

Genesis of Dictator Isaias Afewerqi and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

Genesis of Dictator Isaias Afewerki (I.) and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (A.)

አሪታት ናይ ዲክታቶር ኢሰያስ አፈወርቂ እውን ናይ እቲ መጀምመርያ ሚኒስትር ዓቢይ አሕመድ፡ —

This thread/ፈትሊ explores the genesis/አሪታት of two of Ethiopia and Eritrea’s most consequential political figures—Abiy Ahmed and Isaias Afewerqi. Despite their very different backgrounds, their formative stories reveal striking parallels in ambition, political identity, and the circumstances that shaped their rise to power.

I.

When Eritrean fighters such as the late Ali Said Abdella, who had trained in PLO camps, began joining the ELF, Haile Selassie’s regime and the CIA—operating from the U.S. military base in Asmara—reportedly pursued a strategy described by the Amharic expression “እሾህን በእሾህ ማውጣት” (“removing a thorn with another thorn”): using the EPLF to weaken and ultimately eliminate the ELF. It was within this Cold War strategy that Isaias Afewerki emerged. A young dropout whose father had reportedly served as the king’s proxy during the Eritrea-Ethiopia federation, Isaias was positioned within the EPLF and eventually became its dominant leader. His subsequent consolidation of power cannot be separated from the political and security environment in which the movement developed.

A.

Decades later, Abiy Ahmed would emerge from a very different background. He has stated that his Orthodox Christian mother told him, when he was seven years old, that he would one day become “king” of Ethiopia—a prophecy he says remained significant throughout his life. Whether understood as a personal conviction, a family narrative, or a formative belief, this sense of destiny offers an important window into how Abiy came to view his own political future.

I.

Isaias consolidated his control over the liberation movement and then the country at four key junctures: the menqa and yameen purges of the 1970s/ እታ አሊሚናዝዮን/ምርሓቕ ናይ መንካዕ እውን የሚን ናይ እቶም ገዐታት; the reorganization of the clandestine/ ከላንደስቲን/ምስጢር Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP)/EPLF leadership in the late 1980s; the reorganization and restructuring of the party/ front leadership during the **transition from liberation movement to state and ruling party** in 1991-94; and the purges of the PFDJ and the government in 2000-2001, highlighted by the arrest of the Group of 15 (G-15) and the closure of the independent newspapers. Much of this consolidation of power was facilitated through *Halewa Sowra/ሴፍ እውን ዋልታ*, established in 1974 and, in effect, Isaias’s sword and shield. It functioned as a powerful, behind-the-scenes security apparatus, tasked not only with protecting the front from infiltration and subversion but also with monitoring, suppressing, and controlling internal dissent.

In summary, Isaias’s consolidation of power rested on three interlocking institutions/ልዕሊ ሰለስተ እሱራት ስርዓታት—the **EPRP**, the **EPLF**, and **Halewa Sowra**—which together provided the political, organizational, and security/ርግጽነት instruments through which his authority was established, defended, and ultimately entrenched. These three institutions also survived the transition to statehood/ሀላዊ ናይ መንግስቲ, with only limited modifications: the EPRP was reconstituted as the PFDJ; the EPLF’s structures and personnel were transformed into the institutions of government; and Halewa Sowra remained intact while becoming an even more powerful security apparatus. Thus, the transition from liberation movement to state did not dismantle the institutional mechanisms through which Isaias exercised control; rather, it transformed and strengthened them within the new state order.

A.

Abiy? That sense of political destiny would later intersect with Ethiopia's emerging security and intelligence architecture. In 2006, Abiy Ahmed became one of the co-founders of the Information Network Security Agency (INSA), where he subsequently held several positions. The Ethiopian government established INSA with U.S. support, modelling it in part on the American National Security Agency (NSA). INSA provided Abiy with a pathway into the heart of Ethiopia's security establishment, where he developed technical expertise, institutional influence, and political connections. His subsequent transition from intelligence and security to party politics—and ultimately to the premiership—makes his trajectory especially significant. **But the fact that Abiy subsequently moved from the security establishment into party politics does not make his earlier experience at INSA irrelevant to his eventual rise. The institutional resources he acquired there—expertise, relationships, credibility within the security establishment, and access to networks of influence—could be carried forward and converted into political capital at later stages of his career. In other words, the route to power changed, but the institutional advantages accumulated along the way did not disappear. INSA was therefore not simply an early stop that Abiy left behind; it was one of the foundations from which his subsequent political ascent became possible.** In this respect, there is a significant parallel with Isaias and Halewa Sowra: in both cases, a security institution was closely connected to the accumulation of expertise, networks, influence, and ultimately political power.

I.

Cairo, 1993: Isaias Afewerqi/ኢሰያስ አፈወርቂ condemned African rulers who clung to power/ዝ ይሕዙ ናብ ኢታ ስልጣን/ክኻእሎ, rejected personality cults, and blasted/ገረፈ the OAU's failures. Mobutu Sese Seko (In office 27 October 1971 – 16 May 1997) reportedly replied: "Give him time and he will be like one of us." Four years later, Eritrea was among the regional powers, [Rwanda — the most important military supporter, Uganda, Burundi, Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, which provided varying forms of support and Congolese forces organized around Laurent Kabila], backing the forces that ended Mobutu's 32-year rule. As early as late 1997, Kabila was being denounced as "another Mobutu". In 1998, US President Bill Clinton hailed Isaias and other "new" African leaders as part of a new African renaissance.

Who was right—Mobutu or Clinton?

With Isaias, never judge him by what he says. Judge him by what he does.

In an April 2000 speech/ዘረባ/ጽዋ at Princeton University, Isaias said that "constitutionality, political pluralism and free and fair elections are naturally the best institutional tools" for achieving economic prosperity given the political and cultural realities of a specific country.[35] However, a parliamentary election scheduled in 2001 was later postponed indefinitely. Although police are responsible for upholding internal security and the armed forces' external security, eyewitness reports exist of the armed forces engaging with demobilizing soldiers or civilian militias to complete the hybrid tasks of both. Civil authorities sometimes involve themselves with security forces in an abuse of power.[36] (see Wikipedia)

The trajectory is revealing/ኢታ ፍኖት/መንገድዲ እያ ምቕላፅ (ቀለፀ). The 1997 Constitution, ratified but never implemented, represented the formal promise of constitutional government that was effectively suspended after the 2001 crackdown on the G-15 and the independent press. Then, in 2014, Isaias declared that **"the 1997 constitution is dead"** and announced that a new constitution would be drafted. Yet more than a decade later, no replacement constitution has been produced or brought forward for public discussion.

The significance of this abandonment extends beyond Eritrea's domestic constitutional order. By the late **2010s**, Isaias was increasingly framing Eritrea's political experience within a much broader struggle over the international system. In 2017 and 2018, he repeatedly attacked what he described as a hegemonic or unipolar world order and argued that Eritrea would not remain a passive observer of the emerging global configuration. By 2023, his language had become more explicit: he spoke of working

with Russia to advance a “new order” or “new world order.” In 2024, he described the emergence of a new world order representing the “world masses” as a long-held desire. Thus, the same leader who had declared Eritrea’s constitutional framework “dead” without replacing it increasingly presented himself not merely as the architect of Eritrea’s political order, but as an actor interpreting—and potentially helping to shape—a new international order.

I. and A.

In 2018, both Isaias and Abiy received the UAE's Order of Zayed, symbolizing their emerging alignment and the international recognition of their relationship. Two years later, that relationship took a far more consequential form when Eritrea and Ethiopia became military allies in the war in Tigray. Their cooperation during the 2020–2022 conflict demonstrated that the relationship had moved beyond diplomatic affinity into strategic and military collaboration.



UAE President awards Order of Zayed to Eritrean President, Ethiopian Prime Minister
Tuesday, July 24, 2018 4:59PM

The physical medal is described by the UAE's official news agency as being made of pure gold and studded with precious stones, but the UAE does not publish a monetary value for it.



The UAE was also involved in the Tigray war as an important external supporter of the Ethiopian government. Its military assistance included an extensive air bridge supplying Ethiopia with weapons and other military equipment. The UAE’s military base at Assab, Eritrea, also housed Chinese-made Wing Loong II armed drones during the conflict. Although claims that these Emirati drones were directly used against Tigrayan forces could not initially be independently verified, their presence at Assab, together with the subsequent documented UAE military support to Ethiopia, placed the Emirates within the wider military architecture of the war.

A. Abiy who was initially embarked on sweeping political reforms, releasing thousands of political prisoners and unbanning opposition groups. He was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize "for his efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation, and in particular for his decisive initiative to resolve the border conflict with neighbouring Eritrea"

But, since 2019, Ethiopia has undergone democratic backsliding under Abiy's premiership, marked by severe human rights violations, media censorship, internet shutdown, civil conflicts, systematic persecution and ethnic violence in the Tigray, Amhara and Oromia regions. Politically motivated purges also became common and many journalists and activists were arrested by police for alleged breach of "constitutional laws".

I.

Western scholars and historians have long considered Isaias to be a totalitarian leader, with [Eritrea's constitution](#) remaining unenforced, electoral institutions effectively being nonexistent, and a [policy of mass conscription](#).^{[13][14][15][16][17]} The [United Nations](#) and human rights organizations such as [Amnesty International](#) and [Freedom House](#) have cited him for [human rights violations](#).^{[18][19]} Since 2024, [Reporters Without Borders](#) has ranked Eritrea, under the government of Isaias, last out of 180 countries in its [Press Freedom Index](#), lower than [North Korea](#) and [China](#).^[20] (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

I. and A.

The deeper paradox of Isaias Afewerki 's political genesis is that the question of authoritarianism did not begin after Eritrea's independence. As early as 1973–74, members of the EPLF challenged the concentration of authority and demanded greater internal democracy and accountability, only to have the dissent brutally suppressed. Yet, remarkably, many of those who later broke with Isaias did not fully reclaim the historical legitimacy of that early challenge or present it as a foundational struggle against authoritarianism within the liberation movement. The unresolved conflict between liberation, unity, and democratic accountability therefore remained embedded/ሰርዓት (ሰርዓት) in Eritrea's political history—and ultimately reappeared in the authoritarian state that emerged after independence.

There is, however, an important parallel between the political trajectories of Isaias Afewerki and Abiy Ahmed: both initially appeared to the outside world through an image of political progress and transformation that later came under profound question. Isaias presented the EPLF as a progressive movement committed to democratic principles, only for post-independence Eritrea to develop into a highly centralized authoritarian state. Abiy's case began differently: his early reforms and peace initiative with Eritrea were genuine and earned him the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. Yet the political trajectory that followed increasingly contradicted the image of the reformist peacemaker. In both cases, therefore, the world first encountered an appealing political image before witnessing the harder realities of power. The difference is that Isaias's authoritarian character became apparent after independence, whereas Abiy's transformation unfolded from within a premiership that had initially promised political opening and peace.

Vocabulary building:

ኦሪት, ገዢ famine noun: genesis in English, *genesi* in Italian, means: **1.** (ናይ ኦሪት ሰብ) ትውልድዲ (ወለደ), ሰር, ምንጪ, መፍጠር (ፈጠረ). E.g. this tale had its genesis in fireside stories. They were the genesis of their own movement. He explains the genesis of the project. **ተጻይ መወደዳኦታ, መጨርረኻ.** **2.** (ናይ ነገር/di cosa) ፍጥረት/ፎርማሽን/ክብርና ኣውን ሰላሳታ/ሰቢሉፕፕ formation e sviluppo **ተጻይ መወደዳኦታ, መጨርረኻ.** **3.** law; legal teaching; body of laws; especially the Mosaic Law, Torah. A term referring to a body of law or legal teaching, especially the Law of Moses (Mosaic Law) in Jewish and Christian texts. **ኦሪት** → law; the Mosaic Law; Torah; **ኦሪተ ሙሴ** → the Law of Moses; **ኦገ ኦሪት** → the Mosaic Law / the law of the Torah; **ሊቃኦ ኦሪት** → teachers/experts in the law. **4.** **ኦሪት** as a title/name for the books of the Ethiopic Octateuch.

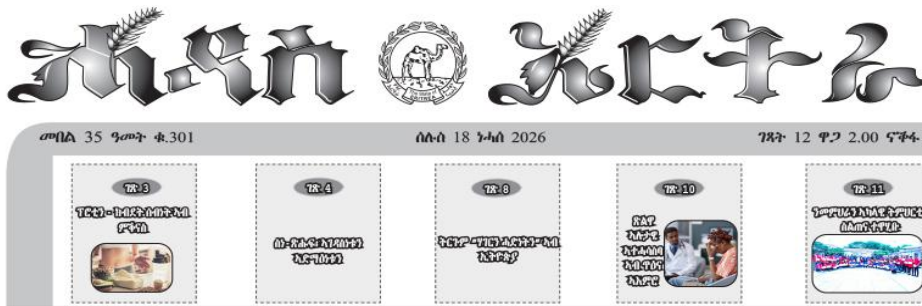
Architect n. ኣርኪተክት, ሐንጻጺ, ሀፍጺ, ነዳቺ



To conclude, here are few of my tweets, 23.08. - 05.09.2026, that are related to the article above.

Dictator Isaias Afewerki, needless to say, is working hard to make his military alliance, “Zmdo” (“alliance”), of undemocratic armed forces bordering Eritrea at least half as strong as that of his rival/ጸላሊ, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. It remains unclear, however, whether “Zmdo” includes the Somali militant group Al-Shabaab, an enemy of Ethiopia.

The true architect of “Zmdo” is not Isaias, but Abiy Ahmed’s flawed policy (ዘይፍጽ-ጽምቲ ፖሊቲካ) of seeking Ethiopian access to the sea by any means necessary. The policy went beyond Assab to encompass all of Eritrea, with Abiy claiming that “120 million Ethiopians had been blocked from the sea by 2 million Eritreans.” Isaias exploited this policy to strengthen his dictatorship and build “Zmdo.” Down with dictators! 23.08.2026



ኣባላት መበል 39 ዙርያ ሃገራዊ ኣገልግሎት፡ ኣካዳሚያዊ ትምህርቶም ጀመረዎ



When you see thousands of 15–17-year-old Eritreans at Sawa, recruited and grouped for a photo in the dictatorial newspaper ‘*Hadas*’ *Eritrea* (Tuesday, 18 August 2026); when you read that 4.4 million children are out of school in Amhara; when mothers in Tigray cry over the Eritrean regime’s conscription policy on their doorstep; and when similar crises unfold in Oromia, Somali Ethiopia, and elsewhere, one conclusion is hard to escape: these nations are sinking faster than anyone imagined. Why? Because in a few years, they may face a devastating shortage of qualified teachers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, writers, astronauts, sailors, and other educated citizens. All will be from other countries. But make no mistake, Eritrea is already there.

The legacy of Isaias Afewerki —a dictator whose disastrous rule, anti constitution, education, election, production, ... pro corruption, division, war, ...—may therefore continue long after him.

31.08.2026

1/2 — WHAT INDEPENDENCE?

“The U.S. Embassy in Asmara extends its regards to the people of Eritrea on the 65th Anniversary of the Start of the Armed Struggle for Independence.”

Thank you for remembering September 1, 1961.

But one question deserves an honest answer:

What independence are we talking about?

Eritreans fought for independence at enormous human cost.

But independence was never meant to be merely the transfer of sovereignty from one government to another.

It was supposed to mean **freedom, dignity, justice, constitutional government and a better future for Eritreans.**

Eritrea achieved de facto/ከብ ሐቅቂ independence in 1991 and internationally recognized independence in 1993.

Yet in 2026, the Constitution ratified in 1997 remains unimplemented.

There have been no national elections, and the National Assembly has not functioned as an effective representative institution.

Since 2001, independent political activity and the independent press have been suppressed.

Political opponents, journalists and others have been detained without the protections expected under the rule of law.

For many Eritreans, indefinite national service remains a defining reality of life.

And then there is the exodus.

Approximately **679,000 Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers** are registered abroad—equivalent to roughly **19% of Eritrea's estimated resident population of 3.61 million.**

Behind every number is a person who left home, family and country.

A country that fought for independence should not have to watch generation after generation leave because they cannot see a secure future at home.

The question is not whether Eritreans sacrificed for independence.

They unquestionably did.

The question is:

What did independence deliver?

2/2 — WHAT BECAME OF THAT INDEPENDENCE?

Where is the constitutional government?

Where are national elections?

Where is an independent judiciary?

Where is freedom of expression?

Where is the political space for Eritreans to disagree with their government without fear?

These are not foreign demands.

They are basic questions of citizenship.

Eritrea has enormous potential—its people, its location, its history and its resources.

But potential cannot substitute for institutions.

A nation cannot build a prosperous future when political power is concentrated in the hands of one man and citizens have little meaningful control over their own lives.

So yes, let us remember September 1.

Let us honor those who began the armed struggle and those who sacrificed their lives.

But honoring their sacrifice should also mean asking whether the Eritrea they fought for has become the Eritrea that exists today.

The history of Eritrea did not end in 1991.

1961–1991 tells the story of the struggle for independence.

1991–September 2026 tells the story of what happened with that independence.

Both chapters matter.

And the second chapter cannot be erased by celebrating the first.

What independence means today is the question Eritreans—and their international partners—must have the courage to ask.

02.09.2026

"U.S. Embassy Asmara Eritrea's Post

U.S. Embassy Asmara Eritrea

[16h](#)

The U.S. Embassy in Asmara extends its regards to the people of Eritrea on the 65th Anniversary of the Start of the Armed Struggle for Independence! As we celebrate 250 years of independence, we think back to our revolutionary roots – a shared experience between our two peoples.

ኤምባሲ ኣሜሪካ ኣብ ኣስመራ ብምኽንያት መበል 65 ዓመት ምጅማር ብረታዊ ቃልሲ ንናጽነት ንህዝቢ ኤርትራ ሰላምታ የቐርብ። መበል 250 ዓመት ናጽነትና ኣብ እነብዕለሉ ዘለና እዋን፡ ሰውራዊ መሰረትና፡ እቲ ኣብ መንጎ ክልቲኡ ህዝብታትና ዝተፈጸመ ናይ ሓባር ተመክሮ፡ ንድሕሪት ተመሊስና ነስተንትን።”

2/3

The U.S. Embassy in Asmara’s message to Eritreans on the 65th anniversary of the start of the armed struggle deserves attention—not only for its political message, but also for the language it chose to use.

The Embassy’s Tigriyna follows a linguistic approach that appears strikingly similar to the language policy of the Eritrean regime and to VOA Tigriyna.

This is not merely a matter of typos or spelling preferences. The choices reveal a particular linguistic standard, with implications for how the language is represented, taught, and understood.

3/3

Consider the Embassy’s own text:

1. **ኣምባሲ**, not **ኤምባሲ** — “e” corresponds to the Ge’ez **አ** vowel pattern.
2. **ኣብ**, not **ኣብ** — e.g., **ኣብ ገዛ** = at home.
3. **ኣብ ምኽንያት**, not **ብምኽንያት** — e.g., **ኣብ ምኽንያት ናይ** = on the occasion of.
4. **መበል** — noun: *female monkey*. **መብበል** = “-th” in English. E.g., **መብበል 12 መዓርግ** = 12th grade. Thus, for “65th anniversary,” the distinction is linguistically significant.
5. **65 ዓመታት**, not **65 ዓመት**.
6. **ምጅምማር** (from ጀምመረ), not **ምጅማር**.
7. **ብረታዊ** = ጠበንጃዊ/ነፍጣዊ/ግንጽላዊ, etc., and does not convey “armed” in the intended sense.
8. **ሕዝቢ** (አሕዛብ), not **ህዝቢ**.
9. And these are only some examples. 03.09.2026



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