppression campaigns were also fairly localized. Nevertheless, the results were dissimilar, because the insurgencies were not identical. The Eritrean movement had grown into a coherent organization with a well-trained and highly disciplined army able to marshal regular units backed by heavy weaponry, while the eastern uprising comprised many armed, quarrelsome groups with divergent goals and varying military effectiveness. Yet the government mistakenly concluded from its successful crusade in the east that its strategy could bear the same fruit elsewhere in the country. In Eritrea, miscalculation led to failure and a staggering sacrifice of human beings and material. Each operation will be analyzed separately.

OPERATION LASH

Lash was a military operation executed in eastern Ethiopia near the middle of 1980. It had two intertwined goals. As the ringworm (*lash*) eats away the hair of the human head, so the army would exterminate the insurgents operating in the southeastern parts of the country. Concomitantly, it would restore national sovereignty over the whole of the Ogaden by expelling the Somali army from the territory. Both goals it expected to achieve in about three months. The Somalis were expelled and the insurgents defeated, though not entirely eliminated, almost right on schedule.[8] The successful strategy contained five elements: (1) sweeps or search-and-destroy operations, (2) consolidation of scattered villages mainly for controlling the rural population, (3) resettlement of displaced persons, (4) creation of specially trained mountain infantry divisions, and (5) spon-

sorship of dissident Somali organizations against the eponymous state and its main proxy, the WSLF.

Southeastern Ethiopia had been in turmoil since the mid-1970s. Espousing a mixture of ideas and objectives, ethnic-based armed groups fought the state from their sanctuaries, which they called "liberated areas," in the provinces of Hararghe, Bale, Sidamo, and Arsi. At one time or another, there were six political organizations with a total fighting force estimated at between twenty-six and thirty thousand. Of the combined force of about eighteen thousand men, two-thirds belonged to the older Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), whose history antedates the revolution, and the rest to the Somali-Abo Liberation Front (SALF). The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which began military operations in Hararghe in 1976, probably had five to six thousand fighters. Its offshoot, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), fought with less than half that number. The Sidama Liberation Front (SLF) and the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Struggle (Echat) were the smallest, their combined force barely exceeding a thousand. These organizations operated in close proximity, four of them competing for the same turf, people, and resources. By claiming "Western Somalia"—comprising about a third of Ethiopia and incorporating a good part of the territories claimed by the SALF and the Oromo organizations—the WSLF inevitably clashed with all three. The territorial conflicts were exacerbated by the groups' divergent goals and ideals, which ranged from autonomy to independence and from socialism to Islamism.

Starting in February 1979 the Ethiopian army executed several offensives in the four provinces, dealing a death blow to the weaker SLF and Echat. Riven with internal strife, its relationship with the Somali state ambivalent, the SALF also atrophied under the military's onslaught. The bigger organizations were harder to beat. When attacked, the guerrillas would simply slip away or merge into the populace and then return as soon as the offensives were withdrawn. Preventing their return and regrouping proved to be a more difficult task than driving them from their hideouts. They could not be defeated as long as they remained submerged in the population. The troops often vented their frustration on the peasants by destroying crops or killing animals. They frequently raided marketplaces to round up the young, harass the old and infirm, beat up almost everyone else, and, of course, loot. If such indiscriminate brutality was intended to terrorize the populace into submission, it often had the opposite effect of increasing support for the rebels.

So the government introduced a double-edged policy that came to be known as villagization. Its aim was to isolate and destroy the rebels and at the same

time resettle displaced peasants. As one counterinsurgency "specialist" has observed, "A victory is not the destruction in a given area of the insurgent's force and his political organization. . . . A victory is that plus the permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population, isolation not enforced upon the population but maintained by and with the population."[9] Rural people helped the rebels, willingly or under duress, by providing sustenance, shelter, and intelligence information. By reconcentrating widely scattered households in larger, controlled villages, the state sought to deny the rebels access to food, other supplies, and manpower. The province that experienced the most extensive villagization in 1979 was Bale, the largest but least populated region, with barely a million people. Arsi and Sidamo were right behind. The relocated villagers were promised schools, clinics, wells, and roads. Delivery varied from one village to another. Other settlements were set up in Bale and Arsi for peasants displaced by the Ethiopia-Somalia war and by the establishment of new state farms. The villages and settlements were guarded by self-defense squads drawn from the peasants themselves and indoctrinated by an enthusiastic coterie of cadres. People's mobility was closely monitored and only under extenuating circumstances could an adult person stay away overnight. As access to these fortified villages became more and more difficult, the insurgents largely limited their activities to Hararghe, which as yet had witnessed little villagization. The army's combat zone had shrunk. It must be emphasized that villagization, which the government pursued with such efficacy, was merely a mechanism for securing physical control over the peasantry; it offered few compensating benefits for the villagers. The government's success was primarily a military victory, even though it relied to some extent on Beaufre's strategy of psychological warfare and economic reform.

The state also used proxies to fight its domestic and external enemies. There were two such organizations. The first to emerge, in 1979, was the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). It was led by former officers involved in the abortive coup of 1978 against Siyad Barre. The SSDF drew its support almost exclusively from the Mijerteen, the largest clan in northeast Somalia. Its leader was Colonel Abdulahi Yusuf Ahmad, the current president of the so-called interim government of Somalia. With its headquarters at Dire Dawa (later moved to Kebridehar), the SSDF may have had a force of up to six thousand by 1984. The Somali National Movement (SNM) was founded in April 1981 by émigrés in London and did not begin military operation until late in the year with a command center at Aware. It was weaker than the SSDF, with which it continually wrangled while trying to unseat the Somali dictator. Ethiopian security called the quarrelsome organizations "Projects 6A and 6B" or "Projects Gobeysene"

("trustworthy"). Working closely with the Eighth, Eleventh, and Twentieth Infantry Divisions of the First Revolutionary Army (FRA) and equipped with mortars, artillery, and rocket launchers, they carried out raids inside Somalia, hitting military posts and economic plants. They provided the Ethiopian military with intelligence and assisted in hunting down the WSLF and SALF, proxy forces of the Somali regime. With such useful tools, the Ethiopian government was determined to finish off the rebels and remove the Somali regulars from its territory; that took a major, multifaceted offensive known as Operation Lash.

Operation Lash was launched against this backdrop. Under the supervision of the chief of staff, Brigadier General Merid Negussie, MOND mapped out a four-stage strategy. The operation was directed by Brigadier General Demissie Bulto, commander of the First Revolutionary Army and an officer with a well-merited reputation for strategic vision, integrity, discipline, and decisiveness. These qualities had earned him the admiration and devotion of his staff and troops, who in turn fought with high motivation and determination. Demissie allowed his field commanders sufficient freedom of action while demanding full accountability. This carefully calibrated response to a complicated situation proved to be extremely effective.

The offensive began on August 28, 1980. Six divisions with about sixty thousand troops were deployed against the insurgents, with the WSLF as the main target. They were supported by the two divisions of the southern command, the Third Fighter Regiment of the air force at Dire Dawa, thousands of peasant militiamen, and the Cuban mechanized brigades at Jijiga. The cornerstones of the strategy were envelopment, surprise, speed and hot pursuit. Tactically, the operation was broken down into several localized campaigns with the aim of encircling, dispersing, and liquidating the rebels. After stationing troops near the border to block suspected entry and exit points, the mobilized forces combed the area by moving in multiple columns supported by armor and helicopters. The rebels relinquished ground without much resistance; the already weakened SALF disintegrated, the WSLF withdrew to northern Somalia, and the OLF abandoned the area by shifting its forces to the southwest, a process it had begun in the preceding year. Some units were subsequently stationed at strategic points to guard the army's rear, win the confidence of the people, and reestablish state authority through physical control, economic reforms, and propaganda. Then, between September 20 and November 19, the army relentlessly attacked, pushing and pursuing the rebels and advancing as far as Gode, Kebridehar, and Warder. Again, it met little resistance because the guerrillas vacated the area by crossing over into Somalia.

One reason the WSLF, despite its size, was so easily beaten was that it was not

as coherent an organization as it appeared to be. The WSLF was as fractured as the Somali community itself, although it had a single leadership headed by a secretary-general. Its nine divisions represented clans, which quarreled, competed for water and pasture, and jealously protected their respective zones not only against government forces but also against one another. When attacked, they were not quick enough and were often reluctant to aid one another. Clanism posed such a serious impediment to unity of action that the WSLF had made its advocacy an offense punishable by death.[10] It was ineffectual, and the WSLF remained fractious and too weak to withstand a concerted assault like Lash. Having enfeebled the rebels, the FRA was now ready to discharge the second part of the campaign.

In the final phase, the army "cleared" the remaining parts of the Ogaden, setting the stage for the assault on the Somali troops still occupying an area that was approximately 420 kilometers long and 250 kilometers wide. A total of 25,412 men were deployed, although roughly half took part in the actual fighting. Led by Colonels Getaneh Haile and Abate Tsadiku, on November 22, 1980, they opened a three-pronged surgical attack from Warder, Kebridehar, and Gode with great coordination and high morale. Enemy resistance was feeble. The operation accomplished its mission on December 3: the Ogaden was completely freed three years after its occupation. Total Ethiopian casualties were less than two thousand.[11]

Even though some work remained ahead, the government's claim of victory was justified, because the Somali invaders were expelled and the major rebel organizations were never able to reconstitute themselves. Only the IFLO, under its enigmatic leader, Sheik Muhammad Hussein Muhammad, better known as Jara Aba Gelda (his nom de guerre), outlived the regime.[12] Its astonishing survival was due mainly to the fact that its men, who otherwise used guerrilla tactics, were more of the "roving rebel" type, hard to differentiate from ordinary bandits. They never established a liberated base. After the administration of Lash, the IFLO was believed to have not more than three hundred fighters. Still, the government wanted Jara, dead or alive, not because he posed a threat to its authority but because of his movement's emotional or symbolic significance. The IFLO represented a dangerous mix of ethnonationalism and religious fanaticism in a multiethnic society. Most of the Oromo, who made up close to 40 percent of the total population, were believed to be Muslim in a country that was nearly equally split between Christians and Muslims. It was feared that an Oromo nationalism that used Islam as its buttressing ideology would upset the delicate balance, auguring interconfessional conflicts. Jara was perceived—wrongly, of

course—as a latter-day Ahmed Gureh. Though its leader proved elusive, the IFLO has nevertheless failed to capture the imagination of the Oromo.

VICTORY WITHOUT PEACE

Notwithstanding the remnants, there is little doubt that Lash was a successful military operation. Eastern Ethiopia was no longer a contested territory. The state had restored its authority and sovereignty. The rebels had not been stamped out, but those who were not on the run had lost their strength, unable to carry out major offensive operations. At the official end of the campaign, the chief of staff, who oversaw its execution, buoyantly declared, "From now on we shall lead events, not be led by them. . . . We have achieved our goals at minimal cost. . . . Never again will a foreign enemy or any other with ill intentions toward us set foot on Ethiopian soil."[13] The government was confident enough of its success to transfer 17,612 of its troops to the northern front to take part in an offensive that it unleashed against the Eritrean insurgents in February 1982.[14]

Lash was the first and last major successful counterinsurgency campaign in revolutionary Ethiopia that gave the government the heart to conduct another operation on an even larger scale. The government's hopes that the victory in the east would be repeated in the north proved unfounded. The Eritrean insurgents were more committed to their cause, better organized, more experienced, more disciplined, more tenacious, and more dexterous. The terrain of operation was also more strenuous, unsuitable to the tank.

OPERATION RED STAR

> This army is paying the ultimate sacrifice in blood and life to fight these traitorous mercenaries and the reactionary force behind them. It does so not for material benefit but for the liberation of the Eritrean masses from the clutches of the bandits, for the defense of the revolution of the Ethiopian peoples, and for freedom, glory, and history. From now on no mercy will be shown to these pitiful dregs of history who treacherously continue to attack the army from the back, directly or indirectly.[15]

Mengistu Haile Mariam made this inauspicious statement on January 25, 1981, when Operation Red Star, or the Red Star Multifaceted Revolutionary Campaign, was announced.[16] The campaign had a dual purpose: to wipe out the insurgency in Eritrea militarily and to rehabilitate the provincial society economically, politically, and psychologically. It was a multipronged assault on

the Eritrean nationalist resistance, even though the military aspect eventually gained primacy. The motto became military victory first and then civic action. Neither aim was achieved.

Eritrea was the millstone around Mengistu's neck. In addition to the primary military objective of liquidating the Eritrean resistance, his government hoped to achieve a range of political and psychological objectives. First, Mengistu's prestige as a patriotic leader had risen sharply following Ethiopia's victory against Somalia. Another victory against the Eritrean insurgents would have further bolstered his nationalist credentials. Second, an end to the costly war in the north would have released valuable resources for building the socialist utopia that his regime envisaged. Third, it was hoped that a triumph in Eritrea would convince the rebels' supporters in the Middle East that Eritrea was as Ethiopian as Syria or Iraq was Arab. Further, it was believed that such a victory would not only rally the Eritrean people behind the regime in Addis Ababa but also eliminate insurgents in adjacent provinces. Military failure shattered those hopes and objectives. Far from undermining the Eritrean will to resist, the failed operation reinforced it by causing the people to rally behind the insurgents in an upsurge of nationalist fervor. Red Star was a personal and political blow to Ethiopia's dictator. Both the army and the regime were also discredited.

Based on its own recent experience on the eastern front, the regime calculated that in order to defeat the EPLF it had to back up its military efforts with social services. In the year preceding the military operation, the government thus waged psychological warfare to win over the Eritreans, but in an essentially controlled social environment. The whole purpose was to destroy or neutralize the EPLF's clandestine organizational networks and to replace them with state organs that would readily respond to popular concerns and needs. This would have meant placing more emphasis on persuasion than on coercion, as had been the practice hitherto. Some effort was made, therefore, to placate the populace by addressing their material and security needs as well as by rehabilitating public institutions and facilities. The Eritrean economy had been seriously disrupted as most of its factories had lain idle since 1977; the few that remained in operation did so only at or near 30 percent capacity. Consumer goods were scarce and too expensive when available. Unemployment was rampant, exceeding the national average, which hovered around 20 percent, and agricultural life was frequently disrupted. In 1981 the state may have invested about US $50 million to resettle displaced peasants, resuscitate the economy, and rebuild the infrastructure. By the end of the year, a dozen factories had been reopened, creating over ten thousand jobs. Industrial output is said to have increased by 40 percent. Blown-up roads and bridges were rebuilt. Hospitals, schools, and government offices were

rebuilt, repaired, or refurbished. Displaced peasants from war-scarred zones were resettled and provided with the tools and seeds to start a new life.[17] It was hoped that through these measures and incentives the state would gain voluntary consent from civil society.

Since such blandishments alone could not be trusted to win the people's trust and loyalty, however, political tools of mass control were more stringently enforced than before and more stringently than in the rest of the country. People were no longer randomly terrorized; the arbitrary arrests, displacements, and violence were drastically curtailed. But life remained regimented. An after-dusk curfew was imposed, and people wishing to travel or change domicile had to obtain special permits from the appropriate authorities. A system of surveillance was instituted. Individuals and families were enticed to spy on one another. The cost to the state was minimal, since the funds were channeled through government-sponsored groups and associations. The government claimed that by the end of 1981 it had created 149 urban dwellers' associations in a dozen towns and 300 peasant associations with a total membership of 60,000, or about 2 percent of the total provincial population. These measures were not peculiar to Eritrea, but they attained special potency under conditions of war.[18] Women's and youth groups as well as the peasant associations held periodic self-evaluations at public forums that were invariably used by the regime's tightly controlled cadres for political sermons and exhortations. Using historical symbols, allegory, slogans, and simple repetition, the cadres lost no opportunity to delegitimize the nationalist insurgents by presenting them as "antiunity, antipeople, and antidemocracy." Worse, they condemned them as mercenaries who were out to sell Eritrea to the highest Arab bidders.

The tactics seem to have worked to some extent. Those who, out of conviction or fear, appeared to disown the nationalists were armed by the state to protect them from reprisals by the rebels but also to press them into service as ancillaries to the security forces. Most remained on the fence. Despite its concessions, manipulations, and divisive tactics, the state was not able to eliminate the clandestine network of its opponents, who continued to intimidate, harass, kidnap, or liquidate those they considered "notorious collaborators." The mop-up operations executed in the province between December 1981 and January 1982 were a confirmation of that failure: on January 23, just three weeks before the much-anticipated offensive was unleashed, the rebels penetrated the heavily defended perimeters of Asmara to hit directly at the state's belly.

The principal aim of Operation Red Star was "to destroy, once and for all, the bandits entrenched in the mountains of Sahel and Barka and to establish lasting peace in the province of Eritrea."[19] A final solution to the Eritrean problem, the

campaign was also aimed at eliminating the armed organizations operating in Tigray and Gondar. The TPLF, in particular, had become a serious impediment to the state's war efforts in Eritrea by forging a tactical alliance with the EPLF. It was strategically located to disrupt personnel movements as well as communication and supply lines. The other groups were the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), both located in Gondar. It was thought that these organizations would wither away or be more easily quashed upon the defeat of the EPLF.

The government believed that it could eliminate the Eritrean insurgency at that particular time because the current domestic and international conditions seemed favorable. Internally, although by no means fully pacified, the eastern front had been brought under control and the government was able to transfer two of the specially trained mountain divisions. In 1980–1981 the state obtained valuable intelligence from Teklai Gabre Mikael, a high-profile defector from the EPLF. Before his defection, Teklai was a member of the EPLF's central committee and head of its internal security, and thus he was well placed to know about the front's organizational structures. What the authorities in Addis Ababa did not know, however, was that the EPLF had taken the necessary precautions by relocating its command system and dispersing its key installations.[20] Externally, those countries in northeastern Africa and the Middle East that had historically supported the Eritrean secessionists were absorbed in their own crises. Neighboring Sudan was immersed in a civil war, and Iraq was at war with Iran. The rest of the Arab world was in a quandary following the historic accord between Egypt and Israel in 1979. If conditions were suitable for the military undertaking, the best time for the attack was the first quarter of the year, the coolest period in that part of Eritrea (with average temperatures ranging from 59 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit). Plans to start the attack in January appear to have been scuttled by the front's preemptive strike at Asmara and the Sembel air base, apparently to reduce the military's air capabilities at the source. The attack was delayed by three weeks.

It had taken a year to make the intensive preparations for the operation the Eritreans call the "sixth offensive," and Soviet military advisers took part at every stage—training, planning and execution.[21] An advance headquarters of MOND, the Directory of Planning and Operations, was set up at Asmara on December 28, 1980, to guide the campaign. The high command consisted of the president and commander in chief, Mengistu Haile Mariam; the minister of defense, Brigadier General Tefaye Gabre Kidan; the chief of staff, Brigadier General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam; the heads of the three branches; senior experts; and Soviet advisers. Between January and February, nearly all governmental de-

partments, including the president's office, were temporarily moved from Addis Ababa to Asmara. Landing strips for helicopters were built at Aqurdat, Keren, and Mersa Teklai. A medical team of 2,813 was assembled. The positions of the Eritrean People's Liberation Army (EPLA) were surveyed and studied with the benefit of aerial photographs taken at night with the assistance of Soviet technicians. Nothing like these photographs had been previously attempted. They showed that the EPLA had established an intricate network: three rings of interlocking trenches and tunnels in the extremely rugged terrain running from Kerkebet to northeast Sahel. The first ring extended from Hal Hal in Barka to Mersa Gulbub on the Red Sea. The second cut across the mounts of Angab, Abashara, and Yeras Arma. The third stretched along the ridges of the Adobha Valley to Mt. Denden, overlooking the Hedai Valley, which the EPLA was expected to defend most resolutely since it was its main escape route.

Given the balance of forces on the ground, few could have imagined that the war would last as long as it did and end in favor of the insurgents. The odds seemed stacked against them. They were outnumbered by about four to one in what came to be a rather static conflict. Some 22,000 guerrilla fighters faced over 84,000 troops and vastly superior ordnance, with the prospect of heavy reinforcements. For the campaign, which covered Eritrea, Tigray, and Gondar, fourteen divisions (sixty-three brigades, of which fifty-three were infantry, six mechanized, and four paracommandos), or a total of 136,540 troops, were deployed. At their disposal was an inordinate amount of armament: 55 aircraft, 131 tanks, 162 armored cars, one warship, 102 infantry vehicles, 499 field artillery, 48 rocket launchers, 873 mortars, 691 antiaircraft guns, 1,349 antitank guns, and 7,714 heavy machine guns.[22] The bulk of the warriors and equipment were distributed among the ten divisions (thirty-eight brigades and forty battalions) deployed at the three battlefronts in Sahel district. The 84,537 combatants were equipped with 99 tanks, 94 armored vehicles, 283 artillery pieces, 611 mortars, 208 air-defense guns, 1,220 antitank guns, 5,457 heavy machine guns, a dozen MiG-21s and MiG-23s, Mi-24 helicopter gunships, and Antonov-12s.[23] The EPLA was believed to have positioned nine or ten infantry brigades, three infantry battalions, five heavy weapons battalions, two artillery battalions, one mechanized battalion, two tank battalions, one engineer battalion, two air-defense companies and three militia battalions known as dejen ("shield"). Of its estimated 22,184 fighters, 2,500 were reportedly from the TPLF.[24] It was known that the EPLA had captured the following items from the army in 1978–79: 19 tanks, 31 armored cars, 28 field artillery, 162 mortars, 45 antiaircraft guns, 387 antitank guns, and 384 heavy machine guns.[25] Never before had the insurgents faced such a menacing force and never before did they show such fine fighting

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qualities. By withstanding the onslaught, they demonstrated that the government's overconfidence was based on false assumptions and an underestimation of their capabilities. In addition to the spirit, mobility, and endurance of the EPLF's fighters, its strength lay in its organizational coherence, efficient leadership, ideological commitment, and strategic skill.

The 1982 conflict in Eritrea was limited mainly to the Sahel district, which was largely populated by nomads. The combat zone itself was a triangle of about 26,055 square kilometers, roughly one-fifth of Eritrea. It stretched for nearly 270 kilometers from Karora in the north to Kerkebet in the southwest, and from there for 193 kilometers to Af Abet in the southeast. Nakfa, a small town located almost midway between Alghena and Keren on a plateau that rises to 1,750 meters above sea level, was the epicenter of the insurgency and the focus of the grinding struggle between the two forces. Split by the Meo River, Nakfa overlooks the Hedai Valley to the south, the Felket Valley to the north, and the Ghirghir Valley to the southwest. It is girdled by six mountains rising up to 2,300

meters above sea level and numerous steep, semibarren hills. It has a pleasant climate with seasonably cold weather from October to February and moderately warm weather the remainder of the year. As the main stronghold of the EPLF, Nakfa had become the symbol of the Eritrean struggle. The government was intent on destroying the resistance as well as its symbol. The insurgents were equally resolved to defend both. In the end, the military failed to capture Nakfa, brought down by its internal weaknesses and the firmness of the defenders, who had positioned themselves in a mountainous area that was nearly impregnable to a conventional motorized force. The insurgents claimed victory for holding their assailants to a standstill.

Five commands under the Second Revolutionary Army were arrayed at five strategic points to prosecute the operational plan. The strike forces, advancing in converging directions from three sides, were to encircle the enemy, prevent his retreat from the combat area, and, with the support of aviation strikes and artillery fire, destroy him completely. The assumption was that the guerrillas would be trapped in their main fortress as the strike forces converged inward. In the north, at Alghena—an insignificant village located at the mouth of a river in the strategic Felket Valley that majestically descends onto the coastal plain—was the pincer called Wuqaw ("Trash"); at Af Abet, a small town on the Keren-Nakfa road, was Nadew ("Destroy"); at Kerkebet, to the west of Nakfa and on the eastern edge of the Barka River, was Mebrek ("Thunder"). Mekit ("Shield") was headquartered at Asmara, and the central command at Mekele, Tigray's capital. Their overall mission: "While Wuqaw, Nadew and Mebrek, backed by jet fighters, helicopters, tanks, and artillery, were to envelop and pulverize the bandits massed at the Alghena, Nakfa, and Kerkebet fronts, Mekit and the central sommand were to patrol vigilantly their zones of operation and safeguard supply routes."[26]

All the commands were assigned specific tasks that in combination would have achieved the final goal. The central command, embracing the First, Seventh, and Sixteenth Infantry Divisions, was to carry out offensive maneuvers in Tigray and Gondar, keep safe the major routes leading to Eritrea and Humera (Gondar), escort convoys, and protect government and public institutions and patrol points. Under the command of Colonel Abdulahi Umar, Mekit would mobilize the Sixth, Fourteenth, and Eighteenth Infantry Divisions to ensure that popular associations sponsored by the state, key installations, and repositories in the southern highlands and lowlands of Eritrea were not sabotaged by the rebels. By advancing north-south and west-east, Wuqaw and Mebrek were to prevent the guerrillas from either breaking out of Nakfa or linking with one another there. They were led by Brigadier Generals Aberra Abebe and Kumlachew Dejene,

respectively. Nadew was placed under Brigadier General Wibatu Tsegaye; consisting of the famed Third, Seventeenth, and Twenty-second Infantry Divisions, it would prevent EPLA units at Alghena and Nakfa from linking with each other by blocking the route at Rora Tselim (Tallium) to the north of Nakfa. Nadew's mission was to capture the main fortress, Nakfa itself. Furthermore, each of the ten divisions under the three commands was to assault specific targets in coordination with others. The Fifteenth Division was to capture Jebel Dambobiet and, with the Twenty-third, cut the rebel supply lines between Araag and the Sudan, destroy the EPLA's depot at the Tabih Valley, and block the Alghena-Nakfa line at Afchewa, while the Ninth Division moved frontally toward Afchewa and beyond. Departing from Kerkebet, the Twenty-fourth Mountain Infantry Division was to drive into Hasta by cutting the EPLA's supply line that extended to the Sudan; the Twenty-first Mountain Infantry Division was to fight its way into Zara through Kur, and the Second Infantry Division was to do the same by first capturing Hal Hal and Asmat. Nadew's Third Division was to depart from Af Abet and, by moving along the Mabalan Valley, first block the Alghena-Nakfa road, then proceed to Agra to enter Nakfa from the north. The Seventh Division would advance along the Kemchewa stream from Mamido to Tiksi, about forty kilometers east of Nakfa, and then pass through Harewa to seize the strategic Hill 1702, four kilometers from Nakfa. The Twenty-second Division would move along the Ghirghir Valley, on the eastern edge of the Anseba River, to storm Nakfa from the southwest. Meanwhile, the Eighteenth Mountain Infantry Division would perform feints from the southern direction to confuse the defenders. In this manner, the forces would converge at Nakfa to suffocate and annihilate the rebels.[27] It was an intricate plan that almost accomplished its objectives. Its main obstacles were the size and ruggedness of the operational area, lack of coordination between the attacking forces, and the mobility of the concentrated rebels and their ability to counterattack from their interior lines.

The insurgents tried on February 13 to disrupt the offensive by opening a lightning attack against the Nineteenth Division, causing serious damage to the Fortieth and Forty-first Mountain Infantry Brigades before they were repulsed with assistance from the Thirty-ninth Mountain Infantry Brigade. That was the curtain raiser for the ultimate showdown. On February 15, 1982, the Ethiopian military launched its offensive on three fronts. It gave every appearance of being both ready and sublimely confident.[28] The success of its operational plan depended on a high degree of coordination. Indeed, all commands advanced with apparent ease toward their targets in the first seventy-two hours. The assault tactics closely resembled those of the Soviets: as Antonovs and MiGs relentlessly pounded EPLA fortifications, the mobile troops and armored columns massed

at the bases of the plateau drove up the narrow valleys to overrun them. They attacked frontally, from the flanks, and from the rear at once since the mountainous terrain favored the defenders. The guerrillas held their ground and by the fourth day the drive lost its impetus, the assailants thrown off balance.

The first major setback occurred on the western front. The three divisions of Mebrek, backed by the Sentik Mechanized Brigade and air support, had reached their initial objectives, but before they could consolidate, the counterattack swept forward. The Twenty-first Division seized Kur at 1020 hours on the sixteenth, while the Twenty-fourth Division captured several important heights. The Thirty-seventh Brigade of the Second Division drove into Filfil as the Thirty-first Brigade and the Second Paracommando Brigade captured Hal Hal. By then many of the young men had perished in the sandy lowlands, unable to withstand the heat and thirst. The already disheartened Twenty-first Division, which had gone to the battlefront without any combat experience, was smashed by the rebels, who may have feigned weakness to lure it into a trap. It had camped within the range of the enemy, neglecting the simplest of precautions. By failing to undertake aggressive patrolling, it exposed itself to a surprise attack.[29] It had also left an open space between itself and the Twenty-fourth. At 1330 hours on the eighteenth, it was caught off guard when the rebels brought down their prepared barrage, from well-seated weapons, on the Forty-fourth Brigade, positioned to the left of the Forty-fifth and directly in front of the Forty-seventh. After calling in artillery and air to cover its retreat, it withdrew in considerable confusion. The rebels had snatched the initiative. Four days later, they ferociously attacked the Forty-fifth Brigade from the right flank. Again, the troops cracked; discipline broke down and retreat degenerated into a rout, but not before hundreds of their comrades had been slaughtered and injured. Not even draconian measures like aiming guns at their backs would halt the panic-stricken soldiers. The offensive in this sector had practically collapsed, and responsibility for the disaster was placed on Colonel Wubishet Mamo, the commander of the Twenty-first Division, who was subsequently executed in front of his defeated troops. The disintegration of the Twenty-first made the positions of the Second and Twenty-fourth Divisions perilous. Before the rebels could seize the forward depot, the troops were ordered to make a full-scale retreat to Keren and Kerkebet, respectively, which they did by February 25. All three divisions were later redeployed at the Af Abet front.[30] The EPLA, its western flank secured and its morale surging, rapidly transferred at least half of its fighters to the Af Abet front. It already had gained the upper hand psychologically.

The situation on the northern front was not as disastrous but it was bleak. When the command opened a three-pronged offensive on February 15, its aim

was to penetrate deep into enemy territory through Adobha as far south as the Ghirghir Valley, where it would have connected with the other commands. The mission failed because the command could not hold on to enemy defensive positions that it captured. At 1900 hours, the Sixth Brigade of the Fifteenth Division crossed into the Sudan around Karora. Traveling by night at impressive speed, it surprised the rebels by storming the strategic 1,785-meter-high Mt. Dambobiet at dawn. Its defenders dispersed in panic and the assailants immediately fenced it in with land mines. The EPLA's attempts to recapture the mountain were unsuccessful. Its supply lines running to the Sudan were cut off. At the same time, the Eighth and Ninetieth Brigades surged southward but fell short of their targets, Hills 1694 and 1294. Supported by the Thirty-second Zeraay Deres Mechanized Brigade, the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth Brigades of the Nineteenth Mountain Infantry Division broke through the high ground between Katar and Mt. Tamru to storm Halibet and Imberber but failed to seize Hills 1389 and 1128. By February 18, in fact, their southern advance was grinding to a halt. The EPLA mounted an effective counterattack, forcing the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth Brigades to relinquish all the areas they had seized. Then it turned against the Twenty-third Division and its backups, the Fourth Paracommando, the Thirty-second, and the Twentieth Nebelbal Brigades, which had marched as far as Belkat and Fah. Their approach to Afchewa, where they were to close to the Alghena-Nakfa route and could attack the rebels from the rear, was thus stalled ten kilometers from their destination. The first phase of the offensive in the northern front had been foiled.[31] Twenty soldiers who were blamed for the failure were executed by firing squad in front of their comrades, who were made to shout "Death to the cowards, a thousand times." Intended to discourage indiscipline, the punishment would be repeated several times in the course of the war but with little effect.[32]

Nadew was the only command that got close to its target. In the first week of the offensive, while the Twenty-second Mountain Infantry Division defended the sector's rear, the Third and Seventeenth Divisions opened a two-pronged assault, achieving impressive results. The Third deceptively moved toward Alghena, paralleling the coast, and then suddenly turned left and, with extraordinary speed and tactical efficiency, attacked the EPLA from the left flank with mortars, artillery, and Soviet Katyusha rocket launchers (known as Stalin Organs); the attack was supported with helicopter-borne firepower and air strikes. The defenders were taken by surprise and may have suffered horrendous losses, perhaps their heaviest thus far. Terror-stricken, they dispersed for safety and regrouping. The division registered its first major victory by seizing the key point of Rora Tselim, from where it was able to prevent the fighters in the

northern zone from linking up with those in the south. From there, it advanced toward the mountain-ringed stronghold of Nakfa, fighting off counterattacks by day and night. By February 20, the Twelfth Brigade had moved on the right flank to within six kilometers of Nakfa, as had the Tenth Brigade in the center; to the left, the Ninth had advanced to within three kilometers of the main target.

The Seventeenth Division, led by Colonel Makonnen Wolde, had also made remarkable progress, and the two units seemed to be outdoing each other for laurels. Departing from Mamido, the division had filtered through the Tiksi Valley to seize a series of strongholds. On February 18 and 19, the Eleventh and Nineteenth Brigades, with air cover, dislodged the EPLA from the much-coveted heights 1521, 1527, and 1590. On the February 20, the Nineteenth and Eighty-fourth Brigades bravely fought their way to Hill 1702, then passed to 1725 and 1755, only three kilometers from Nakfa.[33] They were on the edge of the town's airport. The town itself was reduced to rubble by rockets and air raids. The great anticipation that the two divisions would storm the town came to naught, however. They were not ruthless enough to press forward, whether because of a clumsy intervention by the chief of staff, General Haile Giorgis—who according to a well-placed official, wanted to give "the honor of taking the town" to the Third Division (Mengistu's former unit)—or because of the field commanders' vacillation.[34] Either way, the inaction may have deprived the army of a supreme opportunity to finish off the campaign. The EPLA profited from the tactical blunder by bringing in fresh troops from Alghena.

Within two days the reality on the ground had completely changed in favor of the guerrillas, who found a gap that made an outflanking operation viable. Using tanks, 82 and 120 mm mortars, 85 and 120 mm artillery, ZU-23 and ARPG-7 launchers, the EPLA counterattacked in force to retake the hills and block the corridor that the assailants had opened at a heavy price. As the Ninth and Tenth Brigades of the Third Division charged against Nakfa on February 23, they were crippled by combined fire from the resisters and their own helicopters. They pulled back in orderly fashion, as did the Twelfth Brigade, in the face of fierce resistance. The same day, while the Eleventh, Eighty-fourth, and Ninety-second Brigades of the Seventeenth Division fought to defend 1702, the EPLA assaulted the Nineteenth Brigade, forcing it to abandon 1755, exposing the left flanks of the Eighty-fourth and Ninety-second Brigades. This particular engagement helped stem the tide. The division abandoned 1702 at 1645 hours, and with the subsequent loss of Hill 1590, the army suffered a terrible setback.

The military tried vainly to reverse the situation. With fresh energy and massive air support, the Thirty-sixth Brigade of the Eighteenth Division moved out of Tiksi on February 26 and reached 1725, with the Third Division right behind

it. The guerrillas immediately counterattacked. Although the encircled brigade was rescued by two brave battalions from the Thirty-eighth Brigade, the expeditionary force was defeated. The government sustained heavy losses, including the deaths of the commanders of the Third Division (Colonel Teshager) and the Tenth Brigade. The soldiers did what an Ethiopian army has historically done at such moments—fled in disarray. Consequently, the division was thrown out of its positions and ordered to recuperate at Tiksi. For three days, beginning on March 1, the Seventeenth Division tried to retake 1702 but was ordered to form a defense perimeter many miles away.[35] The roads to Nakfa had been closed, at least for now. A soldier lamented:

> Oh! This Nakfa, Nakfa
> [Is] stuck in my throat,
> I cannot swallow or spit it out.[36]

The guerrillas pressed on. At dawn on March 5, they initiated a massive counterattack against Wuqaw by using the open space between the right flank of the Third Division and the left flank of the Twenty-third Division. They surprised the latter from the rear, splitting it into pieces. Perhaps fearing execution, the division's commander and his deputy are said to have committed suicide. After several ineffectual counterattacks, the troops withdrew to their preoffensive positions.

Despite severe setbacks and enormous losses, the government persisted in its pursuit of an elusive victory. It brought three brigades from the eastern front to strengthen the command. They proved inconsequential. Between March 12 and 23, the Twenty-third Division, reinforced by the Forty-first and Forty-second Brigades of the Nineteenth Division, tried without letup to reoccupy the places from which it had been ejected. It failed. In a bold move, the EPLA attacked from the Sudan along five lines and recaptured Mt. Dambobiet; the terrified defending troops got out of control and hastily abandoned the treacherous terrain to the offensive force. Meanwhile, the Fourth Paracommando and the Twentieth Nebelbal Brigades had reclaimed some heights on March 25 but lost them two days later following a fierce engagement. Shortly thereafter, the troops abandoned their insecure positions and hurriedly withdrew to the plains. With the subsequent loss of Jebel Arab and the near destruction of the Thirty-second Mechanized Brigade, it was all too clear that the offensive on the Alghena front had petered out.[37] The last and decisive phase of the offensive would be fought in the southern sector.

With the western front shattered and the northern bogged down in a stalemate, the military high command pinned its last hope of regaining lost momentum on

a decisive breakthrough in the south, where Nadew's success may have been aborted owing to a tactical misjudgment. Consequently, the longest, and some of the fiercest and bloodiest, battles were fought on the Af Abet front between April and June. Between March 6 and June 6 more reinforcements arrived from the other sectors, and four more major assaults were waged after a hiatus of one month. They were courageous but fruitless efforts. The Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth Brigades of the Twenty-fourth Division, which was the first to arrive, were immediately dispatched via Ras Armas to occupy and fortify Amba. This was a prelude to storming the mountain fortress of Denden, the southern obstacle to Nakfa. They were repulsed. As the EPLA poured in reinforcements, the army brought in the Second Division from Keren. According to a revised operational plan, this division was to seize Hill 1826 in order to close the Alghena-Nakfa road at a point six kilometers north of the town. That would have opened a corridor through which the Second and Eighteenth Divisions would proceed to retake 1725 and 1755, while the Twenty-fourth recaptured 1702 and the Seventeenth moved onto 1590. The Third Division, which had been exhausted in the first phase, was retained for rear-guard action. The attackers, as always, relied on artillery and air strikes to reduce the EPLA's striking force. But, as they drew closer, the guerrillas unleashed their arsenal from their mountainside trenches and foxholes. Another charge had been deflected.

The army would not concede defeat. It brought the Twenty-first Division to Tiksi, raising the number of divisions to seven. Six of them were deployed in the area between Tiksi and Kubkub, to the south of Nakfa. On May 16, as the Twenty-second Division moved southward to attack from the base of the Ghirghir Valley, the Twenty-first maneuvered toward Kubkub to seize Amba and the Eighteenth advanced stealthily from the left flank, something the army had not done before. The Second opened a frontal assault as dummies were parachuted behind rebel lines to confuse and surprise. At the same time, "volunteers of death" were summoned to climb Hill 1702. Through feats of exceptional bravery and sacrifice, they fought their way to the summit of the hill, using machine guns, grenades, and bayonets; in the close fire and merciless hand-to-hand fighting that followed, these dauntless men were decimated.[38] The deputy chief of operations wrote, "Two battalions of volunteers drawn from the Third and other divisions ascended the heights with extraordinary courage and high spirits. But, even though much sacrifice was paid to accomplish this extraordinary mission, it did not succeed."[39] With casualties escalating, enthusiasm for the war was fast fading.

Between the end of May and the first week of June, the army launched its fourth and last offensive, from two directions, but once again failed to meet

its aims. The Fifteenth Division, consisting of the Sixth, Eighth, Thirty-ninth, Forty-first, and Forty-second Brigades, pushed southward with helicopter support to connect with the force moving from the south at Nakfa. It was repeatedly beaten off. The directory rather sardonically concluded, "Since all offensive attempts failed, the command [Wuqaw] was ordered to defend its sector vigilantly and to continue with its training."[40] The outcome in the southern zone was no different. The unit had advanced in three columns, none reaching its destination. The Twenty-first tried to get to Denden through Amba and Angoba, the Twenty-second moved along the Elagher Valley to seize Beshera, and the Twenty-fourth headed toward 1527 and 1590. They were all fiercely resisted and thrown back. By then, an eighth of the Ethiopian warriors were dead and nearly half wounded. Proportionately, the rebels had lost even more. There are indications that they were also suffering from insufficient nutrition and may well have depleted their ammunitions to worrisome levels. The continual fighting and dying, the mounting disfigured bodies of comrades, the sleeplessness and fatigue, the emotional stress—all had taken their toll on the combatants. Surprisingly, the rebels would not bend. On the other hand, as the fervor for war dissipated, gloom hung over the Ethiopian camp. Yet the Operations Department was for the continuation of the offensive, warning that "defeat at Nakfa would have grave political and military consequences."[41] It was an unrealistic proposition. The army caved in, and the commands moved from offense to "active defense."[42] That was the end of the Red Star campaign.

The army had failed to break the equilibrium. Despite relentless air strikes, sustained fire from helicopters and amour, and heroic effort by the troops, the guerrillas refused to be driven from their mountain hideouts in what turned out to be a conventional war. In contrast to the great fanfare with which Mengistu arrived, there was no public announcement when he left for Addis Ababa. A disappointed soldier described the president: he "came roaring like a lion but returned mute, like a mouse."[43] Colonel Sereke-Berhan, another participant, who later became a distinguished commander of the Third Division, succinctly captured the agony of defeat: "The Red Star campaign was a turning point in the war in Eritrea. It bled and broke the morale of the army, which never fully regained its fighting spirit."[44] No question, it was a costly enterprise militarily, psychologically, politically, and economically, and in terms of human life as well.

The killing fields of Sahel imposed a high level of attrition on both parties—a combined total of 43,000 killed and injured. Government casualties were 37,176 (27 percent) and those of the insurgents may have been as high as 15,000 (58 percent). The military suffered nearly 4,000 more deaths at Sahel than dur-

ing the war against Somalia, which lasted from July 1977 to March 1978. Of the government casualties, 1,074 were officers, 22,247 other ranks, and 9,858 militia.[45] The insurgents claimed to have captured 939 men.[46] The government claimed that 11,536 insurgents were wounded, 220 were captured, and another 567 voluntarily surrendered. That it had killed 11,516 was pure fabrication, since that would have meant the decimation and defeat of the EPLA.[47] The Eritreans have acknowledged that they sustained about 3,600 dead and three times as many wounded.[48]

The campaigns were, of course, a heavy drain on the national economy. We have no exact figures for Lash, but the commander reported a surplus of four million birr, or about a million and a half dollars, indicating that the total expenditure must have been many millions more.[49] MOND's inventory for the Red Star campaign showed that a total of 1,291,745,233 birr (US $516,698,093) was spent for the period starting December 27, 1981, and ending July 1, 1982. Of this sum, 871,435,465 birr were spent on armaments (Antonov-12s, MiG-23s, Mi-17 and Mi-24 helicopters, T-55 tanks, BTR-60s and BTR-152s, BM-21 rockets, artillery, radar, vehicles, etc.), almost all from the Soviet Union, and 420,309,768 birr on logistics.[50] Despite the propaganda, the amount devoted to social and economic reconstruction in Eritrea was niggardly, scarcely a hundred million dollars, or less than one-sixth of the military expenditure. Red Star was not really so much multifaceted as preeminently military in purpose.

THE PITFALLS OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

Although the military strategies used to suppress the insurgents in the east and north were more or less the same, the outcomes were different. Evidently, there were more insurgents in the eastern periphery but they were fragmented. Representing diverse ethnic groups, they lacked common goals and were thus plagued by internal rivalry and disputes. These were infant political bodies still struggling to define themselves, and, except for the WSLF, none of them had a secure base. In contrast, the EPLF had a safe base in exceedingly difficult terrain, solid mass support, and more combat experience, and its fighters were unified by nationalist and socialist goals for which they fought with strong commitment, high motivation, and organizational discipline.

The eastern insurgency was defeated because it had many weaknesses, more than those of its northern counterpart. In fact, there was not one insurgency but several in the same locale, all competing with and subverting one another. Not only were they in a state of infancy, but rivalries and rifts also plagued them. Claiming to be the only legitimate representative of the Oromo people and their

aspirations, the OLF and IFLO clashed with one another. The SALF challenged both, even as it competed with the WSLF for territory, popular allegiance, and support of the Somali state. The WSLF and SALF were ambivalent about their relationship to the Somali state, under whose aegis they fought for ill-defined goals. Whereas the SALF suffered from an identity crisis, the WSLF wavered between independence for the Ogaden and unity with Somalia. Somali authorities kept them at bay by playing on these differences. Moreover, except for the WSLF, the groups were young, barely five years old. Hence, they lacked organizational and ideological coherence as well as military discipline. The Oromo organizations were less experienced and sophisticated in guerrilla warfare. Popular support was contested and often unreliable. Although the unpopular villagization (and resettlement) policy had began to erode popular support for the Addis Ababa regime, it was still strong among the Oromo peasantry, primarily because of the radical land reform the regime instituted in early 1975. The mass base of the WSLF had significantly diminished after the 1977–78 Ethiopia-Somalia war. Nearly half of the Ogadenis had temporarily migrated to Somalia, while a significant portion of those who remained behind were confined to "shelters" not easily accessible to the fighters. And operating in the non-Somali highland areas, the WSLF imposed itself on the Oromo, causing conflict with the OLF and IFLO. Further, whereas the SALF disintegrated owing to government pressure, factionalism, and Somali meddling, the WSLF's loss of its rear base in northern Somalia to the SSDF was a fatal blow. Outside support also dwindled; faced with postwar political and economic problems, the Somali regime could not sustain its support for the proxy rebels. The Ethiopian military took advantage of these weaknesses to deal effectively with the insurgents.

The Eritrean insurgents had all the strengths of these groups but almost none of their weaknesses. Despite the great dissimilarities, the government embarked on a disastrous campaign against the Eritreans. Two factors seem to have influenced the decision. First, in spite of a warning by one of its intelligence officers that it was "wrong to compare the fighting spirit of the Somali bandits with that of the Eritrean secessionists," the government was convinced that its victory in the east was repeatable in the north.[51] Second, notwithstanding the army's setbacks in 1979, it was believed that a large offensive could crush the Eritrean rebels; after all, did not the army push them back to the Sahel mountains in 1978? To its dismay, however, the northern insurgents proved to be much more creative and unswerving than their eastern counterparts, and the topography of north-central Eritrea turned out to be more formidable than that of the eastern periphery.

Although outnumbered and outgunned, the Eritrean insurgents fought the

government troops to a deadlock in four months of ferocious fighting. What they lacked in armaments and numbers, the insurgents made up for with competent leadership, skill, mobility, motivation, courage, determination, and perseverance. In these they were a solid match to their foe, who nonetheless would not give them the same respect. Although the military establishment grudgingly conceded that the EPLF's "organization [had] astonishing efficiency and creative ability," it tended to underestimate and even denigrate the fighting capabilities of the EPLF's men.[52] One officer, Colonel Tariku Woldai, expressed a widely held sentiment: "The EPLF rank and file have no experience of coming out of their fortifications and fighting. They are scamperers."[53] When the foe has been underestimated and disparaged, disaster has often struck, as indeed it did in Eritrea. The military refused to accept that the EPLF had become a formidable army of regular brigades equipped with tanks, armored cars, heavy mortars, and artillery. It did not believe the EPLF could creatively and effectively combine guerrilla and conventional tactics or that its fighters were utterly committed to their cause. The Ethiopian troops immediately discovered that, contrary to the picture painted by their superiors, the rebels were skillful fighters. One young lieutenant who took part in the eastern and northern campaigns later confessed, echoing the intelligence officer's caution, that the Eritreans were tough and dexterous: "The first engagement with the EPLF convinced the soldiers not to equate the war in Eritrea with that in the Ogaden. In the Ogaden the soldiers fought mostly on plains. . . . Moreover, the Eritrean rebels were far braver and skillful than the Somalis in military tactics. The rebels had accumulated twenty years' worth of combat experience."[54] Almost eight years after the Red Star campaign but drawing from it, MOND's chief of military intelligence listed the EPLF's major qualities, which were well demonstrated in Sahel: quick, efficient tactical maneuvers, ability to coordinate attacks and rotate units in the midst of combat, effective use of trenches and mines, superb intelligence, and dexterity in handling modern weapons.[55]

Using the latest Soviet technology and tactics, the Ethiopian military bombarded, pounded, and shelled rebel positions, turning the Sahel into a veritable hell, but it could destroy neither the organization nor the indomitable spirit of the insurgents. Not even the vast technological resources at its disposal could break the deadlock. The army tried a whole series of diversionary probes, stretching the battle lines, outflanking and attacking now from the rear and now frontally, but after some thrilling gains that almost broke through the natural obstacles and barricades, it failed. Shielded by a network of trenches, tunnels, and fortifications that snaked around hills and impenetrable mountainsides, the insurgents succeeded in rolling back every assault. In so doing, they seem to

have defied one of the essential characteristics of guerrilla warfare. "The strategy of conventional warfare," David Galula observes, "prescribes the conquest of the enemy's territory, the destruction of his forces. The trouble here is that the enemy holds no territory and refuses to fight for it."[56] Well, the EPLF held its territory and fought for it against an overwhelming adversary. It suffered high casualties—about 15 percent killed—but it seemed that no price was too high for the defense of its sacred cause. The government troops fought with equal bravery and determination, but they were finally outmaneuvered and outlasted by the insurgents' resiliency and doggedness. The Eritreans were able to deter the offensive by flexibly combining guerrilla and conventional tactics in a forbidding but favorable environment.

"Even the mountains fought us."[57] The former soldier could not have more poignantly described the importance of the topography as a factor in the conflict. Almost ideal for the guerrilla, the Sahel is a killer for a conventional army:

> Of terrain, Nakfa
> Of vehicles, Ayfa
> Let them vanish from the face of the earth.[58]

But as the fighter-singer Ukbazgi put it, Nakfa was a shield for the guerrilla:

> You are the mother of morale and hope
> First child of Sahel, big Nakfa, yes, Nakfa![59]

It was familiar territory for the insurgents but an extremely hostile environment for the government troops, who fought on terrain most had little or no experience of, facing men and women who had lived and fought there for many years. To the officer who derided its men as "scamperers," the EPLF's main strength lay in the combat area it had chosen. Indisputably, as Colonel Tariku Woldai admitted, "Nakfa is a natural fortress. The mountains of Nakfa are invincible." Northern Sahel, where most of the fighting took place, is a labyrinth of hills and mountains that rise to 2,500 meters and descend southward from Karora parallel to the coastal and western lowlands. These chains of mountains are broken by numerous steep canyons, narrow ravines, and streams, the beds of which are dry most of the year. Traffic is restricted, except for short stretches, to existing motor roads. Movement on foot or by pack animals along the riverbeds is possible, especially in the dry season. The broken topography offered good cover for the defenders, but for the attackers it was fearsome country. Under the blistering heat, the long marches could be exhausting, and water was a scarce commodity. Although food and supplies were airdropped on occupied heights, soldiers often had to carry jerricans containing twenty liters of water to keep

themselves from dehydrating while traversing the ridges and deep valleys. The distribution of water was difficult at times as each soldier tried to quench his thirst beforh his comrades.[60] It took herculean efforts to survive the ordeal of fighting in such inhospitable territory. Only those who were physically fit and highly motivated, who traveled light and moved fast could hope to match an enemy who moved nimbly through the maze of hills on his sandaled feet. While the hilly terrain permitted quick dispersal and regrouping for the guerrillas, it made pursuit by the heavily equipped government forces cumbersome. It slowed the foot soldier, hampered the effectiveness of tanks, artillery, armor, and aircraft, and made communication, coordination, and resupply harder.[61] A good part of the area was impassable by armored personnel carriers. The tank could not easily maneuver through the craggy landscape and was thus restricted in its usefulness in many of the most hotly contested battles. The aircraft rarely scored direct hits on the guerrillas' burrows and embankments, though the planes were terrifying and the noise was deafening. The EPLA, of course, avoided the plains, where it would have become an easier target for the enemy's field artillery, tanks, and aircraft. Without question, natural obstacles helped blunt the effectiveness of the military's offensive operations.[62] But that was not all. The military itself had organizational and tactical deficiencies that undercut its operational efficiency, denying it victory.

From a conventional military's standpoint everything appeared perfectly in place: tens of thousands of zealous men with an imposing arsenal of weaponry and battle-hardened units led by dedicated, self-assured professionals with combat experience in Korea, the Ogaden, and Eritrea itself ready to deliver a knockout blow to a stubborn adversary that had eluded them for two decades. The objective was not achieved, however, in part because the army lost the decisive advantages of surprise, numbers, and technology. By launching the campaign with great publicity and fanfare, the government alerted the opponent, who was able to store supplies and ammunition that would sustain him for months. In fact, the military was generally derelict in its own operational intentions and in assessing the strength and disposition of its enemy.[63] On the other hand, the EPLF had an excellent intelligence system that earned the envy and respect of the military's intelligence branch—at least this was the case in the late 1980s.[64] No wonder the EPLF struck at the military's weakest spot and threw the campaign off balance, forcing the high command to operate by improvisation for over three months.

The high degree of coordination and mutual support that were required for the success of the operation were not there at all times, owing to physical distance, technical problems, and possibly competition among officers. The com-

mands were unable to provide support for one another's operations and, at critical junctures of the campaign, to communicate directly. They were separated by long distances—105 to 225 kilometers—within the immense triangle, and radio communication was frequently poor because some of the Soviet-made equipment was ill suited to local conditions.[65] "To act upon lines far removed from each other, and without communications, is to commit a fault which always gives birth to a second," says a military maxim.[66] As the commands plunged deep into the enemy's heartland, the spearheads became separated from their rear guards and rapidly outstripped their communications systems' ability to keep pace. Moreover, there were petty jealousies and rivalries among the field commanders. Such rivalries may have undermined the army from the first week of the campaign.

Unclassified reports by MOND's operations and security sections have cataloged additional tactical weaknesses that contributed to the campaign's failure. Incompetence among the officers was rife. Low-level officers, in particular from captain down, were reluctant to make decisions when circumstances called for them or made decisions that did not always correspond to the demands of the situation. They had good reasons not specified in the reports. The military put emphasis on vertical, not horizontal, ties. Such a complex operation could have been directed, of course, only by centralized leadership; however, the Ethiopian command system was too rigid and did not lend itself to independent action. The junior officers, mostly young and inexperienced, were fearful of retribution, for the price of failure was too often execution. The choice between acting and erring and not acting at all was a very delicate one, a catch-22. On the other hand, the EPLA's operational tactics were based on a decentralization of initiative to local forces who acted creatively in accordance with changing circumstances on the ground, mostly employing flanking rather than frontal fire with their machine guns.

Insubordination plagued the army. Field officers were frequently unable to exercise their authority and maintain discipline. There was often a complete breakdown in the chain of command and erosion in the esprit de corps. Unexpected attacks from the rear or flanks caused panic and disorderly retreats, soldiers running off and throwing away rifles that fell into enemy hands. The army was ineffective in the use of its offensive weapons. There was a lack of synchronization and concentration of air and artillery fire at selected targets. The infantry was hesitant to advance under air cover, preferring to move in after the bombardment had ended. That gave the enemy a respite to regroup and launch a counterattack, the result of which was panic and confusion.[67] The reports are silent on miscalculations by the higher command. Nothing so starkly demon-

strates the reason as the alleged intervention by the chief of staff when one of the units was within sight of complete success. If true, it was a tactical mistake of enormous proportions and extraordinary good fortune for the insurgents, who lost no time in adeptly exploiting it.

The reports do acknowledge the rebels' ability to infiltrate and create confusion by spreading rumors of the army's weakness and their own strength. But they do not give enough credit to the stamina of the insurgents, who, though outmatched in men and firepower, fought with a determination and deftness that few of their senior opponents had expected. It is undeniable that the government troops were well prepared and went into battle in the treacherous hills and valleys of Sahel vowing to win another victory. On the other hand, the insurgents, whose survival was at stake, were even more determined not to lose. Additionally, Mengistu's bellicosity was perfectly matched by Isaias's stubbornness. The duel was not merely a clash of ideologies, doctrines, or hardware. Even though several factors contributed to the astounding achievement of the insurgents, it was ultimately the triumph of willpower, and Nakfa was transformed from a symbol of resistance into a symbol of invincibility embedded in the Eritrean psyche and commemorated by a national currency of that name. One wonders whether that sense of invincibility might have contributed to Eritrean intransigence in the war with Ethiopia of 1998–2000. What is apparent is that the disastrous defeat in that war has shattered what might be called the Nakfa syndrome.

The Ethiopian government, as if to erase the humiliation it had suffered at the hands of a despised enemy, embarked on another campaign in the first half of 1983 by deploying some 123,697 troops. The initial gains of this stealth offensive, as the Eritreans called it (*selaahata werar*), had evaporated by the end of four months of fighting and after the loss of 17,648 (14 percent) of the soldiers.[68] It would be the last major offensive by an ever-expanding but increasingly ineffectual war machine. By contrast, the EPLF's stature was elevated, its mass support solidified, and its military arm bolstered with the cache of arms captured from the army. It was able to move from defense to offense, winning a major battle in 1988 that was the prelude to total military victory and political independence three years later.

The principal point that can be gleaned from the preceding discussion is that wars are not decided by hardware and numbers only. Organizational coherence, leadership, commitment, determination, and morale are evidently crucial, especially in revolutionary warfare in which state forces have the advantage of superior material resources, including equipment. And judging by the Nakfa experience, Beaufre, who seems to have received the idea from Clausewitz, was

right that war is a clash of opposing wills. Operation Red Star failed because the military could not impose its will on the EPLF, as it did on the ideologically and militarily weaker organizations on its eastern periphery. Driven by a passionate mix of nationalism and social revolution as well as by fear of extinction, the Eritrean insurgents fought with considerable skill and savage energy not to "kneel down" in their own territory. Through willpower and determination, the EPLF preserved itself and the Eritrean resistance, eventually winning political independence.

The battle for Nakfa was a milepost in Ethiopian history. It is idle to speculate what might have happened to the Eritrean and Tigrayan insurgencies had the EPLA lost. The nationalist resistance may not have been extinguished, but the EPLF could not have easily recovered from a severe military and psychological defeat. With victory at Nakfa, the military might have also shortened the conflict in neighboring Tigray; because the TPLF's fate was so entangled with that of the EPLF, it is hard to imagine that it could have survived without its ally. Hence, had Operation Red Star succeeded, Ethiopia's political and military history of more recent years would have been altogether different. But history is not about imagined events.

8

Af Abet: Ethiopia's Dienbienphu?

> Throughout the world, where Waterloo had created less of a sensation, the fall of Dienbienphu had caused utter amazement. It was one of the greatest defeats ever suffered by the West, heralding the collapse of the colonial empires and the end of a republic. The thunder of the event rumbles.
>
> —*Jules Roy*

> [Af Abet was] one of the biggest victories ever scored by any liberation movement anywhere since Dienbienphu.
>
> —*Basil Davidson*

The EPLF won one of the most resounding victories in the annals of conventional warfare in the third world, and perhaps its most glorious one, on March 19, 1988, at Af Abet. It destroyed the most formidable garrison in northern Eritrea and set in motion a series of events that would lead to total victory three years later. A long-simmering crisis in the Ethiopian army combined with the cunning and ingenuity of the rebels to produce the outcome. A command that was torn apart by rival cliques seems to have forgotten that it was fighting an enemy of surprising resilience, skill, and adaptability, quick to exploit any vulnerability. The battle of Af Abet was one of the three turning episodes of the war in Eritrea. Nakfa ensured the continuity of the nationalist struggle. Af Abet, though not terminal, severely degraded the military's ability to wage war and heralded the demise of the dictatorship and concomitant Eritrean independence. It was such a significant victory that it has been compared to the Vietnamese triumph against the French in 1954. The strategic significance of the battle is beyond

question, but it was not Ethiopia's Dienbienphu. It did not cause the military's precipitous collapse. The Ethiopian armed forces continued to fight, at times quite vigorously, for another three years. The EPLF did not deliver the decisive blow until 1990, at Massawa, the third most crucial battle.

When the EPLF seized Barentu in 1985, *Adulis*, one of the front's publications, declared that "the liberation of this strategic town marks the end of Ethiopian colonialism."[1] The exuberance was premature, for the army reclaimed Barentu within two months. What separates Af Abet from such failed episodes is that it was the front's first *irreversible* military achievement. To succeed, the EPLF opportunistically capitalized on the deadly discord within the army.

The defeat at Af Abet occurred in two stages with a three-month interval. The first weakened the command garrisoned in the town and the second demolished it. Although there were ominous signs on the horizon, the Ethiopian military establishment could not bring itself to believe anything so incredible could happen so swiftly and so ruinously, for the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA) was regarded as the best of the country's three armies. It was the largest, the best equipped, and the most experienced in counterinsurgency fighting. Of the four commands that constituted it, Nadew was the biggest and reputedly the strongest. The command was made up of two mountain infantry divisions, one infantry division, one mechanized brigade, one artillery brigade, and a tank battalion. It had eighty-three tanks, ten BM-21 rockets, fifteen 130 mm and thirty-five 122 mm heavy field artillery, ninety-six 82 mm mortars, five BTR-60s, sixty-seven ZU-23 antiaircraft, and forty B-10 antitank guns.[2] It had the most capacious armory, and its Twenty-ninth Mechanized Brigade was the Second Army's pride because of its fitness, toughness, awesome maneuverability, and extensive combat experience.

Nadew was led by a man of high professional reputation but contentious personality. Tariku Ayne was an able, bold, and notoriously independent general. His self-confidence and defiant individualism were a permanent thorn in the side of his superiors, particularly Major General Regassa Jimma, commander of the SRA. But few of them doubted his leadership qualities or his popularity with the troops. The command he directed was seen as the unassailable shield of the Nakfa front and had played a leading role in all the campaigns (albeit failed) to capture Nakfa, the hub and symbol of the Eritrean resistance. The Eritrean People's Liberation Army (EPLA) knew it well, respected it highly, and feared it most. How was it that such an awe-inspiring force was crushed in barely three days of chaotic fighting? Let's be categorical: the apparent strength of the EPLA was not the only determinative factor.

The EPLF had accumulated extensive experience in mobile warfare and mas-

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sive amounts of arms and equipment, most of them acquired from the Ethiopian military, since it successfully foiled the two largest operations waged against it, in 1982 and 1983, in the Sahel region. When it captured Alghena, a garrison town in the extreme north in March 1984, the EPLA also garnered plenty of equipment as well as making its rear base secure. Though short-lived, its seizure of Barentu in 1985 also brought a vast array of light and heavy weaponry, including, reportedly, thirteen T-55 tanks and twelve artillery pieces.[3] By 1987 the EPLA had become an even more effective combat force than when it fiercely fought for its survival five years earlier. And the real Nadew was less daunting than the name itself.

Nadew was located at Af Abet, a key town and the largest in the Sahel, seventy kilometers south of Nakfa and about 157 kilometers north of Asmara, on the edges of the plains spreading to the east of the Anseba River and the west of the Red Sea. From there, the command, which was located on flat terrain at the southern end of the town, oversaw a very rugged area that stretched for

roughly 165 kilometers from south to north and 90 kilometers westward from the Red Sea, a total of 14,850 square kilometers. Its operational parameters were obviously broad. As Af Abet overshadowed the base areas of the EPLF from the south, the front could not even dream of penetrating into the larger and more strategic town of Keren—and into the more densely populated southern highlands beyond—without breaking through this garrison, Nadew's command center and supply depot. The first opportunity offered itself in 1987.

It was widely known that discontent was rife among the troops serving in Eritrea, especially among those on the front lines of combat; the reasons ranged from low pay and inadequate medical services to shortages of provisions and war weariness. The men under Nadew's command had lived and fought in the foxholes and trenches for seven years, some for as many as nine years, without relief. They were worn out by all the fighting and frustrated by the indecisiveness of the fitful campaigns. One of their persistent demands had been for the adoption of a rotation system, and by the mid-1980s there was widespread hope that the conflict would be settled either peacefully or by any other means necessary, including the use of chemical agents like poison gas.[4] When instead it continued, dissatisfaction escalated, desertions mounted, and discipline declined. From July 19 to March 14, 1988, for example, 35 soldiers were executed, 17 demoted, 34 discharged, and 120 jailed for a variety of "antirevolutionary activities," such as robbery, fleeing, malingering, insubordination, and murder. Forty-seven of the soldiers belonged to Nadew.[5]

Within Nadew the disaffection and insubordination had coalesced by December 1987 around the Twenty-second Mountain Infantry Division, stationed on the Tiksi front line. While the division's Forty-eighth, Forty-ninth, Fiftieth, and Fifty-first Brigades were all involved in the unfolding turmoil, the 502nd and 503rd Battalions of the Fiftieth Brigade were the most defiant and troublesome. The situation was exacerbated by personality clashes between Colonel Girma Teferri, commander of the division, and its political commissar, Captain Sirak Workneh, who was subsequently removed from his post. But esprit and discipline continued to deteriorate because the relationship between Sirak's successor, Captain Fekadu Alemu, and the commander was just as bad, if not worse. The two schemed against each other, splitting the Twenty-second Division into two from the top right down to the squad level.[6] Restive soldiers, often with the encouragement and guidance of their political officers, refused to obey commanders who remained loyal to Girma; they broke into the commissary, confiscated rations and other essentials intended for those leaders, and even ambushed and robbed convoys.[7] One specific instance helps highlight the degree to which discipline had declined. One day when Colonel Girma was addressing

his senior and junior officers, a corporal who was also a political officer stood up, bluntly told him that he was unfit to command, and led the NCOs away.[8] It is no secret that General Tariku, who had a reputation for speaking his mind—bringing him into frequent conflict with his superiors—sympathized with the troops' grievances and supported some of their demands, but he may have allowed the ferment to get out of control. Half of the division was in near-open rebellion. When disciplinary measures were finally enforced, the disorder took a curious turn. Of the forty to fifty soldiers jailed at Tiksi, a dozen, including the political officer of the paracommando brigade, escaped and defected to the EPLF, taking with them much valuable information. According to Mengistu, Tariku "completely destroyed Nadew by dismantling the security and political organs, by killing the morale of the troops, and by his secret dealings with the enemy. . . . Among the deserters were men from the operations, security, and communications departments. Secret codes and operational plans that should have been altered were not. . . . The rebels, thanks to General Tariku Ayne, had come to know everything about our intelligence, chain of command, communications, land mines, trenches, and ammunition, supply, and gas depots from the deserters and prisoners, who actually led them straight to the target."[9]

The accusation was probably a third true, but the factionalism was deadly. Armed with that potent tool, the EPLA acted expeditiously and succeeded in inflicting tremendous physical and psychic damage on the government forces. It attacked the Mekit ("Shield") command, in charge of the eastern lowlands, at 0130 hours on December 6, killing 50 and wounding 106. It displaced the command from the Haleba defense line. This was no doubt a deceptive maneuver, for on December 8 at 0400 hours the EPLA struck the Twenty-second Division under Nadew with greater force. It may have deployed as many as five infantry brigades, one mechanized battalion, and three heavy-weapons battalions. On the second day of the assault infiltrators destroyed the command center following bloody hand-to-hand fighting. The rebels then advanced some thirty kilometers toward Tiksi and twenty kilometers toward Amba, seizing Hills 1742, 1852, and 1698, and the more important Mt. Denden. Further advances were halted on December 12 by the Nineteenth Mountain Infantry Division and the Forty-fifth Infantry Brigade, supported by air strikes. The Forty-eighth, Forty-ninth, Fiftieth, and Fifty-first Brigades were dismantled.[10] Government casualties were 482 killed, 291 wounded, and 615 missing—a total of 1,388 men.[11] Estimates of rebel losses were more than 125 killed and 269 wounded.[12] The total estimated cost of materials lost and destroyed was 6,835,652.83 birr (US $3,334,647.95).[13] Although Tariku was in Asmara for medical treatment at the time, he would be held responsible for the mishap.[14]

The blow had immediate ramifications: executions, demotions, and transfers followed. Fekadu Alemu, Captain Mulugeta Gudetta, leader of the Fiftieth Brigade, and eighteen other men, most of them political officers, were transferred.[15] The Twenty-second Division was moved to Keren and put under Mentir ("Root Out"); a decision to replace it with the Fourteenth Infantry proved ill-fated. General Regassa Jimma submitted an urgent request for more troops and equipment to compensate for the loss. The minister of defense saw no urgency for troop reinforcement but granted the accouterments, some of which may have been delivered. The commander of the SRA himself and the political commissar, Colonel Shewarega Bihonegn, were removed shortly thereafter.[16]

The most severe punishment was meted out to the commanders of Mekit and Nadew. An enraged Mengistu had immediately dispatched his confidant, the crafty Legesse Asfaw, to investigate the circumstances that led to the defeat. It is not known what Legesse reported, but Mengistu himself flew to Af Abet in early February, allegedly to boost the morale of the soldiers but primarily to punish those responsible for the failure.[17] The troops presented him with a catalog of complaints. With clenched fist and tongue in cheek, he promised that their demands would be met even the country could not afford them. He assured them that he would reorganize the army, increase its size fourfold, arm it, with the help of the Soviet Union, with the latest and most sophisticated weapons, and destroy the "hirelings of Ethiopia's erstwhile enemies." The harangues were familiar but the men listened with muted amusement, nevertheless.[18] The commander in chief appeared totally out of touch with reality. Worse still, he would deprive them of their leadership. Smelling conspiracy, Mengistu summoned both Tariku and Brigadier General Kebede Gashe, commander of Mekit, whom he described as "a blabbing Gondare," to Asmara a day after his return to the capital.[19] Two days later, on February 15, Tariku, ever defiant and in full military attire, was executed at Adiguadad, on the outskirts of Asmara. He was fifty-two. Kebede was demoted—the insignia of his rank ripped off in front of a parade—and cashiered from the service the same day. Not even the EPLF missed the significance of these actions. With regard to Tariku's death, the front's Radio of the Masses broadcast that the Derg had "cut off its right hand with its left hand."[20] It was not being sarcastic, for the elimination of one of Ethiopia's prominent generals augured a greater misfortune. Rarely given to admitting mistakes, Mengistu made a scandalous, costly, and fatal decision.

A month after Tariku's death, the Eritrean insurgents opened another strategic offensive for which Nadew was singularly ill prepared even with the plentiful weaponry at its disposal. Its size had dwindled alarmingly and the morale of the troops was at an all-time low.[21] None of the three divisions had even half the

numbers that would normally constitute an Ethiopian division—ten to twelve thousand men. Altogether there were 15,223 men in the three divisions.[22] Moreover, the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Infantry Divisions, which were separated by four or five kilometers, were at loggerheads. Nor did the divisional commanders recognize the authority of the newly appointed deputy commander, Colonel Getaneh Haile, who held the same rank as they did. Ordinary precautions were neglected and with that the ability to forecast the enemy's movements disappeared. Nonetheless, the command was heftily equipped.[23]

The rebels, on the other hand, had made careful preparations for this one glorious day. They had meticulously studied and reconnoitered the location and dispositions of each of the divisions and their main headquarters. They were methodical and furious in their assault, seemingly heeding Napoleon's advice that it is "an advantage to attack the enemy unexpectedly, to take him off his guard, to surprise him, and let him feel the thunder before he sees the flash."[24] The chief of staff had admonished the SRA's commander "to seize the initiative; in other words, never let the enemy surprise you."[25] And to suggest that the command was taken by complete surprise is to exaggerate. Just a day before the assault, the commander of the SRA sent this coded message to the commanders of Mentir and Nadew: "We have been informed by local people that about two brigades of the enemy force have assembled behind Af Abet at Galeb and Awgare. They have transported plenty of weapons by camel. It appears that this concentration of the enemy is intended to hit Nadew from the rear and attack Keren from the eastern side and, if possible, also to close off the Keren–Af Abet road. You are notified to make your own survey and to let me know within 48 hours."[26] Also, as early as December 3, the deputy commander of the SRA had sent a stern warning to the Nineteenth Division instructing it to close without any delay the four to five kilometers of open space separating it from the Fourteenth Division.[27] This order, like the two that preceded it, was simply ignored and the first one was overtaken by events. This indiscipline undermined the chain of command—an outcome that perfectly suited the other side. The rebels, drawing on their own long experience and a cue from the master strategist of protracted warfare that a "war of annihilation entails the concentration of superior forces and the adoption of encircling and outflanking tactics," seized the moment to isolate and overwhelm a stationary, vulnerable force.[28]

Emboldened by the army's internal divisions and pressures, as well as by their limited victory in December, the rebels launched their furtive onslaught on March 17. The front had deployed three divisions, twice as many fighters as there were on the other side.[29] The operation was brilliantly conceived and efficiently executed. It began at 0430 with a minor attack against the Fourteenth

Division, a foray designed to test the enemy's readiness. This was followed by a massive and well-coordinated three-pronged assault on all divisions at exactly 0500 hours. The command posts of the front lines were instantly destroyed. The attackers swept over the first line of trenches, which extended for over sixty kilometers, with amazing agility and ease, pushing the untrenched and disheartened defenders back toward the second and third lines of defense. To the right flank, the Seventieth Division, under Philipos Wolde Yohanes, made a wide sweep to infiltrate the command's position from the rear by quickly overwhelming the Twenty-first Division. Headed by Ali Ibrahim, the Sixty-first Division drove through the central gap between the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Divisions and marched along the Hedai Valley to capture the strategic Meshalit Pass and subsequently close the critical Keren–Af Abet route. These objectives were attained against some spiritless resistance on the first day of combat, when the command's outer defenses were shattered. The complete absence of coordination between the front lines and between them and the reserves at the rear indicated that either the attack had not been foreseen or the two insubordinate divisions simply ignored the signs. From there on the rebels held the initiative, enjoying superior mobility.

But there was a stumbling block on the left flank. The Eighty-fifth Division, led by Gabre Egziabher Andemariam (Wichu), had moved southward parallel to the coast with the aim of closing the escape routes along the Felket-Sheeb gorges and then completing an envelopment. It was held up at Kemchewa, at the foot of the Rora mountains, where the Twenty-ninth Mechanized Brigade fought doggedly, without reinforcements, for nearly a whole day. A forward unit was cut off and fighting for survival; its capitulation would compromise the position of those at the rear. In the end it was left with three choices: fight to a finish, surrender, or retreat. It gambled on the third and hurriedly headed for Af Abet. There was no time for careful reconnaissance. As soon as it reached Ad Sherum, a choke point between mountains, its lead vehicles were hit with 100 mm guns. The burning tank and truck blocked the route. The convoy of about six dozen tanks, APCs, and lorries loaded with missiles, BM-21 rockets, mortars, and artillery was pinned down on the lower ground without any exit points. In desperation, the soldiers began to destroy their weaponry with grenades, according to a witness.[30] Jet fighters were then summoned from Asmara to complete the job, and with their remorseless attacks they turned the place into a furnace.[31] The detritus sent plumes of black smoke billowing into the sky. We have eyewitness depictions of the scene from both sides. "It looked as if all the hills, rocks, and vegetation in its environment had gone up in flames. A volcanic eruption could not have wreaked so much destruction. . . . It was a dazzling, awe-inspiring sight. . . .

Ad Sherum will always be remembered as the graveyard of the Ethiopian arsenal of the Nadew Front," recounted the Eritrean reporter.[32] "The explosions were deafening and terrifying, the smoke suffocating, and the dust blinding. The sun was shining brilliantly when all of a sudden darkness descended over the place. Too eerie to describe, it all seemed like the end of the world. The place had turned into an inferno. It was the most harrowing and unforgettable experience of my life," recollected the Ethiopian soldier.[33]

It was all self-inflicted wreckage and death. But it would be preposterous to conclude, as has been suggested, that this was "the worst decision" Ethiopian military leaders ever made and that it settled "the outcome of Eritrea's 30-year war of liberation."[34] Saving the brigade at Kemchewa or rescuing the convoy at Ad Sherum was nearly impossible, and inaction would have delivered the arsenal into rebel hands in a war that was not over yet. From a strictly military stance, the unit's obliteration appears to have been unavoidable. The tactical error for which the Ethiopian generalship ought to be criticized was not this but its placing the brigade too close to the front line against the expert advice of the ranking officer in charge of the tank and mechanized infantry.[35] His remonstrance was disregarded, with tragic consequences. No one knows how many men may have perished in the inferno, but the unit's destruction enabled the EPLA's mechanized force to move speedily to the Sheeb side, where its infantry had been kept at bay in continuous fierce combat. Its arrival hastened the garrison's demolition—which, of course, did not end the war.

While the mechanized unit was held on the left flank, the EPLA's foot soldiers had been aggressively pursuing the retreating soldiers. But getting into their main target was not so easy. As the envelopment unfurled, a solidly fortified infantry and heavy artillery fire were able to slow down the advancing attackers. The rear guard stood and fought fiercely for two days without interruption. Nonetheless, it had become all too clear by the second day that the command had its back against the wall and that any hope of reversing the impending cataclysm lay in correcting the balance of forces on the ground. But this turned out to be an impossible task. As is generally the case in such situations, the defenders were fast losing the numbers game. Whereas the EPLA could summon fresh fighters from its relatively safe rear sector to reinforce (or shift) its units, the Nadew command was severely handicapped in its ability to do the same. The southern road running from Keren to Af Abet was rough, winding, and too narrow. Military vehicles could not travel at more than fifty kilometers per hour, and tanks had to maneuver carefully to negotiate the steep slopes even in normal times. On the first day of hostilities, two rebel brigades had hunkered down in new bunkers on the surrounding hills so as to effectively close the Meshalit-Gizgiza Pass. Jet

fighters and helicopter gunships could not dislodge them, and heavily armed mechanized units failed to break through the defense. After a hurried inspection by the chief of staff, General Merid Negussie, two infantry battalions were brought in by helicopters and the commander of the SRA took charge of the battlefield to supervise the fighting from Height 2595 until he allegedly "escaped on a camel" just before the fall of the garrison.[36]

The action was too late and too little to turn the tide. The hard-pressed defenders, especially those on the Sheeb line, fought tenaciously for another day, by which time some guerrillas had penetrated as far as the confines of the town with the assistance of the local nomads, who served as suppliers of food, water, scouts, and guides. Meanwhile, those who had returned from the front lines headed toward Keren, refusing to regroup and fight in the last trench. The command tried to stop the disorderly retreat by shooting soldiers on the spot, but nothing, not even Z-23 antiaircraft guns, would stop them. They moved on, threatening any officer who tried to rally or restrain them. Meanwhile, Wichu's unit had arrived to throw its heavy weight behind the infantrymen. In the midst of the chaos, the rebels seized the main command and control center. After some fierce hand-to-hand fighting in the town, the battle field command broke down completely and the commander could only watch almost helplessly as the fighting drew to an end. The rear held on till dusk before it was completely routed. It then degenerated into a disorganized mob. The highly prized ammunition depot fell into rebel hands intact.

The much-vaunted Nadew was virtually annihilated. On March 19, at 0730 hours, the EPLA stormed the garrison. Af Abet, symbol of the army's muscular presence, was lost for good. With it were gone fifty tanks, perhaps more than half of them intact, long-range Soviet-made heavy artillery, a large amount of light weapons, and millions of rounds of ammunition. For the first time, the EPLA acquired 130 mm mortars and BM-21 rocket launchers.[37] The EPLF's losses were unknown but significantly less than the catastrophic Ethiopian tally. Barely a third of the troops were accounted for. The rest were dead, captured, or missing. Among the dead were Colonels Teshome Wolde Senbet and Admassu Makonnen, respectively commanders of the refractory Fourteenth and Nineteenth Divisions, and sixty junior officers.[38] One Russian military adviser was killed and three were captured. Although the roads and tracks were jammed with dead or stranded tanks and vehicles, the commander of Nadew, Colonel Getaneh Haile, along with a few soldiers, fought his way to Keren in a single tank accompanied by four armored cars. He described his daring escape as a miracle; he saw "God's hand in it."[39] Well, the deities were not as kind to most of his men, who remained trapped in the town. Fewer than six thousand made it to safety through

the Sheeb, Elabered, and Keren lines. Most arrived at Keren four days after the end of the battle, walking and skirmishing, hungry, thirsty, emaciated, and exhausted. Many could not endure the hardship and took their lives. A melancholy survivor of the ordeal whose spirit was severely wounded conveyed his feeling: "The fighting was continuous, exhausting, merciless, and bloody. Brothers were locked in a bottomless pit of death. I saw enemy tanks rolling over my dead or wounded comrades. The slow march to Keren was full of thorns and hardship. It was most humiliating and aggravating. Here was the army's strong arm, a force that had served with unrivaled dedication, determination, and distinction. Nevertheless, it just melted like butter in front of our unbelieving eyes. What a sad epitaph for the gallant warriors of Mother Ethiopia."[40] Another echoed those sentiments, highlighting the immediate effect of the defeat: "Af Abet was a grievous, crushing, and painful loss. The enemy captured vast quantities of equipment, including heavy artillery with which he was able to wage his war to the finish, and victoriously. Two division commanders fell on the battlefield; thousands lay dead and maimed. Af Abet was a severe military, political, and psychological defeat. How could the army have regained its equilibrium after such a drubbing?"[41]

Was any one to blame for this ruin? Even though Mengistu ascribed the defeat to problems within the command that drove many officers and NCOs to defect to the enemy with a good deal of costly information, he regarded the Fourteenth Division as the principal culprit. "We [had] 23 divisions; of these the Nineteenth, Fourteenth, and Twenty-first have vanished. The Fourteenth Division was counterrevolutionary, noted for anarchism and insubordination. Just as we were trying to take corrective measures, the bandits hit unexpectedly. The Fourteenth Division is responsible for this terrible fall. All this happened because it left open one of our flanks. Ethiopia is now being kicked around and humiliated because of the work of one idiot. Because some useless men let him in, the enemy destroyed the command and control center, fell on the weaponry, and the command's communications were ruined. This shows how one small incident can unravel and demolish a force."[42] That the division was insubordinate and contributed to the debacle is beyond dispute. It refused to dig trenches and to close a gap. "Let it therefore be held as a principle," warns a great strategist, "that an army should always keep its columns so united as to prevent the enemy from passing between them with impunity."[43] The Fourteenth and Nineteenth Divisions violated this cardinal principle of war not to draw the enemy into a snare but out of utter dereliction. What is not fathomable, however, is why such an unruly unit was placed in such a crucial zone at such a critical juncture. It was a baffling misjudgment. Still, to lay all or even most of the blame on a single

division is unwarranted. In contrast to Mengistu, Karl von Clausewitz would have maintained that such a complete defeat could not have occurred without "major, obvious, and exceptional mistakes." The most egregious mistakes were, of course, the president's meddling in the management of the war and his killing of the command's respected leader.

The causes were multifarious. Indeed, the ad hoc committee that investigated the army's loss came up with no fewer than twenty-eight reasons, varying from the banal to the incisive. In addition to those identified earlier, the committee pointed out distractive illicit business by senior officers, corruption, inadequately trained and inexperienced officers, lack of a reliable reserve force, decline of confidence in the command's leadership, lack of unified periodic exercises, the failure of the commander, political commissar, and security officers to harmonize their functions, war weariness, and the corrosive influence of the enemy's propaganda.[44] It placed overall responsibility for the failure on Colonel Girma Teferri, Colonel Teshome Wolde Senbet, Colonel Admassu Makonnen, and Captain Fekadu Alemu. Colonel Getaneh Haile was held responsible for failing to take timely and decisive disciplinary action against the two disobedient colonels and for not destroying valuable documents and the ammunition depot. General Wibatu Tsegaye was found at fault for positioning the mechanized brigade at a hazardous place and for not pulling it out when it became clear that the situation at the front was fast deteriorating.[45] Getaneh, on the other hand, accused both the government and the SRA of "paying excessive and ill-conceived attention" to garrisons like Tesseney that were "strategically less important than Af Abet."[46] Although this may be construed as sour grapes, the colonel's allegation is not without merit in that it underscores the army's manifold errors, or what Clausewitz calls "exceptional mistakes." The ultimate blame for the disaster rested on the entire military apparatus. The army's weaknesses combined with the EPLA's abiding conviction, skill, and resolve brought about Nadew's doom.

If the fall of Af Abet was partly the military's own doing, the EPLF's victory was facilitated by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The two organizations, whose relationship had previously been murky, began to synchronize their military activities against the government forces by early 1988, perhaps a bit earlier, to devastating effect. Let Mengistu speak: "The [insurgents] have played one tactic. To begin with, today Tigray and Eritrea have no links with central Ethiopia. They have 'blocked us out.' When the bandits of Tigray diverted our attention to wage battle against them for ten days, a plague [*temch*] hit us unexpectedly at Af Abet. When we moved there, the Tigrayan bandits reappeared and seized other towns. Therefore, it was all coordinated."[47] The man was abso-

lutely right. In response to the menacing offensives by the TPLF, the government opened a large counteroffensive code-named Operation Auraris ("Rhino") in March. While the army was thus preoccupied, the EPLF exploited the distraction to grab Af Abet. When the government withdrew one infantry division from the province to beef up the SRA, the TPLF resumed its attacks and seized all the major towns except the capital in May, initiating a series of engagements that would lead to a pivotal battle in its own territory.

Fired up by its stunning accomplishment, the EPLF tried in vain to capture Keren on May 7–9, 1988. The government successfully defended it by bringing the Twenty-third Division of the Bergid command from Barentu to reinforce its forces there. They even broke through the Meshalit Pass, regaining some ground from the rebels.

The effects of the defeat on the government were nonetheless immediate and transnational. Between March 26 and April 2, the army abandoned the key garrisons at Aqurdat, Barentu, and Tesseney, as well as the less vital posts of Ali Ghidir and Haykota. Within a week the government effectually surrendered the whole of northwestern Eritrea to the rebels. In April, a new army comprising three corps was established. This was followed in mid-May by the declaration of a state of emergency in Eritrea and Tigray, which were put under the martial administration of two of Mengistu's closest confidants, both Politburo members. Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, the former minister of defense, became the "overall administrator" of Eritrea.

On a regional level, Mengistu concluded a mutually convenient peace accord with his adversary General Siyad Barre of Somalia, who also was wrestling with domestic unrest supported by the Ethiopians. The deal allowed Mengistu to pull the Ninth Infantry Division from the Ogaden and take the offensive against the front. Some nine infantry divisions, two mechanized divisions, and one airborne division—a total of 104,791 men—were assembled against an estimated rebel force of 49,400.[48] Between May 17 and 26, 1988, the military discharged two frontal assaults from Keren and the Red Sea coast to recapture Af Abet. Soviet officers and technicians assisted in the planning and execution of the assaults, waged in a particularly hot season. The troops suffered horrendous losses, especially the 102nd Airborne Division, which may have lost as many as a third of its men, including the commander, Brigadier General Temesgen Gemetchu.[49] That was the last of the military's fruitless campaigns in Eritrea. The insurgents had irretrievably snatched the strategic initiative from the army.

Af Abet was another turning point in the long and bloody conflict in Eritrea that begun in 1961. It sounded a grave warning to the army and to the regime in Addis Ababa. Yet its historical significance has been inflated extravagantly. The

exaggeration began with Basil Davidson, the eminent British historian. Reporting from the area on March 21, Davidson unequivocally told the world that the EPLF's victory was "one of the biggest ever scored by any liberation movement anywhere since Dienbienphu."[50] Being the victor's guest, Davidson was carried away by the euphoria, for the comparison was not entirely accurate. Yes, two important military bases held by conventional armies were successfully overrun by guerrilla forces in conventional battles. And yes, the offensives in these two far-flung regions commenced in the same month, and the numbers of casualties suffered by the defenders were about the same. But unlike the colonial war in Vietnam, the conflict in Eritrea was a civil war.[51] Af Abet severely injured the Ethiopian military both physically and psychically but not terminally; the Ethiopian state did not fall apart, and neither did its army, for Nadew constituted only 5 percent of it. The EPLF could not even capture Keren, only sixty-six kilometers south of Af Abet. Even though the decline in morale, discipline, and motivation appeared irreparable, there is good reason to believe that the army could have held on for some indefinite time if not for the disastrous loss in Tigray a year later.

By contrast, Dienbienphu was fatal for the French. When the news of the debacle was broadcast on the morning of May 8, 1954, there were spontaneous public reactions throughout France. In Paris, rowdy mobs attacked ministers on the streets, and citizens across the nation demanded an end to the war. Bereft of support, the government fell, precipitating a bigger crisis in the republic. Dienbienphu spelled the beginning of the end of one of Europe's two biggest colonial empires. The French withdrew from what came to be known as North Vietnam within months, and two years later their colonial empire in Indochina became extinct. The Viet Minh victory in 1954 may have also inspired anticolonial nationalists in the rest of Asia and in Africa, notably in Algeria. General Giap does not seem to exaggerate when he writes, "Dien Bien Phu was a victory not only for our people, but also for all weak peoples who are struggling to throw off the yoke of the colonialists and imperialists. That is the great significance of the Dien Bien Phu victory."[52] March 19, 1988, passed like any other day in Ethiopia. No public demonstrations or crisis in the government occurred. No one, of course, can tell what the public mood might have been had the nation been informed about the defeat. From a global perspective, Af Abet was an *event* whereas Dienbienphu was *eventful*.

Yet, as if Davidson's misjudgment were not enough, we now have this spurious assertion: "Like an earthquake under the sea, Afabet's shudder reverberated across the continents, rumbling all the way to the Kremlin."[53] How much more sensational can one be? It may be good journalism, but this is bad his-

tory. In fact, the international community hardly took note of Af Abet. I have not been able to find any reference to it in any of the major newspapers in the West. Af Abet had little reverberation beyond the Red Sea littoral, and it took the Eritrean insurgents more than three years to clinch total victory. Nor was the Kremlin perturbed by the episode. It retained its technicians and continued to supply the Ethiopian military with armaments until March 1990. Their eventual withdrawal was part and parcel of their disengagement from conflicts in the third world, including most notably Afghanistan, their military and political quagmire.

Af Abet was a consequential and historic battle. It was, after all, the battle that set the stage for what would happen in the balance of the civil wars. It rattled the army's equilibrium and destroyed the illusion of military victory. Nevertheless, Af Abet was an essential but not a "decisive battle."[54] It took the equally crucial battles of Shire, Dabre Tabor, and Massawa to rout the Ethiopian armed forces comprehensively.

9

Shire: "Unexpected Grand Failure"

> In a lost battle the power of an army is broken, the moral to a greater degree than the physical.
>
> —*Karl von Clausewitz*

The military's crushing loss at the battle of Shire on February 15–19, 1989, will stand in the annals of the civil wars as the most unlikely of defeats. A guerrilla force that was on the run only five months earlier tenaciously and dexterously outmaneuvered the army and went on to win a splendid victory. This historic engagement took place in the western district of Shire, from which it derives its name. It is hard to imagine a major battle that was so unexpected and yet so complete and consequential, both militarily and politically, as the five-day battle of Shire. Underlying the defeat were the multifold weaknesses and errors that overburdened the Third Revolutionary Army (TRA), which suffered a crippling blow before it could even celebrate its first birthday. The disharmony, incompetence, and tactical mistakes that led to the destruction of Nadew pale in comparison with those of the TRA. When wedded to the strength of purpose and the astounding resiliency of its opponent, they proved fatal to the 604th Corps, the strongest component of the Third Army, and calamitous to the national defense forces. Even though it was not the most decisive battle, as I initially thought, Shire's political and military repercussions were far greater than those of Af Abet.

The battle of Shire was the culmination of fourteen years of armed conflict in Tigray. War raged over a wide area stretching into northern Gondar and northern Wello, with each side in turn gaining the upper hand without ever deal-

ing a decisive blow. That changed dramatically by the end of 1988, when the government withdrew the enervated Third Division, commanded by Sereke Berhan, from the province to strengthen its position in Eritrea. The front used the opportunity to quickly overrun nearly all the military installations, one by one, between March and May, obstructing the supply lines from the hinterland to Eritrea. Only Mekele, the capital, and the few rickety towns between it and Korem, which sits atop the strategic mountain of Alamata, remained in state hands. This setback, combined with the ruination at Af Abet, forced the military to rethink its counterinsurgency strategy. Hitherto, the belief had been that the defeat of the EPLF would ineluctably lead to the easy eradication of the other armed groups. Now the military concluded that, without the elimination of the TPLF, the Eritrean insurgency could not be extinguished. It was perhaps a correct calculation, but poor generalship, constant bickering among officials, difficult topography, bad weather, and stubborn resistance by the rebels brought it to naught. The failure of the operation would have serious repercussions far beyond Tigray.

The government made two changes in the structure of the high command, which was soon riddled with problems. First, it established the TRA on April 9, 1988, by amalgamating the existing Tigray, northwestern, and northeastern commands. The TRA was composed of the 603rd Corps (for Gondar and Gojjam), the 604th Corps (for Tigray), and the 605th Corps (for Wello). With its main headquarters at Mekele, the Third Army was put under the command of Major General Mulatu Negash, a cantankerous professional soldier and a veteran of the Ethiopia-Somali war of 1977–78. Its primary mission was the eradication of the TPLF by capturing its principal sanctuary in Gondar.

Second, on May 14 the government declared a state of emergency that was tantamount to martial rule. The choice of the martial administrator could not have been more inauspicious. Captain Legesse Asfaw, secretary of the Politburo of the WPE, was appointed overall administrator of the autonomous region, and by a special decree of the State Council, all party and state institutions, including the military, were placed under his direct authority. He could appoint, promote, demote, or dismiss anyone under his jurisdiction. In other words, he had total power in military, civil, and security matters. Because of his special relationship with the president and his adversarial personality, Legesse was reviled and universally feared.[1] No one, not even ministers dared venture into his political fiefdom without his consent. At one point, the chief of staff of the armed forces could not get to Tigray to deal with the corps' logistical and operational matters because of Legesse's objection.[2] Vast power was vested in an individual who did not merit it, having neither the competence, the training, nor the experience

necessary in such pressing times. One of the reasons the president probably appointed Legesse to such a critical post was to have an overall commander who enjoyed his trust and confidence, one who could be given free rein to control, direct, and coordinate the civilian and military agencies in the fight to crush the insurgency. Nonetheless, the result of this centralization was effectively to diminish the authority of the field commanders and to marginalize the professionals at MOND. The commanders' ability to act or react creatively, flexibly, and quickly to fast-changing circumstances on the ground was severely hampered by the administrator's undue interference. Summoned to testify before a panel of inquiry to investigate the Shire debacle, the commander complained that he was "captive to power," unable to maneuver as conditions dictated. He added that the administrator "would get angry whenever I submitted [my views] to him in writing. 'We are here together. Why is this necessary?' he would say. He wanted everything to be communicated orally. He did not like documentation. For fear of friction, I avoided communicating with him in writing. Since he is versatile in organizational matters, he may deny it."[3] Like all the other field commanders, the commander abhorred and resented the administrator's reliance on his Soviet advisers, led by Brigadier General Anatoli. MOND was rarely consulted, and military decisions were usually taken above its head. The chief of staff, Major General Merid Negussie, plainly stated that he came to know about operations from copies of field reports sent to him after the events.[4]

It appears that not only Legesse but also the commander of the TRA was ill suited to high command. Mulatu Negash was a career officer. He was older, better educated, and more experienced than his superior, whom he saw as an albatross around his neck. Although it was decreed that Legesse was the overall commander, the responsibilities of the officials were not unambiguously defined and there was room for competition and disagreements.[5] The disagreements arose as much from professional differences as from ambition and antipathetic personalities. Like Legesse, Mulatu was arrogant and egomaniacal, but without Legesse's Machiavellian instincts for duplicity and intrigue. Mulatu also had serious problems working with his assistants, whom he often berated and abused. Over six feet tall and muscular, Mulatu was cast in the mold of a soldier, and although he conveyed a natural air of command, he was gruff and domineering. He is depicted as a man who easily lost his temper, constantly yelling at his subordinates. As a commander, he inspired fear, not respect. Who could doubt that these conflicted relationships would undermine the functional competence of the troops? To boot, neither Legesse nor Mulatu had the strength of character or strategic vision to navigate the army to final victory. Indeed, their petty jeal-

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ousies and frictions, their incompetence, and eventually their cowardice greatly contributed to the army's humiliating downfall.

To put all the blame on the commander would be unfair, however. The TRA was saddled with numerous staffing and logistical problems that made Mulatu's task extremely difficult. The TRA was unwieldy and inexperienced. The army's actual makeup was 26,520 (35 percent) regulars, 32,171 (43 percent) National Servicemen, and 16,802 (22 percent) militia.[6] Thus, nearly half of the 75,493 troops were ill trained, inexperienced, unwilling conscripts.

It was this army that was deployed in mid-1988 to wipe out five armed organizations operating in the northwestern provinces, the largest and most successful of which was the TPLF.[7] The TRA's principal target was the Tigrayan front, which had an estimated force of 54,000 men, 19,000 of whom were well trained, highly disciplined, battle-tested fighters.[8] The rest of the fighters were well politicized, organized, and armed militia who served as auxiliaries while working on their farms. The estimated nine to ten regular brigades were fairly well equipped with a variety of weapons.[9] The TPLF was hell-bent on defending its home base.

OPERATION ADWA

Operation Adwa, so named after the evocative victory against the Italians in 1896, was carried out in four successive phases from June 19 to August 10 under the contentious leadership of General Mulatu. Perhaps inspired by the invigorating historical memory, the TRA fought fiercely during the first seven weeks, routing its opponent in one encounter after another.[10] Nonetheless, the unexpected tough resistance of the rebels, the difficult terrain, and bad weather would slow its advance and increase the chance of a longer war than the military planners had forecast.

The rebels attempted vainly to preempt the campaign by attacking on May 25, 1988, all along the Adigudom-Alamata line. They captured the strategic heights of Ambalage and Alamata, along with the towns of Adishehu, Korem, and Maychew, closing the Addis Ababa–Mekele road to traffic. They could not hold on to them for long, however. After fifteen days of intense fighting (from May 26 to June 11), they were dislodged from the peaks and towns. Without revealing their own losses, the insurgents claimed to have disabled 5,000 troops. It is true that the First Infantry Division, stationed in southern Tigray, was severely lacerated and the government admitted that its losses could have approximated one division. Additionally, the 605th Corps, which assisted from the southern end of the battle line, sustained 2,887 casualties, of which 978 were killed, 400 wounded,

and 1,509 missing. The rebels made off with a large amount of booty, including several tanks, about fifty vehicles, a good number of artillery pieces, and significant quantities of varied weapons as well as medicines, which the front would put to good use in the days and months to come.[11]

The TRA opened its counteroffensive a week later from the eastern and western fronts by deploying two corps with the 605th Corps as supporting unit. The 604th was to clear the northeastern parts of the province of rebels, move to Shire, and head for Dejena via Kaza across the Tekezze River, where it would meet with the 603rd Corps advancing from three points. The 604th Corps was quite successful in its sphere of operation, recapturing virtually all of the towns with remarkable speed. The 603rd Corps also reached Dansha, but with considerable difficulty. In the end, simultaneous advances and coordinated assaults proved unattainable.

Using standard counterinsurgency tactics—search and destroy, piecemeal encirclement—supported by air strikes, the 604th Corps pursued the retreating guerrillas vigorously. The guerrillas did not simply run away; they withdrew fighting, district by district, all the while delaying the attackers and covering their own retreating fighters. There were many skirmishes. For example, the Sixteenth Division fought at Samre from June 20 to 22 and again at Sinqata for about seven hours on June 27. The advance had been preceded by days of aerial bombardment. No fewer than twenty-four fighter helicopters were used, and many villages and towns, including Indasilase, which sits along a major supply line, were bombed.[12] The greatest damage was inflicted on Hauzien, a dusty but teeming marketplace, on Wednesday, June 22. In fifty-three sorties from 1130 to 1830 hours, fighter planes repeatedly struck the town on the flimsy ground that thousands of guerrillas had congregated there.[13] It was a massacre: 1,800 dead and about a thousand wounded.[14] What the military mistook for "three brigades of bandits" were actually innocent civilians attending to their business on a crowded market day. That brazen act served as an awful reminder of Mekele's bombardment on a similar market day over forty years back. When I visited the site in June 1994, I had a casual encounter with many individuals; one of them, a priest of the Orthodox Church, re-created the incident with poetic intensity: "That was the day when earth and hell rubbed eyeballs. The planes that emitted consuming fire kept coming in pairs, shooting at anyone without distinction as to sex or age from morning to sunset. Hard to say exactly how many were killed, but it was butchery. People were cut down as they fled in fear in all directions; they had nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. The yelling and groans of the wounded and dying was heart-wrenching. We wished that the earth would split apart and swallow us all. It did not, of course, and we are the survivors who witnessed it all.

Such savagery, such inhumanity. We plead that Legesse Asfaw be hanged at this wronged place, for there can be no memorial that would be more fitting to those who perished by his evil hand."[15] Not even animals were spared in this vicious civil war. "The air commander has confirmed," one report noted cheerily, "that ten camels were spotted near Sinqata and hit by M-24 helicopter fighters."[16] Camels were targeted because it was known that the rebels used them for transporting weapons and supplies.

Employing such scorched-earth methods—and undeterred by the jagged topography, rain, or hunger—the Fourth, Ninth, and Sixteenth Infantry Divisions of the 604th Corps moved on along the Abyi Adi and Adigrat fronts. They captured the two towns on June 25 and 28, respectively, chasing the retreating guerrillas. Before they could converge at Adwa or proceed to Indasilase, though, the Fourth and Ninth Divisions had first to overcome an estimated force of seven brigades that held them on the peaks of Ando about sixty kilometers from Mayqinetal, not far from Adwa, on June 29 from 1130 to 1930 hours. This tactic was no doubt intended to delay the corps' advance so that the front could dispatch reinforcements to its rear guard; it was also designed to reposition sufficient forces to the northwest of Indasilase to block further westward advances by the 604th Corps as it tried to join its allied unit. While the forward units of the 603rd Corps were being neutralized, the three divisions of the 604th strode jubilantly together into Indasilase on July 3 at 1700 hours.[17] Their effect would be neither rapid nor substantial for logistic, geographic, and climatic reasons.

What happened was not entirely unforeseen. The two-frontal assault on the TPLF was waged despite some strong reservations, if not objections, within the professional staff. From the outset there were skeptics in the military who did not think that the Third Army could attain its objective of squeezing and choking the rebels, partly because it lacked the necessary logistic support and partly because the weather was deemed unfavorable. It was not the soundness or feasibility of the battle plan that the critics contested, only the timing of its execution. To them the area of operation was far too large and inhospitable; moreover, the rivers would be full and the ground muddy, unsuitable for vehicular transport. In time it became painfully clear that the skepticism was not unfounded. There were now additional reasons for the high command of the TRA to rethink the whole project. The 604th was tired, having traversed some nine hundred kilometers in five weeks, mostly on foot. The militiamen, believing that they had fulfilled their three-month tour of duty, were yearning to return to their villages. MOND also advised that there be more consolidation by the 604th Corps while aerial and ground reconnaissance of enemy dispositions was carried out. Both the TRA command staff and MOND cautioned that the final onslaught be de-

layed until after the Ethiopian New Year, when the weather would be more conducive and the soldiers would be rested and their spirits uplifted. Unpersuaded, Legesse ordered the TRA to march on and storm the heartland of the rebels before they could regroup and regain the initiative. Arguing that the government's main goal was the total destruction of the enemy and not the mere retention of territory, he prodded the commanders to complete the campaign within the scheduled six months, no matter what.[18] The defense minister admonished: "Unless prudently executed, the slogan that our goal is the enemy, not territory, will lead to failure. Since nothing falls from heaven, it is a strategic necessity to hold secure places for 'a fallback position' and logistic support."[19] Legesse would not budge, and he would reap the bitter harvest of his folly.

No wonder—the plan was a palpable failure. What was supposed to have been a surgical operation to obliterate the core of the TPLF with speed and fury turned out to be slow and tepid. Hampered by lack of coordination, tactical ineptitude, desertions, the rains and floods, as well as by stiff resistance from the rebels, who enjoyed local support, Operation Adwa petered out within a week.

The 603rd Corps reached its destination rather disorganized and fell short of capturing Dansha-Dejena on its own. The Fifteenth and 114th Infantry Brigades left Metema on June 19 and briskly passed Abedarif for Grarwiha, whence they seem to have lost their way to Dansha, their destination. The party first secretary for Gondar, Gezahegn Workie, and the political commissar of the 603rd Corps, however, saw a sinister motive on the part of Colonel Bekele Haile, commander of the Seventh Infantry Division and the person in charge of the operation on the eastern side. They accused him of sabotaging the mission by using delaying tactics and demanded that the commander be eliminated "for betraying the trust and for nullifying the good efforts of party, state, and people."[20] What is known is that Bekele was cashiered and replaced, in the middle of the campaign, by the deputy commander of the corps, a recent returnee from training abroad.[21] The 115th Infantry Brigade, which had departed from Tikildingay, twenty-five kilometers northwest of Gondar, was likewise delayed by rains, floods, and rebel resistance. The Angereb bridge had been destroyed by the rebels. The Thirty-third Infantry Brigade set out from Humera and had swerved quickly around the Kafta-Humera mountains when it was ordered to halt and wait at Baakar, obviously for fear that it might be assaulted in isolation. None of the units reached Dansha before June 29, almost a week late, squandering the advantage of surprise. The four brigades, with total manpower of 8,967, found the enemy well entrenched on the mountain ranges that ringed the targeted place. Even though they were equipped with some thirty 82 mm mortars, 136 Soviet RPG-7 antitank rocket launchers, ninety-eight light and 118 heavy artillery, they could not break

through the trenches initially defended by no more than four brigades with only three tanks and four ZU-23s at their disposal.[22] But local conditions were favorable; not only were the rebels fighting on familiar terrain but they enjoyed the support of local people with a long tradition of resistance to state authority.

The 604th Corps could not join the 603rd Corps on time; its delay torpedoed the operational plan. That gave the front time to quickly send reinforcements. By July 3, when the army again assaulted rebel positions, the front had funneled in thousands of fighters and heavy weaponry sufficient to change the flow of events. The arrival of the 133rd Infantry Brigade from Gondar on the fifth could not ease the frustration of the assailants, who were visibly exhausted by the sixth. While smaller units blocked the path of the 604th Corps at Adidairo and Edagahibret, a few hours' march to the Tekezze River, the guerrillas seized the moment to launch a crushing counterattack against the five brigades of the 603rd Corps on July 9, pushing them back to Dansha. Before the disheartened troops could regroup, the guerrillas followed and on July 11, at 0600 hours, struck from several directions with awesome ferocity, using rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, artillery, and .50 caliber automatic weapons. Nature was on the rebels' side: rain and fog hindered air and logistic support. A misbegotten assault had crumbled and the soldiers scrambled away in sudden retreat, some fleeing toward Baakar, while others headed for Tikildingay, Humera, and Gondar, leaving behind at least two thousand dead, wounded, or captured comrades.[23] The rebels had turned near ruin into a staggering success. Mengistu admitted that "it was at Dansha that the bandits fought exceedingly well. There were also errors in command and tactics on our part. When one bandit unit attacked, the eight divisions in the vicinity could not deal with it by supporting one another. That was our failure. It is pitiful."[24] The minister of defense, too, was pained: "The main reason for the defeat at Kaza and Dejena was our attempt to assault with only four, tired brigades, even though we knew that the enemy had upgraded his strength by two to three brigades more."[25] He correctly concluded that "the loss had boosted the enemy's morale" but failed to add that it had also devitalized the army. Hayelom Araya of the TPLF summed up the battle's impact more aptly: "Had the two corps managed to storm our base from two sides simultaneously, the result would have been disastrous to us. By quickly exploiting his tactical mistakes, we delivered a big blow to an enemy who had posed a lethal threat to our survival. The army may not have buried us, but it would have taken us many years to recover from a crushing defeat, like starting all over again. Our triumph at Dansha was a real turning point in our struggle."[26]

Adwa was Red Star redux. The army's setback at Dansha drastically changed the character of the conflict. Even the 604th Corps, which had fought its way

to Shire with vigor and purpose, was enervated. In one month, it suffered two more losses that turned out to be a prelude to the Shire debacle. Just four days after their success, the guerrillas turned their attention to the Fourth and Ninth Divisions, the forward units of the 604th Corps. On July 15 the troops were severely weakened at Adigazemo, between Adihageray and Adinebreed, in surprise attacks from their rear and flanks. They were ordered to retreat to Indasilase, which they reached on the eighteenth. The TPLF was able to move the bulk of its army, estimated at nine brigades, to the Adihageray-Sheraro area; this was its main base before it moved to Kaza-Dejena in 1983. Sensing that the front was out to do some mischief, the army struck back by deploying twelve brigades on August 3, while three others protected their rear from Adikokeb. In the face of stiff resistance, they displaced the guerrillas from one hill to the other. However, by the sixth, a rainy, foggy day that hampered air support, their vitality waned. A good number vanished in the floods while the rest staggered on.[27] Calling it "Operation Hauzien," in memory of the victims of June 22, the guerrillas opened the furious counterattack that Legesse had expected.[28] They cornered the Twenty-second and 120th Infantry Brigades of the Sixteenth Division (Mebreq) about four kilometers south of a place called Hiret. The Seventy-fifth and 128th Brigades were too slow to cover their right flank; when those on the left were battered and forced to flee, the other two lost heart and scattered. The skirmish at Adihageray was over. Mulatu agonized: "Our advance was stopped by an enemy who had sworn 'Tsaada Midir [a place in the region] or death.' We fought for three days without air support. It was a battle of bombs and hand grenades. Our losses were unprecedented. For lack of reserves, victory was snatched from our hands. This should not be allowed to happen again."[29] It was sheer swagger. The troops had outrun their logistic support; tired and hungry, they went on a rampage, causing harm to the peasants, whose vengeance would later be felt. The disorderly troops were ordered to make a full withdrawal. They arrived at Indasilase on August 11.[30] The army's total loss during the fifty-three-day campaign was 8,482 killed, wounded, and missing to the enemy's 5,812, according to official sources.[31] Yet the commander considered the campaign a success. Mulatu noted unabashedly in his confidential report that the offensive had "placed our enemy in a political quandary. What better proof of our splendid success than the fact that the enemy fled leaving behind corpses and usable vehicles? We have put 60 to 70 percent of the bandits out of action. I am certain that we will achieve total victory in the next phase, ensuring permanent peace in the region."[32] His claim was inaccurate, a deliberately exaggerated and self-promoting account designed to please his superiors. Subsequent events did not bear out his optimism. The struggle for the TRA would be far longer and more

difficult. As the going got tougher, mistakes multiplied and squabbles among the leaders intensified, undermining the troops' tenuous cohesion and stability.

There was a hiatus of four months between the unheralded end of Operation Adwa and the commencement of Operation Aksum, which, in a bizarre and surprising sequence of events, led to the destruction of the 604th Corps and the departure of the TRA from Tigray. It was a stupendous development that shook the political establishment.[33]

The code name was probably adopted for tactical, historical, and emotional reasons. Tactically, the town of Aksum was to serve as the convergence point of the operational forces, since it was midway between Adwa and Indasilase; historically, Aksum is the ancient kingdom to which the modern Ethiopian state traces its ancestry. The government saw the TPLF as a secessionist movement dedicated to erasing both the historicity and unity of the state. Aksum, like Adwa, was intended to animate the troops by invoking historical memories of statehood and related nationalism. It was a deceptive hope. Operation Aksum turned out to be more ruinous than Adwa.

After foiling the offensive against it, the TPLF repositioned itself at key junctions and resumed its hit-and-run tactics of harassment along the main traffic routes. During the interlude the front had reorganized its fighters into seven divisions, each with at least 3,600 men and women. At least five of the divisions were supported by a mechanized brigade. The front's total force was estimated at 56,000, most of the fighters being local or zonal armed peasants.[34] It soon became very dangerous for convoys to travel from Mekele and Asmara to Shire. Supplies for the 24,000 men of the 604th Corps had to be delivered by small airplanes. Even when the field was expanded to accommodate Hercules planes, the shortages and irregularities in the supply of food, clothing, boots, canteens, ammunitions, and so forth remained, contributing to the mounting desertions.[35] It was under such baleful circumstances that Operation Aksum was launched. Its main objective was to reopen the Shire-Rama-Asmara road. The operation was disastrous from start to finish.

On September 29, 1988, the TPLF overran Rama, killing 21 and capturing 854 of 934 soldiers stationed at the town.[36] This incident seems to have both alarmed and inspired Major General Demissie Bulto, chief of operations at MOND and an officer who had distinguished himself as a leader of the successful counterinsurgency campaign in eastern Ethiopia in 1980. Bulto suggested a plan of action for the TRA. Expressing deep anxiety about what might befall the defense forces if guerrillas were to control the areas extending from Shire to Adwa, he proposed first that the tenuous Shire-Adwa supply line be secured and second that the TRA, in coordination with the SRA, hit the bandits wherever they were, without

cease. He hoped that those measures would delay or circumvent the TPLF's "strategic objective" while MOND accelerated its training program to upgrade the quality of its combat forces. "We cannot do the job with conscripts, and time is running out for us. Should we fail to build our forces expeditiously to deal decisively with this festering problem," he cautioned, "I am afraid that the situation ahead of us will be so terrible that we will not escape the harsh verdict of history."[37] Demissie's statement proved tragically prophetic.[38] His death would be horrific.

The state Defense Council embraced Demissie's assessment of the insurgents' intentions and his strategic assumptions, but the TRA chose to ignore MOND's counsel. Operation Aksum was approved after Demissie and Mulatu apprised the state Defense Council of the disposition and presumed intentions of the TPLF. In his report, Mulatu attested that "the enemy is assembled along the line stretching from Dairotekli [twenty kilometers north of Adwa] to Adidairo. It is wonderful to find the enemy amassed in one place. The plan is to hit him with massive force before he can steal the initiative."[39] Tactical and operational problems that led to blunders, panicky retreats, and surprise counterattacks were more than enough to scuttle the plan.

The first tactical error was made before the operation began. In an undertaking of this magnitude it was imperative that a reserve was maintained or, at the least, that contingency plans were in place for the rapid deployment of reinforcements when the situation demanded. Neither condition was met. Since the rebels had already destroyed the bridge over the Tekezze River, no reinforcements could have been ferried from Gondar. It was for this reason, it seems, that the minister of defense, Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam, strongly urged that at least one brigade be stationed at Aksum to safeguard the airport.[40] The commander of the TRA put an even bigger force there but withdrew it two days later in timorous response to Legesse's objection.[41] A stronger commander would have refused or quit, knowing well that withdrawal would, as indeed it did, pose a grave danger to his corps.[42] And had Legesse heeded the professionals' advice, he might have spared the army the worst consequences of his actions.

The second blunder, just as deathly as the first, lay in the tactical deployment of the offensive forces. The minister of defense again warned against the plan, but nobody listened. As the SRA's Tenth Infantry Division moved from Rama toward Chilla, the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions of the 604th Corps would depart from Indasilase and march along parallel lines about fifteen kilometers apart; the Sixteenth was to proceed to Chilla through Semema and join the Tenth there while the Ninth drove along the main road to Aksum, the point of

convergence for all three divisions. The minister's objection was that the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions were deployed far apart from each other, making them vulnerable to piecemeal attacks. He recommended instead that the Ninth and Sixteenth move in a single formation until they reached Wukro-2, where they would then split—one division moving to Chilla, where it would join the Tenth, and the other remaining at Wukro as a rear guard before the three columns converged at Aksum.[43] The general's recommendation that the units be moved along a single line was supported by a military doctrine that admonishes commanders that when an army is "marching into action, the different corps must be formed in close columns in order of battle."[44] His competent advice was ignored, and the guerrillas promptly exploited the command's tactical lapses to confuse, outflank, and destroy the divisions separately. This first encounter embodied much of the confusion that would come to define the struggle for Shire.

Although the plan for the joint operation by the TRA and SRA called for boldness, exactitude, sound intelligence, efficient coordination, and an effective rear guard, practically none of these criteria were met. When the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions, each with five brigades, left Indasilase at 0530 hours on December 28, leaving the Fourth behind to protect the corps' main headquarters, the town, and its surroundings, they appeared confident and resolute. Their resoluteness dissipated in barely three days. Coordination between the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions of the 604th Corps and the Tenth of the SRA completely disintegrated by the second day of the offensive, for the advance was not properly synchronized. Each division was assigned a wide theater of operation with big gaps between them. These caused serious communication problems that were complicated by the scarcity of operative radios. As the Sixteenth rushed forward, burning crops and dwellings, foolishly alerting its opponent of its exact whereabouts, not to speak of its criminal behavior, its advance guard, the 128th Infantry Brigade, was duped into enemy territory. The brigade had surged far ahead of the others, and the next day it was easily enveloped and destroyed. Its commander was one of the casualties. Instantaneously, the guerrillas turned against the other four brigades, using the gaps between them to advantage. Unable to support one another in the confusing melee, the men of the 128th all fled, refusing to rally and fight. They arrived at Selekhlekha on December 30 at 0700 hours. One reason for the miserable performance of the unit was said to have been disagreements between the commander and the political officer.[45] As so often happened, the division commander was relieved of his duties. Much shaken by the turn of events, the corps commander asked if he could call off the operation and withdraw the troops under cover of darkness. Mulatu rejected the request.

Having smashed one division, the rebels lost no time in moving against the Ninth. They may have deployed as many as six brigades and two heavy-weapons battalions for the duration of hostilities. Two rebel brigades were able to travel a long distance without being detected and to attack the unit from the flanks and rear of its command post. The first to be mangled was the 110th Brigade, which was caught by complete surprise. The Seventy-fifth fled in terror, exposing the flanks of the other brigades. Even though the Black Lion Brigade bravely saved the corps' advance headquarters, which immediately withdrew to Selekhlekha, it bore the brunt of the attack in part because its men were spread over a sizable area. While retreating on orders of the corps' commander, the Ninth Division was attacked from the north and south. It abandoned the crucial peak of Maybrazio. The Thirty-second and 120th Brigades of the Sixteenth Division, supported by tanks and jet fighters, rushed to the scene, enabling the Ninth to recapture the strategic height, which it lost at 2400 hours the same day. Once again, through dissimulation, surprise, and lightning speed, the guerrillas succeeded in pulverizing the second offensive force of the corps. Decimated, the Ninth Division arrived at Selekhlekha on December 31. Of the eight thousand men, about a third did not return. Many officers were sacked or executed for cowardice. Meanwhile, the Tenth Division had fought its way to Rama, where it was effectively contained. Of the many reasons that may have accounted for the setback, the vice minister of defense, Major General Mesfin Gabreqal, identified the nonexistence of a strategic reserve and tactical rear guard, the dismal failure in communication and coordination, and the inability to readjust tactics of maneuver. These were all the result of ineffectual leadership.[46]

The Defense Council took stopgap measures to strengthen the TRA's defensive parameters and then to prepare for the next phase of action. It transferred the Tareb, or Seventeenth, Infantry Division (three brigades), led by Colonel Legesse Lakew from Gondar, and two mechanized brigades (the Sixth and Thirtieth) from Wello to Mekele to take the place of the 103rd Commando Division (four brigades). The 103rd was sent, along with 2,400 soldiers, most of whom had been convalescing in the capital, to Shire. The TRA also moved its main headquarters to Indasilase in May at Legesse's behest.[47] The removal of the Seventeenth enticed the TPLF to capture Debarq, Dabat, and other smaller towns on January 3, 1989, perhaps to distract the TRA, which already had began preparations for the next offensive, which it called Operation Aksum II.

The operation was kicked off on February 8, 1989, under the direct command of General Mulatu with the belief that it would succeed where Aksum I had failed. Just a week before its commencement, Mengistu had boasted that, "be it in the quality of our weapons or the numbers of our men, we will be impreg-

nable."[48] He was proven wrong. The operation failed because it was ill timed and poorly executed. Except for the commando unit, the others were still reeling from defeat. And the 103rd Commando Division, which was mostly made up of fresh conscripts and militiamen without practical experience, was made to spearhead the attack against an enemy of unknown strength. The corps' intelligence seriously misjudged the size, strength, and disposition of its opponent. Whereas the TPLF had assembled more than five divisions, the official estimate was three.[49] Nor was the corps certain as to the exact whereabouts of the guerrillas.

This time the offensive forces were deployed along a single line. Three divisions with specific but reinforcing tasks were assigned for the mission. At about 0600 hours the untested 103rd Division under Colonel Getahun Wolde Giorgis set out from Selekhlekha, closely followed by the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions, and zoomed through the chain of hills and ravines. The left and right flanks of the division's three advance brigades were protected for three kilometers around by the Fourth Brigade of the Sixteenth and two brigades of the Ninth Division. It reached Wukro-2 the following day at 1230 hours and advanced as far as Dura, only five kilometers from Aksum. In the rear was the Sixteenth Division, with its men positioned at selected points from which to launch counterattacks. The Ninth Division was expected to bypass the 103rd to seize Aksum and secure the airfield and the hill of Indayesus—three kilometers north of the town—before it proceeded to Adwa. Everything had gone fairly smoothly and the objective seemed within reach. There was one hitch: the 135th Brigade and one battalion of the 132nd Brigade had gone in the wrong directions, and neither the division's nor the corps' commander knew about the mistake until the next day. The battalion was ambushed and wiped out. Just as surprisingly and damagingly, Mulatu made what turned out to be a colossal tactical error. Displaying timidity when boldness was needed, he aborted the operational plan in the face of strong opposition from the commander of the Ninth Division, who wanted to move on.[50] The general was puzzled as to why the rebels did not stand and fight. Obviously, they had made a tactical withdrawal to the nearby hills and valleys, where they concealed themselves and their weapons so well that the corps' spies and sight patrols failed to detect them. Fearful that the unit was in grave danger of being cut off, he temporized and ordered it to roll back to Wukro-2.[51] His anxiety about encirclement may have been genuine, but what he feared and tried to avoid caught up with him.

The response of the insurgents was swift and dramatic. On February 11, at 0700 hours, they erupted from their hideouts and began striking at their opponent. The army's offensive operation quickly gave way to attrition. The hunters had

suddenly become the hunted—and soon became the vanquished. The battlefield extended some twenty-one kilometers in length and sixteen kilometers in width. In a panicky reaction to what evidently was a diversionary move by the EPLF, the SRA withdrew the Tenth Division from Tigray, weakening the northern flank of the corps.[52] Infiltrating through open spaces that the Sixteenth had failed to cover, the guerrillas first concentrated on the Aqaabsaat-Maybrazio sector, midway between Selekhlekha and Wukro. To create a distraction they momentarily pinned down the reserves in the south as an enveloping force inched its way from the north toward the peak of Maybrazio. The insurgents tricked the Twenty-second Brigade, which was defending the height, by wearing the army's uniform. Still, the Twenty-second gave them a good fight for another three hours. The Black Lion and 142nd Brigades of the Ninth and the 135th Brigade of the Sixteenth, supported by helicopter gunships and MiG-23s, also fought with admirable courage and determination, but they could not save the day or the strategic mount. It fell into rebel hands at 2215 hours. One of the reasons for the mishap was the failure of the Ninth to provide timely support.

The guerrillas followed their success with well-coordinated attacks from the north, south, and east. The sound and blur of the RPGs and mortars spread commotion among the commandos, who were ordered to make an orderly retreat; the retreat was anything but orderly. As bewilderment turned to panic, the soldiers lost control, the chain of command fell apart, and the battlefield became chaotic. The commanders were unable to make clear decisions and enforce them. Indecision at the front was compounded by lack of direction from the rear. So confused was the situation that the 135th Brigade was unaware of a withdrawal order and was left behind. And by hastily withdrawing, the 103rd Division compromised the other two divisions that had precariously held on to their positions. These divisions followed suit in the same disorderly manner. The corps suffered horrendous losses. The commandos who were at the head of the fleeing crowd had failed "to be on their guard, and to reconnoiter adequately the ground at successive intervals."[53] They fell into a murderous snare as they descended the steep and crooked mountain path that leads to Selekhlekha; no sooner had they reached the open valley than the guerrillas disabled their lead and rear vehicles, trapping the entire column. Then the guerrillas aimed their accurate volleys at them from the vital high ground above the left and right flanks, spreading more mayhem and death. One official report lamented that the men were mowed down "at an unexpected place and time."[54] In the words of a soldier, "It was carnage—a ghastly scene."[55] Men trampled over their dead and wounded comrades; the dead were left to rot and the wounded to groan, curse, or plead for mercy. Some were heard asking: "Is this what we fought for?

Is this what we are dying for? Is this what we deserve from our dear country?"[56] These were pertinent questions to a command that they held responsible for their plight. They were also questions that historians will grapple with for a long time to come.

With the forfeit of the initiative, any hope of success vanished. The tactical blunders, the confusion and ineptitude that characterized the operation were so appalling that one wonders whether there could have been some callousness and culpability on the part of the corps' command staff. The disorderly retreats cost more men than died in battle. In the two operations the corps was drained, losing no less than 9,000 of its men.[57] Even though some of the units had bravely fought their way to Selekhlekha, all had suffered a severe blow to their morale and confidence. The Seventy-fifth Brigade broke the encirclement into which it had fallen while protecting the left flank of the 103rd Division. The 142nd Brigade, which was on the right flank of the same division, was cut off and severely mauled. Only one of its battalions returned with the three reserves. To everyone's astonishment, the "lost" 135th Brigade showed up nearly unscathed. Whether it had eluded its enemy or been hiding was anybody's guess. As the dejected and distrustful returnees reworked their new defensive parameters, Legesse gave way under fire and unceremoniously retired to Addis Ababa. His credibility and that of the entire generalship had plummeted. The corps had suffered a strategic defeat because its "encirclement and suppression campaign" had failed, and as a result the guerrillas had moved from defense to offense.

THE PARADOX OF DEFEAT AND VICTORY

The corps was beset by many difficulties, the noose tightening around its neck. Its manpower and firepower had been depleted and it could not replenish them because all the passages to Shire were effectively closed. What it wanted at this moment was not victory but survival and redemption for what would be the worst defeat of state forces since Af Abet. The political consequences of defeat would be far greater than those of Af Abet. Mengistu had failed again to see the sign as boding ill. He pronounced with his usual bravado that, "unless it deliberately capitulated, there is no way that the corps could be defeated, not by any military yardstick."[58] Well, its fate would be decided in the next hundred hours by a versatile rival intent on achieving the total victory that appeared within his grasp.

Successive victories had elevated the spirit of the insurgents, who now moved to the strategic counteroffensive, what Mao calls "the final stage of a defensive campaign." They were determined to finish off a manifestly disheartened and

disorganized army by concentrating superior forces and by the methodical use of encirclement and outflanking. According to Mao, "conditions such as popular support, favorable terrain, a vulnerable enemy force, and the advantage of surprise are all indispensable for the purpose of annihilation."[59] These conditions existed in Shire at this stage. In addition to its regulars and armed local militiamen, the front had fully mobilized the peasants of western Tigray and northern Gondar for auxiliary tasks. The theater of warfare was dotted with ridges and hills and dissected by numerous ravines, nightmarish for a conventional army but ideal for a guerrilla one. The front's tactics of attack consisted of camouflaged bypassing of enemy strong points, massive infiltration and envelopment from the rear and flanks, destruction of command posts and closure of passages of escape or retreat, continued stealthy forward movement, mostly by night, and intensive barrages with 122 mm mortars and PKM grenade launchers from one direction to distract and then quickly from another to massively assault.[60] A defensive posture involves the loss of initiative, with all its disadvantages. The guerrillas were in a position to choose at their own convenience the target, time, and place of their attacks.

The battle of Shire commenced after a breather of three days. It was actually two battles. The first was fought at Selekhlekha on February 15 and the second at Indasilase on February 18–19. The TPLF launched its first counteroffensive, Operation Hauzien II, by deploying five regular divisions supported by many zonal battalions to neutralize decisively the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions guarding the town and its environs. Government forces were stationed at key points but were woefully ill arrayed for battle. They were separated by wide intervals that would prevent them from easily supporting one another given the ruggedness of the terrain. Some important areas and junctions were left uncovered or lightly covered. The elevated areas behind the corps' command center at Selekhlekha to the northeast were left open. Despite repeated instructions, the commander of the Sixteenth Division, Colonel Berhanu Wolde Giorgis, failed to seize a critical hill southwest of the town that was being protected by the 128th Brigade. Incredibly, Mt. Qoyetsa, which overlooks Indasilase from the northeast, was guarded by a battalion and Afghaghah, the passage to the capital from the north, by one brigade. Furthermore, the 103rd Commando Division, which was stationed behind the brigade as a backup, was withdrawn just before the rebel assault.

The tactical aim of the rebels was to hit the isolated units piecemeal first, then seize the strategic heights, cut off the two divisions from their main headquarters at Indasilase, and encircle and demolish them with one concentrated attack.[61] The strategy was scrupulously planned and almost flawlessly executed, to the

great bewilderment of the defenders. With speed and impressive coordination, the guerrillas maneuvered through the gaps to attain their objective. Having positioned themselves at pivotal intersections during the night of February 14, they struck at dawn (0500 hours) from two directions. One unit moved from the south and positioned itself around the ridge of Denbelyala, between Qoyetsa and Afghaghah. In quick succession they assaulted the 120th Brigade from the rear and closed the treacherous Afghaghah passage, where bandits have historically ambushed and robbed merchant trucks. Another unit attacked the troops positioned in the valley between the strategic points as they slept, disposing of them quickly. It then stealthily proceeded through a gap between the Fourth and Sixteenth Divisions and, by overwhelming the battalion from the rear, captured Mt. Qoyetsa. Attempts to reclaim it were fruitless. Within three hours, the guerrillas had taken control of the ridges running from Qoyetsa to Afghaghah and almost entirely surrounded Selekhlekha. Seven brigades were trapped with no prospect of relief, but the corps' command staff had made its exit and relocated itself at Mayadrasha, just northeast of the capital. Rebel assaults came from three directions: one column of guerrillas cut off the main highway leading south, while a second seized a hill overlooking the town, firing salvos from the west and south to distract the defenders; a third column approached from the north, attacking methodically and relentlessly. As the soldiers pushed forward, they ran into a hail of fire. They fought hard, at great disadvantage, until noon, when the corps' command center lost all contact with them. They were completely overrun; most of the political commissars and brigade leaders were killed. A member of the Black Lion Brigade reminisced: "The land was strewn with the dead and wounded. All attempts at breaking in force failed. Everyone was looking for an exit from the hellish place. I was one of those who made it."[62] Another spoke mournfully for his fallen comrades:

> To fight for my country
> I traversed the wilderness of Tigray on foot,
> I hunted the rebels like beasts,
> Not knowing the farmer was the enemy.
> Bound by camaraderie, I could not flee.
> Here I, too, have fallen.
> Shire, O Shire,
> You have become my grave.[63]

At this desperate moment, Mengistu held an emergency meeting with his senior military advisers and Legesse Asfaw to map out contingency plans for reinforcements or evacuations.[64] There was little they could do. Already the two

sets of adversaries had imposed a high level of attrition on each other, and the resistance had collapsed. Of the 6,000–8,000 troops, not more than half made it to Indasilase.[65] The TPLF's claim that it killed or wounded 3,395 and captured 1,604 seems to agree with the official figures.[66] This was one of the bloodiest battles since Af Abet. The insurgents had gained their first objective by winning a major though costly victory. They were now poised for the final showdown.

Employing timeless techniques of warfare, the rebels relentlessly closed in on Indasilase, where the army was pinned down. As Sun Tzu asserts, perhaps with some exaggeration, all warfare is based on deception.[67] The guerrillas were remarkably good at this craft. Having repeatedly confused their opponent by wearing his uniform in previous encounters, this time they used the populace to distract him. The corps' commander was surely less than vigilant when he granted a request by the peasants of the surrounding villages to celebrate St. Michael's Day through the evening. As they danced and beat the drums well into midnight, the guerrillas sneaked in and positioned themselves around the town except for the southern end. They were able to place their rocket and mortar batteries within range of the town, as well as of the corps' garrison, without hindrance.

The TPLF faced a downhearted army of less than 14,000 men,[68] By contrast, it had assembled a force of 35–40,000, consisting of seven regular divisions, some 10,000 zonal fighters, more than 5,000 people's militiamen, and an unknown number of EPDM fighters.[69] Its command center was on the hill of Danso. Facing it were four divisions, three of which were disheartened by the successive setbacks. Their numbers had also been dangerously depleted. The officer corps had been so decimated that the Sixteenth Division was headed by the chief of its military police. Morale was very low and discipline lax. Only the Fourth Mechanized Division, which was brought from Neghele-Borana and accounted for nearly half of the troops, was expected to do well, as it did for sixteen hours.[70] This unit, many of whose members were veterans of the Ethiopia-Somalia war of 1977–78, had not taken part in the previous engagements and had therefore managed to preserve itself.

Led by Hayelom Araya, Abebe Tekle Haimanot, and Samora Yunus, the rebels launched their three-pronged attack at 0200 hours on February 18 with a roar of mortars and heavy field artillery and 122 mm Howitzer guns. Their maneuver through the Afghaghah front line was only a feint. The real onslaught came from the directions of Indagiorgis, Adikokeb, and Qoyetsa, to the north and northeast of the town. The assailants used tanks, 122 mm mortars, and ZU-23 guns "the quantity and ferocity of which were unprecedented," according to an eyewitness.[71] A young Ethiopian officer described the scene: "The fighting

was horrendous. It was a dire moment when [the army] was encircled in an unfamiliar and hilly place, withering from thirst and the enemy's bullets. It was like a hurricane in which male, female, the old, and the young took part under the slogan "Beat the enemy with Stalin's stick."[72]

Fighting continued on all fronts until 0600 hours, when some of the units began to flounder. At 0700 hours the commander, the political commissar, and the operations officer of the 103rd Division took off in a tank, abandoning their unit, which was guarding the corps' southern flank. After two hours without leadership, the unit disintegrated. The soldiers fled south to be reassembled at gunpoint near the airfield, which rebel bombardments had rendered inoperative. Counterattacks to recapture the Mayadrasha-Afghaghah sector failed. Conditions deteriorated rapidly in that sector following the sloppy retreat of the Ninth Division, a reserve unit of the 103rd Division. Only the Fourth Mechanized Division, under what one account calls the "extraordinarily skillful and determined leadership" of Colonel Kebede Birru, held its ground against the main rebel assault, as had been expected.[73] At the colonel's side was Brigadier General Hailu Kebede, the TRA's chief of operations. Both men were reputed to have great courage and determination.[74] By their example they sustained the fighting spirit of the unit. For a while the outcome of the battle hung in the balance.

To the army, it was the unexpected intervention of the Eritrean organization that decisively upset the equilibrium. In confirmation, the Eritreans have claimed that, without their Nineteenth Mechanized Brigade of the Fifty-second Division, there would have been no TPLF victory at Shire. The TPLF appeared to corroborate them when it gratefully acknowledged that the brigade had made "a splendid contribution," arriving from Barentu in the nick of time, "with impressive speed."[75] Today, however, the TPLF insists that the EPLF's contribution was minimal and that the victory at Shire was achieved through its own efforts. This was communicated to me by Tsadkan Gabre Tensae, one of the front's most competent and coolheaded military leaders. The Eritrean unit's role may not have been as decisive as the army and the EPLF claimed, but it was perhaps more significant than the TPLF is willing to admit. The truth will never be known until the historical relationship of the fronts is fully revealed.

What was more apparent, in any case, is that the combined assault by the fronts could not easily knock out the well-entrenched Fourth Division. It refused to budge, continuing to direct its tanks, artillery, and antiaircraft supporting units. Supported by air strikes, it fought valiantly to beat back a feverish attack by the rebels and their allies at 1100–1200 hours. It inflicted heavy casualties on the assailants, who retreated in disarray.[76] Unable to break that impregnable defense, the guerrillas shifted the line of attack to the south—that is, to the rear

of the Fourth Division. The pendulum swung in their favor when a mobile force of the Alula and Aurora Divisions, under Saare Makonnen Yimer and Yohannes Gabremesqel, launched a two-pincer attack, infiltrating to seize Mt. Adikentibay (now Taba Weyanay Tsinaat), to the south of the airfield where the troops of the defeated divisions had congregated. The passionate attempts to rally them for the "cause of the revolution and the Ethiopian flag" fell on deaf ears.[77] To avert disaster, the TRA had to move men rapidly by any means, deploying them quickly at critical defensive lines rendered strong by firepower. That was not within its grasp.

Instead, and to the befuddlement of his staff, the commander of the TRA left for Mekele at 1230 hours, along with the political commissar, Colonel Denekew Abebe.[78] The promise that he would return with reinforcements was a lie that only confirmed the feebleness of will he had shown since Operation Aksum II.[79] The situation took a turn for the worse moments after his departure. The Fourth Division began to crack when its 111th Brigade, much shaken by the steady artillery fire, surrendered its position at around 1600 hours. Two hours later, the corps lost peaks 1931, 2024, 2017, 2089, and 2107.[80] And then within minutes the gas depot, a supply storage, and the corps' headquarters and clinic were set on fire, presumably at the order of the head of logistics.[81] When the command and control centers of the corps and the Fourth Division were hit almost simultaneously, the chain of command broke down. In the ensuing turmoil, over two hundred trucks as well as armored cars rushed south toward Gondar, with the guerrillas right behind them. The resolve of the Fourth Division shriveled, its men scurrying for their lives. Brigadier General Bereta Gomeraw—the obese, ailing deputy commander of the 604th Corps—and Colonel Kebede Birru were captured.[82] The 604th Corps had crumbled.[83] The battle of Shire was over at 1800 hours on February 19, 1989 (12 Yekatit 1981). In the month and the district of the TPLF's birth and in its fourteenth year of armed struggle, the front achieved a spectacular triumph that mystified its opponent and perhaps even awed the victor, for neither side seems to have anticipated such a clear outcome. The rebels entered the town to the jubilation of its residents. The local populace had taken part in the fighting by providing food and water to the rebels, burying their dead, and retrieving the wounded.[84] It was a glorious moment for the front. For the corps, it was total defeat, or, as its political commissar put it, "an unexpected grand failure."[85] Either way, it was catastrophic for the armed forces and indeed for the regime.

Mop-up operations followed immediately and continued until February 21. Some 6,000 soldiers were believed to have escaped from Indasilase in tanks and trucks and on foot. Retreat was extremely hazardous, as the TPLF had alerted its

rural supporters and positioned blocking forces at Indabaguna, Imbamadre and Limalimo.[86] General Addis Agilachew either was killed or shot himself during one of the major skirmishes near Imbamadre.[87] General Hailu Kebede met the same fate after a three-day search by helicopter failed to locate his party.[88] By April 16, 2,972 undernourished, ill-clad, and exhausted soldiers had arrived in Gondar.[89] On the other hand, the TPLF had captured 2,505 soldiers (of whom 609 were wounded) and killed 82.[90] The front may have taken 9,621 prisoners of war, but it surely did not kill or wound 3,000 at Indasilase.[91] Not even a third of that figure fell on that battlefield. No reliable overall casualty numbers exist, although the TPLF has asserted that it captured 14,304 and killed or wounded 19,584 between December 28, when Operation Aksum I began, and February 21, when its mop-up operation ended.[92] But not more than 28,000 men were arrayed for battle on the eve of Operation Aksum II. In all probability, the state's total loss was between 10,000 and 12,000 dead and wounded, 95 percent of the casualties occurring prior to the battle of Indasilase.

The news was received with shock and disbelief. Fearing an impending collapse of the army in Tigray, Mengistu ordered a hasty evacuation of Adigrat on the day Shire was lost. A few days later, Humera was abandoned. In a "tactical retreat" that was as ironic as it was perplexing even to his erstwhile opponents, Mengistu withdrew all party, state, and government officials and their families as well as 24,000 troops from Mekele to the adjacent province of Wello, a haven of the EPDM. The retreat was rather comically code-named *Zemecha Qitaw* ("Operation Punish Him").[93] Before its departure on February 27, the administration destroyed quantities of provisions, weaponry, medical equipment, and five electric generators. The estimated total cost of the material lost at Mekele and Shire was 77,771,261 birr (US $37,937,200).[94] Stunned but buoyed by the government's departure, the TPLF entered Mekele three days later. By March 4, all state authority had completely disappeared from the province. For the next two years, the war was fought not in Tigray but in the Amhara heartland. No longer were Tigray and Eritrea the war fronts. This was the immediate aftermath of the Shire fiasco. A whole province was abandoned for the first time since the start of the civil war.

A chagrined president wrote to the committee he established to investigate the defeat: "A huge army has fallen, scattered, or surrendered within days and hours in a manner that is beyond belief. Quantities of weapons and property that will profoundly impact the unity and survivability of the state have fallen into enemy hands. It is no exaggeration to say that this lamentable episode will occupy a disgraceful place not only in the history of Ethiopia's struggles but also in world military history. We are now in a situation where it is impossible to pre-

dict what the eventual outcome will be."[95] The committee echoed Mengistu's bewilderment and anxiety. It opined that "far beyond the pitiful and shameful place that this defeat will occupy in the history of the country's army, it is impossible to foresee what the consequences might be."[96] The consequences became evident sooner than either the president or his committee expected.

The immediate aftereffects were easy to see. The failed Aksum campaigns were waged to reopen the Shire-Asmara route. Yet not only this line but also the Mekele-Asmara road were effectively closed because of Shire. "The abandonment of Tigray meant the closure of our military defeat," Mengistu acknowledged. He elaborated: "Since Tigray abuts Eritrea, it was our supply route and staging ground; to cede it was to relinquish Eritrea. The Eritrean separatists could have held Nakfa for a thousand years. They could have stayed in the Eritrean lowlands, the Sahel, for a thousand years. They could not mine diamonds or extract gas. There was little they could have done. However, they knew that Tigray was our launching pad. It was our base, the supply artery to our army in Eritrea. Hence, if they blocked it, they would have won half of the war. That was why the EPLF and TPLF allied to encircle our corps at Shire-Indasilase."[97] It was a sober and correct assessment. Eritrea was for all practical purposes severed from the rest of Ethiopia. After Shire, it was accessible only by air and sea and both avenues involved considerable expense and risk. By the MIA's own intelligence, the EPLF had acquired some twenty speedboats that made the navy's operations more perilous.[98] And the loss of the airfield at Mekele meant that the air force could deliver supplies to the besieged SRA only from Bahir Dar, over twice as far from Asmara as the Tigrayan capital. Shire had irrevocably upset the military balance.

Second, Shire led to an abortive coup d'état that helped further debilitate the military, hastening its collapse. On May 16, 1989, only three months after Shire, a group of senior officers attempted to topple Mengistu and his government while the president was on a state visit to East Germany. While the plotters' stated aims included economic reforms, the paramount motive was probably political. After Shire it was clear to virtually everyone in the military establishment except the delusional president that the war was irretrievably lost. With the insurgents enjoying the upper hand, the specter of peace had faded. What the conspirators wanted was to halt the process by negotiating an end to the civil wars so that the army's vestigial honor could be preserved and the state's integrity ensured. It was a prudent tactical move. But, like the coup of 1960, the plot was bungled by poor planning, lack of coordination, and indecisiveness. The consequence was that eighteen generals lost their lives. Aberra Abebe killed the minister of defense, only to be murdered while on the run; the chief of staff, Major General Merid

Negussie, and the commander of the air force, Major Amha Desta, reportedly committed suicide. Four generals were murdered in Asmara, including the redoubtable Demissie Bulto, commander of the SRA, whose mutilated body was dragged through the streets of Asmara by half-drunk commandos, and the provincial administrator, Major General Afewerki Wolde Mikael, a graduate of the Harar Academy, who was regarded by his peers as a man of modesty, decency, and magnanimity. In his habitually vengeful way, Mengistu executed twelve more generals on May 20, 1990, and promoted less experienced men in their places. To satisfy his unquenchable appetite for power, the dictator robbed the military of most of its senior, and some of its most competent, leaders, further ensuring its downfall. A year later, it disintegrated and with it disappeared the military dictatorship. Eritrea seceded from the rest of Ethiopia. The conspirators had inadvertently expedited the two occurrences that they had cleverly sought to prevent.

The army's blow at Shire was the culminating event of a series of setbacks that began in mid-1988. Hence, the reasons for its "grand failure" were multifold and cumulative. The committee that investigated the defeat proffered fourteen interconnected reasons. The more salient ones merit our attention.

The TRA's first weakness was its lack of experience and its heterogeneity. It was organized hurriedly in response to pressing military conditions and entered the heat of battle before its men could develop a sense of camaraderie and loyalty. Its social composition was diverse, and the proficiency and dedication of its men extremely uneven. The better-trained and better-paid regulars made up only a third, the bulk being national conscripts and peasant militiamen. Ill-trained, inexperienced, and uninspired, the latter two groups deserted in droves at the first convenient moment. Their behavior hurt the morale of the regulars. In time and as the setbacks multiplied, the soldiers, too, began to flee at the first sign of defeat, often throwing away their rifles. "Suffer three months and live" became the slogan, as the average length of detention in enemy camps was twelve weeks.[99] Neither the threat of force nor the actual use of ZU-23 guns could stop the men from fleeing. Individual heroism there was, but it was not sufficient to prevent a collective calamity.

Given its daunting mission—the eradication of a stubborn enemy within six months—it is small wonder that the 604th Corps was the best staffed and best equipped of the TRA's three components. Yet even it was encumbered by serious organizational problems that diminished its combat effectiveness. Its shortage of officers, its lack of mobile reserves, and the unruliness and unreliability of its nonprofessionals persisted. At the lower level, the shortage of officers was 15 to 20 percent, and at no time was there a tactical reserve.[100] The incessant and

mostly fruitless campaigns further impoverished the leadership and dampened the army's warrior spirit. So it was not uncommon for battalions to be led by NCOs and companies by privates. Soon even veteran professionals lost the heart for combat, and young officers were the first to throw away their insignia when fighting intensified. During the Aksum operations and rebel counteroffensives, whole brigades frequently abandoned their positions or refused to reinforce others. Sometimes they stumbled into enemy territory because they did not know where the foe was—or even where exactly they themselves were. Large-scale maps were not easily available and not all combat leaders could read them correctly anyway.

The TRA command was torn by dissension and factionalism that inescapably undercut the united effort necessary to win the war. Pettiness, egoism, and obtuseness put the competence of the command staff into question. Evidence of personal incompetence is not wanting. The army was pulled between the ambitions and goals of rival leaders. There were never-ending disputes between Legesse and Mulatu and between Mulatu and his corps commanders. The divisional commanders were frequently at odds with the political commissars. All were distrustful of one another and at times barely communicated, as this not atypical excerpt from a letter by an aggrieved commander shows: "Because of your biased attitude toward me, you have forgotten that I am a general like you. Belittling the rank given me by party and state, you have not even regarded me as an ordinary soldier. Whenever you have visited the corps I lead, you have treated me in accordance with the principles not of military hierarchy but of a master-servant relationship, the kind of social relationship that our revolution destroyed."[101] The relationship between Mulatu and the commander of the 604th Corps was similarly strained, owing largely to differences on matters of strategy and tactics but also to personal incompatibility. Unlike the dashing and impetuous Mulatu, Addis Agilachew appears to have been a self-effacing, low-key general, unflappable and cautious but by no means incompetent. Under such circumstances, the command was never able to produce a cogent and practicable strategy. Planning lacked coherence and consistency. Elaborate operational plans were designed without credible intelligence to support them. The troops suffered as a result. No steps were taken to remedy these organizational defects. Indeed, they were exacerbated by the intrusiveness of the overall administrator, who persistently interfered in the conduct of the war, often enforcing decisions in the face of contrary evidence. For instance, he insisted that the campaign be carried to Dansha-Dejena even though the weather was bad and the conditions for coordinated offense were nonexistent. Again, against the explicit wishes of the TRA commander and MOND's strategists, he removed a unit stationed at

Aksum; the decision was miserably shortsighted and ultimately lethal. When everything unexpectedly and spectacularly fell apart, there were feeble excuses and recriminations from the two principal actors in the tragicomic drama. On inspection these turned out to be only half true. To a large degree, Shire was the result of ineptitude; it demonstrated how gross incompetence could transform a military setback into a catastrophe.

The military's war machine was defective. It lost the war in Tigray out of glaring incompetence and lack of imaginative leadership. But that was only one side of the story. The other side is that it was faced with a foe whose commitment to his cause, resilience, aggressiveness, and tactical skill could not easily be matched.

The TPLF, like the older EPLF, had grown into an imposing military organization with well-trained, highly disciplined, and highly motivated fighters. By 1988 it had mustered regular divisions equipped with tanks, armor, mortars, artillery, and heavy machine guns. It had an impressive logistical and communications network and an equally impressive intelligence and propaganda system. It fought by flexibly combining guerrilla and mobile warfare. Its effective tactical methods were rapid mobility, surprise, envelopment, and timely retreat when warranted. Its *qoretta*, or envelopment tactics, startled and terrified its opponent. In contrast to the TRA's commanders and soldiers, the TPLF's men fought with unshakable dedication and determination. Of the government's forces, only the Fourth Division exhibited these qualities. To the military's factionalized leadership, inadequate training, faulty intelligence, vacillation, rigidity, slowness, and prevarication, the front responded with coherent, integrated command, unity of purpose, meticulous preparedness, boldness, steadfastness, tenacity, accurate intelligence, dazzling speed, and superior tactical decisions. The insurgents repeatedly confused and deceived their better-equipped foe, demonstrating that material and numerical superiority in the absence of strategic vision, tactical dexterity, fortitude, and enthusiasm do not deliver victory. The TPLF made fewer tactical errors and was extraordinarily adept at capitalizing on those of its opponent. Its success at Shire lay not only in the staggering blunders of the army's command but also in its inimitable ability to make the best of those blunders. In this sense, it was ceaselessly vigilant and remarkably opportunistic.

A caveat here. The defeat of the army cannot be understood in narrow military terms only; political factors were, perhaps, more crucial in the revolutionary war. The regime's agrarian, labor, conscription, and administrative policies had contributed immeasurably to the shrinkage of its social base by the turn of the 1980s. And the state's loss was invariably the insurgents' gain. The bulk of the rebel army was made up of peasants who had given up the plow for the gun in

the hope of a better future. If the peasants rallied behind the insurgents, it was not always because the insurgents promised them a better world but because of what the state's coercive organs did to them. The army, or more accurately some of its ill-disciplined troops and the notorious Dragons, alienated significant sections of the rural population by burning huts, destroying crops, slaughtering animals, and raping women. The front won the peasants' confidence and support by abjuring such acts and by taking small measures to help alleviate the harsh conditions of their lives. This does not mean that it was entirely blameless, for it, too, sometimes used coercion and deception. There is, of course, a good deal that we do not know about the murky world of the guerrilla, but it is evident that the TPLF prevailed over its adversary because of its remarkable success in mobilizing the rural population. The army lost because it failed to separate the guerrillas from their popular base. On the contrary, by its repressive actions, it helped expand that base and, in turn, vitiated its own efforts.[102]

That this was a popular insurgency was most poignantly demonstrated during and after the battle at Indasilase. The peasants of western Tigray and northern Gondar helped by intercepting, capturing, or killing the fleeing soldiers. An inquiry committee set up by the commander of the ground forces was so incensed by the peasantry's behavior that it implored the government to retaliate harshly: "The injury that the peoples of Maytsemri, Adiarqay, Zarema, Sanqaber, Dabat, and Debarq inflicted on our retreating soldiers was no less hideous than that of the bandits with whom they collaborated. This committee strongly urges the government to get even by taking appropriate punitive measures."[103] Had the committee bothered to ask what might have driven the peasants to act with such collective wrath, the security officer of the MIA in Shire at the time would have suggested a hint: "When the army is deployed for a specific operation in a particular locale, it inevitably comes in contact with the inhabitants. Wives are dishonored by some of its members when husbands are away for business, medical treatment, worship, etc. Cattle are confiscated or slaughtered for meat. There have also been several incidents in the towns of soldiers refusing to pay for what they ate or drank. When rural people report the incidents and demand justice, they are made to wait at the party's gate for a week. And as administrators are fearful to take action, saying 'How dare we accuse the army," the people's complaints are left unattended. As a result, people feel alienated from the government."[104]

Despite the committee's verdict that the military's defeat in Tigray was "a national failure," it is hardly debatable that it was to a large degree the cumulative result of organizational weaknesses and tactical blunders. Having outrageously prefaced its report by saying that one of its aims was to protect the regime from

"blame or criticism," the committee nonetheless rightly embraced Colonel Amdessa Gemtessa's view that Shire was "the result of a collection of immensely complex and interrelated adverse factors, and therefore no individual or group should be held solely responsible."[105] A search for scapegoats would have indeed concealed fundamental organizational defects in the national war machine; Shire was a monumental failure of the entire system. Nevertheless, good or bad commanders do make a difference in whether battles are won or lost. With that in mind, Mengistu's committee censored Legesse Asfaw for his interference and Mulatu Negash for abandoning his troops in the midst of battle. It recommended that both men be indicted.[106]

These men led the army to a humiliating and crushing defeat but deserted it under fire. Their staying may not have changed the outcome, but their escape from the battlefield hastened the breakdown of the Fourth Division, the one unit that had held the assailants at bay. Mulatu had the unenviable choice of honor in death or disrepute in life. He opted for self-preservation with a tarnished reputation as the first "revolutionary general" to flee from the battlefield. Although he was reprimanded and jailed for a while, neither man was indicted, for, by charging them, Mengistu would have impeached himself before the nation and history. That is something that was not characteristic of him and that no dictator would have hazarded.[107]

Shire was as astonishing as it was epochal. Rarely has a military defeat been as unexpected, as complete, and as unredeemable. What was planned and hoped for did not happen and what was not anticipated did. Mengistu conceded that the defeat had drastically altered the military and political situation in the country: "Of all the debacles we have suffered in the last fourteen years, this is the biggest. It has upset the balance of forces between us and the anti-people [organizations] in the region. It is depressing and agonizing."[108] The president nonetheless continued to bluster: "I do not accept the view that the bandits of Tigray could topple this government."[109] It would take the insurgents a little over two years to prove him wrong yet again.

10

Massawa: The Denouement

The task of war is to overwhelm the enemy's manpower. This can be achieved only by means of a blow.

—*Leon Trotsky*

There is then no factor in war that rivals the battle in importance. And the greatest strategic skill will be displayed in creating the right conditions for it, choosing the right place, time, and line of advance, and making the fullest use of its results.

—*Karl von Clausewitz*

The strength of an army, like the power in mechanics, is estimated by multiplying the mass by the rapidity; a rapid march augments the morale of an army, and increases its means of victory. Press on!

—*Napoleon Bonaparte*

Following a brief hiatus after Shire, the EPLF and TPLF went on the offensive to finish off a depleted and evidently demoralized army. They were fired up by their staggering successive victories. Shire opened the way to southern Ethiopia while tightening the noose around the SRA in Eritrea, a noose that grew more constricting with the loss of Massawa in 1990. On the other front, the EPRDF delivered a blow to the TRA at Dabre Tabor and was inching closer to the Abay gorge, which separates northern and southern Ethiopia. It would be a matter of months before the whole south and Eritrea were lost to the insurgents. If Af Abet was the harbinger and Shire the accelerator, Massawa was the denouement of the destruction of the revolutionary army and the consummation of the civil

wars. Between 1988 and 1990, conflicts large and small, each one presenting painful choices to the Ethiopian military leadership, led to the final, "terrible" resolution in 1991.

FROM NAKFA TO ASMARA

Almost exactly two years after the EPLF moved to the strategic offensive following its capture of Af Abet in 1988, it won its second most important victory by seizing the city and port of Massawa. The assault was as methodical as the earlier one, conducted in utmost secrecy, with utmost speed, and utmost concentration of forces. Its aim was to hit and destroy the enemy's "center of gravity," to use a Clausewitzian phrase. The Ethiopian military had assumed that any enemy offensive was likely to have as its aim the occupation not of Massawa but of Keren, a strategic town long garrisoned. Until then it had focused mainly on defending Keren. It might also have been distracted by the long respite from major combat it had enjoyed, as well as by the failed peace mediations of the Italian Communist Party and former president Jimmy Carter in the spring of 1989. In any case, the army was caught by complete surprise.[1] And as in Af Abet, it lost the main part of the battle in the first three days of fighting. But it did not capitulate until after a week of uncoordinated but fierce resistance.

The EPLF's failure in 1977 and success in 1990 are instructive lessons in protracted warfare. The front miscalculated when, before attaining a favorable balance of forces, it waged a large-scale battle to overrun Massawa on December 23, 1977. Two hundred of its fighters were dead and four hundred wounded, a wanton sacrifice for an operation prematurely undertaken.[2] Thirteen years later, the EPLF was better prepared for massive conventional warfare.[3]

Why did the EPLF invest so much in the place, and why it and not Keren this time? One of Ethiopia's two major ports and home of the naval base, Massawa is connected to Asmara, seat of the SRA, by a 115-kilometer road that winds through a dramatic landscape that rises to 2,400 meters above sea level. Massawa is composed of four sections. On the mainland is the dilapidated town of Edaga, connected to the historic city's residential area of Tualet by a causeway; a shorter causeway joins Tualet with another island, where the port facility is located. To the north of Edaga, jutting out into the Red Sea, is the Ghirar peninsula, the location of the naval academy and the city's hospital. To capture Massawa would be to choke the SRA and to inflict irreparable military and psychological damage on the regime.

The assault on Massawa was well timed, coming on the eve of the naval academy's annual graduation ceremony, a festive day in the city when Ethiopia's

Please see print version for image

war fleet was in the harbor for the occasion. So unprepared were the government and its army that its own troops battled one another.

Operation Fenkel was launched on the night of February 8, 1990, when the armed forces were at a low level of readiness. Highly mobile and well-coordinated infantry, supported by armored and mechanized units for which the Semhar plain was superbly suited, opened their offensive from Sheeb (where they demolished the Sixth Division's advance headquarters, eighty-six kilometers from Massawa) along two directions. They began wide outflanking movements along the ridges on the western and eastern sides. One unit rushed toward Weqiro on the left while the main column raced towards Ghedghed, where it split into three. The right wing swerved to Adi Ile to outflank the Sixth, or Nebelbal, Infantry Division of the 606th Corps at Adishum and the left wing headed for Sehatit. The central unit marched straight to the division's command post. The attackers, led by Philipos and Wichu (two of the three men who directed the assault on Af Abet), as well as Haile Samuel (China) and Gabrehiwet Zemikael (Wedi Liqe),

commander of the esteemed Fifty-first Division, broke right through the main defense line stretching from Mirara on the west to a midpoint between Weqiro and Imberemi on the east where the Thirty-third and 505th Brigades were located. They had the enormous advantage of stealth, speed, and short, uninterrupted lines of communication against troops whose lines were thinly held.

Although the Twenty-first, Eighty-third, 112th, and 113th Brigades to their far left were thrown off balance and suffered heavily, resistance was fierce. It took the EPLA more than five hours to throw them back. The survivors retreated hastily and in confusion to Dengolo, southwest of Massawa, Dogali, and Gurgusum. (Dogali is the famous site where Ras Alula, one of Africa's great generals, demolished an Italian contingent in 1887. Gurgusum is better known for its beautiful beaches.) The EPLA pursued them without letup, using its armored and mobile formations to seize the army's corps at Dengolo and Dogali and to cut the Asmara-Massawa route at Gahtelay. It achieved its objective of smashing the army, but not without a fight. The Third Mechanized Division, under Brigadier General Ali Haji Abdulah and supported by the Fourth Tank Brigade, held its ground, beating back repeated attacks. Then it crumpled. The Eighteenth Infantry Division, one of the military's two most highly respected units, and two mechanized brigades that were dispatched from Asmara to rescue the brigades were thrown back to Ghinda. The Twenty-seventh Mechanized Brigade, which was rushed from Forto, on the city's outskirts, to assist the Twenty-ninth Mechanized Brigade, was similarly beaten back before it could reach Dogali. The attackers kept the defenders disoriented and unable to dig in. It must have been a nightmare for the command staff to try to coordinate the various units and extremely difficult for the troops themselves to get a sense of the big picture and reinforce those already battered. The EPLF kept rolling on the main route to within twenty kilometers of the city, drawing only minimum resistance. Not even MiG-21s and -23s could deter it. The defenders could do little to slow, let alone halt, it. The commander of the 606th Corps, Brigadier General Tilahun Kifle, established a new command post approximately ten kilometers from the coastline to refit the unit and recuperate. Two days after the start of armed hostilities, Dengolo, Dogali, and Gurgusum were lost. The government troops were now hemmed in between a ferocious advancing enemy and the sea.

A brief lull gave the army a chance to regroup its troops and attempt to save itself from annihilation. The third phase of the battle for Massawa commenced on February 10, though on the ninth the EPLA's marine forces suddenly attacked the naval base from 2000 to 2200 hours, when, according to an eyewitness account, the night turned "fiercely dark and quiet."[4] This attack probably was intended to terrify the seamen as well as to distract the main forces on the mainland, who were waiting for the life-and-death battle that began at dawn

of the next day. What followed was perhaps the biggest and most violent mechanized battle of the war. Perhaps ninety tanks of the military and about fifty of the EPLF's were involved. Sergeant Tadesse Tele Salvano of the Ethiopian army saw the fighting as "a replay" of the German-Russian confrontations of World War II. The combat area stretched from Gurgusum to the vicinity of the city, which was "covered with corpses." Several gun positions exploded in a burst of flames and smoke. It was as if "a volcano eruption [had] created a daytime darkness," Tadesse, an eyewitness, said. "Our troops," he lamented, "suffered a sharp drop in morale."[5] The attackers overran the fortifications. Apparently hampered by both a command breakdown and a communications blackout, the exhausted, disorganized troops split into two groups, abandoning the Sixth Division's headquarters. One half, led by Generals Kifle and Ali, sought refuge at the naval base and the other half, led by the defiant commander of Nebelbal, Brigadier General Teshome Tessema, withdrew to Tualet with all the tanks, vehicles, and weapons it could muster. By 1730 hours, the fighting had subsided, although it continued to flare up sporadically into the night. Edaga was fully controlled by the EPLF. Tualet and the base were under tight siege from land and sea, their defenders waiting for reinforcements that never showed up, except for the air force, which did not save them. The clock was ticking, the inescapable hour of total defeat close at hand.

Without much respite, the EPLF moved to take over the naval base. First, to test the seamen and all the soldiers who had joined them the previous day, it sent in, at 1600 hours on February 11, two tanks flying the Ethiopian flag and shooting to the rear to disguise themselves. They did much damage and caused many casualties inside the base; at least thirty-five marine commandos were killed. The EPLF's land forces and flotilla of speedboats fired salvos of artillery and mortar shells, about two hundred shells a minute, to create more fear and confusion. Then, before it sent in its armored and commando units on February 12 at 1100 hours to subdue the defenders, the navy suffered a serious setback. Units of the special commando Spartakiad were flown on the eleventh from Asmara to the Dahlak archipelago, sixty-six kilometers off the coast, and then taken to the naval base at night as reinforcements. In the midst of the confusion and communications breakdown, they mistook the seamen arrayed in foxholes to guard the first defense lines for rebel infiltrators and started slaughtering them with knives, grenades, and bayonets.[6] What should have been a rescue mission turned into a bloody night of knives. It was the prelude to a bigger massacre. The air force tried to deter the rebels by raining down bombs, only increasing the mayhem. Much of the bombing was inaccurate, causing civilian casualties and property damage. The hospital, the Sedaw electric power plant, the cement factory, the navy's fuel depot, and the Mobil and AGIP stations were set ablaze, sending up

black smoke that shrouded the whole area. Meanwhile, the combatants fought at close range, once again using bayonets, hand grenades, and knives. The fighting was "fearsome and harrowing," with men chasing, stabbing, and killing one another in a state of frenzy. The EPLF called in reinforcements and by early in the morning it had brought the base under its control.[7]

There was no slackening. Through the thirteenth, the attackers pounded the city of Tualet and the nearby port with artillery and mortars from land and sea. To spare the city and its dwellers more devastation, the front sought to induce the army commander to surrender. On the fourteenth, the EPLF sent a letter through two of its prisoners to General Teshome. The messengers crossed the causeway by waving white flags. The message advised the general to "surrender peacefully by February 15, 1990. Since no help can reach you by land or sea, you have no choice but to surrender. Surrender to the EPLF and we will arrange for you to go to whatever country you wish. The EPLF will take responsibility for your welfare. We urge you to release the inhabitants of Massawa. If this is not done within twelve hours, you and your staff officers will be held accountable for the ensuing losses."[8] The letter was apparently dictated, possibly under duress, and signed by Kifle and Ali, Teshome's colleagues but now prisoners of the EPLF. Teshome tossed it aside and vowed to fight to the finish. He would die with his finger on the trigger, a great hero to his latter-day admirers.[9] The EPLF responded by shelling Tualet with artillery, tank, and antiaircraft guns. As it attacked relentlessly, the air force dropped bombs, killing civilians and their fellow soldiers. "The revolutionary army and the inhabitants were terrified," Tadesse Tele Salvano later wrote. "The army sustained heavy casualties. The streets were filled with corpses and there was no one to bury them. A horrible stench pervaded the area. Many soldiers drowned themselves by jumping into the sea. There were corpses on the land, corpses in the sea. Most of the structures at the port and the houses in the city caught fire from the air bombardment. The area was polluted with the stench of the dead and the smoke of burning fuel."[10] The city and its inhabitants were made to endure such devastation until the morning of February 16, when the EPLA's armored and mobile units moved swiftly along the causeway. Sporadic fighting continued until 1600 hours, when the guns fell silent. It was suddenly and eerily quiet, but not for long. The battle for Massawa was over. The defeat was thorough, catastrophic, and irredeemable. The vengeful bombing that went on until the end of March, destroying most of the great historic buildings of Islamic architecture, would not change the disastrous outcome. The main reason the insurgents had achieved their objective so swiftly and at so relatively little cost in life and equipment was simply that at every level and in every department they surpassed the armed forces. Their strategy and

tactics and their coordination of infantry, artillery, tank, and naval forces proved superior to those of the enemy.

It was a monumental strategic defeat, perhaps bigger than the setback at Shire the previous year. A former naval officer has reflected that, "without exaggeration, of all the battles fought against Shaabia none was as devastating and harrowing as that of Massawa."[11] Isaias Afewerki of the victorious army seems to concur when he reflects that it was "a victory of the greatest strategic value in the struggle's history."[12] Mengistu elaborated how far-reaching the consequences were: "The defeat at Massawa was the major reason for the collapse of the army. Massawa shielded Asmara. Its occupation [by the enemy] was decisive. Even if we lost Asmara we could always recoup for as long as we controlled the seas and fed our forces. But to lose Massawa was effectively to lose Eritrea. After the capture of the port we could supply our forces by air only, but we do not manufacture planes, nor do we produce oil. All logistics and all foodstuffs for the army and the populace, from salt to sugar, had to be delivered by air. The air force could not do it alone and so we used Ethiopian Airlines. We even rented from abroad. It was not enough. That was when the war ended."[13]

Both sides had sustained heavy casualties but no exact statistics exist. Of the more than seventeen thousand soldiers who fought in the battle, eight thousand, including two generals, were taken prisoners.[14] We also know that one of the ships the rebels destroyed may have been carrying over a thousand wounded soldiers.[15] The rest were unaccounted for. On the Ethiopian side, the list of high-ranking officers included the commander of the Sixth Division, General Teshome; the deputy commander of the Third Mechanized Division, Colonel Belay Aschenaki; the commandant of the navy, Commodore Belete Belege; and his deputies Commodores Haile Mikael Kebede and Getahun Siyum and Captains Tesfaye Makonnen and Tesfaye Kebede. Only fifty-two sailors made it safely to Asmara. Of the eighty tanks the EPLF seized, twenty-four were intact; it also captured eight BM-21 rocket launchers and over twenty thousand heavy and light weapons. The air force lost three MiG jet fighters.[16]

Ethiopia was partially landlocked; a complete blockade lay one year in the future. The Fenkel offensive was, in many ways, the penultimate phase, or even the watershed event of the conflicts. No one could foresee how and exactly when they would be over, but it was apparent that the end of the civil wars was within sight. After Massawa, triumph for the rebels could only be a question of time. In war, victory is achieved when the enemy is completely defeated on the battlefield, and for the insurgents that meant the annihilation of the most important units of the Ethiopian military—the SRA and TRA—and the seizure of the first and second centers of gravity, Addis Ababa and Asmara. The EPLF and EPRDF

were determined to sustain the initiative by attacking the armies on the northern and southern fronts simultaneously, unsparingly, and continuously to ensure rapid exploitation of localized successes. The gesture of peace they made was only for propaganda purposes. The next big success belonged to the EPRDF at Dabre Tabor. It was supported by the EPLF.

FROM DEDEBIT TO ADDIS ABABA

During the two years between the fall of Tigray and the opening of the final offensive to seize the military regime's main center of gravity, the TPLF, along with its junior allies in the EPRDF, set out to destroy the two corps that stood in its path to Addis Ababa. Invigorated by the victory at Shire, the united front carried out two campaigns known as "Peace through Struggle" (*Selam ba Tigil*) and the "Torch of the EPRDF's Unity" (*Fana Ihadeg Semrit*) farther south. The first operation manhandled the already depleted 604th Corps in southern Wello in 1989. That same year, the EPRDF made forays into northern Shewa to do political work among the yet untested provincial peasantry. Its incursion into southern Gondar was stalled at Ghuna, a very rugged area to the east of Dabre Tabor, capital of the southern zone, where the mountains soar to 4,000 meters. The operation was undertaken between October and December, a particularly cold period. After two months of intermittent fighting, the rebels succumbed to the freezing cold and the enemy's counterpunches.[17] They withdrew and suspended all military offensives for a year to evaluate their mistakes, resolve internal conflicts, and make better plans and preparations for the final onslaught, which would take them all the way to the nation's capital.

The united front used the year 1990 for strategic adjustment and tactical reinforcement. The TPLF held its third congress and the EPRDF its first on January 27, 1990. In the early phase of its life, the TPLF expelled its rivals from Tigray, calling upon other nationalities to wage similar struggles on their own turfs. That exhortation came to haunt it when fifteen to twenty-five thousand peasant fighters abandoned the offensive at Dabre Tabor and returned home, arguing that it was not their business to "liberate others." Interestingly, the TPLF mocked them as "narrow nationalists" and begun a year's work of political reorientation, or reindoctrination. The Tigrayan masses, which had so enthusiastically and at such great sacrifice supported a successful ethnonationalist movement, had to be persuaded that their triumphant ethnonationalism would be neither safe nor sufficient for full "liberation" unless the military dictatorship was obliterated.[18] The point was that national liberation would be incomplete without state power, the TPLF's driving motive. On the military side, the EPRDF upgraded

the combat capabilities of its forces by retraining, reorganizing, and refitting its tank unit. It also raised a commando force specializing in the control of urban riots, while moving heavy weapons and supplies by trucks, camels, mules, and donkeys to the southern front. Since the expedition required an adequate ratio of force to space (and to the enemy's own force), it substantially increased its army by recruiting more peasants and integrating as many as 10,000 prisoners. The military estimated the front's total manpower at 86,347 and the combined forces of the EPRDF and EPLF at 157,000 to its own 299,000.[19] The EPRDF's alone may have exceeded 100,000.[20]

Without abandoning the counteroffensive in the north, the government, too, made some structural changes in the hope that they would help remedy an irredeemable situation. Before it even recovered its equilibrium, the SRA tried futilely to reopen the Asmara-Massawa road and recapture the port. Two weeks after its colossal loss, it fought for ten hours at Ghinda only to suffer about three thousand casualties.[21] It lost Adikeyh and Segenayti and could not even protect the provincial capital, particularly its international airport, from routine shelling. In the political sphere, the government abandoned socialism, embraced a multiparty system, and toyed with diplomacy to end the conflicts. But, convinced that the insurgents would not bend at that stage, Mengistu proposed a "people's war" that would be augmented by 500,000 newly trained militiamen and 100,000 regulars. He thought that the events of 1977 could be repeated, although some of his comrades had warned him that that was a pipe dream.[22] The following excerpts from a meeting of the Politburo clearly shows how perturbed the leadership was by the death throes of the regime.

> Alemu Abebe: A transitional phase ought to be inaugurated.
>
> Shimeles Mazengia: The question of a transitional government should be conditional on gaining the military upper hand. Using Addis Ababa as our center, we should establish security first even if it means using children to obtain public trust.
>
> Fasika Sidelel: Fifteen years of rule have created contradictions. It is difficult to think that the public will "automatically" change its image of us. Conditions are changing fast. Some public organizations, like the AMC [Agricultural Marketing Corporation], must be abolished. Nothing else will save us. . . . The superpowers are decisive. I believe that today the EPLF does not wish to talk to us about federation.
>
> Kassa Gabre: We have no choice but to fight on as best we can. The population does not support the war. . . . Who would lead the revolution should we abandon it? We simply cannot fill an airplane and flee. We must lead the army and the people until death.

Hailu Yimenu: It is evident that we have many problems with the army and the populace. For us the solution is more war. The TPLF is stoppable.

Mengistu Haile Mariam: Comrades, we must struggle democratically, politically, and militarily. The army alone cannot save Bahir Dar, Gojjam, and Massawa. . . . Our own representatives have become corrupt swindlers; we are incriminated because they do not present our good work correctly to the people. Although there is democracy, and leadership is collective, the hatred is directed at one person . . . In fact, the people can be criticized. The people should have picked up their guns without our pleading. They fight not voluntarily but only if forced. . . . The great Tewodros killed himself with his own pistol because he felt betrayed by his own people. Only Menelik enjoyed public support. . . . Comrades, honestly speaking, while we can take pride in our people, they are also wavering and treacherous. . . . The people must understand the magnitude of the difficulties we face and decide for themselves.

Fasika Sidelel: When everything is said, what can we do that the army cannot do? Whatever we do now is all useless. Comrade Chairman, as far as I can understand, we no longer have power. When the people are letting the enemy in, how can we say, "Let the people decide"? To allow the enemy in is to become the enemy. Therefore, only when the army stands firm and fights well can we exert our authority. The people hate the AMC. Let's dismantle it and let the people know that.

Alemu Abebe: The AMC is an organization that was established by the government. Caution must be exercised when its abolition is called for. We have also to consider the commotion that can create.

Mengistu Haile Mariam: Whatever we do, let's not do it in panic.[23]

Fasika Sidelel's assessment was prescient, but if he genuinely believed that the elimination of the AMC would placate the public then he was naive. What the people wanted was the regime's liquidation. The regime was totally alienated and faced the bleak prospect of complete defeat. The last rites of the dictatorship were in the hands of the military, which had lost the will to fight. Yet the delusional Mengistu still believed that he could mobilize another 600,000 men. And even those who were convinced that that was another strategic error of the first magnitude went along with him.[24] They would all be humiliated.

What followed was a politico-military maneuver that was smartly planned and skillfully coordinated with the EPLF, which provided some 340 men from its mechanized units for the crusade, according to Tsadkan Gabre Tensae. Following the military's dreary defeat at Massawa, the EPLF and EPRDF had concluded that it was on its last legs and would collapse under relentless pressure at

both ends—an assessment that was wholly accurate. The expedition was accomplished in three rapid successive campaigns that took barely three months.

The offensive was directed from Hagereselam, Tembien, by the gifted tacticians Siye and Meles with the assistance of other Politburo members (Abay, Sibhat, Tewolde, and Tamrat Layne) and competent coordination at the war fronts by Tsadkan, soon to become general and chief of staff of a new army. The battles were fought in two main theaters separated by mountain barriers and escarpments. The principal field commanders were Hayelom and Samora, who were assisted by several equally experienced, bold, and decisive men, including Abebe (Jobe), Seaare, Yohannes, Migbe Haile, and Haile Tilahun. The terrain was more suited to a highly mobile army like theirs; it minimized technological superiority by rendering aircraft and tanks less effective. South-central Ethiopia is defined, as is much of the north, by prominent mountains intersected by narrow river valleys and hemmed by vast lowland plains, parts of which are thickly forested, unlike the barren north. The contested area, which extended for over a thousand kilometers from the western to the eastern wings, was ideal for camouflage and surprise attacks, which perfectly suited the rebel army.

The military had correctly evaluated the operational and tactical goals of the EPRDF and knew that the fighting would be decisive. The EPRDF's aim was to isolate the 603rd and 605th Corps from each other and from their companion units in Shewa by blocking the Addis Ababa–Desie road at Tarmabar and the Addis Ababa–Bahir Dar road at Gohatsion and then attacking the dispersed units piecemeal. But its expectation that the united rebel forces would first attack on the southern Wello front was wrong. The EPRDF had assembled the bulk of its combat force there as a deception tactic.[25] Instead, it opened its offensive on the Gondar front and carried it through successfully.

On February 23, 1991, a year after the fall of Massawa, the EPRDF launched Operation Tewodros and set off on a two-thousand-kilometer journey across challenging terrain of mountains, gorges, and forests; hundreds of its foot soldiers died from disease, bitter cold, sweltering heat, thirst, and exhaustion, not to say from enemy fire. The name of the operation and the date of its launching had symbolic significance. February is the month when the TPLF was born and Tewodros II was the emperor (1855–68) who first imagined a unified, modernized Ethiopia. The government had portrayed the TPLF, the EPRFD's core, as the EPLF's pawn, an organization dedicated to the destruction of the national state. By embracing Tewodros, the TPLF appeared to make a statement: that there was no inherent conflict between its fervent ethnonationalism and Ethiopian nationalism and that it was nobody's dupe. It was an ingenious gesture that

may have won many over as the rebels marched southward. But few of the skeptics were convinced or converted.

The rebels mounted a well-coordinated ground offensive, using the terrain to their advantage. Their goal was to destroy the opponent physically with as few decisive battles as possible. They moved into action with blinding speed and intensity, forcing the military to engage in a consuming defensive fight that it could not win. The art of war is in the legs, says a military axiom, and the rebels' ability to cover large distances quickly and stealthily proved vital to their success. Using diversionary tactics, they seized important heights and massed their forces and weapons at decisive points. Their tactics depended on rapid maneuvers of forces and fire against relatively small, dispersed units, and the attacks were mounted where and when least expected. They faced infantry and mechanized divisions that were supported by aviation, BM rocket launchers, and self-propelled artillery whose effectiveness was compromised by the stark mountains and rifts, which allowed for surprise while providing protection from air strikes and artillery shells. Through their terrifying *qoretta* tactics of ambush and envelopment, they were able to quash the 603rd Corps in exactly two weeks.

What has come to be known as the second battle of Dabre Tabor was not one big, decisive engagement but a series of skirmishes. The fighting begun on February 23 and ended on March 8, 1990, with the virtual collapse of the 603rd Corps. It consisted of two phases: the first lasted only a day and the second stretched from February 24 to March 8.

The rebels' first objective was to neutralize the Fourth Mechanized Division, the corps' main arm, and to seize Bahir Dar. At sunrise on February 23, they opened a vicious two-pronged attack against the division's forward units, which were arrayed in the vicinity of Dabre Tabor. The defenders were unprepared for the blow and gave way to panic. They were quickly dislodged from the ridges and kept falling back toward Hamusit. The assailants bypassed and neutralized strong points as they advanced. The military summoned air support from as far as Dire Dawa to augment the infantry's faltering efforts. Not even the demolition of the Bahir Dar bridge slowed the assailants. And its destruction made the situation in Gondar more precarious. Now supplies could only be ferried by boats to Gorgora and flown in. But there were few boats, and planes were at risk of being shot down by antiaircraft guns mounted on hilltops in the vicinity of the city. With the capture of Bahir Dar around 1810 hours, the rebels had swiftly accomplished the first part of their goal.[26] The loss of the Bahir Dar airport made the army's tactical and logistic situation in Eritrea more desperate.

Realizing its second objective proved more strenuous for the EPRDF. The

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ardor of the Ethiopian troops in that sector was greater, perhaps because they were protecting the corps' headquarters, as well as a historic city with enormous symbolic significance. The rebels were surprised by the fierce resistance they met. The offensive to capture Gondar began in the south at dawn on the twenty-fourth with large barrages of artillery from mobile batteries. But the Twenty-fifth Infantry Division and its supporting motorized and tank brigades doggedly held their ground, if only for a while. The rebels moved from Woreta and divided in two. The main force advanced parallel to the main road and the other curved westward to Gorgora, on the northern shore of Lake Tana, to form the western flank. As the two forces advanced, another was moved from Ambagiorgis, to the north of Gondar. The army soon found itself overstretched and unable to cope with the mobility and envelopment of its assailants. Constantly confusing it with false moves, the rebels pinned the army in certain places, while flanking it with the bulk of their force. Where the troops expected an attack from the south, they were struck from the north and west. Fighter jets and helicopter gunships assisted but could not turn the tide. In a futile effort to relieve the pressure on the corps by creating havoc in the TPLF's rear, the Fourth Infantry Division, supported by four brigades of the Yohannes and Zeraay Derass People's Militia, crossed the Merab from Eritrea under cover of darkness and thrust into Tigray. The force was encircled and crushed near Adwa. It had been a risky tactical gamble that would not have changed the equation even had it succeeded. Air support improved a desperate situation marginally and, as it turned out, only temporarily. The corps was so badly mangled that it was no longer a menace. In the face of imminent encirclement, it disintegrated, losing all contact with MOND near sunset on March 8. Gondar had fallen, and with it practically the whole northwestern region was lost.

A change of command in the midst of combat could neither save the military nor conceal the magnitude of its defeat. On March 6, the commander of the 603rd Corps, Brigadier General Abebe Haile Selassie, was removed from his post and replaced by Brigadier General Assefa Mossissa, who was immediately replaced by Brigadier General Wassihun Nigatu. Major General Asrat Birru, former inspector general of the armed forces, was appointed overall commander of the northwestern command. Operating under a series of false assumptions and vague orders, the men were placed in an untenable situation and without much resistance crossed the Abay into Wellega. Mengistu saw the hasty retreat as ignoble and had Asrat and Wassihun thrown in jail. Remnants of the corps were reorganized and reinforcements sent to form a new defensive line at Kerimu, Wellega, under Brigadier General Getachew Gedamu, brought from the eastern front, but to no avail. Before the troops could recover from their stress and

fatigue and consolidate their feeble position, the EPRDF initiated, late in the month, its "Equality and Freedom" campaign (or, in Orominiya, *Dula Billisuma Welkita*), which would take it across the Abay, or Blue Nile, River, deep into the south and southwestern regions without much effort. The EPRDF forces marched across Wellega and Jimma before heading toward Addis Ababa to join their comrades of the eastern front in May. In disbelief, the commander in chief acknowledged that, "even to a lifetime soldier like me, this sort of swift change can only be described as fairy tale."[27] Inability to perceive reality had been Mengistu's problem all along.

Why did an army of over twenty-six thousand soldiers fall so easily?[28] Besides identifying several technical difficulties, Abebe Haile Selassie stresses three crucial factors. First, he laments the transfer to Eritrea of the Fifteenth Infantry Division and the special Third Commando Brigade, both with excellent combat records, on the eve of the battle. He claims, too, that each of the eight brigades that the EPRDF had assembled consisted of more men than its counterpart in the army. Second, he asserts that "more than 60 percent of the rebel fighters are intensely committed to their cause. Resolute fighters, they are also led by dedicated and capable men. Our fresh recruits and the people's militia, by contrast, are largely conscripts seen off by tearful mothers, their psyches and morale crippled by enemy propaganda. These ill-trained farmers cannot even communicate with one another in a common language. These are the ones that infect the regulars as they are prone to easy extinguishment."[29] Finally, he says, the bulk of the peasantry supported the rebels and "mocks us as the army of the Derg."[30] His is authentic, verifiable testimony and no other field commander stated the case as plainly or forcefully as Abebe. There was one serious factor he omitted, though: his own role.

The battle of Dabre Tabor got off to a bad start with Abebe's appointment to command of the 603rd Corps, an important post for which he did not have the requisite experience, even though he was a graduate of the Harar Academy. His appointment was a glaring mistake that MOND recognized only late in the game, and it was a mistake that clearly showed the military's extraordinary difficulty in planning, coordinating, and executing operations. Under Abebe's erratic command, the army was unable to deliver a hard counterblow that might have robbed the rebels of the initiative and restored the offensive to itself. This was a commander who could neither exert his authority over subordinates nor inspire a body of soldiers who were reluctant to fight. In fairness to him, more experienced and competent commanders on the Wello front did not fare any better. The chief of staff was therefore completely wrong when he tried to put the whole blame on Abebe by saying "that the defeat was a failure of leadership,

there is no question."[31] It was a structural failure, which in turn reflected the general apathy and skepticism at the rear.

The EPRDF shifted its axis of advance to the eastern corridor of the country and in April inaugurated Operation Wallelign in memory of the fiery student from Wello who brought the issue of Ethiopia's nationalities out into the open. The campaign's objective was to cut the line of communication and supply between Assab and Addis Ababa, demolish the seven infantry divisions arrayed in that sector, and then link with the western wing at the nation's capital. It was scarcely surprising that when the rebels opened the offensive the four divisions in Wello began to wilt. Yet again and again the official communiqué would announce that an operation had been successfully concluded when it was fairly evident that the army was retreating or losing. The rebels zoomed across Wichale—the infamous place where an Italian emissary induced the emperor Menelik II to sign a treaty with Italy in 1889—into Dessie, Wello's capital, which was captured at 1500 hours on May 18. Only at the strategic points of Tarmabar—a tunnel between Dabre Sina, a small town on the mountainside, and Dabre Berhan—and Meragna did the Third Division, under Colonel Sereke Berhan, make a last-ditch effort to stave off the complete collapse of the army. A graduate of the Harar Academy and of Indian and Russian military institutes, Sereke had distinguished himself as a competent officer in the major northern battles. Even his nemesis, Hayelom Araya, expressed respect for his "military qualities: a gift of instilling unit pride and of commanding loyalty that moved men to drop everything to follow him into battle no matter the odds."[32] But not even this seasoned commander, who enjoyed the admiration and devotion of his staff and men, could save the day for the military. After Meragna, the prospects of defeat and of the war's being brought to the capital loomed very large indeed.[33] When the rapidly advancing guerrillas reached Dabre Berhan, only eighty kilometers north of Addis Ababa, an elderly man of high profile is said to have expressed the public sense of awe and puzzlement: "It is hard to believe what we are seeing. A whole country is being overtaken by children on camels, mules, and donkeys. Where are the fat, boastful generals? Where are the jets, the tanks, and the rockets? Lies, lies, lies! A system built on a heap of lies has vanished!"[34] The insurgents pressed on to within a short distance of Addis Ababa. On the western front, the rebels had passed the last geographic obstacles to take Ambo, 125 kilometers west of the capital, on April 25. After some fierce fighting, the newly organized Tewodros Task Force of four infantry divisions and one mechanized brigade under Major General Mardassa Lelissa was destroyed, sustaining more than five thousand casualties (out of a total force of sixty-five thousand). The remnants—footsore, enfeebled by hunger, and wasted by sickness—were busy fleeing toward the capital,

which was gripped by fear. Nothing the army could have done at that stage could have altered the situation. It was routed by an enemy that knew exactly its basic weaknesses, had made thorough preparations, and had employed superior tactics and intelligence. The army dissolved in spite of vast unoccupied territory. Morale and will had been exhausted. Of course, the causes of defeat were many, none more important than the eventual collapse of popular support for the wars. What better testimony than the nonexistence of resistance by the people anywhere in the country. Actually, except in two or three locales in Gondar and Gojjam, the peasantry cooperated with the EPRDF forces as they marched toward the first "center of gravity." The government was so despised that much of the populace was apathetic or ready to welcome any alternative as preferable.

In the north, the SRA was on the verge of collapse when Mengistu ran for his life. For four days, it fought the last major battle, which began on May 19 at Dekemhare, forty kilometers southeast of Asmara. On the morning of May 21, Mengistu fled the country. Two days later, the commander of the SRA, Major General Hussein Ahmed, also took flight, precipitating the disintegration of a force of 123,000 men with the largest amount of weaponry in the country. The EPLF captured Asmara on the twenty-fourth, the independence day of Eritrea, soon to be a sovereign state. Assab was overtaken the next day, and Ethiopia became a landlocked nation.[35] Thousands of the defeated troops surrendered peacefully. Tens of thousands fled (along the Keren-Tesseney road) on foot and in vehicles they abandoned before crossing the border. Hundreds perished in the blistering desert of the Barka lowlands. The fear that Eritrean secession would create a fatal precedent of state collapse has not materialized.

In the south, Addis Ababa was virtually encircled. The US government summoned a conference in London comprising the two victorious organizations (the EPLF and EPRDF), the OLF, and a shadowy government led by the acting president, General Tesfay Gabre Kidan. The United States obviously had not fully grasped the realities on the ground, for there was nothing to mediate. The second-largest army in Africa had vanished into thin air, to the utter consternation of Ethiopians, even those who had anticipated its downfall. Rarely had a revolutionary army so large withered so rapidly and so ignominiously in the aftermath of defeat. The insurgents had no concessions to make and asked instead that the decapitated government accept an unconditional surrender. When Ethiopia's last "communist" prime minister, Tesfaye Dinka, stormed out of the conference (eventually landing a lucrative position at the World Bank), Meles is said to have remarked that the man had "nothing to offer." He was absolutely correct. The drama was over when EPRDF forces led by Tsadkan, Hayelom, Samora, Abebe, and Haile Gibe triumphantly entered Addis Ababa from three directions, in

single-file columns, on May 28. The second "communist" president of the republic (whose one-week tenure must have been one of the briefest in history), Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, sought asylum in the Italian embassy, where he stayed until his mysterious death on June 4, 2004. Overenthusiastic youths toppled Lenin's bronze statue, a gift of the Communist Party of the USSR, marking the end of Soviet dominance in the Horn and the return of the United States. The country moved full circle in its international relations. The EPRDF quickly extinguished the resistance in the presidential office of Mengistu's special guards, known to the public as the "well fed" (*qelib*). Its march from Dedebit to Addis Ababa was far longer but no more arduous than the EPLF's shorter journey from Nakfa to Asmara. Following a "national conference" on July 1–5, 1991, a transitional government headed by Meles Zenawi was formed. The thirty-year war had ended with the village overtaking the city. Mao's fundamentals of people's, or revolutionary, war had been proven correct. The revolution from below had triumphed over the revolution from above. The irony of it all, however, was that socialism, for which Ethiopian revolutionaries had slaughtered one another for nearly two decades, was abruptly dropped by the wayside. The ideological guides Marx and Lenin were shunned and Marxism-Leninism became a liability. Only Mengistu remained steadfast and unrepentant, at least outwardly.

The malevolent symbol of the revolution and civil wars was Mengistu Haile Mariam. Let us close this chapter with a few words about him. Two goals frustrated and eluded Mengistu: one, the preservation of a unitary national state through the defeat of the Eritrean separatists and ethnic autonomists and, two, the construction of a socialist state. The latter goal was, of course, one of the great delusions of the last century. Ethiopia was far less developed for socialism than Russia and the East European countries. Mengistu lost to the centrifugal forces not only for lack of a correct strategy but also, and more importantly, for lack of democratic process. Perhaps nothing was more disappointing to him than his failure to live up to what his compatriots called the "Tewodros complex." In the struggles he directed against the Afari, Oromo, Somali, Eritrean, and Tigrayan rebels, Mengistu saw himself, and was perceived by his admirers and followers, as the incarnation of Tewodros II. Defeated by traditional and reactionary social forces, Tewordros in 1868 shot himself rather than submit in humiliation to an invading British army. Mengistu's supporters earnestly expected that, like the lionhearted emperor, he would die fighting or kill himself rather than surrender to his enemies or flee the country. They were bitterly disappointed, for Mengistu was homicidal, not suicidal. A man who had vowed more than once that he would die rather than witness the separation of Eritrea, "for after that

life would not be worth living," Mengistu quietly went into exile.[36] Although he shared Tewodros's vision and patriotic intensity, Mengistu was not Tewodros. Instead of martyrdom, he sought a hermetic life in Zimbabwe, isolated from the host society and shunned by the world.

As party boss, head of the government and state, and commander in chief of the armed forces, Mengistu dominated the country, fighting his opponents with unwavering fealty to the nationalist cause. He was talented, tenacious, and tireless, wholly and ruthlessly devoted to the country's unity, supported by egalitarian principles. Of the rightness and justness of that cause he never had a doubt. Mengistu was nonetheless a rigid man whose preconceived notions no amount of contradictory evidence could sway. Every so often, he was driven more by instinct and will than by reason or imagination. His twilight world of denial and delusion caused Ethiopians incalculable suffering. In many ways, Mengistu left Ethiopia in a far worse situation than he found it. None of his predecessors accumulated power as he did and none of his successors is likely to. The eclipse of his tragic reign was truly an ending and a beginning.

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11

Conclusions

1991: ENDINGS

Our rise was spectacular; so was our fall.

—*Mengistu Haile Mariam*

It was an accurate reflection. An obscure ordnance officer in his midthirties from one of the most oppressed small communities of southern Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam was catapulted to the highest levels of state power in the midst of political turmoil in 1974. The event marked the end of monarchism and inaugurated a new era of republicanism, albeit distinguished by militarization, terror, war, misery, and dislocation, all on a scale unparalleled in the country's history. Mengistu's unceremonious exit in May 1991 was as dramatic as his unanticipated climb to power. It was also dramatic in that it marked the end of the socialist experiment just as his rise signaled the end of feudalism. The configurations of circumstances, the actions of individuals and organizations, the twists and turns of history, and the governmental miscalculations that brought about such a metamorphosis—not only in the life of this accidental leader but also in the life of the whole nation whose aspirations he shaped and by which he was shaped—have been narrated in previous chapters. This section recaptures the approximate causes of defeat and assesses the legacies of the civil wars.

Were Mengistu and the revolutionary soldiers he led fated to fail or the insurgents destined to win? The winners have sought to affirm so by forging a myth of inevitable victory. The losers have scoffed at the claim as preposterous. As their leader put it, the insurgents did not win; the army lost.[1] According to Mengistu, defeat was brought about by difficult terrain, combat fatigue, internal discord,

and perfidy or subversion from within. However, "the biggest reason for our defeat," he reminisced, "was the betrayal by some of our own who, in their eagerness to destroy their own government and party, delivered victory to the bandits on a platter."[2] This was no doubt an allusion to the failed plot of 1989, but by then both the regime and the army were terminally ill and the event merely hastened their deaths. In a country lacking a single independent news outlet, it is no wonder that many of its citizens, including some of the regime's belated critics, shared the former president's misjudgments and believed his dubious allegations.[3] Such fallen and discredited regimes have too often attributed defeat at the hands of domestic rivals or opponents to betrayal from within or subversion from without, and usually to both, rarely to their own inadequacies or ineptitude. Mengistu was saying in effect—to quote an Amharic proverb—"It was my mother's dress that tripped me!" The Ethiopian military was defeated not mainly by internal subversion or the strategic genius of any insurgent leaders. Greater factors were the motivation and tenacity of the rebel fighters and their peasant supporters, the vastness and ruggedness of the country, the discord in the officer corps and the blunders of their commander in chief, and, above all, the regime's alienation from a bitterly disenchanted population.

It is indisputable that the military was handicapped by organizational, managerial, logistical, and motivational problems. The regime raised an army that society could not support without much more suffering and acquired vast quantities of armaments that its forces could not easily master. By relying on numerical dominance, the leadership traded quantity for quality and replaced voluntary enlistment with mandatory conscription. The army suffered from inadequate training, inadequate provisions, and constant shortages of capable officers. Battalions and even brigades were led by young men who lacked the training, confidence, and willingness to accept responsibility. The military had no coherent, sustained counterinsurgency doctrine. Strategic plans adaptable to the unexpected turns of war were rarely put in place. Failing to learn from mistakes, the command could not avoid potential disasters, as in 1988 and 1989. Part of the reason was perhaps MOND's baffling reliance on Soviet "specialists" who lacked fundamental knowledge of the terrain, the people, the cultures, and popular sentiment about the conflicts, not to mention knowledge of people's wars. After all, the Soviets were being whipped in Afghanistan by the mujahideen while trying futilely to save another sinking ship in Ethiopia. MOND should have devised counterinsurgency techniques adaptable to the terrain, made use of leaner but well-trained forces using helicopters and light weapons rather than bombers and tanks, and, more importantly, sought public support and built an army that knew its *rights* and not just its duties. But as Brigadier General Abebe Haile

Selassie points out in his report of the fall of Dabre Tabor, the military paid little attention to, and learned even less from, protracted warfare.[4]

In modern wars, it is said, one fights with bulletins as much as with bayonets. With some hyperbole, MIA enunciated the regime's failure in educating its troops: "The army, particularly the rank and file, is lending its ears to the enemy's propaganda because it does not know its county's history and the meaning of the national flag well and does not know enough about our neighboring countries and their influence on us and about the rebels and their arms. Political education of the past fifteen years has focused mainly on Marxism-Leninism, to the neglect of these issues and other national, regional, and international conditions and realities and without attention to the army's problems. It has not been helpful in correcting its weaknesses."[5] The party and MOND were extremely inept at the management of information and propaganda and readily admitted that they could not match their opponents' ingenuity. The soldiers at the fronts knew almost nothing about what was going on in the country. Party papers were uninformative, repetitive, and boring. Their content bore little correspondence to the harsh conditions or changing realities on the ground. Radio Addis Ababa was restricted to official propaganda and censored news. To learn what was happening in their immediate neighborhoods and in the country at large, the troops began to tune in to rebel radios. Rebel propaganda proved seductive and disarming. An increasing number of soldiers began to harbor sympathy and even admiration for their opponents, born out of respect for the rebels' dedication and tenacity in the face of hardships greater than their own. And in contrast to the insurgents, who took part in inner-party debates, the average Ethiopian soldier knew little about his rights and was forbidden to comment on, much less to criticize, the military's hierarchical command, the party, or the government. The most valued soldier was not the keenest or the most inquisitive but the most submissive and uncomplaining. Dissent was ruthlessly suppressed in the name of military solidarity, party discipline, and national unity. The structure of the Ethiopian military was ill suited for protracted war against dedicated, competent, determined, politically shrewd, and militarily strong opponents whose incessant learning and versatility the revolutionary army was never able to match.

The high command was plagued by infighting and discord that prevented strategic focus and compromised the esprit de corps so vital for sustained motivation and discipline. By the late 1980s, the military had become a hollow colossus torn by rival cliques, scheming, feuding commanders, and divided loyalties. The feuds affected the troops' mood, which usually mirrored the frustrations and anxieties of the people. Particularly harmful were the complicated party-army relations, which were fraught, often hostile, and oddly ambiguous. Although the

so-called triangular command was supposed to facilitate central control, direction, and coordination, as well as foster political loyalty, in actuality it destroyed mutual trust. Sharp personal clashes and bitter jurisdictional disputes caused constant discord deleterious to the chain of command and to group cohesion. The differing pay and supply systems for regulars and nonregulars increased the rancor among the defense forces, and the fact that regulars generally looked down on the militiamen as coarse peasants was not helpful.

There were many patriotic, dedicated, and highly competent commanders, but competence without motivation and skill without will do not lead to victory. Many of the general staff became used to avarice and private luxury, avoiding the battlefield for the comforts of the city. Without leaders able to lead and commanders willing to engage, how can troops be expected to fight with motivation? One of the most intriguing aspects of the civil wars is that, despite the immense hardships and the failings of leadership, the army somehow functioned and soldiers continued fighting, though with diminishing energy and will. This was due to their fanatical commitment to the immutability of Ethiopia, to their professional pride and their loyalty to their comrades, and to their fear of both the enemy's wrath and the heavy hand of the commissars. Executions were common. Eventually, the soldiers gave in to war weariness, made worse in every conceivable way by the continuing depletion of qualified and trusted officers, the shocking fecklessness, incompetence, and cowardice of some commanders on the spot, and corrosive factionalism and political meddling. The many admirable attributes, talents, and skills of individuals could not compensate for institutional weaknesses and organizational blunders.

As prospects for victory dimmed, volunteers grew scarcer and morale and discipline slumped. The regime came to rely heavily on forcibly drafted, inadequately trained, and insufficiently provisioned men. Disheartened soldiers abandoned the cardinal belief that their cause was just and honorable and its success certain. Without conviction, patriotic fervor, a clear historical goal, and firmness of will, it proved impossible to destroy stubborn adversaries. Insubordination, drunkenness, debauchery, and desertion were the result of diminishing will. Desertions and defections were fatal. That the assault on the garrison at Af Abet coincided with the defection to the EPLF of key army personnel was not accidental. We are not as certain about what the contribution of the many prisoners, deserters, and defectors might have been to the TPLF's success at Shire. One would suspect substantial tactical input. To a considerable extent, some of the army's significant reversals were self-inflicted; otherwise, total defeat might have been avoided.

In his reminiscences, Mengistu gives no hint as to his own role in the down-

fall. On the contrary, like most out-of-office politicians, he tries to deflect blame for everything that went wrong while grabbing the lion's share of the credit for everything that went right. Operational interventions invariably made bad situations worse. National leaders often partake in the management of wars, but Mengistu's role was excessive, capricious, and counterproductive. His methods of appointment, reward, and punishment were often arbitrary when not outright devious. Loyalty rather than merit motivated his selections of men for strategic posts, many of whom were drawn from among his classmates or from his earlier military career. But, for all their political reliability, the cronies and toadies did not always make good generals or commanders. For instance, Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, who did not merit his rank and who stayed far too long as a chief of MOND, was generally regarded as a none-too-gifted tactician, let alone strategist; he was the embodiment of the incompetent, insolent, fun-loving, boss-pleasing officer. By constantly intervening, Mengistu deprived the good generals of independence, initiative, and decisiveness. His impetuosity and lack of self-restraint cost him the respect of many of his field commanders. He liked to oversee every operation, small or large, but was quick to blame his commanders in the event of failure. At times, he was rather uncouth when accusing them: "How could I lead when our generals throw off their pants and flee?[6] Strategic errors cannot be blamed on individual commanders or generals. Every major failure of the 1980s was structural, and Mengistu deserved a large share of the blame. His capriciousness and unpredictability terrified his generals, while his erratic judgments bled the army. In 1988, for example, his elimination of Tariku Ayne—who, by the commander in chief's own admission, was one of the most gifted generals assigned to the war-torn province of Eritrea—helped precipitate the first major setback there.[7] That same year, he appointed Legesse Asfaw, a polarizing figure, as his chief representative in rebellious Tigray. Vain and arrogant, Legesse frequently spurned the counsel of professionals, revoking well-considered operational plans even though he had neither the requisite practical military experience nor the competence. He was one reason for the ruin of the Third Army. Mengistu grasped for victory that his policies and actions put out of reach.

The termination of Soviet support in 1990 was damaging, too. In 1988 Mikhail Gorbachev politely but pointedly told Mengistu to seek a peaceful resolution to the Eritrean problem because the experience of a quarter of a century and the current realities did not encourage optimism for a military victory. "Let me be entirely frank," he wrote, "there simply is no alternative to a political solution, naturally within the framework of a united Ethiopian state."[8] The Soviet president also pointed out that a negotiated settlement of the enduring conflict

would release badly needed resources for economic development and the improvement of social conditions, without which the revolutionary government could not hope to win back the support of the masses.[9] With good foresight, Gorbachev was trying to remedy a terrible situation that his corrupt predecessors had helped to perpetuate. But by then the Eritrean insurgents, along with their Tigrayan allies, had broken the strategic stalemate and were less likely to settle for autonomy. For Mengistu, who had built his reputation on an uncompromising centralist stance, Eritrean independence was an option that he could not entertain. The Soviets began to diminish away their role in Ethiopia and finally ended it in early 1990. Even though their action was damaging politically and dampened the confidence of a regime that regarded itself as part of the irresistible forces of revolutionary progress, it had little immediate impact militarily. The army never lost a major engagement because of a lack of arms, munitions, or other essential supplies.

Geography was not kind to the military, however. Time and again, Mengistu professed that state forces were simultaneously combating two enemies: the insurgents and an untamed natural environment. Already mentioned has been Ethiopia's savage topography—its plateaus etched by deep gorges and its mountain ranges that rise to 15,000 feet. If the ragged hills and steep valleys were ill suited for motorized infantries, they provided the guerrillas shelter and cover from massive air strikes and artillery bombardments. In some places the heat was suffocating for the men from the south-central regions, and water was scarce. For a country nearly twice the size of France or the state of Texas, Ethiopia had only 23,812 kilometers of roads, of which fewer than four thousand were asphalted. Poor communications and the vastness of the country greatly hampered antiguerrilla efforts. The dearth of transport facilities restricted the military's mobility and efficacy, while the winding, zigzagging northern roads that the Italians built—marvels of engineering—exposed soldiers to recurrent deadly ambushes by the guerrillas. What was daunting for the military, the guerrillas were extremely adept at exploiting.

In light of the preceding, it is tempting to agree with Mengistu that the insurgents did not win, the military simply lost. That would be an egregious error, however. Although the military's efforts were undermined by its organizational deficiencies, it was emphatically beaten because it could not match the commitment, resourcefulness, and resiliency of its foes. The EPLF and TPLF were highly motivated and ruthlessly committed organizations. In contrast to the army, with its debilitating factionalism and rigidity, the fronts were remarkably cohesive and adaptable. Masterful at using the terrain to their advantage, they fought with will, purpose, patience, stealth, and speed, skillfully exploiting the

army's weaknesses and mistakes while nullifying its strengths. They won not only because enough people supported them but also because they were willing to make extraordinary sacrifices and would not consider anything less than total victory. Such stubborn devotion the military was unable to match politically or psychologically. In the end, the fronts beat a quantitatively and technically superior foe because, despite divergent goals, they supported each other tactically at critical moments. They wore down the army through guerrilla tactics and then annihilated it in conventional wars that were efficiently coordinated.

Yet none of the above shortcomings, impediments, and entangled problems can provide a full and convincing explanation of the outcomes of the civil wars without attention to politics, a most critical component of the conflicts. In wars, especially revolutionary wars, there are no boundaries between the military and the political. The military is actually an instrument of politics (or policies), which in turn can have profound repercussions on military affairs and operations. Under Mengistu's nationalistic leadership, tactics were divorced from political considerations. On the one hand, the leaders constantly confused military capability with the spirit and will of the people. In fact, they cared nothing for popular sentiment and therefore neglected the rear at their own peril. On the other hand, though in one of his poetic moments Mengistu acknowledged of the insurgents that "as guerrilla fighters no one matches them in the world," his party and government were scornful of the political aspirations or pretensions of the insurgents.[10] They saw the insurgents in purely military terms and sought to vanquish them militarily. That was the grand failure. They were too stubborn to seriously consider political solutions to the multifarious conflicts, all the time escalating and mismanaging the wars. It cannot be denied that autonomy was granted to some regions, including Tigray, and several secret meetings between the government and the EPLF were held in Europe. But what did autonomy mean under an uncompromisingly centralist and authoritarian state? And the preservation of the nation's unity was incompatible with the political aspirations of the Eritrean nationalists. To preserve it the government had to crush the insurgents, not an impossible task if not for the multiplicity of armed opposition groups that distracted and obstructed the military from accomplishing its singular mission in Eritrea. Crushing all the ethnonationalist or regional movements would, however, have required an army at least three times as big—a burden the Ethiopian peoples could not have borne—and undiminished civilian support. Only a resolution of the other conflicts would have facilitated victory in Eritrea. That called for a democratic order, unimaginable to the dictatorship.

The insurgents excelled by assigning primacy to politics. Precisely because they integrated the military with the political, social, and cultural, the victori-

ous insurgents have vouched for the inevitability of their triumph. They have consistently claimed that they succeeded because of the justness of their causes, the abiding commitment of their fighters, the support of the peasantry, and the superiority of their combat methods. One does not have to be a believer in the inexorability of people's wars to grant that the success of the insurgents was largely, but not exclusively, due to their superior organizational, mobilization, and motivational techniques. With commitment and motivation rarely equaled and never surpassed, they outlasted the military, forcing its disintegration. The problem with the notion of inevitability is that it completely disregards contingency in wars, and indeed there were moments or chances, as in 1978, 1982 and 1989, when the wind seemed to blow with the other side. Inevitability also fails to account for the many failed insurgencies in Asia and Latin America in the last century. No, insurgent victory or regime defeat was not predetermined. In the specific Ethiopian experience, three related factors made victory possible: ample mass support, sufficient military strength, and a weaker opponent. The insurgents won because they were highly driven, versatile, and skillful in the techniques of protracted warfare and had a more coherent and monolithic core, not because they were more democratic than their opponents.

The contest was not between authoritarian and democratic organizations; rather, it was between extreme and moderate (or mild) authoritarianism. Whoever excelled in political and social strategizing and was able to accept his weaknesses and persist was more likely to win the contest of will and for the village. That was a contest the revolutionary soldiers were ill equipped to win. Failing to win popular support, they compelled submission. They relied heavily on coercion to organize society from top to bottom, using class as their organizing principle, and to distinguish ally from foe. The soldiers allowed no room for discordant voices that dared challenge their assumptions, blueprints, and policies. The masses were to be pulled along like "potatoes in a sack," their concerns and demands channeled through the WPE, the vanguard party of workers and peasants whose main task was rallying them behind it and the state. The approach was typically centralizing and authoritarian, verging on totalitarianism. It only alienated the masses, the strategic rear guard of the revolutionary army.

Although the insurgents, too, were Marxist-Leninists who stressed class, they built broader coalitions across class, ethnicity, and religion. And although they, too, used considerable coercion, even terror, and were just as centralized and intolerant of contrary ideas, they by and large depended more on persuasion and sustained horizontal dialogue than on brute force to teach, convince, deceive, and manipulate in order to rally the traditional and fatalistic masses from the bottom up. They were not exactly democratic and their mobilizing modus oper-

andi may be apprehended as "guided democracy," a populist concept coined in the 1950s by two Third World despots, Nasser of Egypt and Sukarno of Indonesia. Through force and appeasement, the rebels were able to organize enough of the villagers to continually replenish their forces. They did not have to win but to wear out the opponent until he disintegrated, and that they did thanks to the peasantry, which the "proletarian party" and the state proved too good at antagonizing.

The revolutionary soldiers lost peasant Ethiopia primarily because, instead of improving life for the majority of the population, they made it far worse. As Leon Trotsky rightly put it, "The link between social conditions and military matters has always existed, because the army is a copy of society."[11] It was in village Ethiopia that the economic and social contradictions and contests were played out, and it was the regime's failure to appreciate these conditions at the rear that foreclosed any prospects of victory on the war fronts. The relationship between the regime and the peasantry was complex and unstable, alternating between harmony and hostility. The rural population took no active part in the initial stage of the revolution, but that changed with the passage of the historic land reform. Peasants of the southern regions, in particular, became strong allies of the revolutionary soldiers and played a big role in the defeat both of defiant feudalists and Somali aggressors. But the state's consuming goal of winning the civil wars at all cost increased the premium on the rural economy. Economic and social matters were subordinated to the overriding needs and demands of the state and its military. To get what it wanted, the state resorted to extensive coercive methods. The party and affiliated civic associations—peasant, women's, youth—were used to mobilize and control rural producers for surplus extraction, capital accumulation, and war making. The peasant associations, which were vital democratic components of the revolution, were converted into bureaucratic tools of subordination, control, and exploitation. The state levied taxes and demanded contributions, the associations collected dues and helped organize the militias, while state and party personnel extorted what they wished.

Four governmental policies were particularly significant in causing the irreversible rift between the state and the peasantry. No state programs were more resented than the wholesale reorganization of the rural community—that is, resettlement and villagization—the monopolization of the market, and national conscription, which the peasants saw as the most burdensome and inhumane form of taxation. Seemingly piqued by Mengistu's frequent huffing and puffing about why the peasant had turned the gun against the government that had armed him in the first place, Fasika Sidelel retorted bluntly, "What does the peasant demand? The peasant demands that associations be broken up, resettle-

ments disappear, villages be dismantled, and that there be a price increase for his crops. The men in leadership are all thieves, let them be replaced, he says."[12] He omitted conscription, which may have virtually ensured the regime's political doom. National service was universal but it especially targeted the poor and the weak. The laws of induction contained so many loopholes that children of the powerful, wealthy, and well-connected were able to dodge the draft. It was universally loathed for it was rightly perceived as inequitable. While privileged youth stretched out their time at universities, married prematurely, or made their way to Western Europe and North America, the disadvantaged escaped the draft by fleeing into the arms of the insurgents or by becoming refugees in neighboring countries and far beyond. As the insurgent fighters were drawn mainly from the struggling agrarian population, the Ethiopian civil wars were really wars of the poor but not necessarily for the poor.

There was no room for autonomous activity or dissent under the authoritarian state, but the peasants were not entirely inert. Their responses included playing dumb; noncooperation with state, party, and government agents; migration; and open support of rebel movements. Migration to the cities added to the growing urban congestion, decay, and criminality. The state could not deal with the pressing social and economic ills because the interminable conflicts drained the country's resources. The economic devastation wrought by years of war, drought, and the enduring extraction of human and material resources from a society sinking into ever deeper poverty had taken a toll on the state. Its authority had vanished in the war regions—Eritrea, Tigray, Wello, and northern Gondar—outside the cities and towns, and was on the wane in the rest of the country. A depressed and estranged peasantry expressed its bitterness by swelling the ranks of the rebels. This was true largely in the northern regions, though, for universal discontent never led to a national public outcry or to spontaneous peasant uprisings.

Underlying the military debacle was the regime's political defeat, itself the result of a glaring discrepancy between the state's needs for war making and society's meager resources. The civil wars turned out to be far longer, and organizing for war far more expensive, than the soldiers had expected; nor did they foresee that economic and social factors would affect the course of events through their influence on public life and perception. Militarization of the rear, a process that began during the Ethiopian-Somali war of 1977–78, entailed the imposition of authoritarian methods of control and extraction that both depressed and impoverished society. Multiple exactions, economic mismanagement, suppression of dissent, bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency, massive rural displacement, conscription, and chronic unemployment strained the state's relations with all

sectors of society, above all with the peasants, without whom it was impossible to defeat revolutionary, or people's, wars. As rural Ethiopia chafed and became destitute under a careerist and docile hierarchy of state and party functionaries preoccupied with the protection of their jobs, privileges, and status in a failed statist system, the rupture between political and civil societies grew wider. Popular discontent, while eroding the state's social base and sapping troop morale, nurtured the rebels. Even the cadres, most of whom were nonideological, deserted the party when the signs of defeat became apparent. It was left naked. The military dictatorship was pushed out just like its autocratic monarchial predecessor had been because no social group or class was willing to defend it. The village engulfed the city, and the guerrillas displaced the soldiers from the helm of power to erect a new political order, still being contested and negotiated at the time of this writing.

Such a magnificent failure could not have happened without the army's loss of will, the government's estrangement from society, and, of course, the dedication and resourcefulness of the insurgents. If war is politics by other means, as Clausewitz said, then defeat or triumph in revolutionary wars must be preeminently political. A repressive and exploitative military regime led its unwilling army to destruction by alienating the population and consequently brought about its own demise.

Did any one battle determine the outcome of the civil wars? No. In terms of their military, political, and psychological consequences, the battles of Af Abet, Shire, and Massawa were undoubtedly the most significant since the Ethiopian-Somali war and the Red Star campaign to capture Nakfa. Af Abet triggered the decline of the army, dissipating any hopes of victory, Shire accelerated its disintegration, and Massawa virtually sealed its fate. The army's collapse precipitated the demise of the tyrannical regime it had supported for seventeen long years. Its disappearance guaranteed the breakup of the Ethiopian state when Eritrea opted for independence. Could Eritrea have become sovereign in 1993 without Shire? Possibly, but not probably. Without the victory in Tigray, Eritrean independence would have been indefinitely postponed, though not for too long given the dismal state of the armed forces. Shire shortened the war in Eritrea, as indeed in the rest of the country. But it was the timely intervention of the EPLF that may have tipped the precarious balance in favor of the TPLF at Indasilase. This bold intervention might not have happened without Af Abet, for it was probably the lingering fear of another misfortune in Eritrea that prevented the SRA from coming to the rescue of the TRA in its most desperate hour.[13] And the EPLF was able to strike a blow at Af Abet in part because the TPLF intensified its offensive beginning in late 1987, distracting the military from its vigilance

in Eritrea. Only through tactical cooperation were the fronts able to defeat the revolutionary army. The collaboration that brought triumph was nonetheless ephemeral.

LEGACIES

To the living we owe respect; to the dead we owe only the truth.

—*Voltaire*

Over a century and a half after the French Revolution, Premier Zhou Enlai was asked about its significance. "It is too soon to tell," he mused. It is only thirty-four years since the Ethiopian Revolution (and only seventeen years since the end of the civil wars). As the late Chinese revolutionary leader reminds us, it takes generations before such cataclysmic events are dispassionately and soberly assessed. Though it may be too soon, I shall nevertheless mull over some of the more obvious and perhaps most controversial features of the revolution.

The Ethiopian revolutions and wars of the last century were great events with varied, enduring, and contentious outcomes and legacies, about which Ethiopians are as aggrieved as they are divided. The war years were a time when many people freely or forcibly made enormous sacrifices while others callously and shamelessly sought to profit from the fratricide. The core concerns of the revolutions and wars were social justice, who Ethiopians are or how they imagine themselves, and whether, despite different ethnicities, religions, cultures, and historical experiences, they can live in a single political community. Revolution and war released both unifying and divisive forces; in some ways, they made for cohesion, in others for fragmentation. Narratives of suffering and sacrifice, of great defeats or victories will continue to shape the ways in which the conflicts are enshrined in the collective memory and in popular myth.

Recent events in the cauldron of the Horn of Africa are linked to war, and memories of the Ethiopian civil wars are shared by a large percentage of the population, as almost every villager or peasant had a son or husband, a relative or close friend who fought in the conflicts. Memories of the civil wars are hotly contested and often edited for political reasons, but only a harmonization of these conflicted remembrances will help bring about genuine reconciliation and lasting peace. Fractured historical memory is as dangerous for state stability as are the intense rivalries for power and resources. For those with firsthand experience of war, the memory is forever stamped into their lives, and it may help either purge or fortify old prejudices and misunderstandings. Wars mean different things to those who waged them; they are associated with victory and liberation

for one, defeat and humiliation for another. It therefore very much matters how Ethiopians remember, and think about, the civil wars because it has everything to do with how they define themselves. Since what is remembered or forgotten is partly determined by political intentions, historical memory will remain a persistent source of debate, in both the public and the scholarly arenas.[14] At this moment, two colliding views need to be reconciled in order for the diverse population to have a sense of equilibrium. One vision sees the civil wars as a triumph of modernity and secularity that has expanded emancipatory possibilities—that is, of just struggles for human freedom, dignity, equality, and democracy. Another views them as atavistic and wasteful centrifugal conflicts that broke up the country and have sown the seeds of ethnic hatred and social disharmony. The challenge is how to construct a reconciliationist historical memory that citizens can embrace as a genuine expression of collective suffering and redemption.

How Ethiopians harmonize their incompatible ideas of a nation, as well as their sectarian memories and localized allegiances, will to a large extent determine whether they become a coherent political community or fall apart into disparate and ever-warring entities. What is needed is a vision that emphasizes the valor and patriotism of all veterans and the societal sacrifices for the collective good—a vision that sees the conflicts as tragic but defining moments of self-realization that helped consolidate a nation. What will be most critical, therefore, is not how accurately (though this, too, is vitally necessary) historical recollections are reconstructed but whether they ultimately unify or divide, liberate or imprison. Ethiopians ought to take comfort in the knowledge that most nations have been forged through "blood and iron," and national identities are tragically but surely consolidated through conflict, sacrifice, and death. By embracing and celebrating legacies that strengthen the ties that bind them, Ethiopians should slowly and gradually be able to erect a sturdier state on the wreckage of war and revolution.

Reconciliation must begin with healing the scars of war. There is no group more justifiably aggrieved than the defeated and demobilized army. That disbanding and reabsorbing about half a million men—nearly all of them destitute, many severely disabled, all of them trained in violence—would impose tremendous social stress was quite predictable. Demobilization was carried out speedily and efficiently, though not necessarily justly and honorably. Thoughtful technical planning and effort were involved in reintegrating the demobilized into the community, but the abrupt dissolution of an organization that was a national symbol of sovereignty for a half century and that fulfilled its professional obligations faithfully though not always honorably—as it was sporadically but brutally deployed against its own people—has left deep-seated anger not just on

the part of the disbanded but also in large segments of the population. If history is any guide, it would be unrealistic to expect national accord in the face of such corrosive bitterness.

Demobilization began in June 1991 under the direction of the Commission for the Rehabilitation of Members of the Former Army and Disabled War Veterans, with technical and financial assistance from foreign governments and agencies, including the International Labor Organization and the Red Cross. The commission, which was headed by the able Mulugeta Gabrehiwet (Chaltu), "rehabilitated" some 326,338 former soldiers for up to two months and dispersed them to the villages and towns between 1991 and 1993. For their years of service, the demobilized troops received little more than the barest necessities. Not even the infirmed received adequate care. The 169,628 veterans who returned to their villages were given a one-time payment of 137 birr, a card worth ten months' worth of food rations, one hectare of land, draft animals, farm implements, seeds, and fertilizers. All 158,710 veterans who chose to stay in the urban areas were paid 50 birr a month for seven months, and only 7,400 were granted their entitlement to pensions; 7,500 reportedly returned to school, and all the rest were either provided "permanent employment" or left to their own devices. Three categories of 40,000–45,000 disabled veterans were to receive short- or long-term institutional care.[15] A good number of the top generals and commanders have remained in detention. A few have passed away in their prison cells. Between 1993 and 1995, another 60,000 may have been "rehabilitated," and that means at least 80,000 did not report to any of the "reeducation" camps or centers. The very few who tried to resist ended up in exile or in the grave.

In this manner, over a quarter million professionals (that is, not including the militiamen and conscripts) were dismissed into bitter shame, their incomes cut off, their lives and the lives of their families tattered, and their psyches (individual and collective) severely damaged. There was no room for negotiation, as in South Africa or Zimbabwe, since defeat was comprehensive. There is no question that the troops were happy that the wars were over and that they were able to rejoin their families and communities. The speed and efficiency with which the task of demobilization was accomplished immeasurably contributed to postwar stability by eliminating or limiting the many problems that could have arisen in the transition from a state of war to peace. A disorderly or delayed dispersal of the armed forces could have resulted in widespread unrest and friction, leading to years of dissension and uncertainty. Instead it was accomplished in less than five years, with meager resources. That there was no organized resistance to the new government anywhere in the country strongly suggests that the former soldiers were too exhausted, humiliated, and broken, not that they were entirely satisfied

with the postwar arrangements. The demobilization and reintegration process was "exemplary" and "the new government has treated the members of the defeated armies correctly and, in turn, has received their trust," concluded a World Bank study.[16] The statement is accurate only for the technical and administrative aspects of the program; when viewed from the psychological and political points of view, it is an overstatement. The arrangements were accepted by force of circumstances, not as a matter of consent and trust.

There is no veterans' organization that can negotiate on behalf of the former troops, but they exist everywhere in semi-isolation, bristling with bitterness. They face problems that are all too common among war veterans: health, job, and money problems, failed marriages, and broken families. Most have adjusted quickly to civilian life and some have even prospered in minor urban trade, but overall their material condition is extremely precarious and their reintegration into peasant society virtually impossible. Tens of thousands are destitute, and many have turned to begging and petty theft, if not outright criminality. Old medals and ribbons are the cheap staple of Addis Ababa flea markets. I vividly recall the image of one melancholic veteran quietly sitting, naked from the waist up with a small stone on his balding head, in a corner of one of the alleyways near the Piazza area of Addis Ababa. On the ground in front of him were two rusting medals lying on a handwritten note the end of which read, "I am one of the lions of the Ogaden." The absence of social anomie has led the World Bank document to observe, again half accurately, "No significant relationship exists between the increase in crime and the number of ex-combatants in a community. Most ex-combatants are disciplined."[17] They are disciplined but also resentful and restless. In the voices of my respondents there is evident indignation and a sense of betrayal and abandonment.

There are the voiceless and less visible, who loiter in the towns and cities and whose existence, as one of them described it to me, is "between the dead and the living."[18] Many suffer from what the medical world calls post-traumatic stress disorder—anxiety, nightmares, delusion, paranoia, self-pity, isolation. In a country with few resources and therapists, these men have been left to themselves and receive little or no institutional support. On June 10, 1994, I had a chance encounter with one of them in the Markato zone of Addis Ababa. He looked pensive and lonesome but was incredibly eloquent. "I joined the army voluntarily at twenty-two to help myself and my family," he told me. "I served for fifteen years, fighting in all corners of the country. I fought against the Somalis in the Ogaden and the Eritreans in the Sahel. I always fought with zeal and commitment because I believed in my government and country. Now, here I am, a beggar. I am haunted by the images of my fallen comrades and feel depressed

by the reality of my life. This is the ultimate betrayal. May God curse this nation and may this government go to hell."

This justified frustration cannot be washed away. More than half of the former soldiers are now only in their forties, with indignant generations to follow unless perceived wrongs are remedied. The former soldiers who communicated to me—and whose sentiments, I suspect, are widely shared—feel strongly that their case was not handled with sufficient sensitivity, empathy, and equanimity. They hold that a whole army that fulfilled its professional obligation in the belief that its cause was just should not have been penalized because it served the nation under a criminal regime. They feel that they should have been treated more magnanimously, and the respect and honor generally due a valiant though vanquished foe should not have been denied. They claim that they fought and sacrificed for the contested idea of Ethiopia or to preserve the nation's integrity as best they could and should not have been maligned and so brazenly discarded by the victors. In their view, justice and the need for conciliation demand that appropriate compensation be given to those who merit it. In fact, they say, more ought to be done.

The victors have erected monuments to their martyrs at Bahir Dar and Mekele, and the vanquished defense forces feel they deserve no less. It is my distinct impression that few have any emotional attachment to the statue of the Unknown Soldier in Addis Ababa, in part because it was put up by a leadership that finally abandoned them and in part because the engraving at the bottom of it give undue or undeserved credit to Mengistu. The Martyrs' Monument built by the emperor at Sidist Kilo, Addis Ababa, belongs to a different era. It seems therefore most appropriate that the country seriously consider building a fitting memorial, in a suitable spot in the capital, in honor of all veterans since the Ogaden war. This, of course, cannot be done without the consent and resources of the state, but the task of designing and constructing ought to be entrusted to an independent commission of veterans, architects, historians, and representatives of civic organizations. It would be a wiser state also that instituted what the Americans call Memorial Day (perhaps combining it with Martyrs' Day or Patriots' Day) to honor both dead and living warriors. For citizens, it would be a day of remembrance, reflection, and reconciliation—a day to contemplate the causes of war and possibilities for peace and harmony. Such an occasion would immensely help Ethiopians reckon with their recent violent past; without that reckoning, genuine national conciliation and lasting peace will be harder to achieve because there are many other disputable issues.

Few issues stir more intense debate in Ethiopia today than the causes and consequences of revolution and war, and fewer still are more contentious than

the "loss," or secession, of Eritrea (and the TPLF's role in it) and the installment of an unusual ethnic-based federalist system. Both outcomes are likely to be the most enduring legacies of the ERPDF and even more of the TPLF, the dominant organization in the ruling coalition.

Because of unremitting official propaganda, many Ethiopians firmly, but wrongly, believed that the TPLF was created and managed by Eritrean nationalists dedicated to the balkanization of the national state. That it was instrumental in the breakup of the country cannot be disputed, however. Even though it drew inspiration and assistance from the EPLF, the TPLF was an independent movement in pursuit of its own goals. It has consistently maintained that unconditional support of the Eritrean resistance was predicated on the conviction that the Eritreans were engaged in a legitimate anticolonial struggle. That may well be, but the complicated relationship was also expedient. It was based on the TPLF's opportunistic realization that the survival of the movement in Tigray hinged on the success of the struggle in Eritrea. And because of its prodigious contribution, success was achieved in Eritrea. The TPLF distracted the armed forces from concentrating on Eritrea by engaging them on its own turf and by constantly disrupting supply lines. It took part in foiling the biggest successive campaigns against the EPLF in 1982 and 1983. Its success in 1989, achieved with the EPLF's help, severed Eritrea from the rest of the country, choking off the SRA and quickening the defeat of the armed forces. It can be categorically stated that, without the TPLF, the EPLF could never have won *total* military victory and Eritrea probably would not have gained independence in 1993. The alliance was not without political dividends for the Tigrayan organization, either. Without the Eritrean resistance, the TPLF could not have *survived*, let alone marched from Dedebit to Addis Ababa to set up a highly controversial political order.

By seizing state power, the EPRDF, with the TPLF's leading role, was able to put into practice what a section of the radical Ethiopian student movement had passionately advocated: self-determination for the empire-state's constituent groups. The organization's objective was political power and the use of that power to control and transform society according to its ideological precepts. It has constructed a federal structure with constitutional democracy that gives substantial power to the "nationalities," "peoples," and "nations" of the country. This was no less revolutionary an act than the land reform of 1975, but whether it is as irreversible remains to be seen. It is hard to find former empires that have been transformed successfully into genuine federal republics. The Ethiopian ethnic-based federalist system is a novel and fascinating political experiment laden with potential problems, but one that may prove to be the historical exception.

Ethiopia has nine "ethnic states" and numerous language communities that are not congruous with the states, including a mainly Amharic-speaking federal capital in an Afan Oromo–speaking state. The nine autonomous regional states have their own elected parliaments that legislate local laws consistent with the federal constitution. The regional parliaments elect governments headed by presidents (chief executives) who are responsible to them for their activities. Regional governments have control over administration, education, justice, police, taxes, social services, and internal commerce. They finance their own affairs through local taxes and budgets granted by the central government, the amounts determined every year by negotiation but normally proportional to the size of the states' populations. In the event of jurisdictional disputes between central and regional powers, the Federal High Court in Addis Ababa has the ultimate authority to make binding judgments. Every state is allotted a quota of seats and positions—again, proportional to its size—in the national Parliament, or "People's House," and in the federal government. Ethnic groups are likewise represented in the federal judiciary, police, diplomatic corps, and army.

The makeup of the officer corps of the new army has been diversified to reflect society, but whether the army will be as solid as its predecessor, which never showed any sectional cracks during the civil wars, is hard to predict. Its unity and its loyalty to the state will continue to reflect the deep fissures in society. The army can be only as coherent and strong as the federation itself. It should become a truly national institution if the regional and state leaderships steer clear of sectarian politics and if it keeps itself aloof from the machinations of a corrupt patronage and clientele system. This will not be easy since ethnicity is the organizing principle of politics and unscrupulous individuals—seeking to become the gatekeepers of the state at either the national or the regional level—would be tempted to exploit it. Paradoxically, the former army was less representative but it was a unified organization with unswerving loyalty to the national state. Although the new army is more democratically constituted, it may be more susceptible to sectarian and divisive politics and allegiances. The institutionalization of sectarian ethnic divisions through state structures shares some resemblance with the political system in Lebanon, which has not served the country very well. But the histories of the countries are quite different. Russia makes for a more apt comparison.

The radical restructuring of an empire called for imagination, vision, and courage. It was not an arbitrary intervention but the culmination of a historical and social evolution that began with the modernizing policies unleashed by Emperor Haile Selassie, which in turn eroded the foundations of royal absolutism because of its inability to adapt to democratic imperatives. Ideas of decentraliza-

tion have, in fact, vexed multiethnic Ethiopia since the times of Emperor Yohannes IV, and the Derg did fiddle with autonomy for selected regions. The federal constitution of 1995 represented the most determined effort to create a democratic framework in which Ethiopia's intractable national cleavages could find a permanent solution. It is to the credit of the EPRDF that it finally implemented an innovative structure that allows the country's ethnic components sufficient power to manage their own affairs and to develop their languages, cultures, and individual customs. Formerly oppressed and marginalized peoples have, for the first time in a hundred years, become arbiters of their own destiny. But the transition from monarchical and military despotic centralism to pluralist, or parliamentary, democracy has not fully satisfied the yearnings of ethnonationalists like the ONLF and OLF, who feel power has not sufficiently devolved, while it has alarmed others accustomed to a unitary, centralized state. Those adamantly opposed to the new dispensation, which allows the autonomies a qualified right to secession, have even compared it to "bantustanism" under apartheid. Such analogies are disingenuous at best and benighted at worst. Happily, the peoples of South Africa have discarded the fascistic policy for a federalist system in which linguistic categories roughly coincide with geographic divisions. There is a big lesson there for the Ethiopian rejectionists, or centralists.

The contest between federalists and centralists in the search for a formula that would balance sectional and national interests will persist, but there does not seem to be a better alternative to the federalist option given the turbulent history and fragmented pluralism of the country. The only question that warrants serious consideration is whether devolution of powers on a territorial basis rather than by ethnic categories would be preferable. For many Ethiopians, territorial federalism appears less adversarial and disruptive than ethnic federalism. Some are genuinely fearful that the new political setup may precipitate a more catastrophic disintegration of the territorial state. They argue that self-determination ought to be justified not solely on principle but also on its potential consequences. They point to the tragedy of Yugoslavia. Politics, they argue, should be organized around a coalition of class, ethnicity, gender, ideology, and personality, because such political organizations would help develop a national consciousness strong enough to override primordial loyalties. But the historical experience of that European country, which does not exactly parallel that of Ethiopia, also suggests that ethnic mixing does not necessarily guarantee cooperation and social harmony. There is no ground to assume, either, that ethnic identity of itself would be a barrier to the evolution of a coherent, dynamic, and vibrant political community. Those who have constructed the new order are just as convinced that the free association of formerly subjugated and abused

peoples is the only firm foundation of a democratic, sturdy, and stable nation-state. If the transition turns out to be bumpy and painful, they entreat, it is because Ethiopia, a poor country of uneven resource distribution and economic growth, lacks a democratic tradition. In light of the ongoing intense national debate over images of the past and visions of the future, only time will tell if the EPRDF will be remembered for "reconstructing" or for "deconstructing" the national state. No matter what happens, it will be its most enduring political legacy.

Space limits any exhaustive discussion of the consequences and legacies of revolution and war, but a few words about the diaspora and about women are in order because both have figured so prominently in the struggles to restructure state-society. Ethiopians began emigrating to the West, mainly for educational purposes, during the nineteenth century. The Italian fascist invasion of their country in the mid-1930s drove hundreds of them to the neighboring European colonies and Western Europe, from where many of them assisted the patriotic resistance at home by mobilizing public opinion and support against the colonial occupation. That set a new pattern of political activism and social engagement abroad. The three decades between liberation and revolution saw the emigration of thousands of youth to Europe and North America in pursuit of secular education; most went under state sponsorship. The absolutist state could not have anticipated what transpired. Many of "Haile Selassie's children," as they were at times called, turned against the emperor's autocratic reign by the late 1950s, eventually forming the external bloc of the international student movement that crystallized by the mid-1960s. The revolutions and civil wars that the students precipitated dislocated millions of citizens, thousands of whom ended up in the far-flung regions of Australia, the Middle East, Western Europe, and North America, forming what is today called the diaspora.

The character of the exile community varies regionally and within each country of resettlement. The diaspora is ethnically, socially, and politically diverse, an exact mirror of the home society. Many of the émigrés have successfully integrated into the host societies, thriving in business and the professions. Most, however, live on the margins of postindustrial societies, suffering the alienation of exile—a longing for a simpler, more general sense of human connection. And for all the alienation of the exile, the most devastating and irredeemable loneliness is within the self. The Ethiopian exiles are mostly absorbed in their daily lives, and politics are a luxury. But at times they find themselves drawn into the activities of the motley political groups to satisfy fantasies about their origins. These fantasies are often far removed from reality. Some of the political groups have an exaggerated self-image in part because Ethiopia receives hundreds of

millions in remittances annually from the émigré community and in part because the widespread availability of electronic communication—not to mention faxes, telephones, videos, and radio—facilitates the rapid dissemination of their ideas and activities. As a result, they have been able to exert an influence in domestic politics that is disproportionate to their size. Their influence is not always in harmony with the fundamental interests, needs, and wishes of the Ethiopian peoples. They tend to be arrogant, conceited, and reckless, utterly unmindful of the harmful consequences that their actions might trigger but that they themselves do not have to pay the price for. Part of the reason for their self-indulgence and vanity is historical amnesia: most of these individuals stood outside the revolutionary struggles or, like the proverbial Rip Van Winkle, slept through them. These groups closely parallel the Russian exiles of czarist times so poignantly described by one of them, Alexander Herzen. They were, he wrote, "absorbed in dissensions among themselves, in personal disputes, in melancholy self-delusions and consumed with unbridled vanity. . . . Misfortunes, idleness, and poverty induced intolerance, obstinacy, nervous irritability. . . . [They] broke up into little groups, rallying not round principles but round names and hatreds. . . . Ideas did not move a step forward, thought slumbered."[19] No better analysis can be furnished of the whims, fantasies, intrigues, and calumny of some of the windier politicians in the diaspora, who are more frequently at odds with one another than with the homeland government they so vehemently vilify. Admittedly, there is much that can and must be criticized about the EPRDF-led government, but its most impenitent opponents in exile have been able to offer no fresh ideas or alternative programs—only clichés and stale polemics. With reckless abandon, they stir atavistic passions. Their perceptions of the changing Ethiopian reality are peculiarly distorted, no doubt in part by physical distance but also by wishful thinking. They would benefit from Machiavelli's wise observation that the greatest mistake in politics is to confuse one's wishes with reality. To ask the Ethiopian peasant whether he is better or worse off today than he was two decades ago would be a sign of political maturity and wisdom. To physically see what has transpired in village Ethiopia since the end of military tyranny is absolutely necessary. Along the way, the critics will also learn more about the country's women, who make up a good half of the population and are engaged in an unstoppable struggle that will eventually transform the country's political landscape.

Woman is a paradox in Ethiopian society and history, at once icon and less than human, virtuous and villainous. In the popular imagination, Ethiopia is a female figure that personifies the nation, but simultaneously woman is portrayed as a dependent, invisible, mute person relegated almost exclusively to

housekeeping and child rearing. The inescapable evidence of woman's indomitability, courage, and resiliency is rarely acknowledged. Revolution and war, however, have appreciably transformed both the perception and the position of the Ethiopian woman.

All Ethiopian revolutionaries treated gender seriously, at least in theory, along with class and nationality, and the successive revolutionary governments granted women political and legal rights equal to those of men. But women could not have made the impressive strides they have without actively participating in revolution and war. Women accounted for 5 percent of the WPE and more than 4 percent of the armed forces. Most served as nurses, clerks, cooks, and musicians, but not a few distinguished themselves as heroines in the militia. More than half of the former soldiers were married and, upon their departure for the battlefield, their wives were suddenly entrusted with traditionally male private and public tasks; they were in charge of family households, farms, and businesses. Widows raised children as single mothers with meager assistance from the state, changing the image of the docile housekeeping mother taught since childhood to be obedient, submissive, and silent. The fact that 25 to 30 percent of the fighters in both the EPLF and the TPLF were female has enhanced women's social position, especially in Ethiopia. One fifth, or 116, of the 548 representatives in the People's House of the Ethiopian Parliament are female. The number of women who hold ministerial and ambassadorial positions is unprecedented. Success stories abound of women in the army and in the business world. Nationally, they are represented by talented and influential persons, including most notably Azieb Mesfin, Meles Zenawi's equally savvy wife. No politically prominent woman since Queen Taitu Bitul, Emperor Menelik's wife, has been so actively and visibly engaged in the public arena. A former "liberation" fighter, she is emblematic of the liberated Ethiopian woman. Let us not exaggerate, however. Too many of her female comrades live in dismal conditions, and the Ethiopian woman is still shackled by backward and oppressive customs and social practices and embroiled in a continuing struggle against the restrictions of patriarchy and a history of subordination.

Although women have witnessed significant improvements in the conditions of their lives, they still face numerous intractable problems and hurdles. Although they are equal before the law, cultural practices and customs dictate that women are subordinate and even inferior to men. Women still perform more than twelve hours daily of household and farming chores in the villages. In the cities, women have fewer opportunities and, when employed, rarely receive equal pay for equal work. More distressing is the fact that rape and wife beating are endemic. A recent comparative study by the World Health Organization

found that the incidence of sexual and physical violence in rural Ethiopia was the highest in the world.[20] Customs discourage the victim from seeking legal redress. Genital mutilation is widely practiced, among both Christians and Muslims, and childhood marriages are prevalent in rural areas. Given that women's lives evolved against a backdrop of two decades of almost constant warfare and revolution that left few families unscathed, it is amazing how little these antifemale social practices were affected by the upheaval of those years. It will take more time and effort to change reinforcing relationships between gender, class, and culture. The emancipation of women hinges upon the full emancipation of society itself, which will come only with greater prosperity and literacy. Democracy, so essential for freedom, can hardly flourish under conditions of scarcity and poverty. Even under democracy, only women can topple that cruel patriarchy by taking charge of their reproductive and productive resources. The road ahead is rough but conditions are changing, slowly.

Considerable success has been achieved since 1991 in dealing with Ethiopia's knotty political and socioeconomic problems, even though it is a Kafkaesque country still tethered to its authoritarian past. The new federation, governed by political consensus under the protection of constitutional checks and balances, remains extremely precarious because of a lack of any culture of compromise and democratic tolerance, because of the dominant party's tendency to gravitate toward ideas and practices that may have been appropriate to the period of armed struggle but are now a hindrance to the building of constitutional institutions, and because of the inordinately fractious nature of the opposition. The predictable outcomes of the concentration of power in one party are patronage and clientelism, which provide fertile ground for graft, illegal enrichment, incompetence, and inefficiency. Where there is no separation between state and party, the use of governmental powers for political and economic ends is irresistible. The new democracy is thus flawed and fragile, the press not fully free, and corruption rife, and power tends to be vertical and personal and guided by whim.[21] But measured against the dismal record of the previous regime, the achievements are little short of spectacular. Unless one has been living in a cave during the last seventeen years or is ideologically blinkered, one cannot miss the impressive gains in the economic and social spheres as well. If the vast promises remain unfulfilled, it is perhaps due less to lethargy or lack of desire for social change than to the immensity and complexity of the national problems.

Ethiopia's adversarial democracy is real, with many political parties competing for power, but there are structural and personal impediments to it. Civic freedom is stronger than at any other time in the country's history and, despite the impunity enjoyed by many and rampant incompetence, governance has im-

proved considerably. There is a robust private press that has refused to yield to periodic badgering, and there is a thriving network of civic associations. Yet the EPRDF, the ruling party since 1991, has wavered between openness and intolerance, unable or unwilling to shed the authoritarianism that is part of its Leninist and imperialist inheritance. Revolutionary ideals that guided the "liberation struggle" have been corrupted by the practice of power. The executive has concentrated excessive powers, running roughshod over infant democratic institutions and ruthlessly quashing dissent. As a result, some elements in the opposition camp have compared Meles Zenawi, the chief executive, to Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea. The comparison is greatly exaggerated. In contrast to the troubled younger state of Eritrea, run for seventeen long years without a constitution, a free press, or legal opposition, Ethiopia could be a First World democracy. But it is not. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the US State Department have time and again reported governmental disregard for fundamental constitutional rights, arbitrary arrests and solitary confinements, disappearances, systematic torture and extrajudicial killings, suppression of the press, persecution of journalists, students, dissidents, and advocates of human rights. Political interference has inescapably undermined institution building. The judiciary, intended to check executive powers, has been particularly enfeebled; impartial judgments frequently are disregarded and defense lawyers intimidated. To its most strident critics, the government's draconian crackdown on public demonstrations in the aftermath of the hotly contested elections of May 2005, which claimed many lives, was the culmination of those flagrant violations.

In fairness, though, the opposition contributed in no small measure to the excesses of June. In fact, an admission of guilt by one of the two main opposition parties would seem to absolve the government of culpability and moral responsibility for the death and destruction. The election of May 15, 2005, was a historic event in which more than 90 percent of eligible voters enthusiastically took part and in which urban Ethiopia voted with its feet to oust the ruling party from power. It was a vote against the EPRDF, not for the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), that carried the cities that mattered most. People voted against the EPRDF, despite its significant accomplishments, for its arrogance, complacency, and ineptitude. But the party misread the outcome. Notwithstanding the fact that over 80 percent of Ethiopia's electorate lives in villages (the EPRDF's stronghold) and that the electoral process was judged by most international observers as free and fair, CUD contested the outcome and demanded that power be ceded to it. Since the evident irregularities were not serious enough to support the claim of rigging, the EPRDF insisted that it had won another popular mandate to govern. CUD made a regrettable miscalculation;

not only did it boycott Parliament, but it also "blacklisted" business enterprises it believed were associated with the EPRDF. It called upon its followers and supporters to demonstrate, encouraged absenteeism, and, according to the government, incited sedition and insurrection. In the subsequent mayhem, 193 lives were lost and considerable public and private property damaged or destroyed. CUD's leaders and about thirty thousand civilians were apprehended, though most of the civilians were soon released.

After nearly two years of incarceration, CUD's leaders were set free in a melodramatic fashion that may have astonished, if not dismayed, their international supporters. On July 16, 2007, the Federal High Court found thirty-eight members of the party guilty of treason for attempting to overthrow a legal government and sentenced thirty of them to life imprisonment, stripping most of them of the right to vote and to hold public office. But, through the mediation of "elders," the defendants had already admitted guilt and asked the prime minister for clemency, which was granted by the republic's president three days later. In addition to their compatriot supporters at home and abroad, several nongovernmental organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and many members of the US Congress and representatives to the European Parliament had advocated their unconditional release, consistently claiming that the detainees were political dissidents or "prisoners of conscience," a stance CUD had maintained all along. Were the critics of the Ethiopian government in error or did CUD capitulate for lack of conviction, deep political commitment, discipline, and endurance? It is apparent that none of the parties have deep roots and that they are built around personalities rather than principles. They lack long-held beliefs that cannot be violated. That is why the grand coalition that nearly upset the EPRDF in 2005 fizzled as quickly as it flared. Regardless of history's verdict, one would hope that the political "rapprochement" will open a new era of social harmony by balancing the demands of the community and the relations of power. In peace, both political and civil societies would be able to accelerate the social development that is in evident progress.

In spite of this setback in democracy building, Ethiopia is on the road to economic recovery under a policy that purports to combine capitalism with aspects of socialism, or capitalism with a social conscience. The full restoration of market relations has expanded opportunities for the accumulation of wealth and for prosperity, not equally shared. The government has abandoned ideological zealotry for pragmatism, steering clear of free enterprise, but not completely. Its economic policy seems to resemble what the late South African communist Joe Slovo described as "a middle ground between the failures of socialism and the ravages of capitalism." Whether or not such a system is viable, freewheeling capi-

talism is thriving at the moment and the building of infrastructure is continuing unabated. No outsider who has visited Addis Ababa, Awassa, Bahir Dar, and Mekele could fail to be impressed by their physical transformation—the glitter, vibrancy, and relative order. Although the impact of the construction boom on the lives of ordinary people is far from clear, even the long-neglected, suffering peasantry has witnessed some dramatic changes. In 2000, only 13 percent of rural Ethiopia had access to safe water, compared with Tanzania's 42 percent and South Africa's 80 percent. Today, 26 percent has. Similar improvements have been registered in the national health services, transportation, and education at all levels. Hospitals have increased by 36 percent and health centers by 113 percent, while the total network of roads has expanded by more than fifteen thousand kilometers, and the number of universities—public institutions under the direction of the Ministry of Education—has jumped from two to over twenty.[22] Private colleges have mushroomed in Addis Ababa in the last decade. But quantity should not be mistaken for quality. Educational standards have suffered since the revolution. Today, tens of thousands of ill-educated and ill-equipped men and women are being produced from these institutions with little prospect of gainful employment. One reason for the national crisis may be that all the leaders of state universities are political appointees, most recruited for loyalty rather than for their intellect or achievement. That, despite two revolutions, there still is not a single chartered autonomous institution of higher learning should be a national disgrace.

Whatever economic and social changes have been achieved was largely due to foreign aid and loans, and the domestic economy has witnessed little diversification since imperial times. Commercial activities are invariably tied to patronage, and the principal beneficiary of the economic change has been a tiny elite of well-connected entrepreneurs and gatekeepers of the state. Growth has spawned egregious economic disparity, widening the class divide. The masses have seen little of the wealth produced and hence the seething discontent that erupted in 2005. Ethiopia remains desperately poor, and its poverty has enormous political implications for stability and democracy. Its more than seventy million people had an average per capita GDP of US $123 in 2005. Nearly half of the population lives on less than two dollars a day, and more than 30 percent on less than a dollar a day, or in absolute poverty. Unemployment among the adult working population is above 40 percent. The urbanization of poverty, a more recent phenomenon, is visible in the distressing numbers of beggars (many with incredible deformities) that roam around cars at traffic lights asking for alms, the tens of thousands of abandoned children (many of them orphans of war) without shelter, plummeting hygienic conditions, rising crime (particularly petty theft

like mugging of pedestrians), and teeming teenage prostitution, which contributes to the spread of venereal diseases and AIDS. With more than two million persons infected with HIV/AIDS, Ethiopia has one of the largest infected populations in Africa. Addis Ababa has four million people but approximately 30 percent have no running water or modern toilets.[23] A good half of the population lives in ramshackle mud houses or squalid hovels without sewers, and many get their water from community taps. The lack of modern public facilities forces many to defecate on riverbanks, under bridges, and in other open spaces. On hot days, the stench can be overpowering.

Life is not that depressing for everyone, of course. Ethiopia is a society of glaring contradictions, with excessive luxury for a minority and abject misery for the majority. The social conscience of the 1960s and 1970s has largely faded—replaced by the ideal of individualism, commercialism, and consumerism. It is to humanity's shame and a sad commentary on the legacy of the Ethiopian Revolution that what Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote about France more than two centuries ago rings true for Ethiopia today. "The extreme inequality of our ways of life, the excess of idleness among some and the excess toil among others, . . . the over-elaborate foods of the rich, which inflame and overwhelm them with indigestion, the bad food of the poor, which they often go without altogether, . . . the innumerable sorrows and anxieties that people in all classes suffer, and by which the human soul is constantly tormented: these are the fatal proofs that most of our ills are of our own making."[24] Not all the fortune acquired in wartime was ill-gotten and it is fueling the postwar capital accumulation. But the narcissistic culture that Kassa Kebede mocked has only worsened since the fall of the socialist regime. The ostentatious social life, particularly the weddings in the glittering Sheraton and Hilton hotels, can only be described as obscene, terrible reminders of Abiye Abebe's apocalyptic warning. Money easily acquired is being spent with a vengeance in a wretched country where more than 85 percent of the population scratches the earth for survival.

Most of the socioeconomic conditions that aroused the indignation of a generation forty years ago are extant, but the ways that social conditions and processes shape political positions and actions have changed. The old issues of land, class conflict, and resistance to imperialism that animated the student movement between the 1960s and 1970s are no longer setting the sparks. Today, there is not even a national student organization with the courage to think heretically, just groups defined by ethnicity and sectional politics that often pit them against one another. What is missing is the complex dialectic of circumstance and ideology, experience and consciousness, reality and will. The current crisis in Marxism has left an ideological void.

Marxism was the font of inspiration for Ethiopian revolutionaries. But given its shallow roots, it has vanished as swiftly as it captured their imagination. Marxism has completely faded even from Ethiopian political discourse, and it may be easier to locate a needle in a haystack than a Marxist intellectual in the land. One of the reasons for the abandonment of Marxism is that the egalitarian orthodoxy that promised liberty and prosperity delivered instead tyranny and crushing poverty. The popular majorities saw no improvement in the cultural and material conditions of life. Are we to assume, though, that the egalitarian visions that animated the intelligentsia and nourished the twin revolutions have failed and are forever out of reach? Poverty and inequality are increasing and the yearnings for freedom, equality, and justice are as evident today as they were in yesteryear. And surely there must still be alternative critiques or visions that stress the collaborative, cooperative, and collective aspirations of humanity against the culture that cultivates acquisitive individualism, instant material gratification, and hedonism. As Max Weber remarked, "What is possible would never have been achieved if, in this world, people had not repeatedly reached for the impossible." Given the horrific conditions of life for so much of the population, Ethiopians cannot afford to cease dreaming of a better future, even of utopian possibilities, notwithstanding revolutionary Marxism's bitter legacy. We have to believe, like Rousseau, in the possibility and perfectibility of human society through its social and political institutions. There are good reasons to animate egalitarian hopes and abandoned dreams. For this reason, vigorous opposition on the part of those to the left of the current bickering political groups—opposition that would give voice to the silent agonies and yearnings of the poor and oppressed—seems absolutely indispensable.

Today, Ethiopia is riddled with existential anxiety and political fear that have disarmed and confused its youth, who should see themselves as the subjects of history, not its objects, and its agents, not its victims. Instead of conviction, they see evasion and equivocation, and when politics lacks authenticity, honesty, and integrity, it inescapably gives rise to disillusionment. Since the crackdown of May 2005, there is widespread alienation and cynicism at all levels of society, particularly among the youth—and Ethiopia is a very young country. A good segment of the youth—those under twenty years of age, who constitute at least half the population—were born after the revolution, and they are disaffected and despairing of politics. They seem no longer willing to contemplate a future without much hope for a job or a home of one's own. Some of them compensate for their political and economic abandonment with drugs and sex, an extreme antidote not only to the repressive social consequences of the Derg's era but also to current anxieties—fierce competition for scarce jobs and strained

resources. Many wallow in the elusive culture of *qaatism* while others seek succor in religion, and indeed religion is "the sigh of the oppressed," as Marx pithily observed. But as another judicious observer also remarked, "In this world, it is not faith that saves us, but defiance."[25] Fear and conceit have largely disarmed civil society but creative imagination and conscious political activism have not completely disappeared, and they should be encouraged. In these times of stultifying conformity, the young seem to be oblivious to the combative culture of their society. Rather, the sense of alienation and despair ought to give way to youthful idealism nurtured by the heroic struggles of the recent past. In the continuing struggles against oppressive power relations—and to build an Ethiopia that is just, egalitarian, and peaceful—these disillusioned young men and women need to reinvent and embrace the democratic ideas and ideals that inspired the last generation of revolutionaries—even if they disavow their tactics and even if some of those ideas seem to be old-fashioned in the age of corporatism, narcissism, boundless greed, and venality. Theirs is to "remember the past [and] imagine the future" in light of the liberationist and transformative vision of revolutionary history.

RETHINKING REVOLUTION, ENDING WAR

If you cannot find the thorn in your foot, you will always walk with a limp.

—African proverb

If Ethiopia's past was extraordinarily violent and its present is cloudy or murky, its future is laden with daunting challenges. Ethiopia is a tapestry of peoples and cultures, its centripetal unity born of history and ethnicity. Although not all of its ethnic constituents can claim it, Ethiopia is a nation-state with roots in antiquity and the only sub-Saharan country with its own script and calendar. Yet for all its historical depth this nation-state is quintessentially a modern creation, its problems mostly contemporary. Three characteristic features distinguish the country from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. First, Ethiopia was virtually alone in *defending* and *preserving* its independence. Second, no other African state, including South Africa, has ever experienced as sweeping and cataclysmic a social upheaval as Ethiopia. Third, the country has constructed a system of ethnic federalism that has no exact parallel elsewhere on the continent, the result of twin revolutions and multiple civil wars. It is an audacious innovation imposed on a fractured society with factionalized political elites, burdened with the vestiges of an authoritarian political culture, a failed totalitarian imagination of social progress, divergent memories of war, and all the ills associated with underdevel-

opment. It is a revolutionary experiment with worrisome prospects. Yet Ethiopia has, again and again, amazed and silenced the doubters and skeptics.

Most revolutions have involved wars but most wars have been nonrevolutionary. In Ethiopia, revolution and war were blended. Stirred by the events of 1960 and driven by utopian dreams, young men and women made a revolution whose ambitions were as grandiose as its failures. They dismantled an absolutist dynasty and the feudal structures on which it had firmly rested for centuries and for which they blamed the country's abysmal stagnation, appalling poverty, and illiteracy rate of 95 percent. They vowed to create a new and more just society based on scientific socialism before the necessary prerequisites for such profound transformation were attained. It turned out to be a grand illusion. Despite the elimination of feudal relations, many of the basic repressive and exploitative features of the old regime were not only preserved but sharpened and deepened to an unprecedented degree. Among other things, the revolution detonated long-suppressed regionalist and ethnonationalist aspirations that the revolutionary regime proved incapable of resolving. Civil wars consumed the country for nearly two decades. Society was drained but not completely broken. It fought back in ways open and hidden.

The nightmare came to an end in 1991. After seventeen years of destructive civil wars interspersed with invasion, terror on a mass scale, and drought, famine, and starvation of biblical proportions, society reemerged from near cataclysm to experiment with a new political system. The Marxist-Leninist party that dominated both state and society to rule with brute force became obsolete, unable to play any role in the new order. In 1991, Ethiopians stood at the close of a dark era and the opening of a new one with a stronger belief in their national destiny. But as they began reorganizing their thinking, energies, and resources they faced multitudinous problems of peace.

Political, economic, social, and cultural difficulties are at the root of Ethiopia's predicament. The country's pressing problems include an archaic agrarian organization that produces deep, widespread poverty, a booming birth rate that hinders social development, accelerated urbanization without concomitant industrialization, an expanding and ill-educated young population a good portion of which feels it has no stake in the nation's future, intense competition for scarce and unevenly distributed resources, often exacerbated by self-aggrandizing political ambitions and lack of transparent governance and ethical probity. These most intractable problems are further complicated by conflicting historical memories and competing visions of a single political community, as well as by continuing ecological degradation in the face of exploding demographics, the spread of HIV and AIDS, and an extremely hostile environment of

collapsed or collapsing states. Ethiopia is a land of paradoxes. Although it is the water tower of the Horn, its cities and towns—particularly those in the north-central regions—have chronic shortages, a problem that is likely to worsen, with dire social consequences.

Despite these gigantic constraints and the immensity of social reconstruction, the future is not bleak, and considerable achievements have been made during the last seventeen years. The democratization process that provides a forum in which rival claims to truth can compete peaceably and accommodate one another is irreversible. As Ethiopians harbor less apocalyptic visions, reason and democracy have began to displace fanaticism and warfare. But unless and until Ethiopians reconcile with their past and make peace among themselves and with their neighbors, the task of social development, and the alleviation if not eradication of poverty and misery, will be infinitely greater. War—to which the incumbent government devoted considerable resources—has ended, but the region is neither fully peaceful nor stable. Political society is highly polarized and outcomes could be grim. In the absence of genuine political reconciliation, social peace, and regional cooperation, Ethiopians and the people of the Horn of Africa in general cannot hope to conquer or defeat their natural and man-made enemies; they will languish in a state of backwardness and grinding poverty. This they know, and they seem well focused on meeting the challenges.

The revolutionary challenges of the new century and millennium are therefore equality, regional integration, and national conciliation based on social justice. The scale of changes that need to be made in order to meet the escalating human needs is mind-boggling. By 2025, Ethiopia's population is expected to be 125 million, a two-thirds increase over the 75 million in 2007. The prospect is terrifying as it requires the imminent building of the infrastructure necessary to feed, house, educate, provide health services for, transport, and govern justly all those people. Moreover, inequalities in power relations and gaps in socioeconomic status are increasing and are bound to cause class, ethnic, and regional tensions or conflicts. To revitalize the plurality of cultures and to reinvigorate the democratic institutions put in place after so much toil and bloodshed is to both promote national concord and civic culture and to fortify the process of nation building. For this to happen, a greater sense of justice and urgency is critical. What the tragic postelection incidents in 2005 demonstrated is that concessions and compromises are the best populist antidote to both absolutist visions and authoritarian habits or inclinations. Moreover, fast-changing global realities make it abundantly clear that forging larger political communities through integration, which clearly is a universal trend, is not an option for the poor and backward countries of the Horn. This makes it incumbent upon the leaders of Eri-

trea and Ethiopia to surmount bruised egos and restrain unfettered ambitions to work earnestly toward genuine propitiation and the restoration of friendly relations. That would set a peaceful pattern of revolutionary change and open a new chapter for the new century and millennium and for the continent. But national cohesion or regional integration without a political culture that respects the dignity of the person and values liberty and equality would be illusory, for ultimately—and especially in the historical context of the region—peace would be not "the absence of war but the absence of injustice."

The ongoing struggles to construct a pluralist political and civic culture on the ruins of empire are essentially struggles for modernity and secularity within a common, limited space encompassing linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. The weapons of struggle have changed or are changing—from violence to dialogue. The romantic revolutionary aura that stirred Ethiopia's youth roughly two generations ago has waned, and armed violence as a way to state power is rapidly losing its allure. Yet the desire for social justice and the emancipatory and egalitarian vision of revolutionary history remain powerful.

1998: Postscript

WHEN COMRADES FALL APART

> Many wars in this century have been started with only the most nebulous expectations regarding the outcome, on the strengths of plans that paid little, if any, attention to the ending. Many begin inadvertently, without any plans at all.
>
> —*Fred Charles Iklé*

> The legitimate object of war is a more perfect peace.
>
> —*William T. Sherman*

The Eritrean-Ethiopian war of 1998–2000 leaves us wondering with Hegel whether governments ever learn from history. Only seven years after their joint victory against the Ethiopian military regime, the former comrades of the northern liberation fronts, who now ruled two sovereign states, blundered into a war neither anticipated. The war was unplanned by its protagonists and unpredicted by the world, and it ended with catastrophic consequences for both. The reasons were either convoluted or fabricated. It was a foolish war, against the wrong enemy, and on a false pretext. Isaias Afewerki, president of the newly sovereign state of Eritrea, grievously underestimated the patriotism, fierceness, and willingness of his Ethiopian adversaries to fight when he thoughtlessly ignited a war whose scale and duration he did not plan for, for which his country was ill equipped, and for which he had no exit strategy.[1] Eight years after a negotiated end of hostilities, there is still no peace, only a virulent war of words that could accidentally trigger another horrid conflict. Once comrades in arms, the former northern insurgents are now implacable enemies.

From 1991 (when Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia to become a sovereign state in 1993) to 1997, when relations between the new governments in Addis Ababa and Asmara precipitously deteriorated, there were no outward signs of hostility. On the contrary, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)—the new name of the ruling EPLF—and the EPRDF had worked closely, coordinating their economic, diplomatic, and even military policies. They signed pacts of trade, environmental, scientific, and educational cooperation. Eritrea continued to use the Ethiopian birr as a common currency as Ethiopia enjoyed unhindered access to Eritrea's ports. Ethiopia provided military assistance when its neighbor was involved in an armed conflict with Yemen. Youthful, energetic, intelligent, and visionary, the Eritrean and Ethiopian leaders, who enjoyed a particularly friendly relationship, were hailed by their Western admirers, including most notably Bill Clinton, who called them a "new breed" of African statesmen. Then, to the bewilderment of both their own citizens and their foreign friends, the former comrades in arms fell apart.

Ostensibly, the cause of the rift was a territorial dispute. The flash point was Badme, a dusty, melancholy place on the western side of the six-hundred-mile-long frontier. The dispute was a throwback to colonial days, when European powers haphazardly partitioned the continent with little regard to ethnic, linguistic, or cultural homogeneity. Even though Ethiopia negotiated its boundaries, the effects were basically the same: organic communities were split by artificial political lines. Moreover, the borders that were agreed upon by the governments of Ethiopia and Italy a century ago were never demarcated. As they became a source of contention between a new state too zealous to solidify its statehood and an older one too jealous to protect its sovereignty, Addis Ababa and Asmara formed a joint border commission that would make recommendations on delimitation. But relations became too strained before the commission got off the ground. Both the dramatic escalation of hostilities and the failure of mediation efforts by third parties seem to belie the notion that borders were the cause of the conflict. The conflict was, of course, one aspect of the yet-unfinished process of state formation in the Horn of Africa. Nevertheless, land was the trigger, not the root cause of war. The underlying reasons were economic and political ones that the Eritreans had not foreseen or had simply ignored during the years of armed struggle.

Eritrea is a small country with a weak resource base. Ethiopia was the main source of many of its essential foods and of some of the raw materials that fed its factories. It also was the principal market for Eritrea's industrial products. Nearly 70 percent of Eritrean exports went to Ethiopia while only 9 percent of its imports came from Ethiopia.[2] Resident and nonresident Eritreans whose political

status or citizenship was left unresolved continued to play a prominent role in nearly all spheres of the Ethiopian economy. The Asmara Pact, which the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia signed in 1993, seemed to cement a relationship that was skewed in favor of the former, to the chagrin of many Ethiopians. The happy days were short-lived. Over and above lingering political, ideological, and nationalistic differences, new, "incompatible disagreements" arose.[3] Ethiopians complained of overcharges, price changes, and rising hauling fees at Assab and accused Eritreans of smuggling and reexporting Ethiopian coffee. Addis Ababa began to whittle away at the Asmara Pact. It also refused to accept the nakfa, Eritrea's new currency, as having equal value to its own birr, and insisted that all large commercial transactions should be in US dollars. It imposed tariffs on Eritrean imports, widening the gulf between the two countries. The Eritrean leadership felt "shut out of the Ethiopian economy" and may have impetuously reacted to what it called protectionism.

When the Eritreans sent their tanks and artillery across the border on May 12, 1998, claiming that they were attacked first, their intention, no doubt, was to intimidate a government they believed would capitulate to their demands rather than risk the worst. They mistook ethnic federalism and political pluralism for fragmentation, and domestic dissent—especially by a fresh and spirited free press—for instability. Should Addis Ababa resist, they must have assumed, the "unpopular" TPLF-dominated government would quickly crumble under pressure from within and without, and they would win an easy and decisive military victory. Deluded by Nakfa syndrome, they dreadfully miscalculated on both counts. Their aggression, just like that of Somalia twenty years earlier, galvanized Ethiopians, strengthening the hands of a government that had been perceived by many as a puppet of Shaabia. A politically bolstered leadership used the time when third parties tried to help settle the dispute peacefully to muster and arm more than 200,000 men. The Eritreans, who would not be persuaded to withdraw from occupied territory, soon found themselves overwhelmed by a foe they had woefully underestimated.

The Ethiopians launched their Operation Sunset on February 23, 1999, nine months after the first skirmish. The Eritrean forces had entrenched themselves in fortifications and bunkers that led General Samora Yunus, commander of the northern forces, to contemplate: "The Eritreans are good at digging trenches and we are good at converting trenches into graves. They, too, know this. We know each other very well."[4] The general was not bragging, for subsequent events proved him correct, but he may have lost twice as many of his own men as Eritreans he buried in their foxholes. The Eritreans, confident that they would repel Ethiopian assaults, did not even care to build a second line of defense. They

were surprised and outmaneuvered. Realizing that the enemy had assembled the bulk of his forces at the central zone, the Ethiopians attacked massively on the eastern side and after three days of fighting broke through the trenches by executing one of the most difficult maneuvers in war—a flank march past the front of attack. They threw the defenders back about twenty-two kilometers—as far as the Baduma plains. Badme was recaptured. Then on May 12, 2000, the Ethiopians assaulted the Tsorona and Zalambessa central front. Although they suffered heavily, they again overwhelmed the Eritreans and pushed them into the Senafe plateau.[5] When a ceasefire was finally signed on December 12, 2000, in Algiers under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity, United Nations, European Union, and United States, the adversaries had lost between seventy and a hundred thousand combatants. As the assailants, the Ethiopians lost a higher proportion of killed and wounded and squandered hundreds of millions of dollars on armaments. In addition, approximately 350,000 persons were dislocated at the war fronts. Tens of thousands of resident nationals were cruelly deported by the two governments, setting a dangerous precedent in a chronically unstable region. The nations' fragile economies were severely damaged, and with the abandonment of Assab by the Ethiopians, Eritrea's loss has been Djibouti's gain. The impact on the economies of the Afar, Tigray, and Amhara states cannot be underestimated, since Assab is closer to them than Djibouti. Interestingly, the winners did not attempt to draw new lines on the ground as so often in the past, claiming that their sole objective was guarding their own sovereignty, not violating Eritrea's.

Yet real peace has been elusive. A tenuous calm has held under the United Nations Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), which patrols the sixteen-mile corridor, all of it inside Eritrea. The Comprehensive Algiers Peace Agreement of December 12 may actually have made durable peace more difficult to achieve. The accord empowered the Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission (EEBC), made up of five prominent international jurists jointly appointed by the two parties, to determine the exact line. The signatories agreed in advance to accept the EEBC's ruling as final and binding. The commission made its verdict public on April 13, 2002. Ethiopia was the first to accept it, jubilantly, only to reject it later as "illegal, unjust, and irresponsible." The Ethiopians' reaction was bizarre but understandable. They had sought and expected legal affirmation of Ethiopia's claim to lands and peoples that it had administered almost continually since about 1900, when the first border treaty was signed with the Eritrean colony of Eritrea. To the disbelief of the Ethiopians, the EEBC awarded Badme, which had become emblematic of the harmful discord, and a good part of Al-

tiena, farther to the east, to Eritrea. These perhaps are the most contentious stumbling blocks to demarcation and reconciliation.

On November 25, 2004, the government of Ethiopia announced a five-point plan that, it hoped, would revitalize the process, break the deadlock, and thaw the frosty relations with its neighbor. In a dramatic reversal of its rejectionist stance that both bewildered and angered many of its citizens, the Ethiopian government accepted the EEBC's determination subject to mutually acceptable revisions. The Eritrean government rejected it out of hand, instead calling for unconditional compliance with the Algiers agreement and full implementation of the commission's ruling. The Eritrean position is legally compelling. International conventions cannot and should not be disregarded with impunity.

Nevertheless, the verdict seemingly cannot be implemented without some modification, which, of course, cannot be made without concessions by the Eritrean side. It is highly unlikely that the Ethiopian government under Meles will ever submit itself to the ruling in its entirety because the government is at once too weak and too strong. Its political opponents both at home and in the diaspora have accused it of squandering the fruits of the country's military victory by first signing the Algiers accord and then foolishly binding itself to an external adjudication with no recourse to a court of appeal or even to diplomatic arbitration. The domestic political environment is extremely hostile to the accord. Meles, in particular, is vulnerable, since his ardent opponents, former members of the TPLF, continue to accuse him of duplicity that has damaged Ethiopia's national interest. To surrender Badme and Altiena would be politically damaging for him. But should he retire from office without having settled this problem, he risks leaving an extremely tarnished legacy.

It also seems likely that the guarantors of the agreement will not compel the Ethiopians to accept the decision of the commission, for fear not only of destabilizing Ethiopia but also of upsetting a useful regional ally in the fight against "international terrorism." Would the Eritrean leadership resort to force should all diplomacy fail? Isaias has demonstrated repeatedly how unpredictable he can be, but another miscalculation would be calamitous for both his leadership and the nation, and Isaias may not stay in power to make another big political mistake. But a situation of no war, no peace is untenable and the UNMEE cannot remain in the region indefinitely.

The only way out is to have demarcation and dialogue simultaneously and honestly, which the ambiguous Ethiopian proposal seems to accept. It won't be easy—not least because the parties are famously belligerent. Without rigorous, concerted prodding from within and without, neither side will concede Badme,

because of its symbolic significance. It stands as an emblem of the lives wasted in a reckless and unnecessary war. Also, since the EEBC held Eritrea responsible for igniting the war, Isaias hopes or feels that he can vindicate himself by claiming a Pyrrhic victory if he acquires Badme. Eventually, only one country will have it unless the parties agree on some form of dual control or move directly to confederal unity. That would be the easiest and best solution, but it is not realistic.

The other thorny spot is the central zone of Altiena, which appears on most maps as part of Eritrea but has been continually administered as part of the Irob region of Tigray. The EEBC assigned the territory to Eritrean sovereignty in accordance with historical maps but in clear contravention of the inhabitants' national identity; most of them have never been Eritrean, nor do they wish to be. An enforced citizenship or forcible removal would be unacceptable on humanitarian grounds and is fraught with dangerous political implications. Can we really envisage a peaceful future under such arbitrarily imposed conditions? Shouldn't consent of the community be paramount, something the colonialists and former Ethiopian rulers disregarded and the EEBC failed to consider seriously? Ought the arrogance, hubris, and mistakes of the past be callously repeated? Might a tradeoff between Altiena and Badme be workable or even acceptable? Should only the dead, as Plato thought, see the end of war?

A resolution of the entangled Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict will require foresight and political courage, which the leaders of both countries do not lack. Both men have intelligence, nerves of steel, and bellicose ambitions. The Ethiopian leadership cannot hope to subdue its Eritrean counterparts by prolonging demarcation, and the Eritrean leadership cannot coerce the other side by prevaricating on negotiation. Only from negotiated agreements that bind both sides will they be able to achieve what has eluded them thus far. There must be a comprehensive approach that appreciates the intricate interplay of histories, identities, memories, and interests that simultaneously unite and divide Ethiopians and Eritreans. What is positive about the Ethiopian proposal is that it calls for a dialogue to consider the "root causes" of the problem. Even though the horrendous war was kindled by a territorial dispute, the actual reasons were economic, historical, and political. The alternative to peace would be worse: endless strife, poverty, hunger, and stagnation. As John Galbraith sagely remarked, politics "consists in choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable." The Eritrean leaders, knowing too well that their country and Ethiopia are condemned by geography, economy, and history to have their futures inextricably entwined, should not disregard the Ethiopian offer even if it is four years old already. They should show pragmatism and make peace, which the impoverished countries require so desperately.

They need to go even further. From a long-term perspective, only a comprehensive political arrangement that addresses the interconnected problems of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia will ensure durable peace in the region. Densely multiethnic and prone to recurring strife, drought, and famine, the Horn of Africa is a tinderbox. The tragic wars between Ethiopia and Somalia and between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as the current arrogant and dangerous meddling by Eritrea and Ethiopia in Somalia, demonstrate that the poverty-stricken Horn of Africa is an extremely volatile region. Nationalist or ethnonationalist aspirations clash with one another, with the interests and desires of existing states, with the reality of geography and history, and with the logic of economics. There has to be a formula that would somehow reconcile these contradictions.

To imagine a peaceful and stable Horn free of ethnic and social conflicts is to think of a different political order, perhaps in the form of a loose confederation that transcends inherited but absurd colonial boundaries that dissect organic communities like the Somali and Irob. The ideological rigidities and weak social structures may be serious hurdles, but the material needs of the masses and rapidly changing global realities warrant it. Geography and economy demand it. A political union larger than the current fragile nation-states would go a long way in reducing the sources of conflict by ensuring both the survival of cultural groups and the identity of the national states, because there would be no need to redraw borders. But the significance of the Badmes and Ogadens would be so diminished that they would lose their saliency in the larger scheme of things. The Western European experience shows that the creation of larger political units does not erase national identities along with historical animosities. And what the Horn needs for faster growth and prosperity is the erasure of interstate enmities. The anarchy in Somalia, the current animosity between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the neocolonial presence of the French in tiny Djibouti would seem to make the notion of a confederation a foolish proposition, but it is precisely these conditions that ought to reinforce the urgency of regional integration. For a start, the probability of the reintegration of Eritrea and Ethiopia looks higher and would be simpler given the federal experience and the shared religions, cultures, and identities. Meanwhile, efforts will have to be focused on strengthening economic cooperation, which hopefully will lead toward eventual political amalgamation. The formation of the Inter-African Governmental Agency for Development is a good first step in that direction.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Total Manpower Deployed for the Red Star Campaign

Command/Location	Officers	Other ranks	Militia	Total
Nadew/Af Abet	1,793	29,006	5,287	36,086
Wuqaw/Alghena	1,126	18,918	5,630	25,674
Mebrek/Kerkebet	1,186	20,736	3,405	25,327
Mekit/Asmara	975	8,608	15,270	24,853
C. Command/Mekele	444	4,337	12,369	17,150
Additional*	157	839	6,454	7,450
Total	5,681	82,444	48,415	136,540

*As of March 7, 1982.
Source: Brigadier General Abebe Wolde Mariam to Minister, 30.10.1974, abari [enclosure], "Ya Wotaderawi Zemecha ena Ikid Memria ya sidist wer report" ["A Six-Month Report by the Planning and Operations Directory," July 7, 1982], Asmara, MOND, tables 1 and 2. Note that there is a discrepancy between the two tables.

Appendix B

Table 2: Government Casualties, February 15 to July 2, 1982

Command	Killed	Executed	Wounded	Missing	Deserted	Total
Nadew	4,234	57	11,843	405	62	16,601
Wuqaw	5,115	123	9,485	1,996	207	16,926
Mebrek	580	13	1,400	537	19	2,549
Mekit	85	3	176	5	79	348
Central	101	17	308	216	110	752
Total	10,115	213	23,212	3,159	477	37,176

Source: Brigadier General Abebe Wolde Mariam to Minister, 30.10.1974, abari [enclosure], "Ya Wotaderawi Zemecha ena Ikid Memria ya sidist wer report" ["A Six-Month Report by the Planning and Operations Directory," July 7, 1982], Asmara, MOND, tables 3 and 9. Tadesse Tessema, "Ya semien tor ginbar ya 1974 zemecha zegeba—'Key Kokeb Zemecha,'" 1974 ["A Report of the 1982 Operation of the Northern Front—'the Red Star Campaign,'" 1982], Asmara, MOND, 34, gives a total of 36,932 for the period February 15 to July 7.

Appendix C

A rough breakdown of the weaponry and equipment by branches would have looked like this: the motorized and mechanized infantry units of the army deployed a variety of light, medium and heavy machine guns, artillery tubes, canons, towed howitzers and multiple rocket launchers. The antitank weapons were the wire-guided AT3 Sagger missile and the 40 mm RPG-7 shoulder-fired grenade launcher that was also effective against armored vehicles and trucks. The SAM 2 and 3 land mobile surface-to-air missiles, the shoulder-fired, heat-seeking SAM 7 Strela, the self-propelled ZU23 Shilka and the ZU 54, ZSU 57 Dashka were the anti-aircraft guns. The Katyusha rockets and the 122 mm BM 21 and 24 multi barrel rocket launchers, otherwise know as Stalin's Organ were also among the important anti-aircraft acquisitions. The APCs comprised the BMP1 and 2 infantry fighting vehicles, the BRDM 1 and 2 scout cars that were capable of mounting Sagger missiles, and the wheeled BTR 60 and BTR 152 vehicles that provided high firepower, mobility, maneuverability even in mud, and protection from enemy fire. The main tanks were the Soviet T 54 and 55 of which it had at least 1,470. Trucks included the CRAZ 255, GAZ 66, URAL 131and 375, WAZ 452 and 469, ZIL 131, and the unpopular AYFA because it was prone to overturning. The army used several Soviet (or their chicom copies) rifles like the AKM, SKS (Simonov), the RPD light machine gun, the RPK 74 and PK medium machine guns. The AK 47 (Kalashnikov) and RPK (Dutscka) were the most popular assault rifle and light machine gun, respectively; the PKM and 4P 46 were the preferred heavy machine guns. Hand grenades were of the F1 and RGDS models. The Air Force's weaponry was also Sovietized, its American-built maintenance facilities dismantled. It was furnished with a sizeable number of fighters, fighter-bomber and ground attack jets with varying caliber and range that could operate in variable weather conditions, paratroop carriers and freighters, helicopter gunships that figured prominently in the tactics of the ground forces, as well as reconnaissance and transport planes. Over fifteen years, the Air Force may have obtained as many as 112 Mig 21, 37 Mig 23, 15 Mig 17, 20 Antonov 12, 18 Antonov 26, 5 Antonov 22, 10 Sukhoi SU 7, 12 SF 260, 7 TI Oter, 2 Mi 14, 43 Mi 8, and 30 Mi 24. The air defense regiments were equipped with plenty Pechera and Volga missiles. The Navy's capability was raised

with additional flotilla from the USSR. In 1978, when the Soviets began to reequip it, the force had 8 coastal and inshore patrol craft, 4 harbor defense craft, 6 mechanized landing craft, and a frigate from the United States, 4 fast-attack boats from Sweden, a minesweeper from the Netherlands, a water-tanker from Egypt, and a large patrol boat from Yugoslavia. The Soviet manufacture included two Petya class frigates, 7 fast patrol boats equipped with 4 SS-N-2A missiles, 2 Osa 11-class fast attack craft armed with four Styx ship-to-ship missiles, 2 Mol-class torpedo boats, many light air craft and helicopters for patrolling and supporting the marine commandos, and SS-N-2S Styx radar-guided missiles. Ethiopia is no longer a maritime nation, having lost both of its ports to Eritrea. MOND, "Ka 1969 jemiro wade hager ya geba messaria ena tiyit", Hidar 1983 ["Imported weapons and bullets since 1977," November 1990]; "Ya hayloch, ya serawit, ya izoch ena ya liyu liyu kifloch ya nibret zirzir meglecha," Tahisas 1980, abari, Brigadier-General Abebe Wolde Mariam la guad Fisseha Desta, 10 Tir, 1977 ["An inventory of the property of forces, armies, commands and various departments," December 1988, enclosure in Brigadier-General Abebe Wolde Mariam to Comrade Fisseha Desta, January 17, 1985; Martin, "Navy for Sale," 49. The Eritreans acquired 3 landing aircrafts, 1 warship, and 3 tug boats. EPLF, "Bisirihitat hayli bahri Hizbawi Serawit Harnet Eritra kab agelglot wetsae zikonan zitemarakan merakib hayli bahri Itiopia" ["Ships destroyed and captured by the Naval Force of the Eritrean People's Liberation Army from the Ethiopian naval force," undated, RICE, Asmara.

Notes

Translations of Amharic references are provided parenthetically. All translations are by the author. Original dates are in the Ethiopian calendar, which runs from September 11 to September 10, seven or eight years behind the Gregorian calendar.

Ethiopians have no last names or surnames. A person's name (for example, Farris) is simply followed by his or her father's (for example, Jaliye). A person is addressed by his or her first name. The normal procedure among Ethiopians is to alphabetize by the person's name, not by the father's name (Farris Jaliye). Ethiopians spell their names in a variety of ways—as, for example, Haile Mariam, Hailemariam, or Hayla Maryam.

PREFACE

Epigraph: Quoted in Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, 233.

PART ONE: THE SPECTER OF REVOLUTION AND WAR

Epigraphs: Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 264; Sherman, *Memoirs*, xxi (copyright © 2005 by Barnes & Noble, Inc.; reprinted with permission of Barnes & Noble).

1. EPRDF, *The Generation That Shook Mountains.*
2. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 219–21.
3. The main reason for the existence of this "gatekeeper state" is to provide or deny access to the economy (Cooper, *Africa since 1940*).
4. Bayart, *The State in Africa*, xiii.
5. Morgan, "A Geographic Evaluation of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict," 674.
6. Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 5.

CHAPTER 1

Epigraphs: Ungar, *Goethe's World View*, 113; Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 264; Blasingame, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 3:204; Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, 1; Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 9.

1. Girmame received his education in the United States, at Columbia University and the University of Wisconsin. Closely identified with the popular stirrings in colonial Africa, he was the most prominent dissident intellectual. To minimize his influence in the capital, where his generation of intellectuals congregated, the government posted him to outlying areas as a junior administrator. There he introduced mild reforms that nonetheless won him adulation among the people and opprobrium from the traditional power wielders, whom he saw as the main impediments to change and development.
2. For a detailed account of the event, see Greenfield, *A New Political History of Ethiopia*, chs. 17–19; Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States*, ch. 5.
3. Donald E. Paradis, Memorandum to His Imperial Majesty, 16 Jan. 1961, enclosure, US Embassy to Department of State, Addis Ababa, 18 Jan. 1961, National Archives 11 at College Park, MD, 775.00/1–161. Paradis was an adviser in the prime minister's office.
4. Abiye Abebe, *Willful Self-Correction*.
5. Ministry of Information, *From Fascism to Feudalism*, 15–16.
6. These issues have been comprehensively analyzed in many important works, but see especially Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*; Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*; Ottaway and Ottaway, *Ethiopia*; Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*; Lefort, *Ethiopia*; and Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia*.
7. Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 74.
8. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State*, 113.
9. See Bahru, *Pioneers*.
10. Gabre Hiwet was clearly ambivalent, however, about the genesis of capitalism in his country. Educated in Austria, he articulated his ideas in his *Government and Public Administration*, a remarkably original and erudite treatise on the political economy of Ethiopia, the first part of which is devoted to a highly schematic presentation of the evolution of human history. While he believed that contact with the West would inexorably lead to societal change and development, Gabre Hiwet also keenly felt that unequal ties with an aggrandizing global economy could deprive the country of the opportunity to develop a self-generating national economy. Long before Latin American scholars popularized the issue, Gabre Hiwet, who could be regarded as the intellectual ancestor of the reformers, warned that Ethiopia's insertion into the expansive capitalist system would place the country in a terrible state of dependency. But he saw no alternative; caught in ambiguity, Gabre Hiwet simply advocated capitalist development under an autocratic but benevolent leader. He also recommended measures that he thought would minimize exploitation by external agents (Gabre Hiwet, *Government and Public Administration* and "Emperor Menelik and Ethio-

pia," 140–42; Caulk, "Dependency, Gabre Hiwet Baykedagn, and the Birth of Ethiopian Reformism," 569–81. See also Bahru, *Pioneers*, 49–52).

11. The best introduction is Clapham, *Haile Selassie's Government*.
12. Kapuscinski, *The Emperor*, 49.
13. Dessalegn Rahmato, "Moral Crusaders and Incipient Capitalists," 73.
14. Kapuscinski, *The Emperor*, 56.
15. Lefort, *Ethiopia*, 26–27.
16. An accessible source is Keddie, *Modern Iran*.
17. Ethiopia was the recipient of the largest amount of United States economic and military aid in sub-Saharan Africa throughout the 1960s. Since locally extracted revenues were insufficient to cover expenditures, the state relied heavily on foreign loans and aid, drawing 30 percent of its total revenues from them in 1973. That as much as 75 percent of that came from the United States meant that the United States had a dominant influence in the affairs of the Ethiopian client state.
18. Bahru's excellent *Pioneers of Change* is the only extended study of these reformers.
19. The Ethiopian student movement never produced public intellectuals like Ali Shariati of Iran, men and women who could anchor Marxist ideas in traditional mores or religious precepts and share them with the masses in plain language. They were never able to broadcast their ideas widely despite the National Service, instituted in 1963, in which college students were dispatched around the country to enlighten, and help improve the social conditions of, the rural communities. Their impact was negligible.
20. The exception is Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia*.
21. In the United States, regional chapters of the Ethiopian Student Union in North America devoted much less time in their studies to Ethiopian history than to Marxist tracts. As this author remembers, the works that preoccupied us were those of Lenin, Mao Zedong, and some of the leading Western Marxist intellectuals. Among the works we studied with seriousness were Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*, *State and Revolution*, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and *Left-Wing Communism;* Mao's "On Contradictions," "New Democracy," "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," "Some Questions concerning Methods of Leadership," and "On Protracted War." We were also avid readers of Monthly Review's publications. Some of the ideas and concepts we learned about found their way into our publications. The principal journals and pamphlets were *Challenge*, *Combat*, *Strike*, *Tigilachin* (*Our Struggle*), *Tagel* (*Struggle*), *Tatek* (*Be Girded*), and *Tenesh Itiopiawit* (*Arise, Ethiopian Woman*).
22. Clapham, "The Socialist Experience in Ethiopia and Its Demise," 20.
23. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 72.
24. Ibid., 57.
25. René Lefort states the problem succinctly: "The shared conviction that only radical changes inspired by socialist doctrine would wrench Ethiopia out of the rut was not enough to hold together a movement crisscrossed by deep sociological and political cleavages" (*Ethiopia*, 28).
26. The other source of friction was organizational. The students were enthralled by com-

munist militancy and organization. Even though the movement was a mass organization, embracing diverse groups and competing ideas, it tended to behave like a monolithic party, imposing one world outlook, upholding rigid discipline, and censoring those with dissenting views. The easiest way to repudiate and shun dissenters was to brand them as "Trotskyite," "revisionist," "chauvinist," or "reactionary" or to ridicule them as "jolly jacks." Moreover, those members who aspired to guru status used manipulative and divisive tactics to cultivate reverential followers and audiences, thereby creating additional problems.

27. John Sorenson captures the essence of the debate nicely: "Ethiopian nationalist history, claiming a link with the ancient kingdom of Axum, emphasizes continuity, unity, and cultural identity. Opposing narrative constructions challenge these themes and emphasize conquest, subjugation, and difference. History and identity are thus conceived in conflicting narratives" (*Imagining Ethiopia*, 75).
28. Wallelign Makonnen, "On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia." There was a rumor at the university, where I was an instructor, that the article was coauthored by another brilliant student, Yohannes Sibahatu, who would later be killed in Eritrea. This provocative piece was followed in 1970 by a highly polemical article written under the pseudonym Tilahun Takele, "The National Question ('Regionalism') in Ethiopia." Actually, it was the work of a group of Ethiopian students living in exile in Algeria.
29. Clapham is right in suggesting that Ethiopia was not a hodgepodge empire, but neither was it "a multiethnic nation" that could have lasted without profound structural changes. It has taken two revolutions to effect those, but it is far from certain that we have seen the last act (*Transformation and Continuity*, 26).
30. For the origins and evolution of the student movement, see Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students;* Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation;* Andargachew Assegid, *The Long March That Was Cut Short.*
31. The group was led by the late Senaye Likke, who went on to organize the Wez (Labor) League after 1974. Mesfin Habtu, who had played a leading role in the adoption of the historic resolution and subsequently became ESUNA's president, was found dead in his apartment under mysterious circumstances on December 1, 1971. He was the first casualty of the escalating antagonism between the movement's factions.
32. Laqueur, *The Fate of the Revolution.*
33. Lenin, "Letters from Afar. First Letter. The First Stage of the First Revolution," *Essential Works*, 302.
34. Though by no means comparable to Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, the most intimate eyewitness account of events is Ottaway and Ottaway, *Ethiopia.*
35. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 38.
36. In *Rebellion, Revolution, and Armed Forces*, D. E. H. Russell quotes Crane Brinton: "No government has ever fallen before revolutions until it has lost control over its armed forces or lost the ability to use them effectively; and conversely, no revolutionists have ever succeeded until they have got a predominance of effective armed force on their side" (13).
37. Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 22.

38. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 218–44.
39. It is not clear whether the Derg was aware of the fact that it was James Herzog, one of the architects of apartheid, who coined the term "South Africa First," referring, of course, to white South Africa. He is believed to have borrowed the idea from the Nazis.
40. Dessalegn Rahmato, "Moral Crusaders and Incipient Capitalists," 81.
41. Mayer, *The Furies*, ch. 4.
42. For an interesting take on the man and his role in the revolution, see Genet, *Reminiscences*.
43. Quoted in Johnson, *Modern Times*, 101.

PART TWO: COMRADES AGAINST COMRADES

Epigraph: Mao, *Selected Works*, 2:224.

1. The other organizations were: The Afar Liberation Front (ALF), the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), the Somali-Abo Liberation Front (SALF), the Sidama Liberation Front (SLF), and Echat.
2. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat sibseba la sostegna medebegna sibseba ya karabu senedoch," kutir 5, 14.6.77 ["Meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE)—Documents Presented to the 3rd Regular Meeting," no. 5, Feb. 21, 1985], 31–32.
3. One source estimates 63,000 for the EPLF and 53,800 for the TPLF, another reverses the numbers, and still another assigns equivalent numbers. See MIA, "Ya Itiopia ya winbidina yizotawoch ena ya chigru aktachawotch ena stratejawi ya meftiheye hassaboch," kits 2, Meskerem 1980 ["Ethiopia's Rebel Positions, Current Trends of the Problem, and Ideas for a Strategic Resolution," vol. 2, Sept. 1987], 84–86; MOND, "Ya Tigray wotaderawi huneta acher maragagacha," 14 Yekatit 1981 ["A Short Assessment of the Military Situation in Tigray," Feb. 21, 1989], 6–10; and Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, "Shaabia," 30 Yekatit 1982 ["The EPLF," March 7, 1990], 14.
4. Mao, *Selected Works*, 1:147.
5. Taber, *The War of the Flea*, 23.
6. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*, 52, 8–9.
7. Taber, *The War of the Flea*, 23.
8. "The multiple objective and subjective factors involved in guerrilla warfare and their complicated interaction rule out all-embracing formulas and explanation that are scientific, in the sense that they have predictive value," correctly observes Walter Laqueur. But even as this more guarded analyst admits, avoidance of absolutes does not mean denial of the fact that guerrilla movements share common features. An examination of those common patterns helps explain "why some of them have succeeded and others have failed" (*Guerrilla*, 393).
9. Ibid., 402. Emphasis added.
10. Russell, *Rebellion, Revolution, and Armed Forces*, 22–23.

11. For the various outcomes of these movements, see Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*, especially ch. 8.
12. Prunier, "The Rwandan Patriotic Front," 119–33, and Ngoga, "Uganda: The National Resistance Army," 91–106, both in Clapham, *African Guerrillas*.
13. Taber, *The War of the Flea*, 136–37; Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, 393; and Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 35–38.
14. Katzenbach, "Time, Space, and Will," 13. See also Shy and Collier, "Revolutionary War," especially 850.
15. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 10.
16. Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 104.
17. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 154.
18. Mao, *Selected Works*, 1:124.
19. Taber, *The War of the Flea*, 53.
20. Ibid., 54–55.
21. Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 104.
22. Ibid.
23. Taber, *The War of the Flea*, 54–55.
24. It was with this in mind that one longtime observer of social movements in the Third World (wrongly) remarked that Mao's theory may not be as germane in Africa and the Middle East; he saw those societies as highly fragmented, lacking bonds of cooperation and solidarity (Chaliand, *Guerrilla Strategies*, 28). The Ethiopian case abundantly refutes this view. Others have argued that some revolutionary wars (as in Cuba or Uganda) do not pass—or ought not to pass—through all three phases. Inspired by the peculiar Cuban experience, the mythical Che Guevara claimed that a tightly knit armed force (foco) could ignite a people's war by using violence, turning Mao's theory on its head. Guevara elevated the military over the political process. Focoism, as the new conception came to be known, received its most sophisticated articulation by Regis Debray, a French leftist intellectual who argued that it was the armed band that formed "the nucleus of the party, not vice versa." Organized violence gives rise to political leadership, which then creates the vanguard party that politicizes and mobilizes the masses in the heat of the armed struggle. The insurgents of Ethiopia definitely had an element of focoism (Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?*, 116).
25. The apparent imbalance in the discussion that follows reflects the need to compress the well-known political history of the Eritrean nationalist resistance and the relative inaccessibility of the former Eritrean rebels compared with their Tigrayan counterparts, whose movement is nevertheless far less studied. Two works were particularly useful. Pool's *From Guerrillas to Government* offers the most extended reliable coverage of the EPLF's military structure. The only scholarly study of the Tigrayan resistance is Young's excellent *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia*.

CHAPTER 2

Epigraphs: Anderson, *Guerrillas*, 164; Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 42; Trevaskis, *Eritrea*, 129–30; Mao, *Selected Military Writings*, 271.

1. For the preceding, see Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle*, 61–107; Erlich, *The Struggle over Eritrea*, 15–33; and Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*, 57–70. For a revisionist interpretation, see Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia*, and Zewde Retta, *The Eritrean Question*.
2. According to Markakis, "it was fear of arrest that led Awate to take to the bush again" (*National and Class Conflict*, 108). The Ethiopian official account tells a different story: "When Sudanese police destroyed his farm, he protested before Ethiopian officials but received no satisfactory answer. He then crossed the border and stole camels from the Sudanese, which he reported to the local [Ethiopian] administrators. The police that were sent to arrest him for his action damaged his house and farm. He subsequently left for the bush with sixteen other men, only five of whom were armed" (MOND, "Sile Eritra Teklay Gizat huneta mequaqamiya la hasab yireda zend ya tezegaje mastawasha," 1967 ["A Memo Prepared for Consideration of the Situation in the Province of Eritrea," 1974], 2, Addis Ababa). Whatever link there may have been between Awate and the ELF, it was fairly loose; his revolt was more like ordinary banditry than political insurgency. Many of his followers were former policemen in the Sudanese state.
3. MIA, "Ya tsare-hizboch inkiskasie ba semien semien-mirab Itiopia," kifil 1, Meskerem 1977 ["Anti-People's Movements in Northern, Northwestern Ethiopia," part 1, Sept. 1985], 16–17, Addis Ababa.
4. Ruth, *The Eritrean Struggle*, 113
5. Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government*, 79.
6. Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*, 136. In 1976, the front was challenged by a group it called *yemin* ("rightist"). It, too, was quashed, and some of its leaders were similarly liquidated (Markakis, *National and Class Conflict;* Ruth, *The Eritrean Struggle*, 116–17; and Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government*, 85–86).
7. The armed clash was initiated by the EPLF, which outnumbered its rival by almost two to one (approximately 23,000 to 12,000).
8. The most detailed account of the history of the fronts is in Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*, 104–45. See also Ruth, *The Eritrean Struggle*, 108–35.
9. The ELF's total fighting force by the late 1980s was estimated to be a little over thirteen hundred, or about eight infantry companies (MIA, "Biherawi ya dehninet chigrochachin ena tassabi ya meftihye hassaboch," kits 2, Meskerem 1981 ["Our National Security Problems and Possible Solutions," vol. 2, Sept. 1988], 22).
10. Those qualities were acknowledged by the Ministry of National Defense (MOND) in at least two memos: "Isaias is an indispensable person to the movement. . . . It is under his able leadership that the fighters have achieved a high sense of self-pride, morale, discipline, and fame. . . . He is not one to be brushed aside easily" (unsigned and undated memorandum to Major General Gizaw Belayneh, 1975). Another observer wrote similarly, "Isaias Afewerki is a skillful tactician who learns from experience and is trusted by the fighters. He never separates himself from them, but lives with them in the bunker, eating the same food and sharing their hardship. He is a well-respected bandit leader" (Defense Security Department, MOND, "Let's Review in Depth," no. 1, n.d., 107).

11. Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government*, 61.
12. For the EPRP, see Connell, *Conversations with Eritrean Political Prisoners*, app. 1, 139–63.
13. Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government*, 82–131. Eritreans residing abroad were grouped together in similar associations.
14. Ibid.
15. Interview with a former fighter, July 24, 2003, Seattle, WA.
16. Gezaee, *A Maneuver in the West*, 33.
17. Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government*, 95–98, 127–28, and Connell, *Against All Odds*, 188–89.
18. The number of divisions actually ranged from six to nine and the number of brigades from fourteen to twenty-four. Since adversaries tend to inflate one another's size, I have taken the lowest figures. See MOND, "BaHuasse ena Soar ginbar atekalay huneta gemgema," Hamle 1980 ["An Evaluation of the Situation in the Fronts of the Second and Third Revolutionary Armies," July 1987], 4–5; MIA, "Ethiopia's Rebel Positions," 1:2–4 and 11:64; MIA, "Ba Ihidri ya Mekelakeya Mikir Beit liyiu sibseba," 1981 ["Special Meeting of the Defense Council of the PDRE," 1988], 1; MIA, "Our National Security Problems," 1:15–18; and Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, "Shaabia," 13–14. A former member of the EPLF's security department estimated the EPLA's size as between sixty-five thousand and seventy-five thousand (personal communication, Oct. 20, 2004, Oakland, CA).
19. Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, "Shaabia," 3.
20. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 28gna aschequay sibseba kale gubae," Mon., 26 Yekatit 1982 ["Minutes of the 28th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo of the WPE's CC," March 3, 1990], 45–46.
21. I have met two women in the United States who allege they "lost" two sons each to "kidnappers" in the Sudan. See also Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government*, 152.
22. Anonymous, July 24, 2003, Seattle, WA.
23. Alemseged Tesfai, *Two Weeks in the Trenches*, 104–05.
24. Other pamphlets and magazines were *Adulis*, published by the Foreign Bureau, *Sagem* (*Forward*), *Gedli Hizbi* (*People's Struggle*), *Dimtsi Hizbi* (*People's Voice*), and *Chura Teena* (*Light of Health*).
25. MOND, "Ya 1975–76 ya maraja gimit," kifil 2, 1977 ["Intelligence Estimate, 1982–83," part 2, 1984], 95.
26. Ibid., 95–98; MIA, "Our National Security Problems," vol. 1, part 1, 126, 139–40; Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government*, 142–43.
27. Mao, *Selected Works*, 5:411–23.
28. Former EPFL fighter, personal communication, Oct. 20, 2004, Oakland, CA.
29. Iyob Kahssay, a former ELF fighter, provided me with the song (Aug. 12, 2005, Rochester, NY). The Amharic original is: **ግመለይ ግመለይ**
ጎኒ ተጋዳላይ ብረት ተሰኪማ
ተፈታዊት ፍጥረት ናይ ሀገርና ሀብቲ
ደኺመ ዘይትብል ለይቲ ምስ መዓልቲ።

ጽምኢ ዘይወጸ በረኻ ደህሲሳ
ስንቂ ተኰልኵላ ትኽይድ ጢሒሳ
ሐወልቲ ይስራሕ ብግቡዕ ይቀረጽ፤
ታሪክ ጀግንነትኪ ብስፊሕ ይገለጽ
ተዓጣቂት ፍጥረት ግመለይ ዘያዳ
ምስጢር ናይ ሀገርና ዓቂሪት አብ ክብዳ።

CHAPTER 3

1. Central Statistical Office (CSO), *People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, table 7; MIA, "Minutes of the Combined Meeting of the Secretariat and First Secretaries of Territorial Committees," part 1, Oct. 30, 1989, 22, 28.
2. See, e.g., Bent, *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians*, 11–12, 126, and Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia*, 175.
3. Gabre Hiwet, "Ate Menelik ena Itiopia" ["Emperor Menelik and Ethiopia"], 341–42.
4. Ibid.
5. Walker Connor observes of Ethiopia and Thailand that "diverse ethnic elements were able to coexist for a lengthy period within each of these states because the states were poorly integrated, and the ethnic minorities therefore had little contact with either the (mostly theoretic) state governments or with each other" (*Ethnonationalism*, 36).
6. Gebru, *Ethiopia*, ch. 4.
7. Aregawi, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," 587. Emphasis added.
8. For a profile of the man, see Aregawi, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," 588–91, and Tesfay Gabreab, "Sihul the Elder." A more critical study of that six-foot-tall, ebony black, arrestingly complex person is needed. I came to know him through two mutual friends, Mahteme Kassahun and Desta Bezabeh, in 1972. The latter was born in Eritrea and worked in Tigray after graduating from the Business College of Haile Selassie I University. Aregawi does not mention him in his list (576), but I know of no other person who did as much for the renaissance of Tigrayan culture, under the protective shield of Leul Ras Mengesha Siyum, as Desta. I also wish to acknowledge here that without Desta's enthusiastic help I probably would have not been able to interview all the important personalities in Mekele in 1975. When I returned to Ethiopia in 1991, after a long absence, I met him again in Addis Ababa. He had a limp, the result of torture in the dungeons of the Derg. He died a few years ago; depression, I learned, apparently led to heavy drinking and his untimely death. What a pity that the talents of such a vital and generous man should have been wasted. The other individual who did much in the cultural sphere, against all odds, was the rather eccentric but indefatigable Aram Maru.
9. Aregawi, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," 588.
10. Asghede Gabre Selassie, July 7, 1994, Mekele.

11. Aregawi, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," 586, 588–90.
12. Tesfaye Gabreab, "Mussie's Biography." The essay might more accurately be called a hagiography.
13. Abay Tsehaye, June 23, 1994, Addis Ababa.
14. Haile Tirfe, July 12, 1994, Asmara. The original is: **አቲ ትግራይ ኩሕሎ ሸዋ ኮይንካዶ ትግራይ ትሕሎ ለመዘበን ሐዲኡ አሎ።።**
15. Young, *Peasant Revolution*, 96–97.
16. The other two were Lieutenant General Iyassu Mengesha, former ambassador to Britain, and Major General Nega Tegegn, former governor of Gondar.
17. Literally children of women who sold their bodies for a quarter of an Ethiopian dollar. My informant was Zeru Khishen, personal communication, June 25, 2003, Amsterdam, Netherlands. Young reports that they used the Italian word *puttana* (*Peasant Revolution*, 104).
18. The narratives of the circumstances of his death are inconsistent. We are told that he died in combat ("Ka [From] Zalambasa iska [to] Addis Ababa: Reminiscences of General Tsadkan," *Ifoyta*, Ginbot 1989 [May 1997]: 4–6). But another official source, which alleges that Sihul was swept away while crossing a river, also asserts that he was killed by the EDU while on his way to the Sudan (Tesfaye Gabreab, "Sihul the Elder," 108, 124–26).
19. "From Zalambasa to Addis Ababa," 5; Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994; Asghede, July 17, 1994.
20. According to one EDU fighter there may have been as many as thirty encounters between 1976 and 1979 (Gidey Bahreshum, *Amoraw* [*The Eagle*], 193).
21. TPLF, *A Political History of the TPLF*, cyclostyled, n.d., 80–89.
22. Tesfaye Makonnen, *To the Protagonist*, 104–08, 138–40, and Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation*, 1:165–71.
23. Kiflu, *The Generation* (Amharic version), 3:299–326; TPLF, *A Political History*, 57–69.
24. Kiflu, *The Generation* (Amharic version), 3:299–326.
25. MIA, "Ya Kifle Hagerat Issapa Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch 7gna sibseba kale gubae," kutir 7, 21 Megabit 1980 ["Minutes of the 7th Meeting of the Regional First Secretaries of the WPE," no. 7, March 28, 1988], 23.
26. TPLF, *A Political History*, 80–90.
27. Young, *Peasant Revolution*, 135.
28. MOND, "Intelligence Estimate, 1983–84," 104. The first number is suspect.
29. Achievements in these areas are narrated in TPLF Foreign Relations Bureau, *People's Voice* (London), special issue, Feb.–March 1985, 8–12.
30. This slogan, here translated, was still on posters and walls in provincial towns in 1991.
31. Bisrat Amare, Feb. 25, 1995, Arlington, VA., and March 26, 1995, Columbus, OH; Andnet Desalegn, "From History's Notebook" [Amharic], *Ethiopian Register* 4 (April 1997), 54–55. I also heard these stories from ordinary people in Tigray. I have little reason to doubt their veracity.

32. It should be pointed out here that those Politburo and Central Committee members who lost to Meles in the third organizational crisis of 2002 have been almost completely shunned by the public, including by the timid careerists who kissed their feet prior to the fall and by their former comrades in arms. It is one manifestation of the coercive culture of centralism.
33. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994, Addis Ababa; MIA, "Northern Rebels and Possible Solutions," 86–95.
34. TPLF, *Weyeen* 78, no. 18 (1986) [1993], and 79, no. 19 (1986): 4, 5.
35. Ibid.
36. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994; Siye Abraha, July 2, 1994, Addis Ababa; MIA, "The Situation in the North," 206. The TPLF's "Military Tactics of the TPLF," Sene 1971 [June 1979], typed, 29 pages, also provides some insights, but it is by no means an original document.
37. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994, and Haile Tirfe, July 16, 1994, Mekele.
38. Ibid.
39. TPLF, *A Political History*, 144–56.
40. Brigadier General Mulatu Negash to Brigadier General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, 9 Hamle 1973 [July 17, 1980], abari, "Ya Sheraro Zemecha Report," Megabit 1973 [enclosure, "Report of Operation Sheraro," March 1980], 3–40, Addis Ababa; General Inspector, "Sile Sheraro Zemecha ya tesete gelesta ena kalametayik—kifil hulet," Megabit 1973 ["Questions and Explanations about Operation Sheraro," March 1980], 82–144, Addis Ababa; General Inspector, "Sile Sheraro Zemecha ya tezegaje questionnaire," 15 Megabit 1973 ["Questionnaire regarding Operation Sheraro," March 22, 1980], 1–19, Addis Ababa, MOND. Colonel Tadesse Beyene, a member of the ad hoc committee, had a slightly different view. "The army," he noted, "had no reliable and continuous flow of information and it made no effort to get it by itself; it also neglected elementary principles of tactical formation and thus blindly walked into an open space without any protective cover—a death trap set up by the enemy. It was forced to fight face to face at close range for four hours, unable to use its 82 mm mortars, and paid a heavy price. The other problem was that Colonel Tariku Ayne delayed the operation. It was known that he was unhappy about being the coordinating officer and yet no timely action was taken to relieve him of his duties. And when action was finally taken, the man was informed about his removal from command just one hour before the start of hostilities, creating a vacuum in command. It is well known that this caused confusion and panic in the force. Ultimately, all the officers were responsible for the failure" (Mulatu to Tesfaye, "Report of Operation Sheraro," 39–40).
41. Ba Hager Mekelakeya Minister Kedami Memria, "Ba Tigray kifle hager ya Zemecha 'Demsis' atekalay report," 1977 [Primary Directorate, MOND, "A General Report on Operation Demsis in the Tigray Region," 1985], 1–15, Mekele; Major General Alemayehou Desta, la Mekelakeya Minister Kedami Memria, "Sile Zemecha Dandie ena Chercher report," 25 Meskerem 1978 [Alemayehou to the Primary Directorate, MOND, "A Report on Operations Dandie and Chercher," Oct. 2, 1986], Mekele; TPLF, *People's Voice*, Feb.–March 1983, 29–31.
42. MIA, "Ya waqtu ya dehninet witrat ka wadafitu sigat antsar siganazab," miraf arat,

Hidar 1979 ["Contrasting the Current Security Problem with Future Concerns," part 4, Nov. 1987, 192–94; MIA, "Ya Ras Gaz ena Astedadar Akebabiwotch ya Parti Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 10, kifil 1, 4–5 Megabit 1981 ["Minutes of the Meeting of the First Party Secretaries of the Autonomous Regions and Administrations," no. 10, part 1, March 12–13, 1989], 74–75; MOND, "Emergency Meeting of the Tigray Regional Administration," no. 7, 20.11.80 [Aug. 28, 1989], 10; Mehari Kassa, a former Dragon, interviewed Aug. 17, 1993, and Lieutenant Asfaw Zewdie, who worked with the Dragons, interviewed Aug. 24, 1993, both in Addis Ababa.

43. TPLF, *A Political History*, 163, and Young, *Peasant Revolution*, 131.
44. For more, see Young, *Peasant Revolution*, 129–34.
45. Ibid., 133.
46. MIA, "The Situation in the North," 9–22.
47. MIA, "Contrasting the Current Security Problem with Future Concerns," 211.
48. MIA, "The Situation in the North," 26.
49. Ibid., 31–33.
50. I am grateful to Haile Tirfe, a modest but talented thirty-seven-year-old fighter from Tembien, for providing me with these slogans (interview, July 16, 1994, Mekele). Hayelom confirmed them, as did the late Assefa Mamo, another TPLF fighter, although he could not remember the precise wording of the last two (interview, July 20, 1994, Addis Ababa). The original is: **ዕርድና ንዑታት ዓድና**
ቀለብና ወያናይ ሐቦና
ዕጥቅና ካብ ጸላእትና
ጽንዓትና አብ ዒላማና
ሐይልና ሰዉራዊ ሰራዊትና
ዓንድና ወያናይ ሕዝብና።።
51. At our brief meeting in Addis Ababa on July 7, 1994, Sibhat told me he was fifty-nine.
52. "Military Tactics of the TPLF" (Tigriniya), Miazia 1978 [April 1985].
53. Ibid., 26–27. Some of Abay's colleagues complain of vacillation and breach of faith. I was not able to verify their claim, and I found him a very smart, humble, and courteous man who gave me three hours of his time on June 23, 1994.
54. TPLF, *People's Voice*, July–Sept. 1986, 12. For the genesis and formation of the party, see MLLT, *A Ten-Year Assessment of the Communist Force within the TPLF* (Tigriniya and Amharic), cyclostyled, July 1985.
55. The two men were Aregawi Berhe and Gidey Zeratsion.
56. The publications included *Itek* (*Be Girded* [or *Armed*]), *Nikaah* (*Be Conscious* [or *Political*]), *Tederaj* (*Get Organized*), *Tegadel* (*Struggle*), *Wegahta* (*Dawn*), and *Yatigil Tiri* (*A Call to Revolution*), all produced by the Department of Public Relations. The Foreign Relations Bureau published the bimonthly *People's Voice* in English.
57. Anonymous, March 16, 2004, Washington, DC.
58. A former guerrilla who fought in northern Gondar in the late 1970s, wrote to me about the struggle: "The two most pressing problems, the ones that constantly tested a fighter's stamina and resolve, were hunger and lack of clothing. Much time was

spent searching for food, which was not easily found, for the people were very poor. The dearth of clothing and lack of cleanliness were ideal for our infection with lice. Yet the fighter was most willing to endure these hardships because he saw the cause as larger than himself" (Moges Bizuneh, May 16, 1982, Indianapolis, IN).

59. TPLF, *Weyeen*, 64, no. 17 (Tir 1985) [Jan. 1992]: 2–3; MIA, "The Situation in the North," 38–39; and Tesfaye Gabreab, "Operation Agaazi," 10. Tesfaye claims that 1,300 prisoners were set free.
60. Ataklti Embaye, "A Person of Two Worlds," 248; Kassetch Asfaw, June 25, 1994, Addis Ababa; interview with Hayelom, July 4, 1994. For a biographical sketch of the late Kassetch, whom I knew well and affectionately respected, see Tesfaye Gabreab, "Ghuma's Aunt," 105–36.
61. Hayelom, July 4, 1994.
62. Among military strategists, Hayelom admired General Giap most, and among Ethiopian officers, he respected Brigadier General Araya Zeraay for his bravery and tactical skill and Colonel Sereke Berhan for his ability to inspire and lead a disciplined and loyal group of fighters. He confessed that he was never able to break the colonel's code, and no soldiers under Sereke's command ever defected to the TPLF (interview, July 4, 1994). Interestingly, Sereke claimed that it took him only a couple of minutes to decode Hayelom's secret messages but that he nonetheless respected Hayelom both as a fighter and as a leader (interview, April 24, 1994, Mekele).
63. MIA, "Anti-People's Movements," part 1, Sept. 1985, 177–78.
64. Ibid., 178.
65. TPLF, *People's Voice*, Feb.–March 1985, 4–8.
66. TPLF, *Administration of Zana* (Tigriniya), cyclostyled, Nov. 7, 1985, 78.
67. TPLF, *People's Voice*, Feb.–March 1985, 8; Young, *Peasant Revolution*, 187–92.
68. Gebru, *Ethiopia*, 113–18.
69. Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louise Bonaparte*, 124.
70. Young appears to exaggerate, however, when he writes, "What gave the meetings or evaluations their appearance of consensual decision-making when they were to some extent orchestrated by the TPLF was the leadership's willingness to accept criticism collectively and individually and to allow virtually unlimited debate on issues. *No individual or policy was immune to critical evaluation. The result was that fighters and peasants did not perceive a significant gap between themselves and the TPLF leadership. They were not intimidated by the leadership* and while their opinions might not carry the day, their views were heard" (*Peasant Revolution*, 143–44). I have emphasized those parts with which I disagree mildly.
71. My guide was Kahssay Teka, a twenty-eight-year-old former conscript in the national army and then in the service of the current administration. I am thankful to Siye Abraha, then minister of defense, for facilitating my visit.
72. MIA, "Ya semien mirab ena misrak ena mirab Itiopia weqtawi huneta: ya tsera andnet ena tsera abiyot wenbediewoch inkiskasse ba hager wist," kifil 1, Hidar 1979 ["The Situation in Northwestern, Eastern, and Western Ethiopia: The Antiunity and Antirevolution Movements inside the Country," part 1, Nov. 1987], 46–49, 62–63.
73. Ibid., 58.

74. Kuma became minister of internal affairs and then president of the state of Oromia when he fell out with Meles and was dismissed from both the OPDO and the EPRDF. After "rehabilitation" he was returned as defense minister. Asamnew became a brigadier general in the new army.

CHAPTER 4

Epigraphs: Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, 1:211; Moore quoted in Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*, 60; Lefever, *Spear and Scepter*, 139.

1. Figures for the army and total defense forces are also given as 35,500 and 38,800 (Seifu Bekele la Addis Ababa Wana Memria, 18.10.82, abari, "Ka 1967–1982 Megabit diress ya tessera ya hayil ginbata" [Seifu to Main Headquarters, "The Buildup of Forces from 1974 to March 1990"] table 1, Brigadier General Solomon Kinfe la Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, "Ka 1966–1977 diress ya tadaraje ya hayil ginbata" [Solomon to Tesfaye, "Growth of Forces from 1974 to 1984"], tables 1 and 2, n.d., MOND).
2. The army's equipment included fifty M-41 light tanks and twenty-two M-60 tanks with high velocity guns, fifty M-113 and M-114 armored personnel carriers (APCs), two TOW antitank missiles, forty-eight 105 mm air defense guns and self-propelled Howitzer artillery, two hundred M-2 heavy mortars, twenty 40 mm and fourteen 55 mm air defense guns, and an assortment of automatic rifles of which the M-1 and Uzi were the most prized (MOND, "Yat Itiopia ya Mekelakeya aquam ena hayil mashashaya tinat," 29 Meskerem 1969 ["A Study to Improve the Defense Organization of Ethiopia," Oct. 7, 1977], 13, 39, 100; Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 102–03).
3. The air force's inventory consisted of eight supersonic 8F-SEs, twenty F-SEs, twelve subsonic F8–6Fs, ten F-86s, eight Saab-17, three Canberra 132s, five T-28Ds, thirteen Lockheed T-28As, eight T-33s, six Douglas C-47 Dakotas, two Douglas C-54s, two Hawker Doves, sixteen Saab 91-D Safirs, and three Alouette and four Bell UH-7H Iroquois helicopters (MOND, "A Study to Improve," Oct. 7, 1977, 100; Agyeman-Duah, *The United States and Ethiopia*, 74).
4. The navy's "fleet" was made up of one 18,000-ton training ship, four torpedo boats, five patrol boats equipped with four SS-N-2A missiles, one coastal minesweeper, four harbor-defense crafts, and four landing crafts. Most of them were provided by the United States.
5. The Israelis were the first to develop a counterinsurgency plan for the Ethiopian government (MOND, "Eritrea: CounterInsurgency Operations," June 19, 1969).
6. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 265–66.
7. MOND, "Threat Posed by the Republic of Somalia," memorandum to the US government, 1970, 17–18, Addis Ababa. The memo added that, even though the country "may still have a more efficient air force," it had no radar sets and few airfields; moreover, its lack of adequate roads inhibited the army's mobility. To convince the Americans, MOND appealed to cold war sentiment: "In defending her borders and sovereignty, Ethiopia is serving the free world's interest as well. A defeat of Ethiopia

at the hands of a Soviet oriented enemy would constitute a severe blow to the interest of the West in the whole region of Eastern Africa, while at the same time it affords an ominous successor for the Eastern Block, which the West cannot accept with indifference. Therefore, it stands to reason that assistance in the strengthening of Ethiopia's Armed Forces is a very sound investment on behalf of the West, even by calculations of sheer 'cost effectiveness.' . . . A better-equipped and stronger Ethiopian Armed Forces may serve as a deterrent and thus prevent a conflict the repercussions of which are unforeseeable" (2). MOND's concluding remark was prescient.

8. Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War.*
9. Cole, *Ethiopia*, 62–63.
10. Luckham, "Militarization and Democratization in Africa," 33.
11. Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times*, 95.
12. The members of the committee were the commanders of the three services, the permanent secretary of MOND, and four others, including the commander of a new commando unit called Nebelbal ("Flame"). The committee was formed on July 4, 1975, to evaluate the state of the armed forces—that is, their capabilities and needs.
13. MOND, "A Study to Improve," 17–22.
14. PMAC, "Ya Biherawi Abiyotawi Zemecha Memria la maqaquam ya watta awaj," 21 Nehassie 1969 ["A Decree for the Formation of the NROC," Aug. 29, 1977], MOND.
15. MOND, "Ka 1966 iska 1976 la Mekelakeya Minister ya tefekadew bejet ena sile tadarejawm ya genzaab inkiskase matekalaya" ["A Summation of the Budget Allotted to the Ministry of Defense and Expenditures from 1973 to 1984"] n.d., 3; Seifu to Main Headquarters, "The Buildup of Forces," table 1. Another document gives the figure of 128,980 (Solomon to Tesfaye, "Growth of Forces from 1974 to 1984," 12, MOND).
16. MOND, "Atekalay ya asir amet ya zemecha report," Meskerem 1977 ["A Comprehensive Ten-Year Operational Report," Sept. 1984]; Major General Abebe Wolde Mariam la guad Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam, 21.1.80, abari, "Ya huletegnan 5 amet (1986–1996) ya Mekelakeya ginbata ikid simimnet witiet," Megabit 1979 [Abebe to Comrade Haile Giorgis, enclosure, "A Report of the Agreement on the Five-Year Plan of Force Building," Sept. 1987], MOND.
17. MOND, "Ba 1977 ena 1978 wist strategic reserve ya maquaquamia ena Huletegna Abiyotawi Serawit metanakaria ikid," n.d., abari, Brigadier General Fanta Belay to Minister of Defense, 8 Nehassie 1975 ["A Plan to Form a Strategic Reserve and to Strengthen the Second Revolutionary Army," enclosure in Fanta to MOND, Aug. 15, 1982].
18. The three "acting chiefs" were Lieutenant General V. D. Mairko, Lieutenant General Stanislaw Nidonov, and Lieutenant General A. Dinissov.
19. Belay to Minister of Defense, Aug. 15, 1982.
20. Naval Headquarters, "La guad Mengistu Haile Mariam ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Wana Tsehafi Ya Ihidri President ena ya Abiyotawi Tor Hayloch Teklay Azaj," Hidar 1983 ["To Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, Secretary General of the WPE, President of the PDRE, and Commander in Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces," Nov. 1990]; Captain Tilahun Makonnen, "An Insight into Maritime Strategy," 43–47; and MOND, "La Kopwe Maekelawi Komitte gubae abalat ya miset ya Mekelakeya

Minister meglacha," 30 Hidar 1973 ["An Explanation to Be Given by the Ministry of Defense to the Members of the Central Committee of COPWE," Dec. 7, 1980], 13.

21. Anonymous, May 15, 1994, Dabre Markos.
22. CSO, *People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, table 7.4, 29.
23. MOND, "Memorandum on the Development of the Defense Forces of Socialist Ethiopia," n.d., 22, Addis Ababa.
24. The Amharic equivalents were *Ya Akababi Hizbawi Serawit*, *Ya Safara Hizbawi Serawit*, *Ya Shimiq Tewagi*, and *Ya Hizbawi Serawit*.
25. MIA, "La Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat ya Kilil Parti Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch 12gna ya gara sibseba ya karabu senedoch," 22 Tikimt 1982 ["Documents Presented at the 12th Joint Meeting of the CC's Secretariat and the First Secretaries of Zonal Party Committees," Oct. 30, 1989], 1–8.
26. The distribution of men in a battalion, company, and platoon was 580, 186, and 70, respectively (MOND, "Ya Sefera Akababi Militia Serawit metedaderia denb," Megabit 1972 ["Administrative Statutes for the Zonal Militia," March 1985], 1–16). Who was eligible for service? "Anyone age 18–50 and physically fit who either was uninvolved in or has recanted and been pardoned for antirevolutionary activities and does not hold grievances against the revolution. Anyone known for hard work and trust in the community and who has already contributed to the success of the revolution by participating in local civic organizations."
27. Ibid.
28. In 1990 there were 1,972 trained and fully equipped fighters, 1,323 trained but unequipped, and 1,274 in training in the six sectors of military command. These figures are probably too low, for there were about 2,000 fighters in Tigray alone.
29. MOND, "Ya Hizbawi Serawit birgadoch mastababaria aquam," Tikimt 1983 ["Formation and Coordination of the Brigades of People's Militia," Oct. 1990].
30. The original is: **ይህ ካዉ ምኾቱ እኔ በሕይወቱ ከራሴ በፊት ለኢትዮጵያ እናቱ**
31. MOND, "Ya Hizbawi Serawit birgadoch mastababaria aquam," Tikimt 1983 ["Formation and Coordination of the Brigades of People's Militia," Oct. 1990]; MOND, "Growth of Forces," table 2.
32. The reasons were articulated fairly clearly: "The National Military Service will provide a much wider base of recruitment for our diverse manpower needs, while at the same time it affords substantial savings in raising and maintaining our revolutionary army. Furthermore, it will facilitate the buildup of reserve manpower which could be called up in time of necessity and emergency. . . . It will also be instrumental in producing skilled, politically conscious, and disciplined manpower for the economic sector" (MOND, "Review of the Present Capabilities of the Armed Forces [Paper Submitted to the High-Level USSR Delegation]," Sept. 1979, 27, Addis Ababa). The same ideas or issues figured in another document: "The defense forces of the country will be built by young men who know their missions well and whose ideological and political commitment is clear and strong. . . . [In them], Ethiopia will have reliable and trained manpower. . . . Because they have been made to have ironclad discipline, they will serve as good examples, helping the broad masses to become revolutionary

citizens when demobilized and returned to civilian life" (MOND, "An Explanation," Dec. 7, 1979, 42).

33. The first officer to head the commissariat was Major General Siyum Makonnen, a graduate of Holeta and the former chief of intelligence in Eritrea (1977–79). The commissariat's organizational structure included departments for command, logistics, administration, and technical, medical, and political affairs. Successive directors of the National Conscription Program were Brigadier Generals Afewerki Wolde Mikael and Yirgalem Tekle Haimanot.
34. CSO, *The 1984 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia*, 4, table 1.1.
35. There were three stages in the conscription process: preenlistment, enlistment, and training. All men who turned sixteen by January 1 of the year of eligibility for preregistration had to report to the nearest office of the commissariat for a physical checkup. Over the two years prior to induction, those who passed the medical examination had to undergo a minimum of fifty hours of military instruction to acquire rudimentary skills in weapons handling and some knowledge of the military establishment. The instruction was given at the places of their residence, in schools, in workplaces, or at other convenient sites. Draftees stayed at home until induction at eighteen. It appears that this part of the program was discontinued after the first draft, largely for financial reasons. The second stage began with registration and issuance of identity cards at designated places between November and December on weekdays from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. and from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m. on Saturdays. This was followed by a medical examination conducted by special boards composed of representatives of the commissariat and of local medical and administrative services (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat la 3gna medebegna sibseba ya karabu senedoch," 14.6.77 ["Documents Submitted to the 3rd Regular Meeting of the Secretariat," Feb. 22, 1985], 74).
36. On arrival at the centers, the draftees were tested for contagious diseases and inspected for vermin and fleas; some failed these tests (in 1985, 775 draftees were sent back to their homes). Life in the camps began with the shaving of heads, followed by an oath to defend the country and the revolution and a pledge of allegiance to the constitution and the president. Acceptance of two pairs of green overalls, a jacket, two pairs of underwear, a pair of rubber boots, and a pair of canvas shoes marked the beginning of a rigorous life.
37. Brigadier General Afewerki Wolde Mikael, "La sostegnaw zur ya Biherawi Witidirna Agelglot siltena ya tezegaje ya timihrt memria," Hidar 1978 ["An Educational Curriculum Prepared for the Third Round of National Military Service," Nov. 1986].
38. The training period was twenty-six weeks, each comprising forty-five hours of instructional time (five hours on Saturdays). There was no training on three public holidays, and of the total instructional time of 1,463 hours, 335 hours were allocated for firing technique and use of weapons, 278 hours for the fundamentals of military skill, including first aid, and 130 hours for political education. Five hours each week were devoted to the study of Marxism-Leninism and the Ethiopian Revolution. About 333 hours of the training were done at night (MDNMS, "La huletegna zur ya tezegaje ya sidist war abiy ya timihrt program," Tahisas 1977; "La Project 80 'B' siltena ya tezegaje ya sidist war abiy ya timihrt program," Yekatit 1980 ["A Six-Month Major Educational

Program Prepared for the Second Round," Dec. 1985; "A Major Educational Program Prepared for Project 80-B," Feb. 1988], MOND).

39. Brigadier General Yirgalem Tekle Haimanot, "La [to] Tatek 2, Tatek 3, Tatek 4, ena [and] Tatek 5," Hidar 1980 [Nov. 1987], MOND; Getachew Wonde, *Addis Zemen*, 21 Hidar 1984.
40. Amare Mamo Setie, May 12, 1994, Addis Ababa; Tabi Asfaw, March 16, 1994, Addis Ababa; Daniel Amberber, March 18, 1994, Addis Ababa; and Yohannes Damtew, Feb. 29, 1994, Addis Ababa.
41. Colonel Seifu Bekele, "A Report of Force Buildup," July 26, 1990; MOND, "Sile andegnaw zur Biherawi Witidirna Agelglot mebt attetakem ya karabe tinat," Megabit 1978 ["A Study of the Use of Rights for the First Round of the National Service," March 1988]; and MOND, "The Buildup of Forces," March 1989.
42. Colonel Seifu Bekele, "A Report of Force Buildup," July 26, 1990; MOND, "Sile andegnaw zur Biherawi Witidirna Agelglot mebt attetakem ya karabe tinat," Megabit 1978 ["A Study of the Use of Rights for the First Round of the National Service," March 1988]; and MOND, "The Buildup of Forces," March 1989.
43. MOND, "A Force Buildup from 1974 to 1990," table 1.
44. Afewerki Wolde Mikael, abari 'U,' "La Tatek 2, 3, ena 4," 14 Tahisas 1977; Afewerki Wolde Mikael, abari 3, "La sostegna zur ya Biherawi Witidirna Agelglot siltena ya timihrt memria," Hidar 1978 [Afewerki, enclosure A, "To Tatek 2, 3, and 4," Dec. 22, 1985; Afewerki, enclosure 3, "An Educational Curriculum," Nov. 1986].
45. Afewerki Wolde Mikael, abari 'U,' "La Tatek 2, 3, ena 4," 14 Tahisas 1977; Afewerki Wolde Mikael, abari 3, "La sostegna zur ya Biherawi Witidirna Agelglot siltena ya timihrt memria," Hidar 1978 [Afewerki, enclosure A, "To Tatek 2, 3, and 4," Dec. 22, 1985; Afewerki, enclosure 3, "An Educational Curriculum," Nov. 1986].
46. MOND, "La arategnaw ya Biherawi Agelglot siltena ya tezegaje ya timihrt memria," 1979 ["An Educational Guide Prepared for the Fourth National Service," 1987].
47. There was no complete information, but in 1985 out of the total 42,707 examined, 7,874 (18 percent) were disqualified at the training centers (Tekle Haimanot, memo, Nov. 1987).
48. Captain Gabre Medhin Birega, who worked in the security department of MOND, testified that at least twenty generals sent their children to the USSR to avoid conscription (Getachew Wonde, *Addis Zemen*, 14 Hidar 1984).
49. Getachew Wonde, *Addis Zemen*, 18 Hidar 1984.
50. The original is: **የሀብታም ልጆች ወደ ቦሌ የድሀ ልጆች ወደ ጦሌ::** Bole is the international airport in Addis Ababa. Tole (Tolay) was one of the training centers for conscripts. It was located in Illubabor, about twenty kilometers east of the Ghibe River.
51. MIA, "Ya Ras Gaz ena Astedader Akebabiwoch ya Parti Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 10, kifl 3, 4–5 Megabit 1981 ["Minutes of the First Secretaries of Party Committees of the Autonomous and Administrative Regions," no. 10, part 3, March 12–13, 1989], 504–05.
52. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Poletikabiro 37gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," kutir 37, 22.4.78 ["Minutes of the 37th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," no. 37, Dec. 30, 1986], 63–64. At the same meeting, another member, Kassa Gabre, said,

"The talk of the town is that, whereas the poor and those without political connections are forced to go, those with political influence or relatives in positions of influence and those who can falsify health records, bribe, or lie are being exempted."

53. MOND, "Ya Biherawi Witidirna Agelglot 20–21 Meskerem 1978, seminar," Meskerem 1978 ["A Seminar on National Service Held on September 27–28, 1986," Sept. 1986]; Getachew Wonde, *Addis Zemen*, 18 Hidar 1984.
54. MOND, "Ka 1966–1977 diress ya tadaraje ya hayil ginbata," abari, Brigadier General Solomon Kinfe la Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan ["A Force Buildup from 1974 to 1984," enclosure in Solomon to Tesfaye, n.d.].
55. Ibid.
56. MIA, "Our Security Problems," 1990, 107.
57. MOND, "Ka 1967–1982 Megabit diress ya tessera ya hayil ginbata," Megabit 1982 ["A Force Buildup from 1974 to 1990," March 1990]. Another report, though, cautions that the figures have been "greatly exaggerated" (MOND, "Ya Ager Mekelakeya Minister ya 1980 dirijitawi mewaqir," Sene 1981 ["An Assessment of the Organizational Structure of the Ministry of National Defense," June 1989], 6).
58. Seifu Bekele, "A Report of Force Buildup," July 26, 1990; MOND, "Teklala tewagi ya sew hayil," Miazia 1982 ["Total Combat Manpower," April 1990].
59. Seifu, "A Report," July 26, 1990. Tadesse Tele Salvano gives a total of 557,348, indicating that official sources are about 75 percent accurate (*A Nation of Lions* [Amharic], 499–500). What makes accurate calculations difficult is the fact that figures were often invented or falsified by both sides.
60. MOND, "Ya Tigray wetaderawi huneta mararagecha," 14 Yekatit 1981 ["An Affirmation of the Military Situation in Tigray," Feb. 22, 1989], 1.
61. EPLF, "Kab 1961–1991 zitefetsema wetahadarawi sirhatatin kisrat tselain" ["Military Activities and the Enemy's Losses in action from 1961 to 1991"], n.d., RICE, Asmara.
62. Pool, "The Eritrean People's Liberation Front," in Clapham, *African Guerrillas*, 19. Pool's calculation, though, is rather puzzling.
63. Tadesse Telo Salvano's tabulation of the figures gives a total of 150,755 (*The Crushing*, table 39, 423).
64. Drawing from MOND's sources, the then minister of defense, Siye Abraha, gave 1.1 million as the figure for total casualties for the years 1974–91 (*Addis Zemen*, Meskerem 1984 [Sept. 1991]). For population growth, see CSO, *People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, table 7.1, 22. The Americans lost over 970,000 (3 percent) of their population of 31 million in just four years of civil war (1860–64). The Ethiopian adversaries also appear to have planted fewer land mines that continue to kill and maim than their counterparts in Angola or Cambodia, for instance. Comparatively speaking, they seem to have been "civilized warriors." This is not in any way to minimize the horrendous destruction and suffering people were made to endure.
65. The Eritrean War Disabled Fighters Association (EWDFA), which was founded in 1993, claims to have eighteen thousand members, of whom 20 percent are women. Of the total, 87 percent are described as "physically handicapped, 10 percent have sight problems, under 2 percent have hearing problems, and 0.6 percent have a mental

disorder" (http://dehai.org/archives/dehainews archive/0946.htnd; accessed Nov. 2, 2004).

66. I must admit that circumstances did not allow me to verify these stories.
67. MIA, "Our National Security Problems," vol. 1, ch. 2, Meskerem 1981 (Sept. 1988), 127.
68. MOND, "Review of the Present Capabilities of the Armed Forces," Sept. 1979, 32. See also MOND, "Memorandum on Special Request," Oct. 1983, 8, and "Armed Forces Urgent Material Request," 1983, 67; Commodore Tesfaye Berhanu La Hager Mekelakeya Minister, 9.1.76 [Tesfaye to the Minister of National Defense, Sept. 9, 1984], Addis Ababa, MOND; Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam to Comrade G. N. Andreev, May 25, 1985, Addis Ababa, MOND; and Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan to Comrade Konstantine Fomichenko, Feb. 25, 1985, Addis Ababa, MOND.

    The numerous complaints and pleas the military submitted to the Soviets give some sense of the magnitude and persistence of the problems it encountered. In 1983, the Logistics Department complained, "We have received 100,000 TM57 anti-tank explosives and we do not know what to do with them. . . . Also, of the fuses they [Soviets] send us with the 82 mm mortars and the M5 vintage, only 30–40 percent explode when ignited. In spite of our repeated requests that this practice be stopped, of the 250,000 mortar bullets we recently received 130,000 have the M5 fuse." Yet, it added, "we have been receiving barely a third of the amounts of petroleum, oil, and lubricants we asked for. For example, we have received a purchase contract for only 18 kinds of oil and lubricants weighing 41,600 kgs, although our request for the year 1982–83 was for 60 different kinds with a total weight of 138,163 kgs." MOND politely asked that "the items enumerated on the list appended herewith be supplied us as per quantities and delivery dates indicated therein." There were numerous complaints from the service branches, too. And in the following year, the chief of staff pleaded with the Soviets to replace the Project-205 U-boats the country had received in accordance with an agreement of March 30, 1984, with other models, preferably Project-771 or Project-159A, because the Project-205s were old and could not withstand the weather conditions of the Red Sea. In a similar vein, the defense minister conveyed his fear that the Red Sea waves would be too strong for the relatively small harbor minesweepers Moscow had provided. In fact, the woes of dependency were limitless. "Although we have received a limited quantity of radios," lamented another memo, "these have not proved effective in combat [because] of terrain and environmental conditions" (MOND, "Memorandum on the Development of the Defense Forces of Socialist Ethiopia," n.d., 22; Tesfay to Fomichenko, Nov. 2, 1985).
69. MOND, "Memorandum on the Development of the Defense Forces of Socialist Ethiopia," n.d., 22; Tesfay to Fomichenko, Nov. 2, 1985.
70. MOND, "Memorandum on Special Report," Oct. 1983, 9.
71. Major General Asrat Birru la guad Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam, "Ya Teklay Inspektor ya 1979 ya sira kinwan report ena ya 1980 ya sira ikid," 3 Tikimt 1980 [Asrat to Haile Giorgis, "Report by the Inspector General of the Work Done in 1987 and Work Planned for 1988," Oct. 11, 1988], MOND.

72. Standardized products for general industrial use, spare parts, assemblies, and electronic parts were supplied by the Ministry for Foreign Trade of the USSR through the General Engineering Department and the General Technical Department of the State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations. A 1977 agreement between the government of Ethiopia and the State Committee of the Council of Ministers of the USSR for Foreign Economic Relations provided that "annual indents for armament and military engineering equipment shall be submitted to the Soviet side before January 5, and alterations and more precise definitions no later than February 15 of the year preceding the year of delivery" (Colonel Tessema Abaderash la Logistics Wana Memria, 18.2.70 [Tessema to the Directorate of Ordinance, Oct. 26, 1977], enclosure, "Memorandum," Moscow, Aug. 31, 1977). What would become a constant headache began as soon as the agreement was signed, as a memo from MOND reveals: "Another problem is the time and speed of delivery. . . . The practice up to now does not provide for prompt delivery of items urgently required. . . . We are presently in the dark as to the time of delivery or items ordered, the amounts to be delivered, and the means by which they will be sent us." The memo added: "We have no way of knowing when they are dispatched and in what amount and when to expect them here. This method of delivery will not allow us to make any planned repair of equipment and weapons system" (MOND, "Review of the Present Capabilities of the Armed Forces," Sept. 1979, 33, 36–37). In 1983, the organization wrote: "Although the annual spare parts requirements have been submitted a year in advance, a critical shortage of spare parts for MiG-23, An-12, and radar is being felt" (MOND, "Armed Forces Urgent Material Requirement," 1983, 32–33). The organization's continuous pathetic complaints and appeals to the big comrades' "usual cooperation for speedup of deliveries of material for which contracts have been signed" were never responded to with alacrity but always with condescension. See Brigadier General Alemayehou Makonnen to Comrade F. Yarotski, General Manager of Zupchest Exports, Aug. 12, 1985; Alemayehou Makonnen to Comrade Lieutenant General S. A. Nikolae, Chief of GTD, GKES, Aug. 12, 1985; Brigadier General Abebe Wolde Mariam to Comrade Konstantine Fomichenko, March 11, 1985; and Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan to Comrade G. N. Andreev, Oct. 8, 1985, Addis Ababa, MOND. The Soviet explanation for the foot dragging was that the Ethiopian requisition lists were full of errors. See, for instance, the enclosure in Major General Abebe Wolde Mariam la guad [to Comrade] Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam, 21.1.80 [Sept. 29, 1988], 40, Addis Ababa, MOND. It was true that purchases were erratic and requisitions unsystematic, causing considerable waste.
73. MOND, "Armed Forces Urgent Material Requirement," 1983, 33–34. See also MOND, "Review of the Present," Sept. 1979, 38.
74. MOND, "Memorandum," Oct. 19, 1985, 4, Addis Ababa. Ethiopia had become a pitiful beggar nation. "As a result of an economic situation," wrote MOND, "we require urgently the USSR to provide us with operational expenses support such as uniforms, blankets, sleeping bags, webbing equipment, P.O.L., combat food, tents, medicaments and drugs, field hospitals, doctors and nurses, and all quartermaster items for 200,000 men on a continued basis. We also need housing, furniture, transportation,

medical service, clothing, and all other expenses connected with the upkeep and support for all Soviet and fraternal socialist countries advisers, specialists, interpreters, and their families" (MOND, "Defense Requirements Package Submitted to the Government of the USSR," April 1978, 7, enclosure in Captain Haile Wolde Mariam to Chief of Staff, 3 Miazia 1970 [April 11, 1978]).

75. MOND, "Contract No. 02402, Agreement between the Government of the USSR and the Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia," Moscow, March 19, 1980. The Ethiopian government was responsible for unloading and storing the goods at the ports of disembarkation and then transporting them to the interior, where they were assembled and tested by Soviet specialists. The government had to provide maintenance, housing, and miscellaneous expenses for the technicians and their families for up to twelve months. Their numbers were never constant but there may have been as many as three thousand Russians in the country around this time, and a good half of them were in the army. Russian advisers were present at headquarters down to the brigade level.
76. MOND, "Wada Soviet ba milakut ena hager wist litaganu bamichilut mehakel ya 6 amet ya waga mamazagna (ba maekelawi gimet)" ["A Comparison of the Six-Year Average Cost of Repair in the Soviet Union and at Home"] table 1, n.d., but probably 1984.
77. The Ethiopian delegation, headed by the minister of defense, Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, met with Soviet officials of the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Trade from February 30 to March 7, 1987, in Moscow. At the various discussions, the Ethiopian delegation expressed its plight regarding maintenance and repair of its weapons acquisitions, especially spare parts for equipment that was out of production.
78. MOND, "Ya huletegnaw 5 amet (1986–1990) ya Mekelakeya ginbata ikid simimnat witiat report," Megabit 1979, abari, Major General Abebe Wolde Mariam la guad Major General Haile Giorgis, 21.1.80 ["A Report of the Agreement regarding the Second Five-Year Plan (1986–90) for Defense Building," enclosure, Abebe to Haile Giorgis, Sept. 28, 1988], Addis Ababa, 31–43.
79. Enclosure 3 in "Agreement between the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Deliveries from the USSR to Ethiopia of Special Equipment," 2–3.
80. MOND, "Ka 1966 iska 1976 la Mekelakeya Minister sile tefeqadaw bajet ena sile tederagawim ya genzeb inkiskase matekalaya" ["A Summation of the Budget Allocated to the Ministry of National Defense and the Financial Transactions"], n.d., 1.
81. MIA, "Our Security Problems and Possible Solutions," vol. 1, Sept. 1989, 110, 180; MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat la 3gna medebega sibseba ya karebu senedoch," kutir 4, 14.6.77 ["Documents Submitted to the 3rd Regular Meeting of the Party Secretariat," no. 4, Feb. 22, 1985], 14, 38.
82. MIA, "Our Security Problems," table 3, 117; See also *Ethiopian Herald*, Nov. 12, 1993, 1, 5 ("Derg's Military Expenditure Stands at 17.4 Billion Birr, says Defense Vice Minister").

CHAPTER 5

Epigraphs: Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, 1:407; Giap, *Selected Writings*, 160; Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 243; MIA, "Minutes of the Politburo's 3rd Emergency Meeting," March 2, 1989, 76; Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 222, 224 (copyright © 1937, 1972 by Pathfinder Press; reprinted by permission).

1. Between December 1979, when the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE) was established, and September 1984, when the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) was formed, all the political organizations that had surfaced just before and during the first five years of revolutionary turmoil left—either taking to the bush or going into exile. The formation of a sole legal party that was the supreme authority in the land prematurely aborted democracy.
2. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 451, 465.
3. The best analysis of party organization in Ethiopia is provided in Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, ch. 4.
4. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Poletikabiro 38gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," kutir 38, 1.5.78 ["Minutes of the 38th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," no. 38, Sept. 12, 1986], 36.
5. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat la 3gna medebegna sibseba ya karabu senedoch," kutir 3, Hamus, 14 Yekatit 1977 ["Documents Submitted to the 3rd Regular Meeting of the Party Secretariat," no. 3, Thurs., Feb. 21, 1985], 56.
6. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite 10gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 27 Tikimt 1979 ["Minutes of the 10th Regular Meeting of the CC of the WPE," Nov. 4, 1987], 183; "Ya Issapa Maekelawi ya Politikabiro 105gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 30.1.82 ["Minutes of the 105th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Oct. 8, 1989], 202–03.
7. Captain Taye Legesse, April 11, 1994, Addis Ababa.
8. MIA, "La Issapa Maekelawi Komite sebategna medebegna sibseba ya karabe ya Maekelawi Komite Control Commission report," Nehassie 1979 ["A Report Submitted by the CC's Control Commission to the 7th Regular Meeting of the CC," Aug. 1987], 27–32.
9. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Tsehafiwoch ena ya Kiflate Hagerat Komitiewoch Andegna Tsehofiwoch 6gna ya gara sibseba kale gubae," 15–16 Megabit 1979 ["Minutes of the 6th Joint Meeting of the Secretaries of the CC and First Secretaries of Regional Committees," March 23–24, 1987], 310. The first party secretary for north Gondar, Gezehagn Workie, reported that 17 million birr had been embezzled by government and civic organizations in the region and that he had learned from the Control Commission that 539 million were stolen nationally (MIA, "Ya Issapa Sekretariat 19gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 5 Meskerem 1981 ["Minutes of the 19th Regular Meeting of the Party Secretariat," Sept. 12, 1989], 135–36).
10. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 11gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 26–27 Yekatit 1982 ["Minutes of the 11th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," March 4–5, 1990], 331.

11. The original is: **በቀን ካኪ በማታ ጮማና ዊስኪ።።** Mengistu had decreed that all party, state, and government officials wear khaki, an idea he borrowed from the North Koreans.
12. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat 15gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Hamus, 19 Tikimt 1980 ["Minutes of the 15th Regular Meeting of the Secretariat," Thurs., Oct. 27, 1988], 110–17. According to the 1988 report, religion was one factor for loss of party membership. For some, it was impossible to easily reconcile party privilege with atheism, and so thirty-four members got the axe for baptizing their children or for giving feasts in memory (*tezkar*) of the dead (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite 16gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Megabit 1980 ["Minutes of the 16th Regular Meeting of the CC," March 1988], 35–36).
13. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat 22gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 13 Hidar 1983 ["Minutes of the 22nd Regular Meeting of the Secretariat," Nov. 20, 1990], 12.
14. MIA, "Ya Issapa ya Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 106gna sibseba kale gubae," 28.2.82 ["Minutes of the 106th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Nov. 5, 1989], 140–63. Mengistu stated at the meeting that Fikre Selassie was often absent from work and that his absences may, in part, have been for health reasons; Mengistu told the committee that his colleague had "expensive" neurological surgery abroad, perhaps insinuating that Firkre Selassie's problem was mental.
15. Fasika Sidelil described the organizational crisis: "In my view, at the root of our difficulties is the decline in party unity. The problem is not confined to the leadership. Many cadres are unhappy, some joining the enemy camp. Dissatisfaction starts in the CC" (MIA, "Ya Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 105gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 30.1.82 ["Minutes of the 105th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Oct. 7, 1990], 179).
16. According to the general secretary and commander in chief, "Politics command the gun" (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat 75gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Nehassie 1977 ["Minutes of the 75th Regular Meeting of the Secretariat," Aug. 1985], 141).
17. Gabreyes and Mengistu were members of Class 19 at Holeta. The general was killed in a plane crash in Harar along with sixteen of his staff, including three Russian advisers. He was replaced by Major General Mesfin Gabreqal, who held the position until 1991.
18. The commissar was a Soviet invention and Leon Trotsky, commissar of the Red Army, is considered its chief author. Faced with a critical shortage of professionals in the civil war, the Bolsheviks reenlisted tens of thousands of former czarist officers as "specialists" or "experts." Since the officers' reliability to the party and revolution was suspect, the Bolsheviks instituted the commissar, whose primary function was political and supervisory; he was to ensure the party's control of the army through political education, propaganda, and spying. Thus he was the watchdog over the commander with whom he was paired; orders and directives had to be cosigned by them in order to be valid. The commissar, more often than not, strayed into military matters, and possibilities for friction and jurisdictional disputes existed. Nevertheless, whatever his failures, the commissar's contribution to the Red victory is beyond doubt. Not so in

Ethiopia, where society was more backward, diverse, and fractured. The army was only its mirror. See Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, 1:249–53; 11:156–57.

19. Brigadier General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan la Abiyotawi Tor Wana Politika Memria Halafi, etc., 6 Nehassie 1973 [Tesfaye to the Chief of the Political Directorate and Others, Aug. 13, 1980], 1–27; Captain Zemene Damte, June 17, 1994, Addis Ababa; Captain Taye Legesse, April 11, 1994, Addis Ababa; Captain Kiflu Dadi, Dec. 16, 1994, Addis Ababa; Lieutenant Tamrat Makonnen Weju, July 5, 1994, Addis Ababa; and Captain Belay Abebe, June 15, 1994, Addis Ababa. See also Tekeste Melake, "The Military Security Organization," 1–26.
20. Captain Tarekegn Almaw, March 22, 1994, Addis Ababa.
21. General Getaneh Haile, April 25, 1994, Addis Ababa.
22. MIA, "Ya Kiflate Hager Issapa Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 8, 23 Megabit 1980 ["Minutes of the First Meeting of the WPE's Territorial Committees," no. 8, March 30, 1988], 101.
23. But once in a while one comes across a muddled remark such as this: "What we should let our cadres, the army, and the people know is that there is no peace without strength [force]. There is no peace from weakness. A weak husband does not kick his wife out; rather, he leaves with the luggage. Not only that, he confiscates everything and throws his partner out empty-handed." This after sixteen years of communist rhetoric! Intellectually incoherent, ideologically bankrupt, this was not even sensible demagoguery. It was said by Comrade Fissha Desta, CC and Politburo member, secretary of the Secretariat, head of the Commission for Justice, Administration, and Defense, and vice president of the republic (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 19gna aschekuay sibseba kale gubae," kutir 19, 8.1.82 ["Minutes of the 19th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo of the WPE's CC," Sept. 16, 1990], 126).
24. Corporal Kedir Hassen, March 8, 1994, Addis Ababa.
25. Tigray and Wello, let alone Shewa, hardly entered Emperor Haile Selassie's mind when he borrowed the idea from the Yugoslavs in the 1950s. By adopting it, he wished only to ease the growing urban social problems, particularly in Addis Ababa, by settling retired soldiers and unemployed youth, mostly high school graduates, on what the state traditionally regarded as vacant (that is, nomadic) land and thus its own. The Awash, Angher, Didessa, and Wabi Shebeli rivers were seen as potential sites for the project; but it was in Arsi, Bale, Gamu Gofa, and Sidamo that more than 6,000 persons were resettled before the onset of the revolution. And between 1973 and 1977—that is, seven years before the revolutionary government launched its own large-scale program—about 136,000 people had already been relocated to more than fifty places, almost all of them in the southern regions (*Tobia*, Tikimt 1991 [Oct. 1998], 10; Ya Teqebay Kifle Hagerat Atgni Komite, "Safera ba dihre abiyot Itiopia: witiet, chigroch, ya wodafit aqtacha, tiraz 2, acher matekaleya," Miazia 1980 [Committee to Study the Host Regions, "Resettlement in Postrevolutionary Ethiopia: Results, Problems, Future Trends," monograph 2, summation, April 1988], 3, Ministry of Agriculture [MA], Addis Ababa). See also Dawit, *Red Tears*, 282.
26. It is not surprising, then, that the current rulers, who once accused the Mengistu regime of trying to depopulate Tigray in order to kill their movement, have now em-

braced resettlement as one solution to the pressing problems of ecological degradation and rural poverty. They have submitted to hard realities but the federal system of "ethnic states" they have created and the harrowing experience of forced relocation under their predecessors have probably dimmed any prospects of orderly and peaceful resettlement in the foreseeable future.

27. Clay et al. provide a wealth of information on the subject in *The Spoils of Famine*. But for the most concise and cogent evaluation, see Girma Kebbede, *The State and Development in Ethiopia*, 81–84.
28. MA, "Resettlement in Postrevolutionary Ethiopia, Main Report," monograph 2, 251. The largest group, of 367,016 (62 percent), was from Wello, followed by 108,241 (18 percent) from Shewa and 89,716 (15 percent) from Tigray. Of the total, 253,282 (43 percent) were settled in Wellega and 147,915 (25 percent) in Illubabor (Ibid., 77). Some 22,812 people were relocated in their own regions of Gojjam (37 percent) and Gondar (1 percent). Between the end of 1987 and March 1988, when the program was suspended, 100,000–200,000 people may have been resettled at the same sites (MA, "Resettlement in Postrevolutionary Ethiopia, Main Report," monograph 2, 7, 95, 251). See also MA, "A Study Report of Work in the Resettlers' Regions," March 1987, table 1, 20; Dawit, *Red Tears*, 303; and Clay et al., *The Spoils of Famine*, 13.
29. Dawit outlines Mengistu's rationale for the resettlement policy (*Red Tears*, 289).
30. MA, "Resettlement in Postrevolutionary Ethiopia," monograph 2, 155.
31. Ibid., 158–60. The committee believed that the program was salvageable if appropriate measures were taken. For its recommendations, see 163–260. See also MA, "A Study Report of Work in the Resettlers' Regions," March 1987, 64, 72–92.
32. Dawit, *Red Tears*, 289.
33. Quoted in Girma, *The State and Development in Ethiopia*, 81.
34. The TPLF went further to convince the international community by forcing thousands of the people under its control to emigrate to the Sudan. Claiming that it had only facilitated their exit to save them from the claws of a "genocidal regime," it paraded many of the ragged peasants before the international media. It was an unpleasant spectacle but may have achieved its intended purpose of shaming the regime and garnering sympathy or support. I happened to see it on *NBC Nightly News*. It left me feeling how cruelly people were being used as pawns of the competing political forces.
35. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Tsehafiwoch ena ya Kiflate Hager Komitiewoch andegna Tsehafiwoch 5gna ya gara sibseba Kale gubae," kifil 1, 4–11 Tikimt 1979 ["Minutes of the 5th Combined Meeting of the Secretariat of the CC and First Secretaries of the Regional Committees," part 1, Oct. 7–14, 1987], 269–70.
36. For an extended study, see Clay et al., *The Spoils of Famine*, 103–228, but for a more nuanced and balanced overview, see Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 174–79.
37. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 247.
38. Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 177.
39. Ibid., 179.
40. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 8nga medebegna sibseba kale

gubae," kutir 82, 25.8.80 ["Minutes of the 82nd Regular Meeting of the Politburo," no. 82, May 2, 1988], 181.

41. Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 168–69, and Griffin, *The Economy of Ethiopia*, 49–50.
42. MIA, "Ya Ras Gaz ena Astedader Akebabiwoch ya Parti Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 10, kifil 1, 4–5 Megabit 1981 ["Minutes of the Meeting of the First Secretaries of Party Committees of the Autonomous and Administrative Regions," no. 10, part 1, March 12–13, 1988], 154. Teff is Ethiopia's staple. Kassa Gabre could not appreciate the peasants' plight: "We are wartime leaders. War is a societal problem and society will have to bear the burden. . . . Where else can we get the money from? The people know that the government does not have it. There is no one else who can carry what is society's responsibility" (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 80gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 4.8.80 ["Minutes of the 80th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," April 2, 1980], 63–64).
43. The original is: **መዋጮ አሉን መዋጮ ሰጠነ**
ልጆች አምጡ አሉን ልጆችም ሰጠነ
እህል ስጡ አሉን እህልም ሰጠነ
አረ ሰዎች ተዉ በሉ
***መሬትም እንደ ቆዳ ሳይጠቀልሉ።*:** This is one of many poems that my research assistant, Makonnen Berhane, collected for me. Wittingly or not, Mengistu concurred with its sentiment: "There was a time when we said no to 12- and 13-year-old boys wanting to go to the war front. Today, it has become difficult to get officers. This is because we ask great sacrifice, we collect taxes and levies, we ask for people's children and their money, we ask them to produce in their spare time, and we demand that they not ask for a raise in their wages" (MIA, "Ba Ihidri ya Mekalekaya Mikir Biet 4gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Hidar 1981 ["Minutes of the 4th Regular Meeting of the Defense Council of the PDRE," Nov. 1988], 124).
44. MIA, "Ba waqtu ba hagerachin lay kanjababaw adega anstar liwasad sile migabaw afatagn irmija ya karabe mastawesha," Miazia 1983 ["A Memorandum egarding the Urgent Measures That Should Be Taken in Light of the Threat Hanging over Our Country," April 1990], 7.
45. MIA, "Sile 11gnaw ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite medebegna sibseba zigjit ya tadaraje sibseba kale gubae," kifil 3, 15–16, 21–22 Yekatit 1982 ["Minutes of the Preparatory Meeting for the 11th Regular Meeting of the CC," part 3, Feb. 22–23 and 28–29, 1990], 460–77.
46. Ibid., 482–91. The English words in quotation marks were used by Shimeles, who also went on to suggest that private ownership of land might be better for both the farmer and the country. This sudden ideological flip-flop was contrary to Mengistu's insistence that land never be privatized (467–68).
47. Ibid., 492–93.
48. Ibid., 556–63.
49. MIA, "Biherawi ya dehninet chigrochachinin la magamgem ya takahade liyu seminar zegeba," kifil 4, 1982 ["A Record of the Special Seminar Held to Assess Our National Security Problems," part 4, 1982], 159–90.

50. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 66. Copyright © 1937, 1972 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.
51. MIA, "Minutes of the Preparatory Meeting," Feb. 1989, 482.
52. MIA, "A Record of the Special Seminar," 163–64, 173–74. On the economy, see also Griffin, *The Economy of Ethiopia*, 174–91; Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 125–28, 145–49; and MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 75gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Maksegno, 14 Hidar 1980 ["Minutes of the 75th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Tues., Nov. 22, 1988], 21.
53. MIA, "A Record of the Special Seminar," 175–76.
54. Ibid.
55. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat la 3gna medebegna sibseba ya karabu senedoch," kutir 4, 14.6.77 ["Documents Submitted to the 3rd Regular Meeting of the Party Secretariat," no. 4, Feb. 22, 1985], 13–14.
56. MIA, "Our National Security Problems," 1990, 178.
57. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 76gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 5 Tahisas 1980 ["Minutes of the 76th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Dec. 13, 1988], 8–10, and MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi komite Tsehafiwoch ena ya kifle Hagerat Issapa komitewoch Andega Tsehafiwoch 6gna ya gara sibseba kale gubae," 15–16 Megabit 1979 ["Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the CC's Secretaries and First Secretaries of Regional Party Committees," March 23–24, 1987], 256–65.
58. MIA, "Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the CC's Secretaries and First Secretaries of Regional Party Committees," March 23–24, 1987, 510–11. It was believed that in the city of Dire Dawa alone there were more than two thousand contrabandists. Sales of all kinds of goods, ranging from clothing, shoes, transistor radios, and housewares to television sets and refrigerators, were transacted in a section of the city that became known as Taiwan. The merchandise was smuggled in by camels and train from the ports of Djibouti and Berbera (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Kifle Hagerat Komitiewoch Andegna Tsehafiwoch 8gna sibseba kale gubae," kutir 8, 23 Megabit 1980 ["Minutes of the 8th Meeting of Regional Party Committees and First Secretaries," no. 8, March 30, 1988], 64). The party secretary of Harar, Hussein Ismael, described the contraband trade in the eastern region as a "hidden war" against the state. He described how the personnel of the railway, from the top management to the police (guards), were all engaged in illegal trade, especially in *qaat*, or *chat*, a local plant whose leaves are used as a stimulant (MIA, "Ya Ras Gaz ena Astedader Akebabiwoch ya Parti Komite Andega Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 10, kifil 2, 4–5 Megabit 1981 ["Minutes of the Meeting of the First Secretaries of Party Committees of the Autonomous and Administrative Regions," no. 10, part 2, March 1989], 348–50).
59. MIA, "Minutes of the Preparatory Meeting," Feb. 1989, 482.
60. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat 3gna aschekuay sibseba kale gubae," 24.6.81 ["Minutes of the 3rd Emergency Meeting of the Secretariat," March 2, 1989], 102.
61. MIA, "A Record of the Special Seminar," 175–76, and MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi

Komite ya Politikabiro 67gna medebega sibseba kale gubae," 14 Hidar 1979 ["Minutes of the 67th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Nov. 22, 1987], 7. General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan again had this to say: "Workers have to demonstrate their loyalty to the proletarian party by being productive and disciplined. Nothing can be done without discipline. Unless we restore workers' discipline the situation will get out of control." He added: "Corruption is spreading. Workers who earn small salaries drive expensive cars and rent spacious houses. Where does that money come from? It is related to discipline and this issue must receive primary attention." Mengistu responded that lack of discipline was not limited to the working class and was tied to many other factors (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Secretariat 14gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 4 Nehassie 1979 ["Minutes of the 14th Regular Meeting of the Secretariat," Aug. 12, 1987], 243–45).

62. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 22gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Maksegno, 11 Sene 1977 ["Minutes of the 22nd Regular Meeting of the Politburo," June 19, 1985], 12–13; MIA, "Minutes of the Joint Meeting," 23–24 March 1987, 259–65; and MIA, "Minutes of the 52nd Meeting of the Politburo," 27–29 Meskerem 1979 [Oct. 4–6, 1987], 8–9.
63. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 73gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 9.2.80 ["Minutes of the 73rd Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Oct. 17, 1988], 18–25. Kassa Gabre rebutted Mengistu: "The teachers are useless. . . . It is heroic to talk about Pentecostals and against the revolution. . . . How is it that representatives of the party have kept silent? It is possible to imprison students and that is what our enemies anticipate; and if we don't react, we will have to meet their demands. . . . The university is without a head; the children are administering themselves. . . . The university is one of the forums of antirevolutionaries. The unrest will spread to national conscripts" (28–89). Mengistu retorted: "The problem has been festering. When released from prison, antirevolutionaries congregate there. The university has become a rest place, sort of a market. They should know their rights and duties" (30). General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan echoed the chairman's sentiment: "The party is present in the university. What explains the silence of its 241 members? The organization is filled with disgruntled people. . . . While the children of the poor are in the army, our own children are there making trouble" (33–35).
64. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 102gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," kifil 1, Maksegno, 6 Sene 1981 ["Minutes of the 102nd Meeting of the Politburo," part 1, Tues., June 13, 1989], 22.
65. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 19gna aschequay sibseba kale gubae," 8.1.82 ["Minutes of the 19th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo," Sept. 9, 1989], 233.
66. Quoted in *Addis Zeman*, 18 Hidar 1967 (Nov. 25, 1974).
67. Tesfaye Wolde Selassie to Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gabre Kidan and Major General Gabrayes Wolde Hanna, 27 Yekatit 1978 (March 4, 1985), app., 113. The letter's content was not supported by the reports and assessments presented at the seminar held at MOND on March 4–6, 1985.

68. MIA, "Ba Ihidri ya Mekelakeya Mikir Biet 4gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Hidar 1981 ["Minutes of the 4th Regular Meeting of the Defense Council of the PDRE," Nov. 1988], 97–102.
69. Ibid., 110–14. Emphasis added. The minister of defense, Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, weighed in ponderously: "There are some things that we should always keep in mind—that we will never compromise on Ethiopia's unity, our unique party, and the government of the PDRE. . . . The Soviets are telling us to be on our own. . . . We should not allow the enemy to excel over us politically and force us to submit to his will. We must create the conditions to seize the initiative" (102–03). The president concurred: "To end the war peacefully and quickly by bringing the bandits to the peace table, we must first secure the upper hand militarily. . . . Should our external support dry up, the separatists will win. Time is against us and it is deeply worrisome. Therefore, our strategy ought to entail the military, political, diplomatic, and economic. In the economic sphere, we should allow the farmer to be more productive by reducing his burden. . . . Let a segment of the population wage the war at the rear" (125–26).
70. Ibid., 81, 94–96.
71. Ibid., 142.
72. Keneally, *To Asmara*, 100.
73. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Secretariat 3gna aschequay sibseba kale gubae," 24.6.81 ["Minutes of the 3rd Emergency Meeting of the Secretariat," March 2, 1988], 78. Mengistu put the blame on the commanders: "From the battalion to the brigade, upward to the army, decisions are left for Mengistu Haile Mariam to make. There is no one willing to take measures, small or big" (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 19gna aschequay sibseba kale gubae," kutir 19, 8.1.82 ["Minutes of the 19th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo," no. 19, Sept. 16, 1989], 196).
74. This assessment is based on my reading of the Politburo and MOND archives and on information obtained from several anonymous sources in Addis Ababa and Asmara.
75. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politbiro 48gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Maksegno, 17 Sene 1978 ["Minutes of the 48th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Tues., June 24, 1986], 14. Tadesse Salvano gives a good account in *The Crushing*, 75–77, 81–83. See also Getachew Wonde, *Addis Zemen*, 14 Hidar 1984.
76. MOND, "Ya mekelakeya hayil ginbata," Hamle 1976 ["Building the Defense Forces," July 1984], 3–8; MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Secretariat la 3gna medebegna sibseba ya karabu senedoch," kutir 5, 14 Yekatit 1977 ["Documents Prepared for the 3rd Regular Meeting of the CC's Secretariat," no. 5, Feb. 22, 1985], 41–49.
77. MIA, "Minutes of the 48th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," June 25, 1986, 15.
78. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 57gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Maksegno, 19 Tir 1979 ["Minutes of the 57th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Tues., Jan. 27, 1987], 62.
79. MIA, "Ya Ras Gaz ena ya Astedader Akebabiwoch ya Parti Komite Andegna Tsehofiwoch 10gna sibseba kale gubae," kutir 10, kifil 3, 4–5 Megabit 1981 ["Minutes of the 10th Meeting of First Secretaries of the Autonomous and Administrative Regions," no. 10, part 3, March 12–13, 1988], 528–29.

80. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 81gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," kutir 81, 11.8.80 ["Minutes of the 81st Regular Meeting of the Politburo," no. 81, April 19, 1988], 22.
81. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi ya Politikabiro 73gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 9.2.80 ["Minutes of the 73rd Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Oct. 18, 1988], 10–11.
82. MIA, "Ya serawitu ena ya hibretesabu ginugnet iyeshkare mehed," in "Biherawi ya dehninet chigrochachin la megemgem ya tekahede liyu seminar zegeba," 1982 ["The Corrosion of Army-People Relations," in "Special Seminar to Assess Our National Security Problems," 1990], 157–58. Mengistu himself admitted that looting was committed by some troops in some places (MIA, "Ya Kiflate Hager Issapa Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 8, 23 Megabit 1980 ["Minutes of the First Meeting of the Secretariat," March 30, 1987], 106).
83. Quoted in Ian Fisher, "Oriana Fallaci, Incisive Italian Journalist, Is Dead at 77," *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 2006.
84. See appendixes in Tesfaye to Mengistu Haile Mariam. For details, see ch. 9, n. 33.
85. The originals are: **መመልመል ግዴታዬ ነው፡ መከፋብለል መብቱ ነው፡** and **ይታሰልዘንድሮ የወያኔ/ሻዕብያ ኑሮ።:** Major Aklilu Tessema, Dec. 4, 1994, Addis Ababa.
86. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 87gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Maksegno, 10 Nehassie 1980 ["Minutes of the 87th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Tues., Aug. 16, 1988], 32–33. See also MIA, "Minutes of the 83rd Regular Meeting of the Politburo," May 17, 1988 (9 Ginbot 1980), 91–92.
87. Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam to Brigadier General Gessesse Fida, 6 Tir 1981 (Jan. 14, 1989).
88. Corporal Almaz Hailu Workneh, Feb. 14, 1994, Addis Ababa; Captain Taye Tegene, May 13, 1994; Addis Ababa; Captain Yacob Wolde, Feb. 29, 1994, Addis Ababa; Lieutenant Alemseged Ambachew, April 21, 1994, Addis Ababa; and Lieutenant Jenberiye Gelaye, March 18, 1994, Addia Ababa.
89. Major General Siyum Makonnen to Commander of the TRA, 14 and 24 Hamle 1981 (July 22 and Aug. 2, 1989), MOND.
90. MOND, "Major General Hailu Gabre Mikael la guad ya Huase wana azaj," 22 Megabit 1980 ["Hailu to the Chief Commander of the SRA," March 30, 1988].
91. MIA, "Ya Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 78gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 20.7.80 ["Minutes of the 78th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," March 27, 1988], 67.
92. Ibid., 68.
93. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 19gna aschequay sibseba kale gubae," kutir 19, 8.12.82 ["Minutes of the 19th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo," no. 19, Oct. 18, 1990], 196, 258–59.
94. MIA, "Our National Security Problems," 156; Anonymous (graduate of Harar Academy), May 14, 1994, Addis Ababa; Brigadier General Getaneh Haile, April 25, 1994, Addis Ababa; Captain Taye Legesse, May 12, 1994, Addis Ababa; and Lieutenant Colonel Solomon Shaul Kassaye, April 19, 1994, Addis Ababa.
95. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 270.

96. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 78gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 20.7.80 ["Minutes of the 78th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," March 27, 1988], 95–98.
97. MIA, "Ba Ihidri ya Mekelakeya Mikir Bet 4gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Hidar 1981 ["Minutes of the 4th Regular Meeting of the Defense Council of the PDRE," Nov. 1989], 104.
98. Ibid.
99. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 78gna medebegna sibseba kale quabae," 20.7.80 ["Minutes of the 78th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," March 27, 1988], 104–06. Hailu Yimenu would hang himself in the Italian embassy, where he had secured asylum following the regime's fall.
100. Lieutenant Amare Mamo Setie, June 12, 1994, Addis Ababa.
101. Master Sergeant Itaferahu Worku, June 18, 1994, Addis Ababa.
102. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 28gna aschequay sibeseba kale gubae," Segno, 26 Yekatit 1982 ["Minutes of the 28th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo," Mon., March 5, 1990], 16.X.

PART THREE: BATTLEFIELD ETHIOPIA

Epigraph: Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, ix.

1. Eritrea Headquarters, "Ya Raza Zemecha" ("Operation Raza"), enclosure, Brigadier General Getachew Nadew to MOND, 7 Miazia 1968 (April 15, 1975).
2. Alemseged Bogale Adal, *The Eritrean Puzzle*, 149.
3. Dawit, *Red Tears*, 89.
4. EPLF, *National Program of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front*, 10–11.
5. Tesfaye Habte Mariam, *On the Battlefield*, 230–54. According to one MOND report, the force consisted of thirteen infantry divisions, eleven mechanized brigades, eight artillery battalions, four tank battalions, and four BM-21 rocket battalions ("Ya semien qay tireet," 1972 ["The Northern Red Drama," 1979]).

CHAPTER 6

Epigraphs: Clausewitz, *On War*, book 1, ch. 1, 87 (reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press); Abd ar-Rashid Ali Shirmarke, quoted in Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia*, 179; Clausewitz, *On War*, book 7, ch. 7, 530 (reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press); *The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, maxim 19, 62.

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1. Armed Forces Headquarters (AFH), "Sile Sumalia Tor Hayloch giziawi yemereja gimit," enclosure, Colonel Alemayehou Kassa, "Ka Tor Hayloch Huletegena Memria la Tor Hayloch Sostegna Memria," 25 Miazia 1967 ["Intelligence Estimate of Somalia's Armed Forces," enclosure, Colonel Alemayehou, "From the Second Directorate of the Armed Forces to the Third Directorate," April 2, 1974], MOND, Addis Ababa;

Sarin and Dvoretsky, *Alien Wars*, 1996; Laitin, "The War in the Ogaden," 99; and Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 181–82.

2. MOND, "Ba Hararghe kifle hager ya winbidina inkiskassie anesas ena edget" ["The Rise and Growth of Banditry in the Province of Hararghe"], n.d., table, 15. This document, which describes the evolution of the WSLF, was probably written by the intelligence section of the Third Division.
3. Ibid. See also Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*, 225–27.
4. MOND, "The Rise and Growth of Banditry," 13–15, 59.
5. Lieutenant Colonel Kassahun Tirfe (deputy intelligence officer of the Third Division), April 25, 1994, Addis Ababa, and Colonel Ketema Gabre Mariam (paracommando), April 12, 1994, Addis Ababa. Since there was a tendency to overstate the numbers of their opponents, it is unlikely that the combined guerrilla forces exceeded thirty-five thousand.
6. Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994, and Colonel Ketema Gabre Mariam, April 12, 1994.
7. Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994.
8. One report noted, "The sentiments of those nomads who reside within the southeastern parts of our domain are for Somalia; in the event of war, they will collaborate with the Somali army" (MOND, "Tora 3," 7–9, 14). For a similar observation, see Colonel Alemayehou, "Intelligence Estimate of Somalia's Forces," April 2, 1974.
9. *Amtse* 2, no. 11, 20 Tikimt 1970 (Oct. 27, 1977), and *Hurgigo Dima* 2, no. 1 (1977).
10. MOND, "Ka 1966 eska Tir 1971 ba misrak ginbar yanebaraw huneta atekalay zegeba" ["A Summary Report of the Situation in the Eastern Front from 1974 to January 1978"], n.d., Addis Ababa. This is an informative but poorly prepared document; the chronology is frequently confusing.
11. MOND, "Ba 1969 ba Somalia ena ba Itiopia yalew tor ba semen ba Idih ba Ihapa yaderesu gudatoch" ["Casualties Inflicted by the 1977 Ethiopia-Somalia War and by the EDU and EPRP"], n.d., Addis Ababa. Prepared by the Operations Department, the document gives figures for casualties suffered on the eastern and northern fronts.
12. Several factors, including confusing signs of support from the United States, may have influenced the Somali leaders' decision. See Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*, 228–29, and Arnaud de Borchgrave, "Crossed Wires," *Newsweek*, Sept. 26, 1977; 42–43. Nonetheless, it is most likely that the overriding reason for the escalation was the fear that Soviet military assistance, which had increased substantially following Ethiopia's ouster of the US military mission early in the year, would erode the advantage they then held.
13. David Wood, "Sticks, Stones, and Rockets," *Time*, Oct. 24, 1997.
14. Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, 75.
15. Gilkes, "Revolution and Military Strategy," 724.
16. Ibid.
17. MOND, "Intelligence Estimate," April 2, 1974.
18. Ibid.
19. According to the Ethiopians, the invading force consisted of 70,000 troops, 40 fighter planes, 250 tanks, 350 APCs, and 600 artillery, which, of course, would have meant

the entire Somali fighting machine (MOND, "Intelligence Estimate," April 2, 1974, 6). The description of Yilma Gizaw is in Hussein, *Dedication and Firmness*, 101. Other sources name Colonel Tekalign Nigussie as the commander.

20. Lieutenant Colonel Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994, Addis Ababa.
21. Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994, Addis Ababa; Ketema Gabre Mariam, Dec. 14, 1994, Addis Ababa; Technician Andualem Cheru, Nov. 4, 1994, Addis Ababa; Captain Mesfin Baye, May 10, 1994, Addis Ababa; Sergeant Haile Yitagessu, March 24, 1994, Addis Ababa; AFH, "A General Report," 6–8; MOND; "Ba misrak ena debub tor ginbar sile nebaraw zemecha yemigeltse acher report ["A Short Report on the Situation on the Eastern and Southern War Fronts"], n.d., Addis Ababa. This last document is a condensed report of the war.
22. Colonel Aberra Haile Mariam and Colonel Mulatu Negash, "Ya Misrak Teklay Memria—'Zemecha Tebik,'" 30 Hamle 1969 ["The Eastern Command Directorate—'Operation Safeguard,'" July 7, 1977], and "Ya Misrak Iz Teklay Memria—Zemecha Tireg," 1 Nehassie 1969 ["Directorate of the Eastern General Command—Operation Sweep," Aug. 8, 1977], Harar, MOND.
23. AFH, "A General Report," 15–16; Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994; an anonymous sergeant who took part in the battle, March 15, 1994, Addis Ababa.
24. "Sile telat yemereja gimit," abari, Colonel Tsegaye W. Agegnehu la Hibretawit Itiopia Giziawi Wotaderawi Astetader Derg Abiotawi Memeria, 9 Nehassie 1969 ["Intelligence on the Enemy," enclosure, Colonel Tesegaye to the Revolutionary Intelligence Directorate of the Provisional Socialist Military Administration, Aug. 17, 1977], Addis Ababa, MOND.
25. Ibid.; MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 2–3.
26. Anonymous sergeant, March 15, 1994.
27. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 2–3; Lieutenant Solomon Jembere, March 15, 1994; Captain Asfaw Zewde, March 20, 1994; Ketema Gabre Mariam, April 12, 1994, and anonymous sergeant, March 15, 1994, Addis Ababa.
28. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 2–3; Lieutenant Solomon Jembere, March 15, 1994; Captain Asfaw Zewde, March 20, 1994; Ketema Gabre Mariam, April 12, 1994, and anonymous sergeant, March 15, 1994, Addis Ababa; *Addis Zemen*, 12 Nehassie 1969 (Aug. 20, 1977); and James Pringle, "State of Siege," *Time*, Sept. 26, 1977, 43.
29. Hussein, *Dedication and Firmness*, 102.
30. In fact, panicky officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had feared the worst. According to one of them, "If Somalia captures the city of Dire Dawa, where we have the second largest air force base, then it can easily use this base and threaten Addis to a point where the government would be obliged to capitulate" (Dawit, *Red Tears*, 39).
31. Gilkes claims that Dire Dawa was saved not only by the Ethiopian air force but also "by the decision of the Somali commander to withdraw when the city lay open to his forces," due to political intervention by Mogadishu ("Revolution and Military Strategy," 724). This is contradicted by the Ethiopian evidence and it does not seem to be credible.

32. *The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, maxim 72, 79.
33. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 10.
34. Ibid.
35. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 4; Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994.
36. Mengistu was in Harar at the time and both MOND's documents and my informants speak of his "heroic" act. But it is worth mentioning that many Ethiopians doubt that he personally led the assault.
37. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 4.
38. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," part 3, app. 3.
39. Dawit, *Red Tears*, 38; Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994.
40. Undecipherable signature of a lieutenant colonel who was commander of the division and deputy sommander of Zone 1 of the eastern command. His letter was addressed "la Misrak Iz ena Ketena Und Memria," 20 Hidar 1970, abari, Lieutenant Colonel Afewerki Wolde Mikael "la Biherawi Zemecha Memria," 1 Tahisas 1970 ["to the Eastern Command, Zone Directorate," Nov. 27, 1977, enclosure, Afewerki "to the Directorate of the National Service," Aug. 9, 1977], Addis Ababa, MOND.
41. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 5–7.
42. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 5–7; Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994.
43. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 7.
44. Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, "Ya Misrak Iz ya zemecha ikid-Zemecha Awrora," 18 Meskerem 1970 ["Operational Plan of the Eastern Command—'Operation Awrora,'" Sept. 25, 1977], 1–7, Addis Ababa, MOND.
45. Ethiopian intelligence identified the following: the Fifth, Seventh, Eighth, Eleventh, Twenty-third, and Ninetieth Motorized Brigades; the Second Tank Brigade; the First Artillery Brigade; and the 116th Commando Brigade ("Report from 1973 to January 1977," 13–18).
46. Ibid., 8. It must be pointed out that, following the general mobilization, two workers' brigades and seven brigades of PRGs were given crash training at Tatek and, along with four battalions of army veterans, were sent to the eastern front in early October.
47. These figures seem to be corroborated by Somali evidence. Quoting its leader, Gilkes reports that one Somali "brigade suffered 60 percent casualties" and that four others were "so badly mangled that all five were subsequently amalgamated into a single brigade." Their overall loss at the Kore front was three thousand ("Revolution and Military Strategy," 725, 735, n. 20.
48. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 12.
49. Ibid.
50. "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 11.
51. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 27. It seems that anyone who questioned, or conspired against, the military rulers was condemned as a sympathizer or member of the EPRP.
52. Ibid.; "Ye Simintegna Igregna Kifle Tor ya 1970 ametawi report—Huletegna Kifil," 15 Nehassie 1970, abari, Lieutenant Colonel Tesfaye Ayalew la Biherawi Abiotawi Zemecha Memria, 15 Nehassie 1970 ["A 1970 Annual Report of the Eighth Infantry

Division—Second Part," enclosure, Lieutenant Colonel Tesfaye to the Revolutionary Operations Directorate, April 23, 1977], Harar, MOND.

53. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 22–24.
54. Tesfaye Habte Mariam, *On the Battlefield*, 199.
55. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 10.
56. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 25.
57. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 10.
58. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 19–20.
59. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts*, 182–83; David Wood, "Ethiopia Goes on the Attack," *Time*, Feb. 20, 1978, 28. The billion-dollar figure is from Sarin and Dvoretsky, *Alien Wars*, 134.
60. Major Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, "Zemecha Dequs" ["Operation Crush"], Eastern Command Headquarters, 15 Tikimt 1970 [Oct. 23, 1977], 5, Harar, MOND.
61. David Wood, "Sticks, Stones, and Rockets," *Time*, Oct. 24, 1997; Raymond Carroll with Lloyd H. Norman, Arnaud de Borchgrave, and James Pringle, "War in the Horn," *Newsweek*, Feb. 13, 1978; Gilkes, "Revolutionary and Military Strategy," 725–26.
62. Sarin and Dvoretsky, *Alien Wars*, 134, and Dawit, *Red Tears*, 41.
63. This information was obtained from the then Ethiopian ambassador to Havana on March 12, 1994, in Addis Ababa.
64. There could have been some foreign experts, but allegations that there were at least a Pakistani battalion and as many as 15,000 to 29,000 Egyptian and Iraqi troops are without merit (MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 23). See also Elizabeth Peer, "War in the Horn," *Newsweek*, Aug. 29, 1977, 36–38.
65. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 30–31.
66. According to the Cubans, the attack commenced from points to the north and south of Kombolcha. See *Granma*, March 14, 1978.
67. Ethiopian Government, *Tigil ena Jegna*, 29.
68. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 13.
69. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 35–36.
70. Ibid.; *Granma*, March 14, 1978.
71. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 35–37.
72. David Wood, "A Desert Duel Keeps Heating Up," *Time*, Feb. 27, 1978, 40.
73. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 35–37.
74. *Granma*, March 14, 1978.
75. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 34.
76. Hussein, *Dedication and Firmness*, 103.
77. *Granma*, March 14, 1978; MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 37–38; anonymous sergeant, Mcrh 15, 1994.
78. For a good account of the second battle for Jijiga, see Kim Willenson with Loren Jenkins and Lloyd H. Norman, "The Ogaden Debacle," *Newsweek*, March 20, 1978, 46, 51. General Tesfaye claims that, without Soviet and United States intervention for a safe exit through Tugwajale, the Somali troops would have been either wiped out or captured en masse (Tesfaye, *On the Battlefield*, 212–13).
79. Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994; Sarin and Dvoretsky, *Alien Wars*, 134.

80. Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, "Aschquay ya melikt woreket," 26.6.70 ["An Urgent Message," March 6, 1978], Addis Ababa, MOND.
81. Lieutenant Colonel Yirdaw Alemu, "Report of the Eighth Infantry Brigade," in Tesfaye Ayalew (n. 52, above).
82. Lieutenant Colonel Negash Woldeyes in Tesfaye Ayalew (n. 52, above).
83. Yirdaw Alemu in Tesfaye Ayalew (n. 52, above).
84. MOND, "Report on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," 15; MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," 39–41; Captain Assefa Zewde, Feb. 18, 1994, Addis Ababa; and Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994.
85. It is possible to speculate that, had there not been foreign meddling, the Somalis could have held on for a few more weeks or even months, although it is doubtful they would have won. However, one wonders whether a prolongation of the war might not have worked to the advantage of the Eritrean rebels. A major setback in Eritrea would have had profound political and military repercussions at both the center and the eastern periphery.
86. *Granma*, March 14, 1978.
87. Anonymous sergeant, March 15, 1994.
88. Lefort, *Ethiopia*, 227.
89. Ibid.; Kassahun Tirfe, April 25, 1994; and Watson, "Arms and Aggression in the Horn of Africa," 166–67.
90. MOND, "La Issapako Maekelawi Komite gubae abalat ya miset ya Mekelakeya Minister Meglecha," 30 Hidar 1973 ["An Explanatory Note to Be Submitted by MOND to the CC of COPWE," Dec. 7, 1980], 11, Addis Ababa, MOND.
91. Ethiopian Government, *Tigil ena Jegna*, 1987, 23–25, and *Bale Adera*, 1983, 14–15.
92. Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 61–62, and Lefort, *Ethiopia*, 228.
93. For estimates of Somali casualties, see Gilkes, "Revolution and Military Strategy," 736, n. 51.
94. MOND, "Report from 1973 to January 1977," part 3, app. 1; MOND, "Ba misrak ena Debub Iz sir ba wigia ya deresebachew makonnenoch ena balelela maaregoch matekaleya senterej," 11 Hamle 1969–Tir 1970 ["A Chart of the Casualties of Officers and Rank and File during the Fighting on the Eastern and Southern Fronts," July 18, 1977–Jan. 1978]. The Operations Department of the ministry gives the total number of Ethiopian casualties in two tables in a two-page document. According to this report, 6,301 more died on the southern front, for a total of 12,951. This figure is certainly incorrect because most of the fighting took place on the eastern front and should it not follow that most of the dying also occurred there? In fact, the second report affirms that less than a thousand perished in the southern sector ("A Chart of Casualties").
95. MIA, "Ya Issapa Makelawi Komite ya Poletikabiro 86gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 3 Nehassie 1980 ["Minutes of the 86th Regular Meeting of the CC," Aug. 11, 1982], 13, 23–25. Of the returnees, 1,401 rejoined the army, air force, and militia, 323 rejoined the police, and 216 went back to civilian life.
96. Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, 76–79. This information is anecdotal, patchy, and at times unverified, but it indicates the barbarity that civilians were made to endure.

97. MOND, "Report from 1976 to January 1978," apps. 2–10. The exchange rate at the time was 2.05 Ethiopian birr to the US dollar.
98. For an extended consideration of Soviet calculations, see Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 235–54.

CHAPTER 7

Epigraph: Clausewitz, *On War*, book 3, ch. 7, 193 (reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press).

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1. Beaufre, *Introduction to Strategy*, 22–24.
2. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 166.
3. Ibid.
4. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War*, 28–29.
5. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 8, 50, 110.
6. Taber, *The War of the Flea*, 23–24, 26.
7. Ibid., 63.
9. For an extended account, see my "Operation Lash." The documents used include: "Ka Misrak Iz Memria la Ager Mekelakeya Minister ya karabe ya 'Project Lash' tinat," 1 Yekatit 1972 ["A Study of 'Project Lash,'" submitted by the Directorate of the Eastern Command to the Minister of Defense," Feb. 1980], Harar; Brigadier General Demissie Bulto la Hager Mekelakeya Minister ena la Midir Tor Teklay Memria, 23 Hamle 1972 [Demissie to the Minister of Defense and the Headquarters of the Ground Forces, July 30, 1980], Harar; Brigadier General Merid Negissie, "Ya wigia Zemecha Lash," la Misrak Iz Azaj, 4 Nehassie 1972 [Merid, "Operation Lash," to the Commander of the Eastern Command, Aug. 11, 1980], Addis Ababa; "Ka Misrak Iz Memria la Hager Mekelakeya Minister ya karabe ya 'Project Lash,' ikid 1, kutir 2, zemecha teklala report," 20 Tir 1973, abari, Getachew Adamu la Hager Mekelakeya Minister, 17 Yekatit 1973 ["A General Report about Plan 1, No. 2, of 'Project Lash' Submitted by the Eastern Command to the Minister of Defense," Feb. 25, 1981], Harar. The last item is the most comprehensive report of the operation.
9. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 77.
10. MOND, "The Rise and Growth of Banditry [Rebellion]."
11. Demissie Bulto to Minister of Defense, Sept. 4, 1981, 64; "Report of the Eastern and Southern Command," 9; Merid, "Operation Lash," app. C.
12. The IFLO outlived the regime.
13. Merid to Tesfaye, Sept. 17, 1980.
14. A total of 3,392 were drawn from the Nineteenth Mountain Infantry Division, 3,065 from the Ninth, and 3,155 from the Tenth ("Ya Misrak Iz Abiotawi Tor Teklay Memria ya 1974 zemecha report," 5 Hidar 1974 ["The 1982 Operation Report of the General Directorate of the Revolutionary Eastern Command," Nov. 13, 1982], Harar, MOND).

15. There were armed clashes with the Somalis in 1982 and 1984–85, and sporadic attacks by the guerrillas continued into the mid-1980s. The attacks and counterattacks with the Somalis began six months after their expulsion. The major encounter occurred on June 5, 1981, when the Somalis attacked Jed, thirty-eight kilometers inside Ethiopia, inflicting heavy losses on the defenders. They were finally beaten off. Then they attacked from Geldegob, which the Ethiopians, using SSDF as a shield, occupied on July 10. Balambel fell the next day. The SSDF declared the towns "liberated areas." The Somalis were now on the defensive on their own territory. All attempts to reclaim the towns failed. In all, the Ethiopians lost 1,392, of whom 383 were killed, 998 wounded, and 11 missing. They claimed to have killed 3,506, wounded three times as many, and captured 62 (Demissie Bulto, "Ya Misrak ginbar giziawi atekalay huneta," n.d., abari, la Hager Mekalekaya Minister, 27 Nehassie 1973 [Demissie, "The General Situation on the Eastern Front," enclosure, to the Minister of Defense, Sept. 5, 1981], Harar). As against their own losses of four tanks and six APCs, they claimed to have destroyed five planes, thirteen tanks, twenty APCs, twelve jeeps with 106 mm mounted guns, thirty-six RPG-7s, seven artillery tubes, 525 light weapons, and 702 antitank explosives. See also MOND, "Atekalay ya sera zegeba," Ginbot 1974 ["General Report on Work Performance," May 1982]. This document, prepared by the security section of the directory, provides a critical appraisal of the campaign.
16. According to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, one of the organizers of the campaign, Mengistu coined "Red Star" in reaction to "Bright Star," the code name of a military exercise the Americans were conducting in the Red Sea (*Red Tears*, 107). The operation was also called the Red Star Multifaceted Revolutionary Campaign because it combined military and civil action.
17. *Addis Zemen*, 17 Ginbot 1974 (May 1982), and *Ethiopian Herald*, Sept. 3 and 10, 1983.
18. *Addis Zemen*, 17 Ginbot 1974 (May 1982), and *Ethiopian Herald*, Sept. 3 and 10, 1983.
19. Colonel Tadesse Tessema, "Ya semien tor ginbar ya 1974 zemecha zegeba—'Key Kokeb Zemecha,'" 1974 ["A Report of the 1982 Operation of the Northern Front—'the Red Star Campaign,'" 1982], 7, Asmara. This is the most detailed account of the campaign I have seen. It was prepared by the Operations Department of the directory.
20. Connell, *Against All Odds*, 210.
21. MOND, "Ya meglecha mastwasha," 6.8.74 ["Explanatory Notes," April 13, 1982], 7, Addis Ababa.
22. Brigadier General Abebe Wolde Mariam la Minister, 30.10.7, abari, "Wotaderawi Zemecha ena Ikid Memria ya sidist wer report" [Abebe to Minister, July 7, 1982, enclosure, "A Six-Month Report by the Planning and Operations Directory"], 9–10, Asmara, MOND.
23. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 7. According to the colonel, only 74,671 combatants were deployed at the battlefronts. I have taken the median figure. See also "A Report," tables 1, 7.
24. Brigadier General Siyum Makonnen, "La Key Kokeb limimid ya wigia tizaz ya mereja

abari," 4 Yekatit 1974 ["An Intelligence Supplement to the War Preparations for Red Star," Nov. 2, 1982], 18–19, 23–24, MOND. See also "Ya 1975–76 ya mereja gimit," 1976 ["An Intelligence Review of 1982–83"], 95–96, Addis Ababa, MOND.

25. Connell reports that the number of tanks and armored cars seized by the EPLA was eighty (*Against All Odds*, 174). For the other figures, see Siyum Makonnen, "An Intelligence Supplement," 20–21.
26. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 8.
27. Ibid., 8–30; Baalu, *Oromay*, 289–90; Beyene Haile Mariam et al., *The Nakfa Front*, 1992, 10.
28. Baalu, *Oromay*, 303.
29. Major Getachew Melkie, interviewed by Getachew Wonde, *Addis Zemen*, 12 Hidar 1984 (Nov. 19, 1991); Corporal Aschenek Akalemariam, Feb. 3, 1994, Menz, Shewa.
30. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 25–28; MOND, "Atekalay ya aser amet zemecha report," Meskerem 1977 ["Ten-Year General Report on Campaigns," Sept. 1984], 22–23, Addis Ababa, MOND. Mengistu alleges that the TPLF played a critical role in foiling the operation on the western side (MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 97gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," Rob, 22 Yekatit 1981 ["Minutes of the 97th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Wed., March 1, 1989], 6). General Hussein repeats the allegation, claiming information was obtained from defectors and prisoners (*Dedication and Firmness*, 130–31). According to Lieutenant General Tsadkan Gabre Tensae, 4,500–5,000 fighters of the TPLF under Samora Yunus took part in the fighting (e-mail, Dec. 12, 2007).
31. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 8–11; MOND, "Ten-Year Report," 16–18.
32. Lieutenant Gabre Kristos Abadi, March 15, 1994, Addis Ababa.
33. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 16–21; MOND, "Ten-Year Report," 19–22.
34. The "well-placed official" is Dawit (*Red Tears*, 109), who may have had an axe to grind. See "Shaleqa Bitarfs" ["Major, Why Don't You Shut Up"], *Addis Zemen*, 24 Tir 1984 (Feb. 1, 1991). It is hard to believe that the general could have made such a historic blunder without Mengistu's assent. But Mengistu has vehemently denied it (Genet, *Reminiscences*, 252). Since General Abebe Abera, commander of Wiqaw, is long dead, only his deputy, General Hussein Ahmed, was well placed to know exactly what happened. In his self-serving book, *Dedication and Firmness*, General Hussein criticizes Dawit for lying about him but does not say anything about this important matter (203–04). It is an astonishing omission. One would hope that he would change his mind and help us resolve this puzzle. Captain Gezahegn Neknekie puts the blame on the commander of the Seventeenth Division (interview, Feb. 3, 1994, Addis Ababa).
35. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 11–15; Beyene et al., *The Nakfa Front*, 11.
36. Gabre Kristos Abadi, March 15, 1994. The original is: **ፈአይ ይቺ ናቅፋ ናቅፋ**
ጉሮሮየ ዉስጥ ተወትፋ
ወይ አትዋጥ ወይ አትተፋ።።
37. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 11–15; Colonel Solomon Shawl Kassaye, April 19, 1994; Gezahegn Neknekie, Feb. 3, 1994.

38. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report"; MOND, "A Ten-Year Report," 19–22. See also Baalu, *Oromay*, 304–27.
39. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 22.
40. Ibid., 15.
41. MOND, "Explanatory Notes," 1982, 4.
42. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 22–24.
43. Anonymous, Dec. 29, 1993, Addis Ababa.
44. Colonel Sereke Berhan, July 17, 1994, Mekele.
45. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 23–24.
46. Beyene et al., *The Nakfa Front*, 12. They also claimed to have captured 7,517 light weapons and destroyed nineteen tanks and three aircraft. MOND admitted it lost two MiGs.
47. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 35.
48. Anonymous, April 30, 2004, Washington, DC. Connell's estimate was four thousand (*Against All Odds*), 218.
49. Getachew Adamu, "Ya Hager Mekelakaya Minister ya kerabe report," 17 Yekatit 1973 [Getachew, "A Report to the Minister of Defense," Jan. 24, 1981], Addis Ababa, MOND.
50. Brigadier General Abebe Wolde Mariam to Minister, 30.10.1974, abari, "Ya Wotaderawi Zemecha ena Ikid Memria ya sidist wer report" ["A Six-Month Report by the Planning and Operations Directory," July 7, 1982], Addis Ababa; MOND, "Ya dirgit huneta meglecha," Meskerem 1977 ["Description of Work Performance," Sept. 1984], Addis Ababa, MOND. For weapons destroyed, see Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," tables 4 and 5, 36–38. It appears that some 26,230,549 bullets were shot—that is, about 1,008 bullets per rebel ("A Report").
51. Merid Negussie to Tesfaye Gabre Kidan, Nov. 8, 1980, MOND.
52. Baalu, *Oromay*, 61.
53. Ibid. See Kane, "The Red Star Campaign."
54. Tedla Bekele, "Some Internal Causes for the Defeat of the 39th Mountain Infantry Brigade," 28.
55. Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, "Shaabia," 6–9.
56. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 71–72.
57. Asfaw Zewdie, April 24, 1994, Addis Ababa.
58. The original is: **ከመሬት ናቅፋ**
ከመኪና አይፋ
ከምድረገጽ ይጥፋ።። (See also Baalu, *Oromay*, 291). The Ayfa was a Russian-made military vehicle that was notorious for overturning.
59. The original is: **ፍልማዊት አደ ናይ ሞራል ናይ ተስፋ**
በኹሪ ሳህል ዓባይ ናቅፋ እወ ናቅፋ።።
60. Kane, "The Red Star Campaign," 741 (Tariku quotation); MOND, "A General Report," Sept. 1984.
61. Siyum Makonnen, "An Intelligence Supplement," 3.
62. MOND, "Explanatory Notes," 12; MOND, "A General Report," 8.

63. Tedla Bekele, "Some Internal Causes," 37.
64. Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, "Shaabia," 9.
65. MOND, "Explanatory Notes," 12.
66. *The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, 59.
67. Tadesse Tessema, "A Report," 39–40; MOND, "A General Report," 7–9.
68. Of the total casualties, 4,383 were killed, 11,725 wounded, and 1,540 unaccounted for (MIA, 1988, vol. 1, table 3, 117).

CHAPTER 8

Epigraphs: Roy, *The Battle of Dienbienphu*, 287; Davidson, BBC, March 21, 1988.
A version of this chapter and the next was originally published as "From Af Abet to Shire: The Defeat and Demise of Ethiopia's 'Red' Army, 1988–89," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 42, no. 2 (2004): 239–281. Reprinted with permission. An unauthorized translation was serialized in an Amharic weekly called the *Nation*, Sene 1996 (July 2004).

1. *Adulis*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Aug. 1985), editorial page.
2. It also possessed 298 PKMs, 32 RP-46 and RPD heavy guns, 205 APGs, 272 heavy machine guns, 255 trucks and vehicles, 28 water tanks, 15 gas tankers, 11 ambulances, and vast quantities of light weapons and ammunition (Asrat to Tesfaye, "A Report," 5–8, n. 4). See also Major General Regassa Jima la guad [to Comrade] Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam, 13 Tahisas 1980 [21 Dec. 1988], Asmara, MOND.
3. *Adulis*, vol. 3, no. 5 (1986).
4. Major General Asrat Birru la guad Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, 28 Megabit 1980, abari, "Ba Nadew Iz gimbar siletekahedaw ya mirmera report" [Asrat to Comrade Tesfaye, enclosure, "A Report of the Investigation of the Nadew Command Front"], April 6, 1988, 2–6, MIA. This investigative report was prepared by an ad hoc committee consisting of four officers and chaired by General Asrat Birru, inspector general of the Ethiopian Armed Forces (EAF). The other members were Colonel Abdela Muhammad, Colonel Alemayehou Wolde, and Lieutenant Colonel Yirga Haile Mariam. It was supplemented by "Ba 27.7.80 le tezegajew ya Nadew Iz ya mirmera report ya karabe techemari mabraria," 12 Mizia 1980 ["Additional Explanation for the Investigative Report of Nadew Command of April 6, 1988"], April 18, 1988, Asmara. These are detailed accounts of the origin and evolution of the unrest, the individuals implicated, as well as a summary of the battles that followed. I am also indebted to Brigadier General Getaneh Haile (April 25, 1994) and Captain Girma Mamo (March 18, 1994), who supplemented the official information with their firsthand knowledge of Nadew's defeat.
5. Asrat to Tesfaye, "Report," 1.
6. Lieutenant Molla Birkie, secretary of the party commission in the division, was mentioned as another officer who misused his position to undermine the army through gossip and the spreading of defaming information about his superiors (Asrat to Tesfaye, "Report," 3).
7. Ibid., 7–52.

8. Ibid., 18. Allegations of sexual impropriety with his female coworkers had damaged the colonel's reputation, undermining his authority (11).
9. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 246–47, 277; MIA, "Ya Ras Gaz ena ya Astedader Akebabiwoch ya Parti Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 10, kifil 1, 4–5 Megabit 1981 ["Minutes of the First Secretaries of the Party Committees of the Autonomous Regions and Administrative Zones," no. 10, part 1, March 12–13, 1989], Addis Ababa.
10. Major General Regassa Jima la guad [to Comrade] Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam, 13 Tahisas 1980 [21 Dec. 1988], Asmara. See also Beyene et al., *The Nakfa Front*, 16–17.
11. Regassa to Haile Giorgis, 21 Dec. 1988, table 1, 5.
12. Ibid., 4. The EPLA appears to have captured 2 tanks, 21 82 mm mortars, 28 RPG-7 rocket launchers, 45 PKM artillery, 8 RP-46s, 1,161 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 26 PRC-77 radios, 1,260 individual tents, 1,438 water canteens, and many other items (table 2, 6–8).
13. Major General Regassa Jima la Mekelakeya Minister ya Dirgit Wana Memria, 6 Tahisas 1980, "Ba Nadew Iz ginbar ka 28.3.80 eska 30.3.80 diras ba tedaregaw wigia ya wadema ena ya tefa ya nibrat zirzir" [Regassa Jima to the Main Operations Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, Dec. 14, 1988, "A List of the Property Lost and Destroyed during the Battle from December 6 to 8 on the Front Line of Nadew"], Asmara.
14. Girma Mamo, March 18, 1994.
15. Regassa to Ministry of Defense, Dec. 14, 1988.
16. Ibid. Note the marginal notation of the minister to the chief of staff, 13.
17. Mengistu later recounted: "I absolutely did not expect what I saw and heard. The commanders stood apart from the cadres and the cadres were allied with the security men. The commanders had formed their own block. The troops stood alone. The political cadres could command planes and get whatever they needed from the various producing agencies in Addis Ababa. Illicit business was flourishing" (Genet, *Reminiscences*, 246).
18. Girma Mamo, March 18, 1994.
19. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 248–49.
20. *Ifoyta*, no. 5 (1984): 14.
21. Girma Mamo, March 18, 1994; Girma Kemis, Dec. 23, 1993; and Corporal Aschenek Akalemariam, Dec. 22, 1993, Mahel Meda, Menz (Shewa). General Regassa had warned as early as December 21 that the contraction of its size, the loss of intelligence because of "some traitorous elements," and the "poisonous propaganda being spread by the bandits" had reduced the fighting spirit of Nadew, "threatening its martial ethos" (Regassa to Haile Giorgis, Dec. 21, 1988, 9).
22. Asrat to Tesfaye, "Report," 27. Its commander believed that Nadew had a little over 13,000 (Brigadier General Getaneh Haile, April 25, 1994, Addis Ababa). It is interesting to note that the EPLF claimed to have killed, wounded, or captured 18,000 men. See *Sagem*, special issue, no. 2 (Miazia 1988): 9. The size of the command has been the subject of speculation. We have Gilkes's low figure of 20,000 and Dawit's

and Pool's wild figures of 100,000 and 150,000, respectively (Gilkes, "The Battle of Af Abet," 39; Dawit, *Red Tears*, 365; and Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government*, 155). Only Africa Watch has it right (see *Evil Days*, 237).

23. Asrat to Tesfaye, "Report," 8.
24. *The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, maxim 59, 111–12.
25. Major General Merid Negussie la Guad [to Comrade] Major General Wibetu Tsegaye, 20 Yekatit 1980 [Feb. 28, 1988], Addis Ababa.
26. Brigadier General Wibatu Tsegaye, "Ya melikt woraket," la Mentir Iz Azaj la Nadew Iz Mikitil Azaj, 7 Megabit 1980, abari 4 [Wibatu Tsegaye, "Message," to the Commander of Mentir Command and the Deputy Commander of Nadew Command], March 15, 1988, Asmara, app. 4, Asrat to Tesfaye, "Report."
27. Ka Huletegnaw Abiotawi Serawit Mikitil Azaj, "Ya Tor Hayloch ya melikt woraket," 4.3.80, abari 3 [From the Deputy Commander of the SRA, "Message of the Armed Forces"], Dec. 3, 1988, Asmara, app. 3, Asrat to Tesfaye, "Report."
28. Mao, *Selected Military Writings*, 146.
29. Alemseged Tesfai, *Two Weeks in the Trenches*, 101–02. "In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force (two, three, four, and sometimes even five or six times the enemy's strength), encircle the enemy forces completely, strive to wipe them out thoroughly and do not let any escape from the net" (Mao, *Selected Military Writings*, 349–50).
30. Alemseged Tesfai, *Two Weeks in the Trenches*, 120–21.
31. The military's report was that "helicopters and jet fighters destroyed the vehicles and weaponry left behind to prevent them from falling into enemy hands" (Asrat, "A Report," 12, 17).
32. Alemseged Tesfai, *Two Weeks in the Trenches*, 120–21, 122.
33. Captain Girma Mamo, March 18, 1994.
34. Wrong, *I Didn't Do It for You*, 331.
35. Colonel Ijigu Lakew, "Ya 1980 gimash amet report," n.d., tederabi 2 ["A Semiannual Report of 1988"], app. 2, Asrat to Tesfaye, "Report."
36. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 277.
37. EPLF, *Sagem*, April 1988, 9. Mengistu told the Politburo the implications of this: "The leaders at Af Abet could have at least saved the weaponry. They could have burned the ammunition. Without doing anything they fled to save their own lives. We are now being hammered with this arsenal" (MIA, "Minutes of the 83rd Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Tues., May 17, 1988, 25).
38. A list of the names is available at the Research and Information Center of Eritrea (RICE) in Asmara. It was first made public on Radio of the Masses on May 8, 1988.
39. Getaneh Haile, April 25, 1994.
40. Corporal Aschenek Akalemariam, Dec. 22, 1993.
41. First Lieutenant Shiferaw Awlachew, March 22, 1994.
42. MIA, "Ya Kiflate Hager Issapa Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 8, 23 Megabit 1980 ["Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee of the Regional First Secretaries of the WPE," no. 8, April 22–23, 1988], Addis Ababa, MIA.

43. *The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, maxim 11, 59.
44. Asrat to Tesfaye, "Report," 13–18.
45. Ibid., 22–24.
46. Getaneh Haile, April 25, 1994.
47. MIA, "Minutes of the Committee of the Regional First Secretaries of the WPE," no. 7, 21 Mizia 1980 (May 9, 1988), MIA.
48. Mengistu bragged about this hasty mobilization: "We have been able to mobilize about 150,000 troops by air, land, and sea in less than seven days. This [operation] is the first of its kind in world history, except for some attempts in some places by the Americans and Soviets during World War II." Both the numbers and the historical account, of course, are erroneous (MIA, "Minutes of the Meetings of the First Secretaries of Autonomous and Administrative Party Committes," no. 10, part 3, March 12–13, 1989, 20).
49. The army's casualties were 1,105 killed, 2,890 wounded, and 1,374 unaccounted for (MOND, "Ba Huasse ginbar ka Ginbot 9.18.1980 diress ya takanawane ya Zemecha Hibret ikid enea teklala hidet," Ginbot 1980 ["Tasks Performed by the SRA in Accordance with Operation Hibret ('Unity')," May 17–26, 1988], 1–10, Asmara; MOND, "Zemecha Hibret—acher zegeba," 18 Ginbot 1980 ["Operation Hibret—A Brief Account"], May 25, 1988, 3–10, Asmara). See also Hussein, *Dedication and Firmness*, 143–45.
50. *Adulis*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Aug. 1985), editorial page. See also *Adulis*, vol. 5, no. 3 (April 1988). Asked what he thought about the appropriateness of the comparison, Sibhat Ephrem, a member of the EPLF's Politburo responsible for military affairs, cleverly evaded the issue by saying, "I prefer to look at [the battle] by connecting it to our previous success. [Af Abet] derived from those victories" (*Sagem*, April 1988, 9–10).
51. The battle of Dienbienphu began on March 13, 1954. The French had between thirteen and fifteen thousand men at the besieged garrison and they suffered nine to thirteen thousand casualties. See Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 70–71, and Simpson, *Dien Bien Phu*, 169–71.
52. Giap, *Selected Writings*, 187.
53. Wrong, *I Didn't Do It for You*, 337.
54. Connell, *Against All Odds*, 228.

CHAPTER 9

Epigraph: Clausewitz, *On War*, book 4, ch. 13, 271 (reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press).

1. Mengistu himself has admitted that Legesse was loathed by everyone in the government (Genet, *Reminiscences*, 207).
2. Major General Merid Negussie to Comrade Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, app. 5, 3, Tesfaye to Mengistu. See n. 33, below.
3. Major General Mulatu Negash to Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, app. 6-A, 40–41 and 53. See n. 33, below. To appreciate how byzantine the bureaucracy was, note these addi-

tional remarks by the general: "The party machine has harmed me immensely. The strategists are many. The first party secretary of the autonomous region, Comrade Sileshi Mengesha; the party's political and administrative chief of the autonomous region, Comrade Colonel Belay Bitew; and the administrator of Tigray, Comrade Brigadier General Haile Meles—all of these are critics. . . . By and large, the directives I received never followed the principle of centralized command; they were transmitted to me through Colonel Abdissa and his [the administrator's] special assistant, Captain Kebede. Worse, instructions were sent above my head to my deputy, to corps commanders and their deputies, and to the representative of the air force. These created problems for me."

4. Merid to Tesfaye, 3–4; Tesfaye to Mengistu, 20, 23. See n. 33, below.
5. Major General Mulatu Negash to Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, 2 Miazia 1981 [April 9, 1989], app. 6-A, 5, Tesfaye to Mengistu. See n. 33, below.
6. Major General Siyum Makonnen, "Ba Tigray sile derassaw widqet," 20 Hamle 1982 ["The Failure in Tigray," July 28, 1989], 14–17, Addis Ababa, MOND.
7. The other organizations were the EPRP, the EPDM, and the EDU.
8. Siyum gives a total of 51,985 ("The Failure in Tigray," 9–10). Another document provides an estimate of 46,000, or twelve to fifteen brigades, one commando brigade, four heavy-weapons battalions, ten zonal battalions, and 30,000 militia (MIA, "Ba Ihidri Mekelakeya Mikir Biet, ya majemeria sibseba," 24 Ginbot 1980 ["First Meeting of the Defense Council of the PDRE," June 1, 1988], 9). It is difficult to verify all government estimates.
9. MOND, "Ba Huletegna ena Sostegna Abiotawi Serawit ginbar atekalay huneta gimgema," Hamle 1980 ["An Assessment of the Situation in the Fronts of the SRA and TRA," July 1988], Addis Ababa. The weapons included a dozen tanks, nine armored cars, forty-two heavy artillery, forty-nine mortars, thirty-eight cannons, ninety-two antitank and forty-seven antiair guns, tens of thousands of heavy machine guns, assault rifles, and hand grenades. The above MOND document (n. 6) gives the following: two BTR-60s, fifteen 75 mm mortars, sixty-five 82 mm mortars, sixteen ZU-23s, sixteen B-10 antitank and 37 mm antiair guns, and twenty-six Caliber guns.
10. MOND, "An Abbreviated Report," Mekele, "Zemecha Adwa," 7 Sene 1980 ["Operation Adwa," June 15, 1988]; "Ya Zemecha Adwa miraf und zegeba report," 19 Sene 1980 ["A Report of Phase 1 of Operation Adwa," June 27, 1988]; "Ya Zemecha Adwa miraf hulet afetsatsem report," 25 Sene 1980 ["A Report of the Implementation of Phase 2 of Operation Adwa," July 3, 1988]; "Ya Zemecha Adwa miraf arat ikid," 21 Hamle 1980 ["The Plan of Phase 2 of Operation Adwa," July 28, 1988]; and "Ya Zemecha Adwa miraf arat afetsatsem zegeba," 20 Nehassie 1980 ["A Report of the Implementation of Phase 4 of Operation Adwa," Aug. 1988], Mekele, MOND.
11. Mekele, "Ya Tigray Aschquay Gize Huneta ya Mekelakeya ena Dehninet Mikir Beit sibseba," kutir 1, 1.10.80 ["Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives of the State of Emergency of Tigray," no. 1, June 17, 1988], 3–7, MOND.
12. MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 2, June 18, 1988, 7.

13. Ibid.
14. Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, 258–64.
15. The man looked to be in his fifties. Although he spoke in the presence of a sizable group, he was not eager to reveal his identity.
16. MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 4, 20.10.80 [July 27, 1988], 6.
17. MOND, "An Abbreviated Report," 4–8; Legesse Asfaw to Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, 27 Megabit 1981 [Jan. 4, 1989], app. 2-A, 5–6 (see n. 33, below); MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 8, 13 Tahisas 1981 [Feb. 12, 1989].
18. MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 2, June 26, 1988, 7; MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 7, 20.11.80 [July 28, 1988], 2; Legesse to Tesfaye, 8–10, Tesfaye to Mengistu (see n. 33, below).
19. Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam to Comrade Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, 23 Megabit 1981 [April 1, 1989], app. 3-A, 3; see n. 33, below.
20. MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 5, 21.10.81 [June 29, 1989], 5–6. The full text reads: "It has been said that Comrade Colonel Bekele Haile, commander of the Seventh Division and leader of the unit that set off from Metemma, had from the outset insisted on having vehicles. Thereafter, he would move and then stop or move to the wrong place and then fall back, wasting time. Then he would complain that he was in a wilderness without water and would not move any farther. He reached Girarwiha on the twenty-third but stayed there until June 25, 1988, although the corps commander, the deputy commander of the TRA, and even the comrade overall administrator had told him to move on expeditiously. Although the force used draft animals to carry its supplies and ammunition, helicopters were used to deliver additional water and logistic support. His action has harmed the efforts of party, state, and people. Since the command should not be allowed to proceed in this manner, Colonel Bekele Haile has been placed under arrest and replaced by the corps' deputy commander. He should be immediately put out of action." The man had grumbled of having to use animals instead of vehicles. Apparently, that was held against him.
21. Ibid.
22. MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 6, 11.11.80 [July 18, 1988], 2–3.
23. MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 9, 15.1.81 [Sept. 23, 1989], 12.
24. MIA, "Ya Isapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 85nga medebawi sibseba qale gubae," 12 Hamle 1980 ["Minutes of the 85th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," 20 June 1988].
25. Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam to Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, 23 Megabit 1981 [March 31, 1989], app. 3-A, Tesfaye to Mengistu. See n. 33, below.
26. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994, Addis Ababa.
27. Legesse to Tesfaye, 12–14, and Tesfaye to Mengistu. See n. 33, below.
28. MIA, "Special Meeting of the Defense Council of the PDRE," Dec. 1989, 35.

29. Ibid.
30. MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 9, 15.1.81 [Sept. 23, 1989], 12.
31. MOND, "Report . . . of Phase 2 of Operation Adwa," July 3, 1988, 10. The official estimate of rebel casualties was certainly inflated. Note that MOND's estimate of the TPLF's regular fighters was 19,000. According to Mulatu's own report, only 5,812 of those were put out of action, and that is only 30 percent. The material loss of the TRA was seven tanks, fourteen armored cars, seventy-six vehicles, 209 artillery pieces, 137 antitank and fourteen antiaircraft guns, and 3,769 light weapons ("An Abbreviated Report," 11).
32. "An Abbreviated Report," 11.
33. Much of what follows is based on the most comprehensive and thus most important report on the battle of Shire, "SiIe Shire Tor Ginbar awedadeq ena sile Mekele siltawi meleqeq ya karabe ya mirmera report," Miazia 1980, Addis Ababa ["An Investigative Report of the Fall at the Shire Battlefront and the Tactical Withdrawal from Mekele," April 1988], enclosure in Tesfaye Wolde Selassie to Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, n.d., MIA. The document was prepared by a three-man ad hoc committee appointed by President Mengistu Haile Mariam on April 18, 1989. It was composed of Tefaye Wolde Selassie (chair), member of the CC, alternate member of the Politburo, and minister of internal affairs; Major General Siyum Makonnen, member of the CC and minister-secretary of the Defense Council; and Major General Kefalegn Yibza, member of the CC and minister-inspector of military affairs in the office of the republic's president. The report is 613 pages long, of which 381 pages (15 of these are handwritten) are appendixes, a total of eleven.
34. MIA, "Ba Ihidri ya Mekelakeya Mikir Biet 4gna medebegna sibseba gize ba guad Major General Mulatu Negash ya karabe geletsa ka gets 68–73" ["An Explanation by Comrade Major General Mulatu Negash at the 4th Regular Meeting of the Defense Council of the PDRE, pages 68–73"], app. 6-F, in Tesfaye to Mengistu, 2–3; Mulatu to Tesfaye, 38–39. According to the chief of operations, Major General Abera Abebe, the front had 49,120 men and consisted of nine divisions, four heavy-machine battalions, one engineering company, one reconnaissance company, and fifteen zonal battalions (MIA, "Ba Ihidri ya Mekelakeya Mikir Biet liyu sibseba," 29 Hidar 1981 ["Special Meeting of the Defense Council of the PDRE," Dec. 7, 1989], 1.
35. MOND, "Meeting of the Defense and Security Representatives," no. 8, 13.4.81 [Dec. 21, 1989], 9).
36. Among the dead were Brigadier General Eshetu Gabre Mariam, commander of the 609th Corps, stationed in Eritrea, and its political officer (MIA, "Minutes of the 89th Meeting of the Politburo," Sept. 25, 1989, 13).
37. Major General Demissie Bulto la guad Teklay eta Major Shum, "Ya wist Mastawasha," 24 Meskerem 1980 [Demissie to Comrade the Chief of Staff, "Internal Memo," Oct. 2, 1988], 1–6, Addis Ababa, MOND.
38. The general was later killed by his own soldiers.
39. Mulatu, "An Explanation," 29–30.

40. Haile Giorgis to Tesfaye, app. 3-B, 30 Megabit 1988 [April 7, 1988], 4–6, Addis Ababa.
41. Mulatu Negash la guad [to Comrade] Mengisu Haile Mariam, 2 Miazia 1981 [April 10, 1989], app. 6-A, 2–3.
42. Each battlefield decision is unique yet this maxim seems quite appropriate to this episode: "Every general is culpable who undertakes the execution of a plan which he considers faulty. It is his duty to represent his reasons to insist upon a change of plan; in short, to give in his resignation rather than allow himself to become the instrument of his army's ruin" (*The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, maxim 72, 79).
43. Haile Giorgis to Tesfaye, app. 3-B, 30 Megabit 1980 [April 7, 1988], 3–6.
44. See David Chandler's commentary on Napoleon's maxim 13 (*The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, 120).
45. Colonel Amdessa Gemtessa le guad [to Comrade] Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, 25.7.81 [April 2, 1989], app. 8-A, in Tesfaye to Mengistu.
46. See his assessment of the defeat in Mesfin to Tesfaye, 14 Megabit 1980 [March 22, 1988], app. 4-A, 36–40; see also Legesse to Tesfaye, 20.
47. Mulatu to Mengistu, April 10, 1989, 6.
48. MIA, "Minutes of the 95th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," 23 Tir 1981 [March 1, 1989], 18. At about the same time the chief of staff had warned that "unless improvements are made it is hard to say that the TRA can withstand the current threat" (Major General Merid Negussie la guad [to Comrade] Major General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam, 24 Tir 1981 [Feb. 1, 1989], app. 5, 1).
49. Legesse to Tesfaye, 22.
50. Mulatu to Mengistu, 5–6.
51. Ibid.
52. Haile Giorgis to Tesfaye, 23 Megabit 1981 [April 1, 1989], 9; MIA "Minutes of the 97th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," March 1, 1989, 11–12.
53. Nigatu to Tesfaye, 10–13; Major Nigatu Bogale, "604 Kor ka Yekatit 1.6.81 eska 12.6.81 diress ka telat gar silataderagew ena bamamacharasham la Mekele malaqeq mikniat yehonu gudayoch atekalay report" ["A Cumulative Report of the Fighting between the 604th Corps and the Enemy from February 8, 1989, to February 19, 1989, and the Reasons for the Evacuation of Mekele"], n.d., app. 10-A. This is the most detailed account of the battles.
54. Colonel Tadesse Demissie la guad [to Comrade] Major General Imbibel Ayele, 2 Sene 1981, abari "Ka 3.6.81–12.6.81 ba Shire ena Selekhlekha akababi ba wagen lay ya daresaw shinfet ba tamalekate tetarto ya karabe zirzir report," ["A Detailed Report of the Defeat of Our Army around Shire and Selekhlekha, February 10, 1989–February 19, 1989"], n.d.: "The division was caught at a place where there was no natural defense and from which it could not return fire and became an easy and pitiful target." This report and that of Nigatu Bogale give sharply differing accounts of the fall of the 103rd Division.
55. First Lieutenant Mezgebe Bayiu, Feb. 7, 1994, Addis Ababa.
56. Nigatu to Tesfaye, 13.

57. Tesfaye to Mengistu, part 1, 15.
58. MIA, "Minutes of the 87th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Tues., Aug. 16, 1988, 21–22.
59. Mao, *Selected Military Writings*, 122, 146.
60. Nigatu Bogale, "A Cumulative Report," 30–31; Colonel Solomon Shawl Kassaye, April 24, 1994, Addis Ababa.
61. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994. See also Tesfamariam, "The Battle of Shire," 54–55.
62. Lieutenant Solomon Belette, April 22, 1994, Addis Ababa.
63. Anonymous, April 18, 1993, Addis Ababa. The original is: **እዋጋለሁ ብየ ለሀገሬ**
የትግራይን በረሀ አቋርጬ በግሬ
ወንበዴን ሳሳድድ እንደ አዉሬ
መቸ አወቁኝ ጠላት መሆኑን ገበሬ፤
እንዳልሸሽ በንዳዊ ፍቅር ታስሬ
እዚሁ ወደቅኩኝ አብሬ፤
ሽሬ ወይ ሽሬ
ሆነሻል መቃብሬ::
64. Haile Giorgis to Tesfaye, 12.
65. Nigatu Bogale, "A Cumulative Report," 13; Mulatu, "An Explanation," 45.
66. *People's Voice*, special issue, vol. 2, no. 1 (1989): 5.
67. Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, 168.
68. Nigatu Bogale gives 10–12,000 whereas Legesse says there were about 15,000. As will become clear later, the force was about 13,000 ("A Cumulative Report," 14–15; Legesse to Tesfaye, 27).
69. Nigatu Bogale, "A Cumulative Report," 15–17. According to Hayelom, the TPLF had about 35,000. The five divisions that were directly involved in the assault were Agazi, Alula, Aurora, May Day, and Yekatit (Hayelom, July 4, 1994).
70. Hayelom, July 4, 1994.
71. Nigatu Bogale, "A Cumulative Report," 18.
72. Second Lieutenant Kifle Ergetu, Dec. 16, 1993.
73. Nigatu Bogale, "A Cumulative Report," 21.
74. Solomon Belette, April 22, 1994; Captain Asfaw Zewdu, Jan. 10, 1994, Addis Ababa.
75. TPLF, "Wotaderawi zena: anstbaraqi ya Hawzien Hulet Operation," 27.2.89 ["Military News: Spectacular Operation Hauzien II"], 1. I am grateful to an anonymous friend who brought this document to my attention. Tesfamariam has included it in his appendixes. Hayelom Araya, Siye Abraha, and Tsadkan Gabre Tensae have rejected the EPLF's claim as untrue. According to General Tsadkan, both he and Meles had met with Sibhat Ephrem and Petros Solomon of the TPLF in June 1988 at Hadamu, not far from Sheraro, in the hope of mapping out a joint military operation against the TRA. But the Eritrean representatives not only declined the proposition but tried to dissuade their Tigrayan counterparts not to take any precipitous action against the 604th Corps, arguing that the balance of forces were not favorable. Only when they saw an opening, said Tsadkan, did the EPLF send a token force that was too small to have made a difference in the outcome. Four of its tanks were destroyed before it had even entered into action and the rest withdrew to Adidaro in confusion. Tsadkan was

categorical: "We planned it. We executed it. We won it" (personal communication, April 24, 2005, Arlington, VA, and e-mails, Dec. 10–12, 2007, Addis Ababa). I remain skeptical for three reasons: (1) If the TPLF was certain of winning all by itself, why did it fall back on the EPLF? (2) Why did the situation change dramatically soon after the arrival of the Eritrean fighters? (3) Why did the TPLF thank them so hardily right after the end of combat? For the Eritrean side, see the video *From Shire to Addis Ababa* (Tigrinya), Eritrean Television (Eri TV), May 2005.

76. The Eritreans alone may have lost more than 120 of their men (Colonel Tsehaye Makonnen, Eri TV, May 2005).
77. Nigatu Bogale, "A Cumulative Report," 23.
78. Mulatu, "An Explanation," 45. Nigatu reported that the general left at 1500 hours ("A Cumulative Report," 23).
79. Unaware that he was contradicting himself, Mulatu wrote: "I believe that I have done a great service to Ethiopia by leaving Shire. The choice I had was between death and capture. [It was the right choice] unless, of course, we wanted the enemy to brag about the death or capture of an army commander" (Mulatu to Tesfaye, 44).
80. MOND, "Ka 604 Kor wana Azaj la Sostegna Abiotawi Serawit wana Azaj," 12.6.81 ["From the Commander of the 604th Corps to the Commander of the TRA," Feb. 20, 1989], app. 6-C.
81. Tadesse Demissie to Imbibel, 10; "From the Commander of the 604th Corps to the Commander of the TRA," Feb. 20, 1989, app. 6-C.
82. Mulatu has admitted his failure to take the sick general with him when he abandoned Indasilase ("An Explanation," 51).
83. The army's material loss was a bonanza for its enemy. The TPLF seized thirteen tanks, 106 trucks, two PRT armored cars, one BM-21 rocket launcher, two hundred PKM heavy artillery and 340 RPD light artillery, ten 100 mm mortars, 132 RPG rocket-propelled antitank guns, nine SU-23 antiaircraft guns, fifteen MB-10 antitank recoilles guns, 8,505 rockets, 8,000 hand grenades, over 24,000 PKM rifles, fifteen 122 Howitzers, seventy-eight RPG-7s, four SPG-9s, three heavy machine guns, 183 machine guns, 225 radios, eight heavy construction machines, loaders, and bulldozers, 1,714,719 bullets of varying types, and two big warehouses full enough for the counteroffensive still ahead. The destroyed equipment consisted of two BM-21s, four tanks, nine 122 Howitzer mortars, seventeen ZU-23s, 127 trucks, six SPG-9s, four MB-10s and one Mi-42 helicopter (MIA, "Ba Shire ginbar ya wadame teklala nebrat zirzir" ["A List of the Property Destroyed at the Shire Front"], n.d., app. 11-D, Tesfye to Mengistu; MOND, "Ya Tigray wataderawi huneta—acher maregagecha," Yekatit 1981 ["The Military Situation in Tigray—A Brief Checklist," Feb. 1989]; *People's Voice*, 8).
84. Nigatu Bogale, "A Cumulative Report," 49–50; Colonel Gabre Mariam, June 30, 1994, Addis Ababa; MIA, La guad Minister, "Mastawasha," 8 Megabit 1981, "Sile Shire widqet ba waqtu ba sifraw ya nabaru ya Awrajaw Dehninet Halafi ka karabut report ya tawesade" ["Adopted from the Report of the Fall of Shire Submitted by the Ministry's Security Officer in the District"], March 15, 1989, app. 11-B, 7.
85. Nigatu Bogale, "A Cumulative Report," 4.

86. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994; Tesfamariam, "The Battle of Shire," 65.
87. Colonel Ketema Gabre Mariam, June 30, 1994.
88. Legesse to Tesfaye, 27; MOND, "Ya Shire wigia," 25.6.81 ["The Battle of Shire," March 3, 1989], Addis Ababa, 3.
89. Brigadier General Tesfaye Tirfe la Midir Tor Hayloch Teklay Memria, 15 Miazia 1981 [Tesfaye Tirfe to Ground Forces Headquarters, April 22, 1989], Gondar, MOND.
90. TPLF, "Military News," 4–5; "Hizbachin ba Shire ginbar ya tabatatenewin ya Issapa serawit ya melqem zemechawin qettlewal" ["Our People Have Continued with Their Pursuit of the WEP's Army Scattered at the Shire Front"], n.d., 1–2.
91. TPLF, "Military News," 2.
92. Of these, 4,683 were captured and 16,584 killed and wounded at the battles fought prior to February 19. See *People's Voice*, 4–5.
93. Mengistu Haile Mariam la guad [to Comrade] Legesse Asfaw, 17.6.81, abari 1-A [Feb. 24, 1989, app. 1-A].
94. MOND, "Ba Shire ena Mekele ya wadame masaria ena nebrat," abari 2, liyu liyu ["Equipment and Property Destroyed at Shire and Mekele," app. 2, misc.]; Captain Gabre Medhin la guad [to Comrade] Major General Mulatu Negash, 7.7.81, abari 5 [March 15, 1989, app. 5].
95. Mengistu to Tesfaye, 4.
96. Tesfaye to Mengistu, 2.
97. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 268, 269–70.
98. MIA, "Minutes of the 89th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Tues., Sept. 26, 1989, Addis Ababa, 8.
99. Mulatu, "An Explanation," 49.
100. Amdessa Gemtessa to Tesfaye, 5–6; Brigadier General Kinfe Gabriel Dinqe la guad [to Comrade] Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, 11.8.81 [April 19, 1989], Addis Ababa, app. 7-A, Mulatu to Mengistu, 5–7.
101. Brigadier General Hailu Berewaq la guad [to Comrade] Major General Mulatu Negash, 19 Hidar 1981 [Nov. 27, 1989], Bahir Dar, included in app. 3-B. Hailu was the commander of the 603rd Corps. For the similarly acrimonious relationship between Mulatu and the commander of the 604th Corps, General Addis Agilachew, see Major Nigatu Bogale, "Ya Sostegna Abiotawi Serawit wana Azaj ka 604 Kor wana Azaj ena indihum ka leloch akalat gar yeneberachew ginugnet," 27.7.81, ["The Relations between the Commander of the TRA and the Commander of the 604th Corps as well as with Other Organs," March 2, 1989], Addis Ababa, app. 10-D, 1–7.
102. The preceding is based on the committee's account. See Tesfaye to Mengistu, part 3, 95–115.
103. Tadesse Demissie to Imbibel Ayele, 22.
104. To Comrade Minister, "Memorandum," 6–7.
105. Amdessa to Tesfaye, 6.
106. The following were the committee's specific recommendations (Tesfaye to Mengistu, part 1, 6–10):

"The Commander of the Army: The chief commander must be held responsible for failure to provide leadership during the inauspicious last two days at Shire. Know-

ing well that subordinates do not order superiors, the commander abandoned his command post without directive from above in a manner not to be expected from a military leader, for the spurious reason that he was instructed by his subordinates to go to Mekele and get additional troops. When ordered to return to his post immediately, he used delaying tactics. Meanwhile, the morale of the hard-pressed troops dissipated and, for lack of a leader to organize an orderly retreat, they fell apart. Therefore, the committee believes that the commander is chargeable under Criminal Law No. 325 for fleeing from the battlefield.

"The Political Commissar: It has been ascertained that, instead of rendering the kind of leadership expected of him at such a critical moment, the officer abandoned his position and left for Mekele along with the commander for the unbelievable reason that he did so in order to bring more political workers. It is the committee's conviction that he is chargeable under Criminal Law No. 325 for fleeing from the battlefield.

"Comrade Chief Administrator: In its examination of the failure at Shire and the subsequent tactical withdrawal from Mekele, the committee has found that the administrator's responsibility and accountability are even heavier than those of the persons directly implicated in the case. In accordance with the Special Order of the State Council No. 1/1988, section 6, subsection 1, the chief administrator was granted the authority to lead, coordinate, and command the army. Our investigation has confirmed that he used his authority fully. He himself has not denied that he used all the powers invested in a military commander, including moving troops from place to place and organizing campaigns. Therefore, he is chargeable under Criminal Law No. 327 not only for the army's defeat and final failure but also for failures of administrative leadership."

107. Gamal Abdel Nasser is perhaps the exception in recent memory. He tendered his resignation following Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The public would not accept it and he stayed in power until his sudden death in 1970. Perhaps it was all organized propaganda.
108. MIA, "Minutes of the First Party Secretaries of the Autonomous and Administrative Regions," March 12–13, 1989, no. 10, part one, 20. See also Genet, *Reminiscences*, 36.
109. MIA, "Minutes of the 98th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," March 6, 1989, 11–12.

CHAPTER 10

Epigraphs: Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, 4:419; Clausewitz, *On War*, book 4, ch. 11, 261 (reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press); *The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, maxim 9, 58.

1. "Message from Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam," *Aemro* 1, no. 12, Yekatit 1986 [Feb. 1993], part 5, 3.
2. Connell, *Against All Odds*, 154. MOND's estimated figure of 7,000 was a fabrication (Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, "Shaabia," 13–14).
3. MOND did not seem to have had the time to prepare a report on the fall of Massawa.

I have not seen one. The following account is constructed mainly from Tadesse Tele Salvano's *The Crushing* and the EPLF's *Sagem*. Tadesse was a sergeant in the army from 1976 to 1991, serving as political commissar for over ten years. He was captured at the battle and provides a brief eyewitness account of it (*The Crushing*, 19–23, 63–67). His account was translated with help from the late Thomas L. Kane, who asked only for a copy of the book as remuneration, thankfully given.

4. Tadesse, *The Crushing*, 19.
5. Ibid., 64–65.
6. Commander Abebe Haile, "The 24th Hour at Massawa," *Aemro*, Hidar 1986 [Nov. 1993]: 38.
7. Ibid., 65–66. See also "The Suffering at Massawa," *Muday*, no. 7, Megabit 1985 [March 1992]: 34–37.
8. Tadesse, *The Crushing*, 21.
9. In contrast, Kifle and Ali have been vilified as spineless traitors, perhaps unjustly. General Wibshet accuses them of "collaboration" and calls Ali a traitor but gives no supporting evidence (Major General Wibshet Dessie la guad [to Comrade] Lieutenant General Addis Tedla, 11.6.1982 Feb. 19, 1990], Asmara, MOND). See also Getachew Yerom, *Ethiopia*, 235–53.
10. Tadesse, *The Crushing*, 66.
11. Abebe Haile, "The 24th Hour at Massawa," 39.
12. *Sagem*, 2, no. 4 (April 1990): 3.
13. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 275–76.
14. Wibshet Dessie to Lieutenant General Addis Tedla, Feb. 19, 1990.
15. Abebe Haile, "The 24th Hour at Massawa," 38.
16. *Sagem* 2, no. 12 (Dec. 1990): 27.
17. Aboneh Ashagre Zeyesus, "A Victory March from Ghuna to Dabre Tabor"; Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994, Addis Ababa.
18. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994.
19. MOND, "Ya hayloch, ya serawitoch ena ya Koroch gidaj," 10 Hidar 1983 ["Tasks of Forces, Armies, and Corps," Nov. 18, 1990], 12, 17; Major General Kinfe Gabriel Dinqu, abari, "Ya waqtun watadarawi huneta la magamgam ya karabe ya wagen tor asselalaf ena ya wisanie hassab," 8 Ginbot 1983 [Kinfe Gabriel, enclosure, "An Assessment of, and Decisions Made, on the Current Military Situation in Relation to the Deployment of Forces," May 16, 1990], MOND.
20. Tesfaye Gabreab, "Sihul the Elder," 129; MOND, "Tasks of Forces," Nov. 18, 1990, 15–18.
21. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 28gna aschequay sibseba kale gubae," 26 Yekatit 1983 ["Minutes of the 28th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo," March 4, 1991], 19–20.
22. One of Mengistu's comrades since the start of the revolution, Kassaye Aragaw, warned that "the mood of the people is not what it was in 1974 and 1975. The war has bankrupted the economy and we have not met the proletariat's demands. Nor have we helped the farmer to make good use of the land we gave him. We have taken away his children and appropriated his produce. The farmer no longer supports us. The

petite bourgeoisie is angry for a variety of reasons. . . . Our only supporters are the army and the unpopular cadres who have no other choice" (MIA, "Ya Ras Gaz ena Astededar Akebabiwoch ya Parti Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kifil 1, kutir 10, 4–5 Megabit 1981 ["Minutes of the Meeting of the First Secretaries of the Autonomous and Regional Administration Party Committees," part 1, no. 10, March 12–13, 1989], 59–61). See also Fikre Selassie Wagderass's reflections in MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 105gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 30.1.82 ["Minutes of the 105th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Sept. 1, 1990], 49.

23. "Minutes of the 28th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo," 17, 25–28, 28–29, 31–32, 36–37, 46–53, 62–63, 64.
24. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite Sekretariat ena ya Kilil Parti Komite 1gna Tsehafiwoch 12gna ya gara sibseba kale gubae," kifil 2, 22 Tikimt 1982 ["Minutes of the 12th Joint Meeting of the Secretariat and First Secretaries of Regional Party Committees," part 2, Oct. 28, 1990], 306–23. At this meeting, the chairman made this disingenuous statement: "As I said in the Shengo last time, I can no longer tell the Ethiopian people about failures. . . . I have fulfilled the responsibility vested in me for fifteen years, like any other citizen and to the full extent of my ability. Henceforth, I shall not talk failure. I will not beg anyone. My choice is to join the Third or Second Revolutionary Army and die honorably like an ordinary soldier" (332).
25. A fairly comprehensive account of the episode was submitted by the commander of the 603rd Corps. It is a fluently written and moving report that was complemented by the Operations Directorate report (Brigadier General Abebe Haile Selassie la guad Lieutenant General Addis Teda, "Sile 2gnaw ya Dabre Tabor wigia report," 30 Miazia 1982 [Abebe to Comrade Addis, "A Report of the 2nd Battle of Dabre Tabor," May 6, 1990], MOND). The account appears in *The Generation That Moved Mountains*, vol. 1, 137–99. See also Zemecha Wana Memria, "Ba 603gna tor ginbar ka Yekatit 16–Megabit 5, 1983 ya takahede ya wigia report," 23 Megabit 1983 [Main Operations Directorate, "A Report of the Fighting at the 603rd Corps' Front from February 23 to March 12, 1991," March 30, 1991], and Aboneh Ashagre Zeyesus, "A Victory March from Ghuna to Dabre Tabor," 214–69.
26. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994.
27. MIA, "Minutes of the 28th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo," March 8, 1991, 9.
28. The army was equipped with fifty-five tanks, twenty-nine armored cars, eleven BM-21 rocket launchers, 285 RPG-7 grenade launchers, fifty-six mortar launchers, and 261 heavy and light artillery (Main Operations Directorate, "A Report of the Fighting," 5–9).
29. Abebe Haile Selassie, "A Report," 22–60.
30. Ibid., 11–15; Main Operations Directorate, "A Report of the Fighting," 4. The corps did not report its losses. The EPRDF has given the figure of 2,400 deaths to its own 237 killed and 829 wounded (Aboneh Ashagre Zeyesus, "A Victory March from Ghuna to Dabre Tabor," 268).
31. MIA, "Minutes of the 28th Emergency Meeting of the Politburo," March 8, 1991, 19–20.
32. Hayelom Araya, July 4, 1994. Hayelom's testimony was complemented by that of

Colonel Dagnachew Malede, Oct. 11, 1993, Addis Ababa. I immediately felt the force of Sereke's personality when I interviewed him on April 24, 1994, in the main prison of Mekele. He was a tall, slim man with sprinkles of gray hair. The athletic outfit he wore made him look more like the celebrated marathon runners of Ethiopia than a famed military commander. Perhaps because of the unwelcome presence of the prison warden, he did not tell me why he was kept there and not in Addis Ababa.

33. Abebe Haile Selassie, "A Report," 19–20.
34. Kinfe Gabriel Dinqu, "An Assessment," May 16, 1990; Colonel Mesfin Teklemariam la guad Lieutenant General Addis Tedla, "Ba Semien Shewa sile tasalafew tor ya wigia gimgema ya inspeksion report," 9 Meskerem 1981 [Mesfin to Comrade Addis, "An Inspection Report of the Army's Disposition in Northern Shewa," Sept. 17, 1989]; Ya Sostegna Abiyatowi Serawit Neus Kedami Zemacha Memria, la Tor Hayloch Teklay eta Major Shum ya tazegaje geletsa, 21 Meskerem 1983 [Advance Operations Directorate of the TRA, "A Memorandum Prepared for the Chief of Staff," Sept. 29, 1991], Dabre Berhan.
35. The transitional government's auctioning, in September 1996, of the seventeen ships that survived the battle of Massawa marked the end of Ethiopia's era as a maritime nation.
36. MIA, "Ya Ras Gaz ena ya Astetadar Akebabiwotch ya Parti Komite Andegna Tsehafiwoch sibseba kale gubae," kutir 10, kifil 3, 4–5 Megabit 1981 ["Minutes of the First Party Secretaries of the Autonomous and Administrative Regions," no. 10, part 3, March 12–13, 1989], 539.

CHAPTER 11

Epigraph: Genet, *Reminiscences*, 394.

1. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 261.
2. Ibid., 266.
3. Worqu Ferede, *Decline in the Name of Progress*, 191–215. Formerly of Meison, Worqu was a member of the Derg's Awards and Decorations Commission.
4. Abebe Haile Selassie to Addis Tedla, "A Report," May 7, 1990, 69, MOND.
5. MIA, "A Special Seminar to Assess Our National Security Problems," part 3, 1990, 154–55.
6. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 96gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 7 Yekatit 1981 ["Minutes of the 96th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Feb. 15, 1989], 17.
7. Genet, *Reminiscences*, 245.
8. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite ya Politikabiro 89gna medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 17 Meskerem 1981 ["Minutes of the 89th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," Sept. 25, 1989].
9. Ibid., enclosure, 2–5.
10. MIA, "Ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite 78gna ya Politikabiro medebegna sibseba kale gubae," 20.7.80 ["Minutes of the 78th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," March 28, 1988], 109–10.

11. Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, 5:7.
12. MIA, "Sile Ilgnaw ya Issapa Maekelawi Komite medebegna sibseba zigjit ya tadaraje sibseba kale gnbae," kifil 1, 15–16, 21–22 Yekatit 1982 ["Minutes of the Preparatory Meeting for the 11th Regular Meeting of the Politburo," part 1, Feb. 22–23, 28–29, 1990], 74.
13. Mengistu gives contradictory reasons. On the one hand, he says that it was jealousy between Tesfaye Gabre Kidan and Legesse Asfaw and, on the other, that it was fear of an EPLF assault on Keren that forced them to transfer one division from Tigray to Eritrea (Genet, *Reminiscences*, 262–63).
14. Lowenthal, "History and Memory."
15. Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), *Commission for the Rehabilitation of Members of the Former Army and Disabled War Veterans*, Sept. 1991, 7, 27–8, and June 1991–Sept. 1993, 2–8.
16. Colletta et al., *The Transition from War to Peace in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 46.
17. Ibid., 55.
18. Anonymous, April 11, 1994, Addis Ababa.
19. Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, 130.
20. Elizabeth Rosenthal, "Women Face Greatest Threat of Violence at Home, Study Finds," *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 2006.
21. The "Corruption Perceptions Index 2006" ranks Ethiopia 130 out of 163 countries (*The Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report*, "Ethiopia at a Glance: 2007," Jan. 2007).
22. World Bank, *Document of the World Bank*, Report No. ICR0000383, 2007/08/20/000020439–20070820105110/Rendered/PDF/ICR0000383.pdf,11,35;wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2007/05/14/000090341–20070514111,2.
23. World Bank, *World Development Report*, 1996 and 1997, Washington, DC, 1998.
24. Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, 84.
25. Quoted in Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 412.

POSTSCRIPT

Epigraphs: Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 108 (reprinted by permission of Columbia University Press); Sherman quoted in Gat, *A History of Military Thought*, 667.

1. Tekeste and Tronvoll, *Brothers at War*, and Abbink, "Briefing: The Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Dispute."
2. Tekeste and Tronvoll, *Brothers at War*, 41.
3. Young, "The Tigray and Eritrean People's Liberation Fronts."
4. *Reporter* 3, no. 27, Ginbot 1992 [May 2000]: 4. A brief account of the fighting is provided on 4–19.
5. Ibid.

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MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
MOND	Ministry of National Defense, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
RICE	Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Asmara, Eritrea.
NHA	National Historical Archives, College Park, Maryland

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ORAL INFORMANTS (CITED IN THE TEXT)

Abay Tsehaye (TPLF), June 23, 1994, Addis Ababa

Adugna Ferede (Captain), Dec. 23, 1994, Addis Ababa

Aklilu Tessema (Major), Dec. 4, 1994, Addis Ababa

Alebachew Abeje (Major), March 14, 1994, Addis Ababa

Alemayehu Yilshaw Awlachew (Captain), Feb. 14, 1994, Addis Ababa
Almaz Hailu Workneh (Corporal), Feb. 2, 1994, Addis Ababa
Amare Bisrat (Private), April 15, 1994, Addis Ababa
Amare Mamo Setie (Private), June 13, 1994, Addis Ababa
Anonymous sergeant, March 15, 1994, Addis Ababa
Anonymous, Dec. 29, 1993, Addis Ababa
Anonymous, May 4, 1994, Addis Ababa
Anonymous, May 5, 1994, Dabre Markos
Anonymous, July 4, 2003, Seattle, WA
Anonymous, March 6, 2004, Washington, DC
Anonymous, Oct. 25, 2004, Oakland, CA
Aschenek Akalemariam (Corporal), April 24, 1994. Addis Ababa
Asfaw Zewdie (Captain), Jan. 12, 1994, Addis Ababa
Asghede Gabre Selassie (TPLF), July 7, 1994, Mekele
Assefa Mamo (TPLF), June 20, 1994, Addis Ababa
Ayele Yeshitla (Private), June 11, 1994, Addis Ababa
Berhanu Borji (Private), Dec. 28, 1993, Addis Ababa
Bisrat Amare (TPLF), Feb. 25, 1995, Arlington, VA; March 26, 1995, Columbus, OH
Dagnachew Malede (Colonel), Oct. 11, 1993, Addis Ababa
Daniel Amberber (Private), Feb. 25, 1994, Addis Ababa
Deriba Jimma Ayano (Private), Feb. 20, 1994, Addis Ababa
Ergette Banteyifer (Private), Dec. 15, 1993, Addis Ababa
Gabre Kirstos Abadi (Lieutenant), March 15, 1994, Addis Ababa
Gennet Tamru (Lieutenant), Feb. 28, 1994, Addis Ababa
Geremew Hailu (Master Sergeant), Feb. 2, 1994, Addis Ababa
Getachew Neknekie (Captain), Feb. 3, 1994, Addis Ababa
Getaneh Haile (Brigadier General), April 25, 1994, Addis Ababa
Girma Kemis (Lieutenant), Dec. 23, 1993, Addis Ababa.
Gizaw Belayneh (Major General), June 26, 1994, Addis Ababa
Haile Tirfe (TPLF), July 16, 1994, Mekele; July 17, 1994, Asmara
Hayelom Araya (TPLF), July 4, 1994, Addis Ababa
Itaferahu Worku (Master Sergeant), March 22, 1994, Addis Ababa
Iyob Kahssay (ELF), Aug. 12, 2005, Rochester, NY
Jaafar Gidi (Captain), April 20, 1994, Addis Ababa
Kassahun Debalikie (Lieutenant), Dec. 19, 1993, Addis Ababa
Kassaye Haile (Captain), Jan. 17, 1994, Addis Ababa
Kassetch Asfaw (TPLF), June 25, 1994, Addis Ababa
Kedir Hassan (Corporal), March 8, 1994, Addis Ababa
Ketema Gabre Mariam (Colonel), June 30, 1994, Addis Ababa
Kiflu Dadi (Captain), Dec. 16, 1994, Addis Ababa
Lemma Regassa (Private), Oct. 23, 1993, Addis Ababa
Mekuria Berhanu (Major), April 20, 1994, Addis Ababa
Mesfin Baye (Captain), Dec. 20, 1993, Addis Ababa
Mintesinot Yacob Wolde (Captain), Feb. 28, 1994, Addis Ababa

Moges Bizuneh, May 16, 1982, Indianapolis, IN
Mulugeta Gabre Hiwet (TPLF), May 28, 1994, Addis Ababa
Sereke Berhan (Colonel), July 17, 1994, Mekele
Shiferaw Awlachew (Lieutenant), March 22, 1994, Addis Ababa
Siye Abraha (TPLF), Feb. 7, 1994, Addis Ababa
Siyum Tekeste (Captain), Jan. 12, 1994, Addis Ababa
Solomon Shawl Kassaye (Colonel), April 19, 1994, Addis Ababa
Tamrat Makonnene Weju (Lieutenant) April 29, 1994, Addis Ababa
Tarekegn Almaw (Captain) April 22, 1994, Addis Ababa
Taye Legesse (Captain), April 11, 1994, Addis Ababa
Tesfamariam Tesfahunegn (Lieutenant), March 1, 1993, Addis Ababa
Tesfaye Aweke (EPDM), Feb. 12, 1992, Addis Ababa
Tsadkan Gabre Tensae (TPLF), April 24, 2004, Arlington, VA; Dec. 10–12, 2007, Addis Ababa
Yakob Wolde (Captain), Feb. 29, 1994, Addis Ababa
Yemaneberhan Lemma (Lieutenant), March 16, 1994, Addis Ababa
Yohannes Damtew (Private), Feb. 29, 1994, Addis Ababa
Zemene Damte (Captain), June 17, 1994, Addis Ababa
Zeru Kihshen, June 25, 2003, Amsterdam, Netherlands

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