**The Shadow Government of Ethiopia**

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On its 28th of July report Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) described the impact of the absence of Meles Zenawi and his leadership. Contrary to what Sebhat Nega and Bereket Simon portrayed, ESAT reported those middle management are in suspense all over. The poorly explained absence of Meles has created deep tension that could tear the country apart. Rumors are abundant about emergency meetings. Lack of information has made high-ranking bureaucrats nervous and unable to run the daily affairs of the nation. According to the report, these groups are in a panic mode desperately seeking to get their families and dollars out thus creating a vacuum.

The absence of Meles is one obvious dilemma and a minefield the junta is trying to figure out how to address carefully. For the author the question is not what Meles’s crime partners are doing. The criminals will do all they can to retain the status-quo. According to Sibhat Nega, the junta runs the country in accordance to their standard practices that is, even if a leader goes down, they have a method in place that enables them to run the nations affairs uninterrupted. Hence, Sibhat inadvertently admitted that the junta runs Ethiopia in disregard to the wishes of the public hence minimized the absence of Meles. Therefore, it is more important to focus on what this criminal junta is trying to attain, which is the continuation of the defunct regime, rather than the life or death of the criminal Meles.

Dead or alive, the prevailing assumption is that Meles is done politically. That being the case, publicly, there are discussions of many succession possible scenarios. Former TPLF strongman Meles’s crime partner Seeye Abraha told Voice of America (VoA),

“They don’t have a system" [of leadership succession], Seeye said.  “This is a crisis situation and the dust has not settled.”

 On the other side, former US Ambassador to Ethiopia David Shinn told Voice of America,

 “I would be willing to bet very good money that he has been planning for some way to deal with this issue in order to insure some kind of reasonable succession of government in Ethiopia.”

Some speculate that the army could take over; some say there will be smooth transition of leadership from within the ranks. Regardless, there is assumption that there will be change of leadership and that is creating unease for the stakeholders. The sad part is, the people of Ethiopia will not have a say in this transition. The US is key stakeholder and, the glaring question is what the role of the US going to be is?

Thence, the question is what does the US know about Meles’s whereabouts and condition? Is it possible for the US not to know what is going on with Meles? The answer, the US knows exactly what is going on with Meles! And that automatically leads to the question, what is the US doing?

Obviously, the embassy in Addis is working overtime as it tries to do many things at once. The key is to act behind the scene, to give appearance that this is Ethiopian led process.

Firstly, the key is to maintain stability. For the US, Ethiopia is the most important country in the region, if not Africa. Ethiopia works as a lynchpin to US agendas in the region interlinked to US’s South Sudan and Sudan agenda; linked with US Somalia agenda and US agendas related to the region. Ethiopia’s role in forwarding US interest vis-à-vis the region is indispensable militarily and politically playing a pivotal role in forwarding US agendas in the region.

Secondly, to ensure US agendas, there needs to be smooth transition. Contrary to public rhetoric about democracy and transparency, the US puts US interests above all. Therefore, there will be a hidden struggle to ensure a transition that satisfies US interests.

In the meantime, the US needs to quite things down, identify a viable candidate, groom him or her, ensure a consensus amongst the key actors and, place him or her in Menelik Palace. Once that is in place, sell the leader to the people of Ethiopia and the international community.

Regardless of what the people of Ethiopia think about the TPLF/EPRDF’s succession process or lack thereof, nothing works without the blessing of the US Embassy in Addis. That is what those interested need to understand. The question is, how successful will the US be in this patchwork.

After decades of selling the international community how important Meles Zenawi is to the stability of Ethiopia and the region; placing him in positions of international influence and exposure; after providing the financial means and political cover and after over two decades of enabling tyranny, the US and its allies do not have a succession plan on place. In short, they gambled everything on Meles at the expense of the people of Ethiopia, the region and certainly America’s long-term interest. The crimes, the genocides all over Ethiopia and Somalia and criminal violations of international laws Meles Zenawi committed are collateral damages in the eyes of Western nations that funded the atrocities.

The reality is, instability looms large and US interest in the region is with Meles in Belgium in critical condition. The ill-conceived agenda ignored the people and the region placing more importance on one individual and that is proving costly.

**Noting the obvious**

Meles Zenawi is or was the nemesis, scourge and curse of the region. The damages he has done to Ethiopia and the region is long term. Ethiopia finds itself in precarious place where no one knows the trigger to the undercurrent that will shake the core of the nation for good. This will go down in history as one of the greatest unpunished crimes against humanity.

Yet, his departure brings new opportunities for the people of Ethiopia and the region. That takes understanding of the opportunities and willingness to rewrite history by creating a spirit of collaboration and working for the common good of the people of the region.

Like many in the region, I have been following the developments related to the health and life of tyrant Meles Zenawi keenly. I read many articles, listened to news accounts and interviews related to the matter. Surprisingly, the views are consistent that the majority’s desire to see the tyrant’s days finished. My motivation to write this piece was heightened after I read an article with the header, “Post-Meles Possible Scenarios.”

 After describing how different post Meles scenarios can unfold, after knocking and elevating the issues, countries and personalities in accordance with his views the article concluded with the following,

“Lastly, the direct intervention and real pressure of Western powers can have a serious impact in the direction of facilitating the creation of a government representative of all contending forces. Their pressure can thwart the scenario of military coup or of a refurbishing rule of the TPLF; it can even prevent the start of a popular uprising. The two basic conditions for Western pressure to be effective are: (1) Western powers themselves must show a united front and act as honest brokers; (2) the opposition must speak with one voice and credibly argue in favor of a transitional inclusive government. This last possibility is by far the best course, for it alone promises a peaceful transition.” Emphasis mine.

I found the above statement repulsive. Obviously, the author is vying for a position in a western-brokered process essentially, the continuation of the status-quo. Otherwise, he will know Western powers do not need his invitation, they are there invitation or not.

The end of Meles’s regime is precisely the opportunity that the people of Ethiopia and the region need to expose the negative role the West plays at the expense of the region. The West had ample time and opportunity to foster inclusive and, just process that encourages cooperation in Ethiopia and amongst the people of the region. Instead, they sent President Jimmy Carter to bless a fraudulent election. It is also telling when Ambassador Shinn “would be willing to bet very good money that he [Meles] has been planning” for his succession is not saying much about a transparent process. The ambassador is betting on his people’s ability per se.

**Conclusion**

The demise of the criminal regime is here. However, it does not mean that it will be easy to scrap-clean the grime that it will leave behind. Above all, however, it is an opportunity to bring peace, cooperation and prosperity for the people of the region by trusting each other to bring indigenous solutions to our issues rather than believing strangers that foment hate. It is time to collectively lead and bring, to the process, those who are partners rather than masters that exploit. It is possible to come together as people of the region and make our voices heard collectively in the quest of bringing peace and solutions for our people that have endured untold suffering for decades. We have to believe on us and each other to bring humanity back to us. That is the only choice left and it is about time. The alternative should not be entertained.

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