

A Citizen-Centered Roadmap for Systemic Transition in Ethiopia

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PART II: THE MODALITIES OF AN ETHIOPIAN POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

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We are pleased to share this update of our 2023 citizen-centered roadmap for a post-EPRDF systemic transition (Part 1). The framework document argued that a brief period of well-organized transition is far more preferable to military rule or hasty elections in a country with weak institutions. A well-crafted transition program with built-in restraints on powerholders is a potent instrument for making systemic transformation irreversible and legitimate.

This 2025 update of developments over the past four years and expanded articulation of our model of a post-PP transition (Part 2) rejects, as illusory, a systemic transition led by a regime that relies for survival on state terrorism against peaceful opposition. Sadly also, the option of a government of national unity by opposition parties is infeasible due to the fragmentation caused by parochial ethnicism. The third and sole alternative, an inclusionary people's transition, hopefully spearheaded by a unified and unabashedly Ethiopianist Amhara Fanno, is outlined below. This update goes beyond broad outlines to offer actionable advice on effectively managing the early phase of Ethiopia's post-civil war political settlement, paving the way for the rule of law, national unity, and, in due course, a country of democracy and prosperity.

We build our proposal on several anchors, including a broadly representative council of the wise, a transition charter that defines the authority of the council, the decisive role of a unified and unifying Fanno as a guarantor of the transition program, the need for an elected interim parliament to oversee transitional justice, institutional overhaul, constitutional reform, and democratic elections within three years. Process-wise, we believe a transition to a democratic order should be as democratic as possible through a robustly courageous civic engagement.

- Ethiopian Specificities
- Political Settlements in Conflict-Prone Societies
- Liberia's Instructive Model of Transition
- A Viable Political Settlement for Ethiopia
- Two Roadmaps Meet at a Historic Crossroads

I. ETHIOPIAN SPECIFICITIES

Ethiopia, a country with overlapping political, historical, and socio-economic tensions, desperately needs a multi-track, phased, and inclusive political settlement to accentuate positive incentives that favor the rule of law, meritocracy, and productive work. Since proper diagnosis must precede treatment, we must have a shared understanding of the foundations and alignment of power centers in the country.

1.1. Where from?

Much has been written about the myriad endemic crises facing Ethiopia. For the much-needed update of notable developments over the past few years, the following observations would suffice to rationalize the roadmap we offer for Ethiopia's post-ethnic political transformation:

- ❖ The emergence, especially over the past five years, of an absolutist and totalitarian regime that has managed to gain total control of state assets and institutions. This anti-Ethiopian and anti-Orthodox ruling cabal is ethno-fascist, irremediably violent, avaricious, lawless, expansionist, instinctively supremacist, and hatefully divisive. These regime traits would explain the diabolical method of governance that is pushing the country toward social anomie and disintegration.
- ❖ The emasculation, by the executive branch, of the civil service, judiciary, armed forces, and parliament. The halting post-WW II progress toward professionalism and respect for the rule of law and bureaucratic norms by government agencies has been subverted by the privatization of the Ethiopian State by a cabal led by Abiy Ahmed. The new rulers are displaying, with alarming consistency, the predictable pathologies of personal loyalty over merit, cruelty over decency, and partisanship and patronage over openness and fairness.
- ❖ Following the autocratic consolidation by Meles Zenawi after 2000, Abiy Ahmed has sadly morphed into a narcissist, pathologically lying, instinctively cannibalistic, and deeply corrupt chief of state. He seems unhinged from reality in his vainglorious and delusionary search for a divinely preordained theocratic rule over 130 million Ethiopians.
- ❖ The toxic mix of sectarianism and ethnicism has predictably destabilized one of Africa's historically aversive countries to political ethnicity. Ethiopia's slow but peaceful development has been hopelessly imperiled by a regime bent on manufacturing dissent and civil strife, inflamed by revisionist narratives of victimizer and victimized communities.
- ❖ A dangerous transition from low-intensity civil strife into full-fledged civil war is well underway throughout the country. Large-scale civil wars, involving well-armed and trained paramilitary militia are degrading the Ethiopian National Defense Force into a mercenary guard conducting police functions to save the regime. The loss of much of the countryside (and Tigray) to an assortment of rebel militia has impelled the

beleaguered regime to concentrate on taking a last stand around Addis Ababa by diverting resources from development projects and basic public services.

- ❖ The IFI¹-sanctioned war economy, based on crony capitalism, is also deeply ethnicized and corrupt. This means the system is endemically prone to unrestrained contests over wealth redistribution rather than wealth creation.
- ❖ This sordid state the country finds itself has impelled the desperate regime to resort to confiscatory economic measures (prohibitive taxes applied selectively to perceived adversaries such as the Amhara and the Gurage), imposition of punitive economic sanctions on entire communities, uprooting long-established neighborhoods in the name corridor development (including the subsumption of Addis Ababa into Oromia in the latest federal budget), and imposing hasty and costly neo-liberal reforms to please donors.
- ❖ Finally, Ethiopia's slide toward self-inflicted implosion has regrettably exposed the country to the traps of implacable geostrategic enemies, who have sought, with some success, to impose neocolonial hegemony over the Nile Basin, its natural resources, and the Red Sea.

The spent force of the TPLF-PP governance model of exclusionary politics, institutionalized corruption, and genocidal internecine warfare is a grave danger to the Ethiopian State and society. It can be eradicated only with comprehensive political accords, often called a political settlement.² Political ethnicity must be replaced by *civic nationalism*—based on equal citizenship and allegiance to the best of Ethiopian values, the rule of law, and loyalty to accountable state institutions. A well-designed political settlement, involving transitional arrangements, is needed to undergird free and fair elections based on a genuinely democratic constitution, addressing longstanding grievances, restoring faith in a legitimate government, and credibly offering a bright future that we can all believe in.

1.2. Where to (Manifesto) and How (Strategic Roadmap)?

A political roadmap should not be confused with three other in-conflict strategic documents, which together inform a viable political settlement. One is a hard-nosed ***political diagnosis*** of the root causes of a revolt of long-aggrieved citizens. The other end of this genesis point is a compelling vision of the end point of the struggle. This is generally known as a ***political***

¹ Acronyms not defined in text: IFI = international financial institutions; EPRDF = Ethiopian peoples' revolutionary democratic party; PP = prosperity party; ENDF = Ethiopian National Defense Force; OLF = Oromo liberation front; OLA = Oromo liberation army; TDF = Tigray defense force; IDP = internally displaced person; and CSO = civil society organizations.

² A political settlement, it must be noted, is a set of negotiated agreements among fundamental interests in society concerning the reallocation of power and authority that ends a civil war permanently.

manifesto, which outlines the foundational elements of transformational change in Ethiopia, equality, the rule of law, citizen sovereignty, and prosperity.³

The bridge between the two, then, is an equally compelling and well-synchronized *politico-economic roadmap* that defines the ‘how’ of the struggle, encompassing the armed resistance leg and the non-violent civil disobedience leg. This strategic action plan is ideally practical, sequenced (with timelines, phases, metrics, and milestones), and identifies challenges, resources, and opportunities.⁴ Early in the post-victory period, competing political parties are expected to issue competing *policy platforms* aimed at winning the electoral competition.

Given the institutionalized nature of the multiple crises facing the country, a historic yet fleeting opportunity has once again emerged for implementing a transition program toward a democratic constitutional order. In this regard, one can expect three contending roadmaps for transition, each representing the stances of three fundamental political interests: Pan-Ethiopianist (all-Ethiopia, national political parties), Ethno-Confederalist (ethno-regional political parties)⁵, and a Hybrid (uneasily blending the regional with the national).

We favor the *Pan-Ethiopianist and citizen-centered roadmap* and proceed to articulate the updated and detailed version of the framework program issued in 2023. Using the political settlement conceptual framework, we pay particular attention to novel ideas concerning the composition and role of a transitional council and an interim legislature, both of which spearhead a three-year systemic transition program.⁶

II. POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS IN CONFLICT-PRONE SOCIETIES

A successful post-conflict political settlement requires careful negotiation, compromise where feasible, and a commitment to addressing the root causes of the recurrent conflict over the terms for the exercise of state power. Such a concord envisions the creation of an enabling environment in which people can rebuild their livelihoods and communities with credible assurances about respect for all internationally recognized human and civil rights.

The key elements of a post-conflict political settlement include:

³ The classical pan-Ethiopian and defiant political manifesto that still rings true today is the Citizens' Charter, initially issued to counter rigging of the 2005 parliamentary elections. Citizens Charter Group (2012), “The Citizens Charter for a Democratic Ethiopia.” Downloadable from www.enathager.org.

⁴ Imbylta/CECA (2023), “A Citizen-Centered Roadmap for Systemic Political Transition in Ethiopia: The Framework” Downloadable from www.enathager.org.

⁵ See, for example, “Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia,” *Negarit Gazeta*, July 22, 1991.

⁶ Imbylta/CECCA (2025), A Citizen-Centered Roadmap for Systemic Political Transition in Ethiopia: The Modalities of Political Settlement.” Downloadable from www.enathager.org.

1. Power-sharing agreements with equitable allocation of key political positions and resources among different fundamental interest groups with a proven record of legitimate representation of the communities they profess to serve.
2. A Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program to provide ex-combatants with cash payments, job training, education, and other support to help them transition back to productive activities.
3. Security Sector Reform (SSR) to rectify the criminal involvement of state security forces in purely police work. SSR focuses on restructuring and reforming the security sector to make it accountable to the constitution, be professional, and respectful of the rule of legitimate law.
4. Transitional Justice mechanisms, such as setting up truth, justice, and reconciliation commissions, international tribunals, or special domestic courts. The transitional justice process must address past crimes through informal and formal processes, including providing reparations to victims.
5. Constitutional Reform to eliminate exclusionary political practices by guaranteeing public participation in political deliberations and ensuring free and fair elections to restore the sovereignty of the voter.
6. Reconstruction and Development to restore destroyed or damaged livelihoods, basic social services, and resettle internally displaced citizens. Such programs require the engagement of external donors in providing funding and ensuring the full participation of civil society organizations for equity and non-corrupt practices.

The political settlements of South Africa, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Lebanon, Sudan, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Macedonia illustrate how the forms of negotiated settlements can vary depending on the specific circumstances of each conflict and the goals of the negotiations. In each case, the settlements aimed to address historical grievances, establish power-sharing mechanisms, and create resilient governance frameworks that prevent a return to violence. However, not all have succeeded in attaining these objectives.

III. LIBERIA'S INSTRUCTIVE MODEL OF POST-CONFLICT TRANSITION

In our judgment, Liberia's experience provides the closest parallel to that of Ethiopia as we conceptualized it in this document. Liberia's National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) was a power-sharing arrangement established to usher in peace, stability, and democratic governance. It spanned almost two and a half years from 2003 through 2005.

The Chairperson was Gyude Bryant, a neutral businessperson with no military background, while the vice chairpersons represented various factions and interest groups. The interim legislature had seventy-six members, equally divided among Taylor's loyalists, rebel groups, political parties, and civil society organizations.

The mandate of NTGL included ceasefire enforcement and disarmament, implementation of DDR programs, facilitation of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, preparation for

democratic elections (held in 2005), and the restoration of the rule of law and key national institutions. This model of post-conflict transition, underwritten by the international community, managed to bring sustained peace, including the UN-led disarmament of 100,000 ex-combatants, free and fair elections that resulted in Ellen Johnson Sirleaf becoming Africa's first elected female president, the return of refugees and displaced persons, and the gradual restoration of basic public services.

The Liberian experience holds important lessons for Ethiopia. First, an inclusive power-sharing arrangement guided by non-partisan leadership helped avoid gridlock or backsliding. Second, international support played a key role by providing financial resources for DDR, rebuilding state institutions, and restraining rampant corruption. Third, sustaining deeper reforms after the elections and ensuring long-term economic development was bedeviled by rampant corruption.

IV. A VIABLE POLITICAL SETTLEMENT FOR ETHIOPIA

The credibility of a transition program crucially depends on making explicit our best guesses concerning the circumstances under which systemic transition might occur in post-conflict Ethiopia. The possible scenarios at the national level are the following:

Scenario 1: Fanno inflicts a decisive military victory over the federal and other competing militias to capture Addis Ababa. In this Syria-like eventuality, the magnanimity of Fanno will drive the inclusiveness of the transition program.

Scenario 2: Fanno attains a dominant position among the leading armed contestants for federal power (i.e., ENDF, TDA, and OLA). In this case, Fanno, being first among equals, will be compelled to lead a coalition of the willing in an Ethiopia-centered transition. The power-sharing arrangement that will follow will be akin to a government of national unity.

Scenario 3: A coup d'état by Ethiopianist officers of a weakened ENDF. This outcome may have one or two consequences. One possibility is the installation of a military dictatorship much like the Derg. The other possibility is the new ENDF becomes an impartial guardian providing ample space for an inclusive transition to a democratic order.

Scenario 4: An Oromummaa coup d'état by the top echelon of senior Oromo officers. The aim is, with support from OLFites and Oromo PP, to sustain Oromo supremacy over the machinery of the Ethiopian State and the economy.

Scenario 5: A protracted stalemate ending in national disintegration. In this eventuality, several successor states might emerge (notably, Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, Somali, and

Sidama). One can reasonably expect an endless war of all against all in a country lacking a history, until 1995, of self-governing regional polities with defined territory and administrative autonomy. Contests over economically and politically significant multiethnic cities such as Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Harrar, Nazreth, Assela, Hawassa, and Jimma will be particularly bloody. Political divorce in a historically unitary state is an exceedingly messy business worth contemplating rather than dismissing it out of hand.

The transition roadmap outlined below is anchored on the hope of realizing Scenario 1 or 2-- the probable and highly desirable outcomes. As outlined in our 2023 transition framework proposal, we believe the right model of transition for Ethiopia stands on three sequenced legs:

First, a nationally representative Ethiopian National Salvation Council (ENSC, አገር-አድን የጠቢባን መግከርት), a council of the wise comprised of respected elders and leaders, to guide the first phase of the transition for a year.

Second, a three-year Transition Charter (TC), preferably drafted with the help of a brief national dialogue process to enhance its legitimacy. The TC pins down the authority and mandate of the Council, a program for the cessation of hostilities and DDR (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration), a caretaker government of technocrats, the establishment of commissions on reconciliation and a new architecture of democratic institutions, and a plan for the election and selection of members of an interim parliament or a Transitional Shengo (TS).

Third, a mandate for the TS to take over state administration from the Council, approve and implement the recommendations of the various commissions, serve as a constitutional assembly to bring a citizen-based democratic constitution for national deliberation and referendum, and oversee free and fair parliamentary elections to conclude the transition period.

4.1. The Ethiopian National Salvation Council Revisited

An inclusive and competent transition council can play a crucial role in facilitating ceasefire agreements and DDR processes, particularly in countries like ours where customary authority or moral legitimacy has historically carried significant social influence. Given the erosion of religious and elder authority with fifty years of leftwing nihilism and polarizing ethnicism, the ENSC will have to assume a posture of deliberativeness with boldness and wisdom to craft a consensus framework of principles, goals, and timelines.

Furthermore, because of the multifaceted nature of its work, its membership should be large enough (say, 50) to accommodate several standing committees but nimble enough to make timely, implementable, and monitorable decisions. The ENSC may also need to establish

regional counterparts to monitor the implementation of agreements in a locally nuanced manner.

4.1.1. Composition of the ENSC

Eligibility for membership of the Council is the most critical and contentious issue. The membership will have to be drawn from civil society organizations, respected secular community leaders and civil servants, leaders of Ethiopian-nationalist political parties as well as ethnonationalist political parties without secessionist or supremacist records, independent businesspersons and academics, prominent religious leaders, prominent human rights activists at home and in the Diaspora, and, where compelling, selected lower-level members of the ruling PP who have not been implicated in war crimes or grand corruption.

Selection criteria must include the following personal qualities: Deep knowledge of the country, independent-mindedness, farsightedness, compassion, integrity, respect for diversity as well as Ethiopian unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia, and richness of life and work experience. A commitment to justice, truth, democratic procedures, and reconciliation is also a heavy plus.

The urgent task now is to identify the names of potential members of the Council and specify their mandate and objectives in sufficient detail to guide concrete actions. A realistic starting point, given the absence of meaningful political space at home, is for a meeting of mind by Ethiopianist Diaspora organizations to deliberate on constituting an ENSC Search Committee. This taskforce will be mandated to collect the biographies of potential members and prepare the groundwork for establishing a genuinely representative ENSC based in Ethiopia. This process may establish a shadow Council with a template that spells out the mandate and working procedures of the Committee for a trial run of its challenging work in a climate of disarray following a government collapse.

The hardest nut to crack in devising a program of systemic transition is obtaining a firm grip to stem chaos in the event of a sudden collapse of state institutions. If the situation allows, it will be beneficial for legitimacy to conduct a brief national dialogue to articulate and endorse the work of the Commission, including overseeing a transitional government, issuing an interim constitution or charter, and supervising the election of a transitional parliament. The dialogue should also outline the modalities of negotiation, including the roles of international participants as arbiters and mediators, as well as the confidence-building measures that define preconditions.

If not, the guardianship of a capable and responsible Amhara Fanno movement becomes indispensable. While the widest representation is necessary, it may not be practical. Political actors are often unequal in terms of capability, motivation, or the sacrifices they have made to facilitate regime change. To be blunt about it, the following questions need to be answered candidly and unambiguously at the outset:

- If the Amhara People's Movement (APM), comprising the Fanno and civil disobedience legs, is to become the backbone of ENSC (in terms of providing security, offering a compelling vision for a post-PP order, and uniting disparate Ethiopian groups), shouldn't APM leadership constitute a simple majority in ENSC?
- Which contentious issues should be settled by a simple majority vote and which by a super majority?
- While ethno-nationalists must be represented in any political settlement, shouldn't the ENSC, having rejected exclusionary identity politics, be a predominantly Ethiopianist body committed to citizen equality and national unity?
- What is the minimum size and composition of the national defense/security force needed to enforce the transition program and also defend the country's compromised international borders, and how is it to be constituted to ensure effectiveness and non-partisanship?

4.1.2. The Mandate of ENSC

The mandate of the ENSC (for a tenure of one year) should then include the following momentous measures:

- (1) Finalizing a peace accord among combatants. It would establish guiding principles, issues, and modalities for a cessation of hostilities, including all major combatants; finding credible facilitators and guarantors; and providing security guarantees for all stakeholders.
- (2) Demobilizing the ethnic militia of the regional states by disbanding some and converting the rest into regional police forces or the national defense force.
- (3) Preparing a realistic plan for selecting and supervising a caretaker government of meritorious technocrats and re-professionalized security forces. This will defang and replace the destabilizing arm of the defunct government.
- (4) Establishing and supervising independent courts led by competent professionals.
- (5) Dismissing the toothless PP parliaments (federal and killil) and replacing them with elected/selected advisory councils answerable to the Council.
- (6) Reconstituting the ethnic-based regional states into 20-30 interim governorates, based on geography and economic links. The new constitution will set administrative boundaries.
- (7) Overseeing the election (and, in some cases, selection) of the members of the Transitional Shengo to ensure legitimacy.
- (8) Drafting a Transition Charter that specifies the authority and mandate of the ENSC and the successor Transitional Shengo.

4.1.3. The Transitional Arrangement

A transitional government is an interim authority established to oversee a country's transition from conflict to peace, often involving representatives from former warring parties, civil

society, political society, economic society, and other stakeholders. Its purpose is to stabilize the country after a damaging conflict, oversee the implementation of ceasefire agreements and DDR, prepare for constitutional or electoral reforms, and foster an inclusive political dialogue.

On the positive side, a transitional arrangement encourages power-sharing among conflicting parties by reducing winner-takes-all tensions, buys time to rebuild institutions before elections, and fosters reconciliation and national dialogue in a less adversarial environment. There are risks, too: a poorly or hastily designed transition program may entrench wartime elites or delay genuine democratization; it may lack legitimacy if not widely inclusive; and the coalitions that often emerge can easily relapse into renewed conflict.

Quick and dirty elections supplemented by judicious selections enable citizens to select leaders and representatives, which is widely viewed as a hallmark of legitimacy and sovereignty. The aim is to legitimize leadership through the ballot box, signal an imminent return to a functioning constitutional order, and serve as a benchmark of the end of the transition. Expedient elections can restore citizen trust and promote political accountability, garner international recognition and aid, and foster citizen agency through political participation.

There are real risks worth contemplating. Premature elections in fragile or polarized environments can reignite violence; winner-takes-all systems may exclude former rivals and provoke instability; citizens cannot realize electoral preferences in the absence of the requisite state capability and accountability-enforcing public institutions; and electoral solutions may lack inclusivity if displaced persons or ex-combatants remain disenfranchised in elite bargains.

Overall, elections can provide a solution where the security situation is credible, governance institutions are functional, and external pressure for quick legitimacy is palpable. A protracted transitional arrangement is preferred, as we advocate here for Ethiopia, where deep mistrust is the norm, the security situation is fragile, and the need for an inclusive dialogue is compelling.

Ethiopians are, therefore, well advised to adopt a sequential model of transition ending with free and fair elections. That is, firstly, establish a transitional government to restore peace and prepare the ground for peacebuilding by judiciously reforming institutions and rigged laws. And, secondly, hold credible national legislative elections when conditions are conducive.

4.2. The Transition Charter

The transition charter, a compendium of the various moving reform components, provides for overall guidance for interim governance focused on a caretaker government and a transitional parliament. A well-designed Ethiopian political settlement, therefore, entails three distinct phases: Immediate Tasks, Charter Making, and Structural Reforms. The immediate tasks include brokered ceasefire, humanitarian assistance, and disarmament—facilitated through third-party mediation and enforcement of agreements. The phase of structural reform involves institutional transformation, culminating in free, fair, and inclusive elections.

Phase 1: The Ceasefire and DDR Processes

The balance of forces — stalemate or imminent defeat of the sitting regime— is a determining factor for the willingness to silence the guns. For a comprehensive negotiated settlement to gain traction, the government and the insurgents must recognize that continued fighting will not bring decisive gains.

The ENSC, on its part, would play a key leadership role at this historic moment:

- Mediation and negotiation: ENSC members serve as neutral mediators, utilizing their wisdom, moral authority, and community trust to credibly bring conflicting parties together at the table for a win-win solution.
- Trust building through stepwise and verifiable local ceasefires can facilitate dialogue among armed groups, government forces, and civic activists, especially in low-trust settings.
- Ensuring clear and specific terms in the agenda, including timelines, demilitarized zones, responsibilities, civilian protections, and humanitarian access.
- Monitoring ceasefire agreements with a neutral stance: local bodies can be effective monitors, especially in cooperation with international third-party actors. Independent observers (from UN and AU missions, CSOs with the help of technologies like drones and satellites) can effectively detect and report violations to ensure compliance.

DDR is a key component of post-conflict peacebuilding, reconciliation, and stabilization.⁷ The primary goal is to assist former combatants in transitioning to civilian life and prevent the resumption of violence. To ensure sustainable peace, DDR should be accompanied by a transitional justice and reconciliation program, which involves:

- The mapping of armed actors, including regional militias (especially, Fanno, Oromo Liberation Army, Tigray Defense Force, and Oromia militia).
- Incentivizing honest demobilization and reintegration with economic and psychosocial support.
- Security sector reform is essential to ensure ultimate loyalty to the State and its democratic constitution, rather than to the ruling party or sectarian groups.
- Addressing the need of victims for acknowledgment and building in accountability mechanisms to preempt revenge cycles. This would involve the establishment of a truth, justice, and reconciliation commission that would embrace community-level healing, formal prosecutions for atrocity crimes, reparations, and amnesty where warranted.

At its core, Ethiopia's political crisis since at least 1800 reflects intensified competition for scarce economic resources. As a result, Ethiopia has long fallen into the proverbial poverty-

⁷ Disarmament involves registration of ex-combatants and the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of weapons, ammunition, and explosives from combatants and often from the civilian population. Demobilization involves the encampment and then discharge of active combatants from armed groups. Reintegration is a community-supported, long-term process through which ex-combatants gain civilian status and sustainable livelihoods through programs of social, economic, and political reintegration into families and communities.

tyranny-conflict trap: no personal security, no food security, and no reliable basic needs provision (clean water, electricity, basic education, all-weather road). Capturing the State (the political kingdom) to loot public resources has become a profitable venture for ambitious but poorly resourced elites.

Religious and ethnic differences, rather than class cleavages in a non-industrial setting, have provided powerful emotional fuel to mobilize kin for the zero-sum project of redistributing wealth, rather than the positive-sum project of wealth creation. Since power maintenance requires a rich patronage system, institutionalized grand corruption—a growth killer—has become the new normal. Endemic conflict, autocratic totalitarianism, and chronic poverty are, therefore, not aberrations. They are integral features of Ethiopia's political economy.

So, mindful of this historical backdrop, we need to exploit fleeting windows of opportunity like the present one to extricate the country from the vicious trap. This means the most urgent tasks of the Council to launch a successful post-conflict stabilization and recovery become:

- Rehabilitation to resettle IDPs with relief (especially food and shelter) aid and reintegration programs, and restoration of public services to address the immediate needs of the affected populations;
- Rebuilding destroyed or heavily damaged businesses and infrastructure to restore livelihoods; and
- Reconstruction by building better and laying the groundwork for a productivity-driven recovery, growth, and sustained development.

Following stabilization, a couple of the investigation commissions we recommend below will deliberate on the best ways to build an agro-industrial economy for Ethiopia. To drain the swamp of institutionalized corruption and reduce the temptation by ambitious young persons of modest means to enter the lucrative contest of state capture, it is imperative for the reform program to go for:

- Land to be re-privatized as rick as most state enterprises and party enterprises;
- The economy to be market-based and private-led with a constitutional guarantee for private property;
- Food security as a right of citizens to be the highest government priority, which entails a program of agricultural commercialization, small-scale irrigation, support for high-value-added crops (coffee, spices, and fruits), and off-farm activities.
- Investment in market connectivity and school-to-work transition; and
- State-Private partnership in policy planning, infrastructural investment, and demand-led educational curriculum.

Phase 2: Caretaker Government and Transitional Shengo

There are many valuable ideas on offer regarding the composition of the Shengo. We distill here what we believe is both desirable and feasible, as explained in full in our 2023 framework paper. Mindful that democracy is often conceived non-substantively as a mere procedure to elect leaders for majoritarian rule with minority protection, the hybrid election-cum-selection modality we propose is as follows:

- All rural and urban districts or *Woredas* (1,400-1,700), adjusted for population size, may each be represented by at least one elected deputy.
- While lower-level members of the ruling PP and TPLF may be selectively allowed to run for the interim parliament, senior cadres of the ruling coalition will be disqualified to avoid the capture of the people-centered electoral process by an entrenched class of ethnic politicians.
- Selected (i.e., non-elected) members of notable CSOs and respected members of the Diaspora may be given seats in the interim parliament at the discretion of the ENSC; and
- Since the 1400 to 1700-member Shengo is likely to be too big and unwieldy, the ENSC may constitute them by regional state. Each regional state can then elect its representatives to the transitional federal Shengo, which comprises some five hundred.

Phase 3: Constitutional Reform and Legislative Elections

The Transitional Shengo, as an authoritative body and de facto constituent assembly, takes over the responsibility of supervising security services and the caretaker government of technocrats. This approach will ensure continuity in governmental administration, including the responsibility of providing basic public services.

The mandate of the TS includes establishing the following key commissions to study and recommend structural reform. Please refer to the 2023 document for details: (a) Peace, Truth, Reconciliation, and Justice Commission, (b) State Assets Reclamation Commission, (c) Constitutional Commission, (d) Electoral Commission, (e) Territorial Administration Commission, (f) Land Tenure Commission, (g) Population and Housing Commission, and (h) Constitution Drafting Commission.

The TS should, by fiat, serve as a Constituent Assembly to oversee the drafting and ratification of a democratic constitution. To ensure that the drafting commission produces the right document, the TS needs to provide the key features that define the content of the democratic social contract that would resonate with the Ethiopian people.⁸

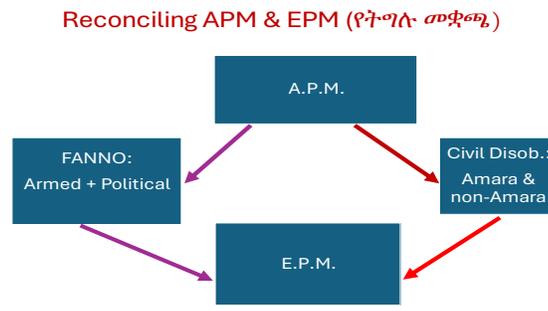
⁸ CECA (www.enathager.org), “A Citizen-Centered Roadmap for Systemic Political Transition in Ethiopia.” Part I: The Framework (in English and Amharic, 2023).

With a democratic constitution in place and free and fair elections held to conclude the transition period, Ethiopia will be well on its way to keeping poverty and tyranny at bay. At this critical moment, launching a fraught but promising journey, generous support from foreign friends with innovative ideas and substantial funding can make all the difference.

V. TWO ROADMAPS MEET AT A HISTORIC CROSSROADS

The transition to a modern Ethiopian society, to escape the vicious politico-economic trap, necessitates forging a formidable coalition anchored in two key political actors: the Amhara People's Movement (APM) and the Ethiopian People's Movement (EPM). These two differ markedly from the narrowly based ethnocentric confederalists or secessionists that have dominated Ethiopian politics for the past thirty-five years.

APM, walking on the two legs of Fanno armed self-defense and non-violent civil disobedience, fuses ethnicism and Ethiopianism at its core (see chart). EPM, although fragmented, has immense potential for mounting a people's resistance movement and is uncompromising in its commitment to national unity, the rule of law, and democratic equality.



The EPM roadmap outlined above adopts a top-down approach, providing a secure framework for all members of the multicultural Ethiopian society to participate as equals in public affairs. It commits itself to a constitutional order built around free citizenship, strong institutions of accountability, and consistent delivery of public services. Promising a future of freedom and prosperity, it invites all Ethiopian communities into the national tent fully cognizant of their rights and responsibilities.

The companion APM roadmap⁹ understandably follows a bottom-up approach to achieving similar goals. It prioritizes Amhara self-defense to eliminate the real danger of political and

⁹ See Abba Bahrey Forum (ABF), *The Amhara Roadmap to Freedom*, September 4, 2025. The two roadmaps overlap in their conception of the structural transformation of state institutions and the economic order, as the fundamental grievances of all Ethiopians with the current polarizing and unjust order are largely the same.

economic emasculation as a people by an assortment of ethno-fascist forces. Its endgame, however, is the rebuilding of the Ethiopian state to make it technocratically capable of delivering key public services and democratically constrained to ensure it is fully accountable to its sovereign citizens.

It is, therefore, incumbent upon Amhara nationalists and Ethiopian nationalists alike to align the EPM and APM strategic roadmaps to forge a robust coalition of those organized groups with a proven record of resistance against tyranny and national disunity. United and effectively organized, the forces of free citizenship, the rule of law, and democracy shall prevail, but only by collective design and sacrifice rather than chance alone.

