Ethiopia: the unmaking of the minority TPLF regime

By Tecle Abraham Habtemicael

Ethiopia is experiencing a huge upheaval never seen during the 25 year of the minority TPLF regime`s brutal reign. The political revolt is coming in the midst of worsening economic, political and social problems that are making the live of the average citizens unbearable. The people have had enough and are demanding a fundamental change, not short of the removal of the regime. In a normally constituted democratic government such an upheaval would have lead yielding to the demand of the people or even resignation. But the ruling governemnt is rather strangely constituted in such a way to maximise its minority ethnic domination and thus the demands being a menace to its reign, the possiblity of political resolution is not foreseen. It is therefore more likely this resistance would transform itself into violent confrontation as a reaction to the regime`s attempt to crush the protest using force. Under this perspective the loyality of the army and the operational capability of the armed opposition would determine the nature and outcome of the resistance.

When the TPLF entered Addis Abeba revengefully and assumed power, few had dreamt that TPLF would be such a nightmare to the people of Ethiopia. Despite everything, the people gave it the benefit of doubt, that over time it would be fair, rational and realistic in the distribution of power and wealth. But, it did the exact opposite and instead become more entrenched and repressive. It was indeed a dangerous gamble and the TPLF loves to gamble big way . Imagine a country where the 6% Tigrai minority dominating the political, economic power and their representation in state institutions remains predominant even after 25 years. In the most important institutions of the Army and security agents the Tigrains rather dominate the top brass completely. The same can be said to the distribution of wealth. Even the federal structure suppossed to devolve real power to the states is superficial and is not benefiting the Nationality states. All the real representatives of the respective nationalities are displaced by puppets who are under the tutelage of the TPLF and assume no real power. The Oromia and Amhara which constitute more than 70 % of the population are systematically marginalized , whom the regime sees as a threat to its contiued rule ( *the first as narrow nationalist and the latter as the nostaligic neftegna).* As the case with typical minority regimes, it is paranoid - the more resistance it faces, the more it become dependent on its kins and get more respresive. Reform and poltical relaxation is therefore not an agenda in such a regime.

After 25 years of brutal reign, the minority regime is though seriously challenged by the people of Ethiopia for freedom, justice and equality. Those who closely follow the genesis of this backward and brutal TPLF regime are not surprised that the volcanoe has finally violently erupted. Like a dormant volcanoe, it was unstable from its foundation :- It is a minority regime and brutal and backward at that. This huge upheaval happening barely over one year after the scandalous sham election victory, not only exposes the true nature of this minority regime but also an emergence of rupture in its system of control. With its brutal security and organizational measures, the regime has been quite successful in crushing previous upheaval in Oromia and elsewhere, but not this time. The Oromia wide upheaval is rumbling for more than nine months. Then quite unexpectedly the Amhara people`s upheaval came, which is gaining momentum and evolving into total mobilization. In many areas the people have been able to dismantle the local adminstrative arms of the regime, denying it the means of control and supervision. In some areas Tigrains, especially those apparachitiks of the System, have been targeted and many have indeed fled to their own state. No doubt the regime was scared by the course of events. What was even more worrying to the regime was the fact that these supposedly belligerent communities demonstrated their solidarity to each other and to some extent coordinating their resistance. This is indeed unprecedented and a clear demonstration of the regime`s divide and rule policy is cracking.

The gravity of the situation and the threat to its reign is not lost to the regime. Considering the predicament the regime finds iself and its wish to be seen as a government in control, no one expect it to openly tell the truth, but the traces are there all to see. The former TPLF chief of Staff general Tsadkan, for example, admitted openly the looming danger and even suggested unless the demand of the people are somehow addressed adequately, it could lead not only to the destruction of the ruling regime but also the country as well. That is as much an admission you can possibly get from a Ex-TPLF official whose concern for his party is no different from his kins in power. To his credit though he has specified the symptom of the underlying problems to the extent of his intention in stark contrast to the problems cited by the EPDRF executive committe. One can not help notice the mismatch between what the people really demand and what the minority regime would like to portray as the cause of the people`s upheaval. What that means is that the people`s demand is not going to be politically resolved and instead the regime will try its utmost to crush it using security forces and the killing and arresting of thousands of people in the pprocess.

The loyality of the security forces is therefore one of the important factors determining the direction of this people`s upheaval. Being the main pillar of the minority regime`s power, continued loyality of the army is of critical importance. However the security forces are like swords with double edge that can cut both ways. The top brass belonging to the TPLF, there is no doubt where their loyality lies. But, the same can not be said with certainity about the rank and file of the soldiers, who predominantly come from those resisting Oromo and Amhara communities. Apart from their own grievance against the domination of the military by the Tigrains and the ubiquitous mal-adminstration, one can safely assume them sharing the cause of their respective communities. Some have already done that and joined the people`s resistance, although so far there is no indication that the regime is losing control over the security forces. It is of course too early to pass judgements, as the dynamics of the resistance are just evolving. The loyality of the army to the people would accelarate the downfall of the minority regime and at the same time reduce the suffering of the people. And the reverse is also true.

Then there is one of unknown quantity but of equal improtance to the result of the current people`s resistance. And that is the role of the armed opposition gorups. As a matter fact there are more rebel groups operating across the land during this regime than in the previous Dergu`s reign, which it replaced and this is actually the best moment to show leadership and propel the people`s resistance to victory. Although it is diffcult to know their extent of involvement, it can be safely assumed they are indeed in the midst of the people considering the organization and execution of the demonstration. In the northern part of Amhara state where many of the communties traditionally own arms, have the capacity to defend themselves and indeed engaged the security forces. These are operational areas of the Patriotic Ginbot 7 and therefore has the access to organize and support the resistance. During this rainy season militiary activites are probabaly scaled down, but once it is over, the front can probably project its military power to advance the cause of the people. To the knowledge of the Author, the armed opposition have the militiary and organizational capability to influence events in those northern areas. If the armed resistance can demonstrate its capability to engage the army in a manifested way, then the balance would definetly tip in favour of the people over time. The regime will find itself outstretched and outorganized to fight all the rebel forces across the land and to maintain the loyality of the army. No one one can tell how protracted or quick the military engagement would be, but the transformation is inevitable.

In conclusion, considering the untenable foundation of this minority regime, change is unavoidable. The real question is how quick. The people have demonstrated their determination for change. But this brutal system will not yield to peaceful poltical protest. In fact it is going to try its utmost to crush the resistance using security forces as it has already indicated. But it can not fully rely on the loyality of the security forces who came from the majority Oromos and Amharas. Although there is no doubt where the loyality of the rank and file, it is difficult to see the circumstaances and conditions which would trigger them to stand with the people in mass. Then there is the organizational strength and militiary capability of the armed opposition to bolster the resistance of the people. All these unknown quantities will determine the course of the resistance and whether it will be protracted or short militiary confrontation, before the miority regime is finally thrown to the dust bin of history.