

## Ethiopia and the United States: Can the Crisis be Prevented?

by  
**Dawit W Giorgis**

The simmering crisis in Ethiopia has reached a boiling point. It is extremely serious and every person who has watched Ethiopia closely knows that. It is not simply about repression and extrajudicial killings, stifling of freedom of expression, but most of all it is about ethnic politics; a minority government, representing in theory 6% of the population, that is in complete control of the state machinery including the economic political and state apparatus. This is the part that the US and other European governments and the mainstream media do not want to discuss when referring to the regime in Ethiopia. Current Ethiopia is gripped with the Rwandan syndrome before the 1994 genocide. It is Tigray people (the 6%) versus the rest of the population. It is a situation where most belonging to the 6% get better treatment than the others. It is a situation where the elites from the 6% own major private enterprises directly and indirectly. It is a situation where the entire 6% is portrayed as a superior race than the others. It is a case where disproportionate amount of resources is being directed to the province where the 6% live. It is a case where the majority of the 6% are led to believe that they will be exterminated unless they have full control of the economic, political and security apparatus. It is a case where through fear, intimidation and blackmail, the 6% is being brainwashed to hate the rest of the population and prepare itself against a possible genocide. Hence the hate becomes mutual. The binding tie between the various ethnic groups, which has lasted for thousands of years, is under stress. Tigray is the cradle of Ethiopian civilization, the source of its language and culture. The people of Tigray are innocent victims of the so-called TPLF, which came seeking power and ethnic dominance. The majority does not share that though they are exposed to relentless propaganda to see themselves differently.

The violence that is going on now is against the majority Amahra and Oromo population. But the tides of change have arrived. The people have united against the regime and for the last few years there has been persistent call for change with violent reprisals. It is like the proverbial saying “the chicken has come home to roost.” The Tigreans are under siege and most have not even benefitted from a regime ( TPLF=EPRDF) which it states is there on their behalf.

The only way that this regime can stay in power is by putting one ethnic group against the other, by fabricating stories, by dividing them in an even smaller ethnic groups and preaching hate, committing atrocities and blaming other ethnic groups for the incidents. Those who closely monitor the situation know that this is a recipe for disaster and genocide. The dirty tactics that has made it possible for the TPLF regime to stay in power for 28 years has come to a dead end. The next thing that most Ethiopians expect is civil war and unless the regime's major supporters, EU and the US, take the necessary steps and force the government to transit to an internationally monitored democratic election, the civil war may be unstoppable. The US's major ally in the region is Ethiopia because the Ethiopian regime is an important partner in the fight against terror in the region. To make sure that the US continues to support the status quo in Ethiopia, the regime is doing everything possible to ensure that it is seen as an indispensable partner in the fight against terror in the region.

Now the major source of terror is becoming Ethiopia itself. By creating the conditions for terrorism to thrive and hostile external elements to comfortably operate in Ethiopia, the regime is preparing the nation to be another Yemen. Ethiopia is descending to anarchy and possible proxy war. The stakes are high and no neighbor including Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Yemen and some of the Gulf States (certainly Saudi Arabia) would want to be left out in trying to shape the future of Ethiopia.

This will serve neither the short term nor long term interest of the US. The US is acting against reason and allowing this country to implode and create an unprecedented chaos in the region. And this will certainly reverberate across the Horn and indeed Africa. Every Ethiopian now realizes that this might not be preventable. The US administration looks at the surface and not what simmers beneath; the periphery not the center of the discontent and rebellion. The US expects that the worst scenario will not happen and if it happens it would prefer fighting the fire rather than preventing it from happening. Ethiopia is 100 million people, the second largest population in Africa, bordering countries who will be directly affected by the spill over.

Successive administrations have lacked wisdom and consistency in building an African policy. America as a global leader for democracy and human rights cannot afford to sit on the side lines and witness a tragedy unfold.

Contemporary history of successive US administrations is replete with

history of non-willingness to intervene to prevent a disaster in Africa. US administrations have always opted for the status quo where America's interests are not affected. They allowed grave situations to change to human tragedies and then credit themselves for providing humanitarian assistance when they could have prevented the whole crisis from the beginning. When situations are clearly leading to civil war, US prefers making policy options that are based on assessments that preclude objective analysis from credible sources. It seems State department does not have the expertise nor does the CIA to know what is exactly going on in Ethiopia and what is likely to happen. They may have adequate and precise information but do not have the willingness to take pro-active measures. Like the Saudi Lobby, the Ethiopian lobby in the US has become one of the most powerful whose agents are paid enormous amount of money.

The facts are easy to discover if only we refer to independent sources who have visited many parts of Ethiopia and talked to young and old, in the absence of minders. Then they would realize how serious the situation is. People will tell you that they are amassing weapons, some of them distributed by the regime to its own allies for 'self-defense'. It s like the Habyarimana Government ( Rwanda just before the 1994 genocide) which has been openly distributing weapons to the Hutu militias (Interhamway) in early 1990s. But America buried it's head in the sand and as a result over 800,000 people were killed. It refused to acknowledge the early warnings. I was there with the agonizing job to stabilize the situation including organizing mass graves. What happened in Rwanda could have been prevented or stopped.

On a 1998 state visit to Kigali, the Rwandan capital, Clinton formally apologized for US inaction "It may seem strange to you here, especially the many of you who lost members of your family, but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror," he said.

In a 2013, interview he was more frank: "If we'd gone in sooner, I believe we could have saved at least a third of the lives that were lost," he admitted. "It had an enduring impact on me." He estimated that if the US had provided as few as 10,000 troops, more than 300,000 Rwandan lives could have been spared.

In one of my previous articles entitled Lessons Learnt from Rwanda, I wrote this:

*“ We might think that such kind of scenario will never happen in Ethiopia. But just think about it: who thought that a country called Somalia with one language, one ethnic group and one religion would so rapidly fall apart and be a failed state for two decades? Who would have thought that the former Yugoslavia would disintegrate and result in the kind of genocide and ethnic cleaning we have seen in the heart of Europe, sending many leaders to the international criminal court? Who would have thought that South Sudan, which had its independence in 2011, after decades of war, would descend to a civil war that is causing the death and displacement of hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese? Who would have thought that Muammar Gadhafi would be overthrown in such a swift and brutal way and the country plunging into civil war and becoming the breeding ground of terrorists like ISIS, an evil that slaughtered many innocent young Ethiopian migrants? And the list can go on.”*

Washington’s continued support for the Egyptian dictatorship in the face of massive pro-democracy protests was a sign that both Congress and the Obama administration remained out of touch with the growing demands for freedom in the Arab world. There was coup d’etat and General el Sisi imposed a military rule. Many lives were lost to attain freedom. In the end the sacrifices did not mean anything. America allied with a system that was worse than Mubarak. Egypt of today looks worse than it’s past. Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s crackdown on dissidents continues. ISIS and other radical elements are now freely operating in Sinai and many parts across the country.

The Horn of Africa is the most complex security zone in the world. Ambassador David Shinn writing for the international policy Digest says, “When you add the fact that the Horn is located on a religious fault line, you have a recipe for frequent conflict. It has arguably been the most conflicted corner of the world since the end of World War II. The Horn has constantly posed a serious challenge for U.S. policy.”

As the only super power, America must exercise it’s weight judiciously, cautiously and fairly. That is the only way it can maintain a credible

image and in the process protect it's strategic, economic and security interest.

In one of my favorite books '**The March of Folly,**' the author, Barbara Tuchman, assessing the Vietnam War shows how America had accurate intelligence from independent reportage and special investigative units that the goal of the war was not achievable. She states that the folly consisted not in pursuit of a goal in ignorance of the obstacles but in persistence in the pursuit despite accumulating evidence that the goal was unattainable and damaging to the society and national interest of the USA.

“The question raised is why did the policy makers close their minds to the evidence and the implications? This is the classic symptom of folly: refusal to draw occlusions from the evidence, addiction to the counterproductive.”

The least the US can do is to stop what is perceived as collusion with a state sponsored terrorism.

Dawit W Giorgis

---