

The Red Book: The Political Foundation of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces under the EPRDF

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Abstract

Based on a thorough review and analysis of a document that has hitherto been kept secret, this article elucidates the political foundation of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) aimed to build. In doing so, the article demonstrates how the EPRDF, contrary to the country's legal framework and socio-political context, attempted to create a partisan national army. The document outlines three things: firstly, the ultimate objective of the ENDF is to be the bastion of 'revolutionary democracy'—EPRDF's ideology. Secondly, in the absence of revolutionary democracy's hegemony within Ethiopian society, ENDF's loyalty to it should be attained through the political indoctrination of its members. Thirdly, since indoctrination alone may not be sufficient, there must be a systematic and integrated implementation scheme. This was expected to ensure the building of a revolutionary democratic army. The effect of these was that, despite the ENDF's image as a force of regional peace and stability outside the country, it dwarfed the possibility of it becoming a politically neutral and professional national army. In the context of a divided society where major political contestations are far from settled, building a partisan national defence force was a recipe for disaster, as attested by the ongoing politico-military crisis in Ethiopia (2020-2022).

Keywords: Defence forces, revolutionary democracy, Ethiopia, military professionalism, national security

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Introduction

A major and highly regarded task like building an army is undertaken only for a clearly stated objective. If the army that is built is not capable of achieving its objective, it is unfit for purpose; and if an army is built contrary to the stated objective, the energy, resources, and money invested to build it would be for nothing...Therefore, the effort to build an army should state its objectives clearly and in detail. It should be based on and subjected to the clearly stated objective.—
the Red Book

The above quotation is taken from *the Red Book*, a secretly kept document authored by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2001, which held a doctrinal role in defining the political foundation of the ENDF (Ethiopian National Defence Forces) under the EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front). By extensively relating to *the Red Book*, this paper illustrates the political strategies of the EPRDF in building the national army, and the grand objectives the ruling elite had in mind in that endeavour. The implications of this document extend beyond ENDF to almost all aspects of socio-economic and political life under the EPRDF.

Building an Army in a Revolutionary Democracy, so entitled but mostly known as *the Red Book* among those who are familiar with its content and relevance, outlines the *raison d'être* and political foundation of the ENDF. It lays out a political framework and/or objective for the ENDF². In doing so, it sought to create a partisan defence force that, when the political situation in Ethiopia went from bad to worse, the army eventually became an arena of political rivalries within and outside the EPRDF. This, in effect, led the army's senior leadership to pick sides when the post-2018 defence reform kicked off and reached its climax on 3 November 2020 with the attack on the Northern Command and the ensuing armed conflict.³

² Since the document is primarily known by its informal name, “the Red Book”, the same is also used when referring to in this article as well.

³ The informal discussions and anonymous interviews that the author of this article had (between July and September 2022) with some midlevel and senior officers of the ENDF indicate that there had always been latent divisions within the army. The division was mainly between midlevel/senior officers who were former TPLF fighters and the rest who joined after or just a few years before the establishment of the ENDF in 1996. The latter views the former as too close and loyal to TPLF's ideals and interests. This division was

This article is, nevertheless, not about the conflict in Northern Ethiopia which ended in November 2022 after the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) signed a cessation of hostilities agreement in Pretoria. Rather it is about the political foundation of the ENDF before the post-2018 political reform. It is important to note that, both from legal and political perspectives, the ENDF of pre-and post-2018 are different. From the legal perspective, it is different because the 2019 Defence Forces Proclamation (Proclamation No. 1100/2019) affirms the constitutional provision that the ENDF should be a professional army without having political affiliation. It also expands it from an army of Ground and Air Forces to include naval forces. From a political perspective, the reform aimed at extricating the ENDF from its attachment to the EPRDF and the political objective imposed by *the Red Book*.⁴ So, what does *the Red Book* say the objectives of the ENDF should be? What fundamental political principles did it prescribe in building and operating the ENDF? How was it translated into practice? Primarily using extensive quotes from *the Red Book* and supplemented by other relevant legislations and print and audio-visual sources, this article elucidates the *political* foundations of the pre-reform ENDF.

Organized into five sections, the first section of the article is this introduction. Section two briefly discusses the origin and evolution of the ENDF. The third section focuses on the legal framework that establishes and governs the ENDF. Section four explains, based on *the Red Book*, the political framework that the EPRDF created to provide ideological and institutional guidelines to the ENDF. The fifth section, which is the conclusion, briefly reflects on the implications of the ENDF's experience and the consequences of attempting to establish a politically partisan defence force in the context of divided societies and

particularly apparent following the 2018 political reform and was in the open when the 2019 defense reform kicked off.

⁴ In discussions held with senior ENDF officers, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed criticized *the Red Book* for reducing the army to a guardian of a political party (EPRDF). He stated that one of the main objectives of the defense reform was replacing *the Red Book* with a new one 'that makes the army the guardian of the country, not a political party'. These discussions were aired on the national media in June 2020, focusing on 'Strategy for Building a National Army'.

(accessed on 16 April 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fekYvCURgfE> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDwLyoQApoI>), and in April 2022 focusing on current affairs (accessed on 16 April 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUEMnTbTPE4&t=1889s>).

unsettled political contestations. As such, this article is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it provides readers with a closer look into the ‘software’ of the ENDF based on a document that is available only in Amharic (the working language of the Federal Government and the army) and that has hitherto been confidential. Secondly, it lends us some perspective in terms of understanding the implications of building a politically partisan national defence force in a diverse country.

Origins and evolution: From a rebel army to a national Defence force

Ethiopia as one of the oldest independent polities in the world, although that of its national army under a centralized state leadership is relatively recent, i.e., dating from the first quarter of the 20th century. It was Emperor Haile Selassie I who, just before the second Italian invasion of 1936, initiated the establishment of a modern and centralized army that was under the leadership of the emperor himself and his defence minister. Before that, the national army was in practice an amalgam of the armies of the provinces or provincial governors who were expected to contribute fighters voluntarily whenever needed or required (Erlich, 1983; Yohannis, 1984; Mulugeta, 2017a).

Re-established after the defeat of Italy in 1941, the Imperial Army saw unprecedented modernization in its history, assisted by European and American military advisors. Britain, through the British Military Mission to Ethiopia (BMME), helped reorganize the newly established army. While Swedish military advisors played an important role in establishing the air force, Norwegian advisors organized and supervised the navy. Following the 1953 Mutual Defence Agreement, however, it was the US which had significantly helped the modernization and expansion of the army through the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) (Fantahun, 2014). By the end of Haile Selassie's reign in 1974, the Ethiopian army had the Navy, Air Force, and Ground Force. The Imperial Army was expected to be professional and apolitical. The military academies, particularly the Harar Military Academy, which was led by Indian officers and instructors, recruited candidates from a pool of academically and physically abled students at high schools and colleges. The academy did this "...by examining their individual academic records and physical fitness" (Birhanu, 2021, p. 35). Overall, the emperor made sure that the army was professional and not involved in politics, although a section of it later attempted an abortive coup in 1960 and later finally removed the emperor from power following the creeping coup of 1974 (Yohannis, 1980 & 1984).

Following the "February Revolution" of 1974, the Ethiopian defence forces saw massive modernization and qualitative and quantitative improvement. This

was due not only to the revolution but also to internal and external military threats and actual civil and inter-state wars (Gebru, 2009; Fantahun, 2014). Having fought a full-fledged inter-state war against Somalia and been trapped in a long dragging counter-insurgency amidst revolutionary transformations, the defence force became a "revolutionary army" (Erlich, 1983). In this important period, the army saw massive qualitative and quantitative changes. The newly found friendship with the USSR and Cuba following the Ethiopia-Somalia war of 1977-1978 played a significant role in this change (Patman, 1990; Gebru, 2000; Yordanov, 2016).

In addition, since 1980, the army had been under the auspices of the so-called "triangular command". This command was composed of individuals assigned by the political wing (led by the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE)), the Public and National Security Agency (later Ministry of Internal Affairs), and the army generals commanding respective army divisions. As such, the rivalry within the "triangular command" and the protracted civil war weakened the Revolutionary Army (Fantahun, 2014, p. 77). Under these circumstances and as an army entrusted to defend the country's integrity and the revolution, the army was not politically neutral.

By May 1991, a coalition of rebel forces known as the EPRDF replaced the Revolutionary Army. As the army's command and control collapsed, the EPRDF had no interest in retaining it as an Ethiopian defence force. Thus, keeping only "a few of its creams", mainly those considered to have the specific technical expertise and "cleared of any criminal offence"; it systematically disbanded it as part of its post-civil war DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) projects.⁵ Between 1991 and 1995, the EPRDF army became the de facto defence force of the transitional government. In 1996, through Proclamation No. 27/1996, it formally became the ENDF adding some from other organizations and including a few from the Revolutionary Army.⁶ The EPRDF leadership had emphasised building a small but efficient defence force. The leadership's view informed this decision that one of the vices of the preceding regime was building an oversized

⁵ According to the then General Chief of Staff of the ENDF, Tsadkan Gebretensae, '...about 6,000 skilled former members of the armed forces were selected to be retained after it was determined that they had no criminal records' ("Facilitating Conditions", 1995). This number was quite small proportion if one considers the fact that more than 300,000 members of the army were actually demobilized ("Former Members", 1994).

⁶ By 1996, the government had demobilized about 30,000 TPLF fighters from the newly formed ENDF in order to create an 'ethnically balanced army' from the Tigrayan-dominated EPRDF army (see "Recruitment", 1995; "Effort to Balance", 1996; "Effort to Build", 1998).

army at the expense of the country's economic development.⁷ This policy continued until the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998 to 2000), which led to the reinstatement of thousands of former members of the Revolutionary Army to fight off Eritrea (Mulugeta, 2017a, 2020).

Following the signing of the peace agreement with Eritrea in Algiers in 2000, the ENDF again demobilized around 130,000 soldiers and focused on deterring Eritrea (Mulugeta, 2017a & b). Over the years, the ENDF undertook some reforms before and after the Ethio-Eritrean war, following the 2001 split within the TPLF/EPRDF (“No Force”, 2001; “Senior Leadership”, 2001), and recently in 2019. While the war with Eritrea increased the defence budget and the number of recruits,⁸ the 2001 split resulted in the division, dismissal and reshuffling of senior officers. The most prominent case was the forced retirement of the General Chief of Staff of ENDF L/G Tsadkan Gebretensae (replaced by General Samora Yenus) and the commander of the air force M/G Abebe Teklehaimanot (“General Samora”, 2001). In between, minor changes were undertaken by the ENDF to improve its organizational structure, technical facilities, and role in the national economy. The ENDF has also been seen as a force of domestic and regional stability, although its legitimacy has not been unquestioned domestically (Mulugeta, 2017b).

One of the notable records of the ENDF has been its greater participation in peacekeeping or peace support operations in many parts of Africa. In fact, the ENDF placed Ethiopia on the world map as one of the top troop-contributing countries (TCCs) to the UN peace support missions (United Nations, 2021). Through the ENDF, Ethiopia also attempted to project its regional status as a force

⁷ Defence Minister of the Transitional Government, Seye Abraha (in 1994), and Deputy Prime Minister of the newly established federal government, Tamrat Layne (in 1996) had stressed on this issue as one of the departures of the new government from the previous regime (see “Our Defence Force”, 1994; “Country’s Defence”, 1995 and “Recruitment”, 1995).

⁸ During the Ethio-Eritrean war, the defence budget increased from 673 million birr (or approximately 122.5 million USD) (in 1994) to 6.9 billion birr (or approximately 886.9 million USD) at the peak of the war between 1998 and 2000. This was later reduced to 4.2 billion birr (or approximately 503.9 million USD) in 2001. It was still very high considering the total budget of the 2001/2002 FY was only 15 billion birr (or approximately 1.8 billion USD)—almost a third of the total budget (see “One Million Birr” 1994 and “Ministry of Finance” 2001). The exchange rate was calculated based on the historical data available on <https://www.investing.com/currencies/usd-etb-historical-data> (accessed on 20 July 2022).

of security and stability by deploying them as an anti-terror contingent in Somalia from 2006 on, as part of a regional peace operation mission from 2009 (AMISOM), and as a stand-alone UNPKO in Abiyei (on Sudan—South Sudan border).

The legal framework: Political neutrality and professionalism of the ENDF

As of 2022, the framework that lays the legal foundation for the ENDF is composed of the Federal Constitution of 1995 and six proclamations subsequently adopted/repealed and amended by the House of Peoples' Representatives (or the Federal Parliament) and Council of Ministers, namely Proclamation Nos. 27/1996, 123/1998, 343/2003, 385/2016, 1100/2019, and Regulation No. 809/2014. For the purpose and scope of this article, however, the legal framework excludes Proclamation 1100/2019. This section neither covers every legal detail nor only focuses on some provisions to elucidate the legal framework establishing and governing the ENDF regarding neutrality and professionalism.

Proclamation No. 27/1996, *A Proclamation on the Defence Forces of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, was adopted in February 1996 as the first legal instrument that established the ENDF, elaborating on article 87 of the Federal Constitution, which laid out the following principles:

- (1) The composition of the national armed forces shall reflect the equitable representation of the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples of Ethiopia.
- (2) The Minister of Defence shall be a civilian.
- (3) The armed forces shall protect the sovereignty of the country and carry out any responsibilities as may be assigned to them under any state of emergency declared in accordance with the Constitution.
- (4) The armed forces shall at all times obey and respect the Constitution.
- (5) The armed forces shall carry out their functions free of any partisanship to any political organization(s).

In its preamble, the proclamation declared that the ENDF was established to "...safeguard the country's sovereignty, embody a fair representation of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples and carry out their functions in a manner free from political loyalties". Article 3 of the proclamation, which focuses on the organization of the ENDF, states that it "...shall consist of the Ground Force and

the Air Force". Article 4, which focuses on recruitment, stipulates two requirements: (a) the recruitment "...shall embody a fair representation of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" of the country, and (b) "officers shall be recruited only from among the ranks of the Defence Forces". While the first requirement is necessary and understandable, the reason for limiting officers' recruitment to members of the ENDF is something uncommon elsewhere. The proclamation does neither explain why. Like any defence force of the modern world, every member of the ENDF is required "...to uphold the Constitution as well as to obey military laws, rules, directives and all standing orders" (Article 8). At the helm of the ENDF are the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence, and the General Chief of Staff (Articles 23 & 24).

Proclamation 123/1998, *A Proclamation to Amend the Defence Forces Proclamation* (i.e., 27/1996), came into effect on 30 June 1998, after the May 1998 outbreak of war with Eritrea. As one can understand, this amendment was made to create an enabling legal environment to recruit new members and recall former soldiers in response to the war with Eritrea. The amended provisions are mainly related to the terms of service and age limits. The amendment also included provisions for the award of medals and promotions.

Again, Proclamation 343/2003, *A Proclamation to Amend Defence Forces Proclamation* (of 3 June 2003) amended some provisions of Proclamation 27/1996. This amendment mainly pertains to the definition of some terms (e.g., Non-commissioned officer, junior officer, and senior officer), the extension of terms of service (from 45 to 48), rearrangement and addition of military ranks (both in the Ground and the Air Forces), and the establishment and operation of military courts. The most important addition, however, is the one that provides for reserve forces, saying that "...each force may have reserve forces as may be necessary" (Article 2). This amendment was made because of two reasons: (1) in the aftermath of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war and the signing of the Algiers Agreement, Ethiopia had gradually embarked on demobilizing close to 130,000 soldiers (Mulugeta 2017a & b), and (2) related to the first is that since the threat of war with Eritrea was not completely over and the uncertainty might force it to keep the demobilized forces in the loop. Thus, the idea of having "reserve forces" appears to be a cautionary measure ("National Reserve", 2003).

Proclamation 809/2014, *A Proclamation on Defence Forces of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, is quite long (31 pages) compared to the previous ones, which were 9, 7, and 5 pages, respectively. It came into effect on 2 January 2014, almost two years after the death of the late Prime Minister Meles

Zenawi. It can be understood from the preamble that the purpose of this new proclamation is threefold:

- (a) To reassert that the ENDF is "...organized to safeguard the country's sovereignty, to embody the equitable representation of nations, nationalities, and peoples, and to carry out its functions free of any partisanship to any political organization";
- (b) In order "...to have a legal framework for the Defence Forces of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia by which it is directed, and which is consistent with its contemporary commitments which take into account its future commitments"; and
- (c) Since Proclamation 27/1996, a series of amendments have been made, which makes the law quite dispersed and hence "...necessary to revise and consolidate the existing legal framework of the Defence Forces of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia".

The last two are the main reasons for replacing the previous proclamations. This is an outcome of compiling the three proclamations into one and the amendment, addition, and deletion of some provisions. The proclamation provides better details, definitions, and stipulations that were very brief in the previous proclamations. In this sense, Proclamation 809/2014 can be considered quite comprehensive. However, it does not only provide details but also adds new terminologies such as "national reserve force," which, for instance, is defined as "...person[s] recruited according to law to be a member of the national reserve force and waiting to give military service upon taking the necessary training" (Article 2(13)). Another important addition is the introduction of "special forces" in addition to the Ground and Air Force (Article 4). Article 74 repeals Proclamation 27/1996 and deems it inapplicable.

Regulation 385/2016, the *Council of Ministers Regulation to Provide for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Defence Forces Administration*, came into force on 6 May 2016. It is important to note that this long overdue regulation came amidst heightened protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions, where some members of the ENDF were believed to have shown "solidarity" with the protestors. Focusing mainly on administrative matters, this regulation states that the ENDF has four major missions (Article 5), namely:

- (1) defend the country and the Constitutional order from outside invaders, terrorists, and internal anti-peace forces effectively; and ensure peace of

- the country and the continuation of the fast economic development and building of a democratic system;
- (2) build order and security, maintaining the capability of the relevant regional peace and security structures and work in close coordination with them;
 - (3) protect and rescue the nations, nationalities, and peoples of the country and the development institutions and infrastructures of the public and the State from any natural or manmade disasters;
 - (4) ensure national security, and effectively participate in regional, continental, and international peacekeeping missions.

In addition, the regulation requires all members of the ENDF to refrain from participating in political activities, demonstrations, strikes, and the like. It also prohibits them from engaging in preaching religious teachings, directly and indirectly, within the army. Furthermore, it precludes them from giving unauthorized interviews to the media, trying to know classified secrets, etc. Hence, the regulation sets out the mission, values, and dos and don'ts of the ENDF.

In all, as of 2018, the legal framework that governs the ENDF looks like the aforementioned. Proclamation 809/2014 and Regulation 385/2016 consolidated the legal framework's evolution into two legal documents. Central to these two documents as well as the Constitution, is that ENDF, by law, is a politically neutral national defence force. Whether the same can be said about the political framework is a question that the next section addresses.

The Political Framework: Toward a revolutionary democratic army

As discussed in the previous section and per the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia as well as the proclamation establishing it, the ENDF is required to be "free from politics". Political parties are also prohibited from recruiting members of the ENDF. ENDF members are also prohibited from engaging in political activities. In terms of political orientation, however, the ENDF was virtually made the armed wing of the EPRDF. Its leadership was filled with former TPLF/EPRDF high-ranking leaders, except for a few. Therefore, when a serious split occurred within the TPLF and later the EPRDF in 2001, the ENDF was one of the institutions that were severely affected by the political turmoil. Its high-ranking officers, including the General Chief of Staff and commander of the Air Force, were forced to leave the army through forced retirement. It was in this context and following the split within the TPLF/EPRDF that *the Red Book* was written (in 2001) by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who was also the chairperson of the EPRDF.

The document—*Building an Army in a Revolutionary Democracy*—which is commonly known as *the Red Book* amongst members of the ENDF is a political doctrine that dictated how the defence forces of Ethiopia should be built and led.⁹ Organized into five parts, it has 204 pages, and each part is divided into several sections and sub-sections. The significance of this document, the single most important one on its own (and perhaps more important than the proclamations in terms of depth and impact on the army), is that it served as the primary tool for building/rebuilding the ENDF. Although no specific date/year of publication is printed on it, as the document emerged after the 2001 split within the TPLF/EPRDF, we can safely assume that it was prepared in the lead-up to TPLF/EPRDF's lengthy *Tehadiso* (renewal) meetings.¹⁰ It is also important to note that similar documents have been published focusing on various sectors, including Foreign Affairs and National Security. Most of these documents were also written by Meles Zenawi and enriched by his close confidants.¹¹ While the other documents, including the one on foreign affairs and national security, were made public, *the Red Book* had been kept from the public eye. And it is not still made publicly (formally) available. This section below discusses *the Red Book's* central ideas on the ENDF.

A careful examination of *the Red Book* leads us to identify at least three fundamental prescriptions. The first prescription pertains to the ultimate objective

⁹ The document is known in the army as ቀይቀ መጽሐፍ (*K'eyiwua Metsihaf* in Amharic), meaning the *Red Book* because of the colour of its cover page. The choice of its colour may also be deliberate given the fact that the central tenets of revolutionary democracy were rooted in the Marxist-Leninist ideology.

¹⁰ *Tehadiso* (Renewal) was a political process that ensued after the split within the TPLF/EPRDF. Its main features combined a series of political activities, including rigorous evaluation and self-evaluation (known as *gimgema* in Amharic), and re-orientation of cadres of the EPRDF in line with the new political alignment and the way ahead (Medhane & Young, 2003). The main aspect of the *Tehadiso* was, however, the town hall meetings and the closed discussions known for its stringent process of subjecting party members to *gimgema* (see Labzae, 2020).

¹¹ In fact, an anthology of Meles's writings that was published in Amharic by the Meles Zenawi Foundation confirmed this. Understandably, the anthology does *not* include *the Red Book*. Rather, this posthumously published volume, *Ethiopia: Renaissance Journey, Meles's Works on Development and Democratization*, compiles his five major policy contributions, namely: Our Vision of Rural Development; Issues on Building a Democratic System in Ethiopia; Building Ethiopia's Implementation Capacity Strategy and Programmes; Ethiopia's Industrial Development Strategy; and Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy (Meles Zenawi Academy, 2017).

of the ENDF. It clearly and unequivocally states what the ENDF defends as an Ethiopian army. Secondly, it prescribes political indoctrination as the best way to inculcate the ultimate objective. It emphasizes the importance of indoctrination in ensuring the attainment of the objective and maintaining cohesion within the army. Finally, the third is that it outlines the implementation process, i.e., how the ENDF should be built in line with the ultimate objective. Combined, the three prescriptions—the ultimate objective, the importance of indoctrination, and the implementation thereof— are key to building a *Revolutionary Democratic Army*, as discussed below.

Revolutionary democracy

Before delving deeper into the three prescriptions of the *Red Book*, let us briefly discuss revolutionary democracy, which was the official ideology of the EPRDF that ruled Ethiopia from 1991 to 2018. Its origin can be traced back to the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist roots of the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front), which created the EPRDF as a coalition of four ethno-nationalist political organizations (of the Tigray, Oromo, the Amhara, and the 'Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples'). It is, thus, one of the most important contributions of the TPLF to the EPRDF, which "provided the ideological direction" in its almost three-decade rule over Ethiopia (Aalen, 2020).

However, there is no single official or unofficial definition of revolutionary democracy. Scholars who closely followed the EPRDF have tried to characterize it based on what the EPRDF itself claimed to stand for in its political programs and policies and their assessment of its governance of the country. For instance, Medhane and Young (2003, p. 392) identified recurring ideas that could be considered as attributes of EPRDF's revolutionary democracy, such as "...national self-determination, land tenure, federalism, the vanguard status of the TPLF and EPRDF, support for the peasants, and lukewarm attitude to pluralism and civil society". The questions of ethnic groups' right to self-determination, including up to secession, state ownership of land, and ensuring the vanguard status of the EPRDF was particularly at the heart of EPRDF's pursuit of revolutionary democracy's hegemony in Ethiopia.

On the other hand, Jean-Nicolas Bach said that since TPLF's 1970s and 80s insurgencies, revolutionary democracy "...has always been defined negatively, i.e., in opposition to 'liberalism' and more recently 'neoliberalism'" (Bach, 2011, p. 644). This is mainly due to two reasons: the first is that while liberalism's focus is on "securing individual rights", EPRDF's revolutionary democracy "defends collective rights through notions of nations, nationalities, and peoples" (Bach,

2011). Secondly, unlike liberal democracy, revolutionary democracy "...is not considered representative, but one in which the people are governing" (Bach, 2011). This characterization echoes the recurring debates over individual versus collective rights and allies and enemies between the EPRDF and some of the opposition parties (especially those considered or claimed to be pan-Ethiopian).

Furthermore, Lovise Aalen (2020, p. 654) said EPRDF's revolutionary democracy could be understood from the perspective of its commitment to two major projects over the past three decades: ethnic federalism and developmental state. These two projects—contradictory and apparently difficult to implement simultaneously—have, until 2018, been the major preoccupations of the EPRDF. As such, Aalen argues that revolutionary democracy for the EPRDF fulfilled an ideology's defining purposes. It has served as "a guiding and unifying vision, helped mobilize supporters and recruits, and prescribed a certain way of organizing in order to reach a defined goal" (Aalen, p. 655).

The lack of an accepted definition aside, the extant literature on EPRDF's revolutionary democracy characterises it more or less in a similar fashion as having "inherent ambiguities" (Bach, 2011, p. 653), "conceptual opacity" or "mystery" (Vaughan, 2003, p.635), and for being a "malleable tool" (Aalen, 2020, p. 654). Part of the reason for this is that the EPRDF had left revolutionary democracy—deliberately or otherwise—undefined and constantly adapted it to the dynamics of national and international contexts. Both its internal crisis and survival in a changing national and international context were also explained by its malleability (Aalen, 2020) and pragmatic "love-hate relationship with liberalism" (Bach, 2011, p. 653).

Finally, it is important to mention that the EPRDF used revolutionary democracy to transform the relationship between the Ethiopian state and society as "a discursive exclusionary tool or strategy" (Bach, p. 655). This "powerful discursive and political tool" was used to target opponents both from within and outside the EPRDF. As such, it created "a radical dualistic logic" which viewed the relationship between itself and its opponents (variously vilified as chauvinists, narrow nationalists, rent seekers, etc.) as antagonistic. This had to be settled through the triumph and hegemony of revolutionary democracy (Bach, p. 655). To this end, the EPRDF had to lead the country and win the struggle against its opponents through political functionaries. Therefore, "far from recognizing alternative centres of authority, it has sought consistently and universally to either co-opt or marginalize them" (Vaughan, 2011, p. 366). This permeated the policies and institutions it implemented. As such, the EPRDF had systematically excluded and/or antagonized certain political constituencies and/or elites since 1991 (Khisa,

2019). Furthermore, as studies on certain sectors (for instance, the sugar industry and electricity sector) show, it also deliberately subordinated professionals/technocrats to politicians or loyalists within the bureaucracy (Fana & Kamski, 2019; Lavers, et al., 2021). In all, it made sure that state institutions, including the civil service/bureaucracy, were insulated from the influence of enemies of revolutionary democracy, which it called "chauvinists" (mainly the Amhara political elite and, to a certain extent 'pan-Ethiopianists') and "narrow nationalists" (mainly Oromo political elites in the opposition).

ENDF as a bastion and last fortress of revolutionary democracy

Citing Carl von Clausewitz's famous saying of war as "the continuation of politics by other means" as a basis for scientific analysis of war, *the Red Book* builds its premise on the view that a national army is built to defend a political objective. It asserts that "...the fundamental issue is that war is not merely an expression of politics, but it is also the highest stage of the political struggle" (*The Red Book*, 2001, p. 5). By extension, armies are needed or built in the context of such a political struggle and to fight a just war in defence of a just political objective as "...no political entity enters into war contrary to its political objective" (p. 8). Deduced from this is that the purpose of building an army, *the Red Book* argues, is to enable and achieve a particular political system by defending it against its enemies—regardless of whether the threat comes in the form of civil or interstate war. The army is, therefore, a force that benefits from and deeply understands the political objective it is entrusted to defend (pp. 9-13). In practice, a country's defence force and/or defence capability is "...the [political] system's main and last fortress, and the efforts to build it should consider this. A system with no defence force with such character—does not have the last fortress—is susceptible to collapse" (p. 19).

So, what does that mean for the ENDF? What is the political system and objective it is entrusted to defend? *The Red Book* elaborates on the nature of the national political system and its internal and external environment:

The objective we uphold and implement is to bring about revolutionary democratic changes and to entrench thereof. Not only we can implement our objectives to bring about development and fundamental changes, it also cannot be implemented where there is no peace and stability. From our country's internal situation perspective, there is a conducive environment to achieve our goals through peaceful consultation and persuasion. If we look at it from the

perspective of the external situation, our interest is to get along with our neighbours and develop. There is no single reason to invade one and destabilize the other. From the perspective of the external situation, we can achieve our objectives peacefully and only when there is peace and stability (*The Red Book*, p. 20-21).

Nevertheless, it also clearly spelled that there are forces—both domestic and external—that threaten the system. In the words of *the Red Book* "narrow and chauvinist forces" have posed threats to the system and even "imposed a war on it" (*The Red Book*, p. 22).¹² Such threats to the political system come in the form of insurgency or interstate conflict. Therefore, building a defence force with a clearly stated objective of defending the political system is considered necessary:

It is necessary to clearly and plainly state that the defence force we are building is the shield of our revolutionary democratic system. There is an expression that a defence force is built to protect the state's security. Since there is no way of defending the state separately from the system's security, it can be said that this expression is right. On the other hand, there is a view that the state and the system within are different; the army's objective is to protect and defend not the system but the state. Since such type of distinction does not and cannot exist, and to be free of this inaccurate view, we should put it clearly; its objective is protecting the revolutionary democratic system (*The Red Book*, p. 5).¹³

Although this can be viewed by many as assigning the responsibility to defend a partisan political objective to a supposedly non-partisan state institution, *the Red Book* does not shy away from clearly and unequivocally stating it. In fact, it asserts that "...we prefer to clearly and plainly state it that the objective of our defence force is to protect and defend our revolutionary democracy" (*The Red Book*, p. 28). One may find the justification for doing so even more interesting or

¹² This was a reference to a range of EPRDF's domestic detractors (e.g., OLF, ONLF, Amhara nationalists and pan-Ethiopian politicians, etc.) as well as its main external nemesis, Eritrea.

¹³ Unlike the common mistake of confusing state security with regime security, this argument deliberately conflates them. It makes them appear inseparable to the extent that defending one is automatically defending the other as they cannot exist apart.

strange —depending on what she or he thinks about the ultimate objective of building a national defence force. The conflation of the security of the political system with the security of the country/state is not done mistakenly, as some may automatically assume. It is rather deliberate and, most importantly, a result of a political conviction that the very survival of the Ethiopian state hinges on the survival of the revolutionary democratic system. In the words of *the Red Book*:

...defending the security of our country and our system are not separate. If our revolutionary democratic system does not exist, there cannot be a country we can call ours. It will disintegrate, and if the country does not exist, there cannot be a foundation and situation in which revolutionary democracy can take root. Thus, when we say that the objective of building the defence force is to protect and defend the security of our country or our system, it is all the same. We can use one or the other as we see fit. Since saying that it is to defend the country's security may create the impression that all are defenders and concerned about the country's security, we need to get rid of this confusion decisively (*The Red Book*, p. 27-28).

The rationale behind such reasoning can be found elsewhere in the same document, in which two interesting distinctions are made. The first distinction is made in the context of "internal political contradictions" or civil war. In this context, *the Red Book* argues, a system should have its own ways of solving or settling the contradictions, i.e., peacefully or crushing them by force. This, in turn, is described in two ways: either in terms of "shielding a single party" or "protecting the Constitution and the constitutional system" (*The Red Book*, p. 23). The view advanced by *the Red Book* is that such a distinction is merely an indication of differences between systems which "...does not change the defence force from being the last fortress of the system" (p. 23). The second distinction is made from the perspective of who defends the country. *The Red Book* states that everyone will not defend the country because people view a "country's affair" only from the perspective of their fundamental interests. Where their interests are not found, it asserts, they do not defend it. Even if they do, they will not do it equally. Therefore, "...thinking that all citizens will defend the country equally is being unable to view a society scientifically, and it can only be a dream" (*The Red Book*, p. 25).

In other words, *the Red Book* tells us that those Ethiopians whose fundamental interests are addressed by revolutionary democracy will defend the

system and, by extension, the country. For them, defending EPRDF's revolutionary democratic system and defending the country's security are "fundamentally the same" (*The Red Book*, p. 26). This is mainly because "...if there is no revolutionary democratic system, there cannot be rapid and sustainable economic and social development, democratic unity, etc. If this does not exist, the country will disintegrate" (p. 26). This is tantamount to saying that the country continues as a country so long as revolutionary democracy—by implication, EPRDF—continues to exist. Thus, from this perspective, *the Red Book's* answer to the question of who defends the country is quite clear. Those Ethiopians are benefiting the most defend it, as "they do not see the system and the country separately", while what the document called "narrow and chauvinist forces" do not (pp. 26-27).¹⁴ Putting this clearly and unambiguously, *the Red Book* argues, the army will have "a decisive role in that fateful day", meaning when the very survival of the revolutionary democratic system hinges on the ENDF's "capacity and identity" (*The Red Book*, p. 31).

All in all, *the Red Book* views the ENDF as the bastion and last fortress of revolutionary democracy. That is, the efforts to build its institutional capability aim at achieving two important and interrelated objectives, namely; (a) "creating a defence capability that shields the revolutionary democratic system from its internal and external enemies that attempt to destroy it by force", and (b) "creating a defence capability that averts the dangers of war by aligning with other models of struggle".¹⁵ The realization of these objectives hinges on several factors, but *the Red Book* particularly identified two important processes which are discussed in the following subsections.

¹⁴ From the perspective of revolutionary democracy, the 'greatest beneficiaries' of the political system are and will be the 'nations, nationalities, and peoples' of Ethiopia who have passed through 'national oppression' and whose 'right to self-determination up to and including secession' is guaranteed and protected by the FDRE Constitution (Aalen, 2020; Bach, 2011; Medhane & Young, 2003). These are, according to EPRDF's political program, the main beneficiaries of the political, economic, and social changes brought by the EPRDF-led government. This may essentially mean everyone that is not against, or at least not actively opposing, the EPRDF's ideology and leadership. There is no statistical figure that can be used as an indicator of this section of the Ethiopian people.

¹⁵ It does not list here what the other models of struggle are but they may include diplomacy, espionage, etc., as indicated elsewhere, on page 30.

Hegemony through political indoctrination¹⁶

The Red Book admits the fact that revolutionary democracy, as an ideology, is not hegemonic within Ethiopian society, not even close. However, it anticipates that it will eventually achieve that status, as liberal democracy did in Western societies. In light of this anticipation, the document briefly compares building an army in an incipient revolutionary democracy with that of liberal democracy. It says that in a mature liberal democratic system, liberal democracy has attained hegemonic status. Its principles and values are socialized through the school curricula, the media, and other institutionalized processes. Hence, as parts of society, members of the armed forces (recruits and senior officers alike) are already socialized by liberal democracy, and they do not need further indoctrination. If the liberal democratic system is threatened, they certainly defend it. What is more, since liberal democracy is already hegemonic, political differences within the system are expected to be tolerated because they do not pose a serious threat to the system. Electoral politics also functions well because contests for power are made within the system's limits (*The Red Book*, p. 72-76).

However, the *Red Book* concedes the same cannot be said about the Ethiopian revolutionary democracy because it does not have hegemonic status within the society. Hence, the aim is to achieve its hegemony within society and the army. To achieve this, it prescribes political indoctrination:

Although it is accepted by the people and controls state power, revolutionary democracy is not a system that has a hegemonic preponderance within the society. Although it is said that the majority of the society supports revolutionary democracy since their benefits are guaranteed by it, all sections of the society are exposed to inclinations that are contrary to thoughts of revolutionary democracy and have backward cultures and various limitations.... In the absence

¹⁶ The Amharic phrase used in *the Red Book* is “politicawi ginbata”, an activity aimed at “...shaping or changing the attitudes, beliefs and norms upheld by individual members of the army...” (Building an Army, p. 87). The literal meaning of “politicawi ginbata” is “political building” or “political construction” which makes little sense. The author’s informal discussion with some senior officers of the ENDF reveals that the process was colloquially referred to as “matmek”—meaning baptizing—while others simply call it indoctrination. If one carefully reads the description of activities and objectives included in the “politicawi ginbata”, the latter characterization, i.e. indoctrination, is better. Hence, “politicawi ginbata” is translated as political indoctrination.

of revolutionary democracy's hegemonic preponderance over the Ethiopian people's attitude, it is impossible to shape the army's attitude given that of the society. [Therefore], the political activity in the army will inevitably and mainly be political indoctrination (*The Red Book*, p. 80-81).

As one can understand, the fact that revolutionary democracy is not yet hegemonic within the army, and the army's ultimate objective is to defend it creates discomfort. This is so both from the legal and political points of view. From a legal perspective, political indoctrination within the army means violating the Constitution and the proclamations. It means promoting the ideology of a political party where it is clearly prohibited. From a political perspective, it means a fusion of the party and the state, a phenomenon already observed in the non-military sectors (Vaughan, 2011). As a ruling party, the EPRDF through its officials in the Ministry of Defence promotes or propagates its ideology within the army. Regardless, as *the Red Book* itself conceded, the preponderance of revolutionary democracy "...can only be ensured by undertaking a very broad, careful, and wise work of political indoctrination" (*The Red Book*, p. 83). The awkwardness of this can be deciphered from the following excerpt:

It is because we understood this necessity that our Constitution prohibits political parties from recruiting and engaging in political activities; and precludes army members from becoming members of political parties. Based on this, rules and procedures were adopted to guide the daily lives and activities of the army. In the meantime, in the absence of revolutionary democracy's hegemony, the task of inculcating the political objective will not be left, assuming that it is the army's internal affair (*The Red Book*, p. 85).

So, what will happen if it is not to be left as the army's internal affairs? First, the *Red Book* argues, the EPRDF takes care of the indoctrination through its activities of ensuring revolutionary democracy's hegemony within the society at large. This will affect the army indirectly since its members are part of society. Secondly, although EPRDF cannot directly be involved in politically indoctrinating the army because of the Constitutional limits, it can again indoctrinate the army "indirectly". Therefore, the EPRDF-led government, to firmly ensure the hegemony of revolutionary democracy, "...must play a very broad and swift role in the political indoctrination of the army. It has to also follow up and monitor whether the indoctrination is being carried out properly" (*The Red*

Book, p. 86). This basically means that the EPRDF, through the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Forces (i.e., the Prime Minister), the Minister for Defence, and other civilian staff within the Ministry of Defence can engage in political indoctrination. This includes incorporating revolutionary democracy in the training centers and cadet schools' manuals and curriculums of military education.

In a nutshell, the EPRDF, as can be inferred from *the Red Book*, was aware but did not seem willing to be restrained by the contradiction between the constitutional requirement and its prescription of political indoctrination within the army. Rather, it views the Constitution as "...enough and qualified basis for the political indoctrination of a revolutionary democratic army" (*The Red Book*, p. 88). It also interpreted the constitutional mandate of the ENDF, which is to defend the Constitution, as tantamount to defending the political system it established. Therefore, it construed political indoctrination to mean inculcating constitutional principles and values. Most importantly, it assumed that this contradiction is transient because when the hegemony of revolutionary democracy is realized at the societal level, it will not be necessary to engage in political indoctrination of the army. Once the hegemony of revolutionary democracy is affirmed, the ENDF itself is expected to become the last fortress of the system due to the socialization process.

Integrated implementation

Having the ultimate objective of defending revolutionary democracy and the inculcation thereof through political indoctrination were deemed insufficient by themselves. These need to be aligned with the organizational structure and recruitment processes of the ENDF. *The Red Book* emphasizes the importance of all three processes. It should be noted here that the ENDF, as a national defence force of Ethiopia, is both an old and a new entity though it is predominantly the latter. It is an old entity because it combines members from two different but already existing entities. The first is that its rank and file include a few selected members of the pre-1991 national defence force and most fighters of the EPRDF. As such, one can expect some level of institutional continuity inherited from both. The second is that since almost the entire national defence force of the pre-1991 era was demobilized, reintegrated into society, and replaced by a new national defence force with a new legal-political framework, there has been entirely new

thinking and practice.¹⁷ As a national institution, however, what is now called the ENDF is the making of the post-1991 political dispensation with the formalization of EPRDF's military ethos and political values (Mulugeta, 2017a).

The effort to make the ENDF a revolutionary democratic army, in practice, meant that it should be led by civil and military leaders who had internalized revolutionary democracy. Furthermore, its members from the lowest rank should be recruited from those considered to be the greatest beneficiaries of the revolutionary democratic system (*The Red Book*, p. 29). Moreover, on the promotion ladder, only those who were already members of the army could become officers and/or join the cadet schools. *The Red Book* compares this with the practice in a liberal democracy, where soldiers and officers pass through different paths of promotion to ensure loyalty to the system (p. 126). This comparative perspective—regardless of whether it is accurate—is perhaps telling:

In a liberal democracy, as members get promoted, they become beneficiaries of the system in their social standing. This alone increasingly strengthens their loyalty to the system. In revolutionary democracy, no reason to have additional rank and responsibility means increasing and strengthening loyalty to the system. Rather, those loyal to the system will be those of the lower rank who, due to their social origin, are closer to the main beneficiaries of revolutionary democracy (*The Red Book*, p. 82).

What this, in practice, means is that although it is imperative to have a dependable revolutionary democratic leadership at the top, *the Red Book* does not assume that the loyalty of the army hinges on the leadership's achievement of a particular social standing in the system. Instead, it is the composition of the army, the recruitment process, and the continuation of the recruited soldiers' contact with society which is expected to ensure the army's loyalty. As *the Red Book* bluntly puts it:

[Unlike liberal democracies], from top to bottom, the origin of our army is just one in our case. All are from the sections of society that

¹⁷ It is to be recalled that Ethiopia undertook one of the largest DDR processes in the early 1990s. The government at the time considered it a very successful case of security sector reform (SSR), carried out through 'local ownership' of the process (Mulugeta, 2017b).

are the greatest beneficiaries of revolutionary democracy. Those who are outside of society do not want to be recruited as soldiers in the first place; they are not what the army selects, even if they want (*The Red Book*, p. 126).

This, in short, means that it is necessary to make sure that the ENDF, from the lowest to the highest rank, is composed of sections of the society that are beneficiaries of revolutionary democracy. In addition, efforts are to be made so that one's 'physical and spiritual attachment with them is not lost because of joining the army' (*The Red Book*, p. 82).

Therefore, ensuring and realizing that the ENDF becomes the bastion and the last fortress of revolutionary democracy primarily depends on the social identity of those who joined it and stayed. They must be beneficiaries of the revolutionary democratic system who believe that without it, "...there cannot be better Ethiopia and do not see the system and the country separately" (*The Red Book*, p. 26). In addition, the loyalty of the ENDF to the system can be realized not just through its leaders' social standing within it but through their commitment to revolutionary democracy and by "maintaining a dependable political condition at the highest level" (p. 83).

Conclusion

Several implications can be drawn from *the Red Book*—ENDF experience but let us limit ourselves only to the most prominent ones. It is important to note, however, that unlike similar documents, such as the Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy document, it was kept confidential and is still not publicly available. Not just the content, but its very existence was not known by outsiders to the army except the small circle of the government and the party. If there were any, they were few and most probably directly or indirectly related to the ENDF.¹⁸ Its existence was made public when publicly and frequently mentioned by senior government officials in the context of the post-2018 reform/transition—after the EPRDF morphed into Prosperity Party and the TPLF rejected to join it. Hence, it was made public on two occasions: (a) when the

¹⁸ One of those few persons who occasionally mention *the Red Book* was M/General Abebe Teklehaimanot (former commander of the Ethiopian Air Force), who later also mentioned it in his 2019 book, published in Amharic. As *the Red Book* was written after he was forced to retire from the ENDF, it is likely that he did not have direct/official access to the document. He may have just heard about it from his acquaintances.

incumbent Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed talked about the justifications for defence reform and (b) when some active-duty senior military officers referred to the document as something that reduced the army to a guardian of a single political party rather than the country during discussions. Both occasions were aired on the national media in 2020 and, most recently, in 2022, as mentioned in section one.

Firstly, the reason for keeping the document confidential can be anything ranging from protecting sensitive information about the army, considering it as part of protecting the country's national security, etc. Nevertheless, the most plausible explanation is that it was kept confidential because deep down, the EPRDF—its senior officials in the party and/or the government—knew very well that the document did not align with the Constitution's provision about political neutrality of the ENDF. This can be taken as an example of EPRDF's tendency to take the constitutional and legal provisions as suggestive rather than restrictive in its three-decade rule, as attested by its human rights record. It contravenes the provisions of the Constitution and the proclamations establishing and governing the ENDF by prescribing a partisan political ideology for the army.

Secondly, it is not a secret that revolutionary democracy has been the ideology of the TPLF/EPRDF. Publicly stating that the ultimate objective of the ENDF was to be the bastion and last fortress of revolutionary democracy could have been tantamount to admitting that the accusations by major opposition parties—inside and outside the country—that "the ENDF is the armed wing of the EPRDF" was true. It is difficult to tell whether such accusations were softened by keeping *the Red Book* confidential. However, had its content been widely known and if the ENDF was operating with the stated political objective as its ultimate mandate, there could have been a much worse public perception of the ENDF. As mentioned earlier, EPRDF's revolutionary democracy permeated state institutions and policies. As such, it was antipathetic toward political neutrality and distrustful toward the technocrats/professionals in other sectors. If this is considered, EPRDF's aim to create a politically partisan army was not unique in and of itself. It was simply the most sensitive—and secretly kept—aspect of its state-building project.

Thirdly, there is no question that the defence forces of a sovereign state are built to defend the state's political system, values, and ways of life. To that extent, *the Red Book* is right. Nevertheless, the process through which that system came into being, the legitimacy it has, and the legal and political space it accords to alternative views, are very important. In a context where there is an absence of national consensus on the political system, a lack of legitimacy thereof, and a closed political space where alternative views—moderate and radical—are

violently suppressed, defending the political system cannot be the same as defending the state.¹⁹ In a deeply divided society where social origins are instrumentalized and weaponized, reducing the national security of the country to the security of the political ideology of a single political party simply multiplies the insecurity of both, as witnessed in the recent political conflagrations and violence of post-2018 Ethiopia. Although the civil war that ensued after the 3 November 2000 attack on the Northern Command has multiple and complex causes, there is little doubt whether the post-2018 defence reform had its own contribution. Coupled with the morphing of the EPRDF into the Prosperity Party, the unceremonious dumping of revolutionary democracy, and the assassination of then General Chief of Staff General Seare Mekonnen (and others) in June 2019, it created a sense of insecurity among EPRDF loyalists, most of whom were TPLF's fighters loyal to revolutionary democracy. As such, the ENDF was dragged into an intra/inter-party conflict, with fatal consequences for the political parties, the army, and the country. Further research might seek to establish if there was a clear linkage between the reform and the war.

Fourthly, it is also important to note that *the Red Book*—ENDF experience has implications for two of the most important virtues of a national defence force, i.e., political neutrality and professionalism. Studies on security sector reform and governance indicate that national defence forces should be built as politically neutral and professional entities. Their composition should also reflect the social composition of the country. Their primary responsibility is to defend the country and its people from existential threats. Unfortunately, *the Red Book* emphasizes only the composition of the army, not the importance of political neutrality and professionalism. In fact, the importance of building an apolitical and professional army was not favoured by the document or the regime. More emphasis was given to ENDF's loyalty to the political system than its professional service to the state. Therefore, it was a matter of time for those who were too loyal to feel alienated when a new one replaced the political system they were entrusted to defend.

In the final analysis, the EPRDF, through *the Red Book*, attempted to build an army that would defend an ideology and a political system set to be hegemonic

¹⁹ This should not be construed as ignoring the complexity of the relationship between regime and national security. In a country like Ethiopia, the boundary between the two securities is sometimes blurred. Nevertheless, equating the survival of the state with the survival of a political party's ideology is self-serving at best, and fatalistic—not scientific—at worst.

in the future. To do that, its political neutrality and professionalism—much needed in Ethiopia's deeply divided society and fragile political environment—were deliberately undermined. Effective and praised on several occasions for its role in regional security and peace support missions, the ENDF from 1996 to 2018 leaves two impressions: a domestically challenged legitimacy and regionally acclaimed effectiveness. Whether these—particularly the latter—can be attributed to its political foundation, i.e., *the Red Book*, can be taken as a subject of further inquiry.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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(Data collected from *Addis Zemen*, in chronological order. Translated from Amharic by the author)

Our defence forces from where to where? (1994, May 13). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1, 5, 12.

One million Birr per day will be reduced from defence budget. (1994, October 20). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1, 7.

319,000 former members of the defence forces have been rehabilitated. (1994, November 16). *Addis Zemen*, p. 4.

The facilitating conditions for resort to war have been disappearing. (1995, 28 May). *Addis Zemen*, p. 1.

Recruitment from all ethnic groups has been completed. (1995, 2 December). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1, 7.

The country's defence force is expected to demonstrate high performance in a low cost. (1996, 12 February). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1, 5.

The effort to balance the ethnic composition of the army is successful. (1996, May 23). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1, 6.

The effort to build a national army with [ethnic] balance has been effective. (1998, May 12). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1, 5.

There is no force that can deny us our constitutional right. (2001, May 19). *Addis Zemen*, pp. p. 2.

Major General Samora Yenus becomes Chief of Staff; Two senior defence officers removed from their Posts. (2001, May 27). *Addis Zemen*, p. 1.

Our defence forces' senior leadership was not clean from corruption and anti-democracy. (2001, June 19). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1, 7.

Ministry of Finance said that the half a billion Birr reduced from defence budget has been reallocated as subsidy to regions. (2001, June 25). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1.

Measures have been taken to create the first national reserve force in the country. (2003, January 27). *Addis Zemen*, pp. 1, 9.