

Ethiopia

The End Game and Transition

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By Dawit W Giorgis

I talk to you today with a lot more wisdom than I ever had. For the last 26 years I have been working in over 13 African countries, all conflict areas, and visited almost all the countries in sub Sahara Africa. In the last few years I have founded a research institute the Africa Institute for Strategic and Security Studies (AISSS) a research center, dealing with contemporary security challenges of Africa, mostly on terrorism and transnational crimes in Africa. It is at its infant stage but we do a lot of research. During these years working in Africa, I have witnessed many countries descending to anarchy and some becoming failed states, people destroying each other like in North and South Sudan, Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone, in Central African Republic (CAR), in Somalia, in DRC and in Angola. I have witnessed the horror of genocide in Rwanda where close to a million people were killed. I have seen ethnic and religious differences being manipulated by a few to cause hate, hate that resulted in genocide and indiscriminate killings. I have seen that, when people can be pushed to hate then killing becomes easy. It is age-old wisdom that tolerance and good leadership is the only way to peaceful survival. Let us learn from the mistakes of history. Let us not repeat them.

Plato was the Greek philosopher wrote in 380 AD, *The Republic*,

"States are as the men are; they grow out of human characters. Like State, like man."

Throughout the annals of history, it is evil human character that has become the cause of many wars and crimes against humanity including more recently the first and second world wars, the holocaust, Rwandan genocide, the plight and migration of millions across treacherous routes in search of freedom and justice, the suffering and dying of millions in the most heinous ways, the slaughtering of people like animals, modern day slavery and human trafficking, civil wars in the middle east and in several places in Africa.

The regime in Ethiopia grew out of such evil characters. It engineered an ideology of hate, the supremacy of few and ethnic segregation. It started off by redefining the boundaries for which millions of Ethiopians have fought and died for, destroyed the unity, the culture, the history and the future of its people particularly that of the youth.

It introduced and preached ethnic politics, established fake ethnic federation and launched propaganda of hate among the various ethnic groups. It manufactured and distorted the history of Ethiopia and instituted systems and policies that openly

promoted the supremacy of a minority population in Ethiopia. In the most diverse continent, Ethiopia is the only country where one ethnic group, which represents a minority population, dominates the economy, security, and political and social life of the country. Ethiopia today has the largest number of starving people, 15,000,000 who are on the verge of death but at the same time the regime manipulated the international community into believing that Ethiopia is the fastest growing economy and one of the most stable countries in Africa. Real economists and those who have lived the lives of the people outside the glittering cities know that it is false. Ethiopia by all credible international measurements is one of the ten poorest countries on earth, it is a country that has the largest number of political prisoners by today's counts, it comes second in the world with the largest number of jailed journalists, as of today it **is the most censored and controlled country in the world**, (movement of people, press, internet, TV, telephones, mobile phones, radio,) technologically the most backward in the world, a country that cannot even compete with the failed state of Somalia which does better in proportion to its population.

Eventually the world came to a conclusion that it was duped into believing that Ethiopia was the fastest growing economy in Africa. The other day the NY Times wrote a piece where it said; “ **Africa rising was really good for some crackpot dictators but in some ways was a myth. No place exposes the cracks in the Africa Rising narrative better than Ethiopia, which had been one of the fastest risers. Ethiopia now is in flames. The government whose stranglehold is so complete that not a single opposition politician sits in the 547 seat parliament.**”

Like the Nazis of Germany the regime in Ethiopia has been able to legislate with impunity because there is no institution in the governmental framework to scrutinize what it is doing. Like the Nazis, the Ethiopian regime is being run by a parliament, executive and judicial system which is completely owned by a small number of people. This regime has massacred thousands, imprisoned thousands more, tortured and implemented a policy of ethnic cleansing. It has violated the sanctity of life, the sanctity of mosques, churches and faith.

The brutality and the marginalization of the majority came to a level where Ethiopians can no more tolerate it. Under intense and relentless pressure from the people this regime is about to be overthrown. The issue at hand now is how is this coming to an end?

Contemporary history of Africa is replete with failed uprisings, coups d'états and violent revolutions that succeeded in nothing more than replacing one form of dictatorship with another. Mass mobilizations with or without violence, on the other hand, have a stronger track record of laying the groundwork for democratic change because they are based on popular and sustained protests. When people at all levels are engaged, the probability of peaceful transition is usually very high.

And some dictatorships are so totalitarian that their end can come only through violence: Muammar al-Qaddafi, for example, was determined to fight his people to the bitter end. This led to a civil war between pro and against and between various Muslim and tribal factions. In the case of Ethiopia, there is a virtual consensus that this regime must be removed and if the regime decides to fight it out, it will do so at its own peril against the great majority of the Ethiopian people who are opposed to it. The outcome is certain but the price will be too high and unnecessary. That is why Ethiopians need to work together with their Tigrean brothers and sisters and reach a common understanding that this revolution is about justice and freedom for all, which includes the great majority of Tigreans who have been used and equally oppressed by a handful of backward narrow-minded people and their cohorts who have participated in looting Ethiopia.

The recent declaration of state of emergency is certainly a clear indication of how desperate the regime is and to what extent it is prepared to go to stay in power. But history shows that there is no state of emergency that has been successful when the legitimacy of a regime is questioned. This state of emergency and the draconian power it has given to the vastly illiterate soldiers to violate the individual and collective rights of people indicate society's approach to collapse. Nothing can block a movement that has been triggered and that has caused the sacrifice of so many lives. The barrier of fear has been crossed. As they say 'the Rubicon is crossed'. Their aggressive behavior will only tighten the noose around the neck of the TPLF. I call this the **birthmark of Ethiopia's future.**

Make no mistake, like the Nazis, like Polpot of Cambodia, the Rwandan Genocide, the several criminal leaders and war lords that we have seen see in some African countries, it is all about a group of people, in our case, a group Tigrean mafia, consumed with greed and hate!!! Tigreans have to liberate themselves from this bondage and join the struggle for justice and freedom where they belong before it is too late. I realize that there are many trail blazers in this regard; Ethiopians should applaud them for taking the right and responsible steps and appeal to all those undecided, to liberate themselves from the shackles of TPLF's false and fake promise and be with the rest. Let them be on the same side of history in a place and a country where God has placed them to live together in peace and harmony.

The people have initiated a struggle across the full length and breadth of the country and unified the movement on the ground in a way that shocked the regime and assured the Ethiopian people that this is a struggle that cannot be manipulated. The deep-rooted ideology of the TPLF to divide the Oromos and the Amharas came to its disgraceful end when they joined hands and pledged to fight TPLF under the banner of **Ethiopia for All.** They are now waiting for all Tigreans to be on board.

The great worry for Ethiopians is not whether change will come but how it is going to come. The current struggle can go in any direction under present political ethnic based

formations. The uprising in Ethiopia needs to be guided and coordinated. If it is assumed that change could come through either negotiated settlement, between regime and opposition, or through a violent overthrow, excluding coup d'états, in both cases there will be a need for the opposition in and outside Ethiopia to be organized and be prepared. Though it is difficult to know when and how change will come, what is known for certain is that change is in sight. According to many, in whatever way change comes, the kind of change that the majority of Ethiopians will accept will have to have two basic elements. **The destruction of the TPLF ideology and the dismantling of the TPLF structure.** These will not and should not be subjects of negotiation.

People are demanding for a common voice of Ethiopian opposition that can coordinate the struggle and develop a common strategy and guide the uprising towards a peaceful transition. They need one voice with which they can approach the international community and seek support and assistance. Without this, the uprising will either lead to civil war or the establishment of fiefdoms like in the times of Zemene Mesafint. It is great news that the major Ethiopian political groups have now decided to unite and lead a non violent struggle with a common vision and agenda under a common platform. With commitment and proper organizations there is no doubt that that this organization named the Ethiopian National Movement (ENM) could lead the country to a peaceful transition.

Amidst these emotions, people might lose sight of the bigger picture. People need to be organized so they can sense the dangers that they face within and outside Ethiopia. Ethiopia is not of interest to Ethiopians alone. It is of great interest to many other countries in the region and beyond. As much as the people try to steer the course of events in their favor there are those who would like to steer it towards their own interest and agenda.

People have to be able to see the big geo political picture before they are able to understand how crucial stability in Ethiopia is to the region and to the world. There are several countries surrounding Ethiopia who have serious security problems of their own. South Sudan is mired in civil war and North Sudan is experiencing low intensity civil war as well. Not very far Central African Republic (CAR) is almost failed state with ongoing civil war. Egypt is in turmoil because of internal insurrection. Somalia is a failed state and the hub of terrorist activities. Al Shabab from Somalia has destabilized North and North East Kenya. Eritrea is an isolated country whose security very much depends on what happens in Ethiopia and in countries across the Red Sea. Across the Red Sea, Yemen is at war with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. **These are the neighbors of Ethiopia.** The Horn of Africa is the most complex security zone in the world.

It is a very fragile region with the largest number of UN peacekeeping forces in the world. If Ethiopia, with a population of 90million, explodes the security implications for the region and for the world will be mind-boggling. Just think of forced migration from the region and what this will mean to the already glutted human trafficking across the

Sahara and to the Mediterranean with possible tragic consequences, far more than what the world has ever seen. That is why the world and the region are closely monitoring the situation in Ethiopia. That is why we have to prepare for an orderly transition.

That is why Ethiopians need to create one coordinating group that watches the internal and international dynamics of the struggle and ensure that there will not be any excuse for the status quo to continue, or allow this country to descend into anarchy and or allow proxy war and eventually be a failed state. With this kind of organization, which unifies the opposition, Ethiopians can manage their own affairs and be in a position to come out of this crisis united and stronger. This body (ENM) is composed of all the political groups that currently conduct the struggle on the ground, and these are the Ormos (ODF) Amahras (represented by an individual and expecting an organized group representing the Amharas to come up soon) the Afars (APP) the Sidama (SPDF) plus the PG7 which is multi ethnic. This is just the beginning and it is believed more organizations that conduct struggle in Ethiopia will join this alliance.

Let us discuss just two of the benefits of having such an organization:

One is **Removing the Regime** through popular protest and the second is organizing a smooth **The Transition**.

Removing the regime is underway. This historic struggle and enormous sacrifice can finally pay off only if the opposition is united and forms an umbrella body that has the mandate and the capacity to coordinate and speak on behalf of the people. Such a movement will not satisfy everybody, in the current reality but it is important that it begins to function and evolve to be a more robust and inclusive movement.

There are some voices, which have gained some traction. These voices advocate reform. The reform voices come from two camps. One camp is the camp that believes that there is no united credible opposition group that can take power at this moment. Therefore they advocate for the status quo with some reform. This includes some Ethiopians and members of the international community. The other group is composed of those who have a lot to loose from the fall of this regime. And their argument is based on self-preservation and fear mongering. They argue that the fall of the regime can lead to a civil war.

If opposition is well organized, the country will not descend to anarchy. Therefore the solution is not to succumb to fear but rather to make sure that there can be an orderly transition. The end goal of this struggle should be the unconditional destruction of this ideology and the rebirth of a new nation at peace with itself, democratic, stronger and more united than ever.

The Transition could have many tasks and the first will be to define the members of the transitional government and the period of transition. While defining the members of the transitional government might not be difficult, the aspect of the transition that will create problems will be to define the period of transition.

Revolutions do not necessarily lead to successful democratic transitions as manifested in contemporary history of Africa. The causes for such failures of democratic transitions fall into six major categories.

- 1 The lack of a clear transitional agenda and goals among the opposition groups especially during and after the fall of totalitarian regimes. Do the Ethiopian opposition groups have a clear and common agenda and vision of what change they would like to see in Ethiopia? At this moment they don't even have a common platform much less have a common agenda. Unless there is a common agenda around which all can rally and work with a common purpose, the transition could easily fall apart and introduce another era of instability with warlords cropping up in various parts of Ethiopia.
- 2 The second factor is the role of armed groups who have been fighting the regime. These forces can make smooth transition impossible. These armed rebel groups need to be included in the transition period immediately before they begin acting on their own. Their needs to be a strategy on how to change them into a disciplined armed group directed and supervised by the transitional body. It is worthwhile to learn from the experiences of Libya, Syria, Yemen, Burundi, North and South Sudan, CAR etc....where the victorious rebel groups made violence an end instead of a means to transform their respective countries.
- 3 The third factor is foreign interventions that have lead to the destruction of many democratic transitions. Ethiopia is of strategic importance for US and Europe and the Arab world and for the countries in the region, and existential threat to Eritrea, Egypt and Sudan. Depending on how they interpret the policies espoused by the change, which might conflict with their interests, they may directly or indirectly, militarily or through proxy actors, intervene. And we have seen these in Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Syria, DRC, etc.....
- 4 The fourth factor is the role of the regimes military and security establishments in the political process. The military establishment as we see it today is composed of mainly Tigreans. Integrating this military and security forces in the transition process is impossible. Immediate steps need to be taken to make sure that there is a transitional power that supports the change and can enforce rule of law and protect the sovereignty of the nation in the interim period when it is most vulnerable. And then there is the risk of demobilized soldiers mainly from the TPLF who may create a resistance force that can destabilize the nation and

the transition process. The transition period needs to address these issues because the inability to manage these demobilized forces will have serious consequences.

- 5 The fifth factor is the capacity of the transitional body. The transitional body can be very weak and lacking the collective and individual leadership qualities to manage the transition, either by not making the needed decisions and reforms or by adopting authoritarian policies to monopolize power. From the start it is very important that Ethiopians choose the right leaders for the transitional administration to be able to steer the country to the right direction and towards a democratically elected government that works for **All Ethiopians**.
- 6 The sixth factor is the weakness and dysfunction of government institutions, which are currently not transparent and accountable to the people. These are why corruptions, human rights violations and arbitrary arrests and executions are rampant in Ethiopia. Government institutions have been established to serve the minority. The ministry of defense, justice, security, foreign affairs, local and so called federal governments, the police, the institutions that run the economy, the legal system and the personnel within it, the electoral commission have all been structured to be the implementing body of the ideology of the minority regime.

There are many examples of the failure of democratic transitions because of all or some of the above factors.

It is therefore extremely important to learn lessons and make sure that the transition period is long enough but not too long to be able to address the various issues that would be the anchors of a strong united people and government

Five major issues will help determine the period of transition in the case of Ethiopia.

1. Cohesion Between the Various Ethnic Groups:

The end goal of transitional government is to have a democratically elected government. Political parties should form around a common set of beliefs, generally away from ethnic and identity politics. If a particular minority ethnic group in a nation feels that its people are not being represented well or that these ethnic values are being unheard then forming an ethnic party can become a healthy democratic outlet for government activism. This is much preferable to the alternative of ethnic minorities being ignored or shunned from politics, or for revolts, terrorism or full-scale civil war to occur.

To be able to bring these various ethnic groups around a set of common beliefs needs a lot of work. There have been a lot of recriminations; accusations, stigmatization and

labeling that are founded on distorted or manufactured history. These have to be put in the proper historical perspective and truth be told and retold so that there will be harmony and the political system and the political parties that will establish the new government also reflect the set of common beliefs and aspirations. This will need time. The establishment of a (National Commission) non governmental independent congregation of scholars members of civic organizations, veterans, religious leaders, elderlies etc. to work on these and related issues followed by sustained activities to educate the people will bring people closer before the transition to democratically elected government. This will be one factor in considering the period of transition.

2. Rule of Law, Justice and Reconciliation

The establishment of law and order across the country during the transition period is the most important task of the transition. Transition environment after years of conflict and instability is characterized by insecurity and lawlessness, poor or badly functioning economies, and a lack of social services and social cohesion. This phase may require disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of the armed groups and the establishment of forces that can enforce law and order. It will certainly require vigilance particularly from dissidents that may be supporters of Weyane or have different political agendas than the one established.

Then there is the issue of peace and justice. Can there be stability and peace without justice? There must be justice and no impunity for those who have introduced an ideology of hate and massacred hundreds of thousands and looted the country. There are of course the concepts of retributive justice and restorative justice. While retribution typically focuses on prosecuting all those complicit in committing the said crimes, restorative justice focuses on the victims' needs, the root causes of the conflict, and the possibility of reintegrating the perpetrators into society and rehabilitating them. Examples of restorative justice are South African Truth and Reconciliation, which according to my opinion was flawed, and did bring neither reconciliation nor justice. It failed to bring a proper balance between reconciliation and justice.

For the perpetrators of the ideology of hate and those who looted Ethiopia, killed and tortured there should be no other recourse except the hand of justice, like Pol Pot of Cambodia, like the Nazis, like those who committed genocide in Rwanda, in Liberia and Sierra Leone and many others. .

The concept of restorative justice can probably be considered for those who have been used and or forced to commit criminal acts. That I believe is the only way Ethiopians can make balance and move forward.

It is true that in countries like Ethiopia, which have witnessed violent conflict and gross human rights, violations, inherited ethnic divisions, that it deals with the past so that

Ethiopian society moves forward towards a unified and harmonious future and avoid a relapse into conflict.

3 National Conferences

National conferences at all levels can be effective vehicles for representation, and consensus formations. These conferences are necessary because there will be pressure and demands from the Ethiopian people for public dialogue and discussions, at community and grass root levels to discuss the democratization process. These kinds of conferences can form part of nationwide process to bring harmony and understanding after years of repression, mistrust and insecurity. As stated by one scholar on the subject “ such conferences would be best understood as opportunities to define and classify issues, establish accountability and mobilize a broad cross-section of popular constituencies.” Such dialogues would give the framework of the drafting of a new constitution and preparation for a general free and fair election under an independent and international supervised election for a new government.

4. Restoring Moral, Ethical and Traditional Values

There are other damages that this regime has caused that need to be addressed during this phase also. Weyane has attacked the very soul of Ethiopiawinet, shamed the sense of patriotism, violated traditional and family values, destroyed the entire fabric of society that has defined Ethiopiawinet, violated places of worship and tried to make them places of politics, fabricated and or distorted history with the sole intention of creating animosity between the various ethnic and religious groups. These and related poisons that have been preached and spread by the Weyane which require well considered approach involving the communities at all levels, academics and civic groups and probably establishing an independent body to identify these damages and develop a detoxification project by well-meaning and learnt people. These are the works of Weyane, which cannot be addressed through legal means and need strategy and time.

5. Interfaith Dialogue

The transitional period should also open an interfaith dialogue particularly between the two major faiths so that their relationships are stronger than ever and together they close every gap, every crack to protect themselves from government interferences and from destructive and extremist ideas that would put their faith in danger and be causes for instability. This again is not a question of law but rather a challenge that the community needs to address with the support of the transitional government. With such basic understandings and dialogue that will have to go beyond the transitional period, democratic process for the establishment of an elected government will have more chance of being one that represents all. Africa particularly the horn of Africa and the Northern Africa have become the breeding ground of extremist ideology and

terrorism. Terrorism thrives in countries where there is instability with people who want to settle scores with government they are not part of. The country has resisted these challenges and proved to be a country with unique harmony mainly between the two great religions. However particular vigilance would be required during this transition period because of the nature of transition from authoritarian rule to democracy.

6. Foreign Affairs, Allies and Alliances

The transitional period will also be a time for intense diplomatic activities to explain the foreign policy, get support and strengthen relationships with allies, with AU, the UN and European Union and members of the UN and to identify adversaries and keep them at bay. From the start transitional bodies have to exercise wisdom and not emotions. Wisdom informs us that those governments who fail to operate within the international system will fail. We work in a global reality where each country's problems become the problems of the other. No country can afford to live in isolation. This interdependence is founded on mutual respect of the sovereignty of any country however small or poor it may be. Europe and particularly the US have had and continue to have great influence in the politics of Ethiopia. Ethiopia because of its strategic location and size of population attracts a lot of attention and there has been continued interest to make sure it is on the side of the US as an ally. And indeed it has been, even with this brutal regime.

We have to realize that the primary concern of the US in foreign relations is its own national interest. Its national interest is economic and strategic. These and nothing else guide its policies. It has its own humanitarian department and through it and through many other NPOs the US implements humanitarian programs as it has always done in the case of Ethiopia irrespective of the kind of regime the country has. In the 1982-86 famine crisis in Ethiopia, the US was the largest single humanitarian donor despite the fact that the regime was aligning with the Soviet Union as a Marxist regime continuously and insistently condemning the US as an imperialist power.

However successive American administrations have allied with dictators and gross human rights violators like Saudi Arabia, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Libya under Quadafi, Egypt under Mubarak and so on. The main arguments in all such cases have been US national interest. It is therefore imperative that Ethiopians explain to the administration how the US own national interest would be affected by siding with a regime like Weyane and why it should support change.

It is also important that the US administration be convinced that there is a viable strong opposition that is supported by the people and continue to be an ally of the US. In the case of the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie there was an organized army that took over. In the case of the Dergue there were the organized joint EPLF/ TPLF forces, which were ready to take over and fill the vacuum. In the current situation there are none except a splintered opposition, which cannot be seen as an alternative power.

The world, including the US administration, has in the strongest possible terms, condemned the regime for its brutality and supported the demand for freedom and justice, thanks to the relentless vigils and demonstrations of the diaspora all over the world. The US has issued a sweeping travel advisory which sends a clear signal to the regime. However, until now, there is no alternative force that can represent the people and that can be a partner for negotiation and lead Ethiopians to transition. Today the pressure should be on the newly organized alliance and make it accountable. The US and the international government have done their part. Now the ball is in the court of the opposition leaders. If they miss this momentum and descend to anarchy or allow status quo to continue, history will judge harshly the opposition leaders.

7. The Drafting of a Constitution

And finally the transitional period will be the time to draft the constitution that reflects the best interest of the people. The draft needs to be discussed by the people at all levels and their views fully taken into account. The constitution will guarantee the establishment of an independent electoral commission that will facilitate the first election with a strong international observers team.

The shifting of power from authoritarian rule to democracy is a daunting task. The aspiration for political expression will be a primary demand, as people everywhere want their voices to be heard. Ethiopia will face a legacy of fear, insecurity, poverty, militarization and highly ethnicized politics. Expectations will be very high and to meet these challenges will be a huge undertaking. A government of all people can be established through diligent, meticulous and detailed preparation and this preparation needs **to begin now** and go until the fall of the regime through the transitional period. The transition **begins now** in civil society, in the opposition movements, in study groups, think tanks, inside the country, within the churches and mosques in universities and institutes of higher learning within the diaspora. Without such preparations it will be near to impossible to have a free united, peaceful and democratic Ethiopia all of Ethiopians dream of.

Thank you