**Horn of Africa Activism and US Presidential Election Politics**

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US presidential and congressional elections are of great importance to every American’s life, way of life, belief system and values. US elections affect legal, ethical, social and the economic fabrics of the nation in many ways. It is American affair with implication to every American.

Elections have also been important to the world because, US elected representatives   are interwoven to US’s international relations through the committees they serve be it foreign relations, international aid, the military, international trade etc… These important committees touch many aspects of the lives of people around the globe.

For decades, Americans of differing ethnic and national backgrounds have understood the importance of US elections, and participated in the process rather effectively. We can learn from many such examples like the Irish Americans, Jewish Americans and Cuban Americans. These are important constituencies that politicians would not dare cross simply because the consequences are dire for their election prospects. The Cuban American community in Florida is a great example.

The US has been involved in the Horn of Africa for decades deeply affecting the lives of everyone in the region. However, the people of the Horn of Africa failed to have a collective voice even when the impacts of US policies have been the same to all. That in large part is due to the divisions that exist amongst them. That division has not served them well in furthering their interests; to the contrary, it opened opportunities for those that affected the region negatively.

The people from the Horn have been divided politically, ethnically, regionally, religiously and along other faultiness for decades. They have historically focused on areas that divide them rather than the areas that unite them. As a result, anyone that wants to exploit the region perpetuated a divide and rule strategy unchallenged.

The US has been a key player in the Horn of Africa since WWII. Over the last two decades, the US has taken lead and prominent role in pursuit of its agendas in the region. The US pursues its agendas with unreserved persistence applying every resource available to the detriment of the people in the region. While, lack of vision, leadership and entrenched division denied people from the Horn a collective voice that can put the fear of God in the hearts of US policymakers.

In a way, the Diaspora has harmed the peoples in the region more by taking individual approaches when it regards to solving their issues through the White House and US congressional offices. Intellectuals and opinion makers from the region have contributed to the continuation of the status quo by focusing on small issues based on agendas that could satisfy some self-interest by lending views as if representing the collective view misleading many. Most damaging however, are incendiary comments that pin the communities against each other.

The above is accurate and simplistic depiction of how the people of the Horn acted against each other at the expense of the people of the Horn for decades. No one is immune from these responsibilities. We all share the blame equally. Ethiopians, Somalis, Eritreans, and Sudanese etc… are, or have been at odds against each other in one form or another for decades. They are unable to work together or focus on issues of common interest.

It is time for change, time to understand our common interests and most importantly, it is time to demand respect and earn that respect. How do we do that? How can we earn respect?

We can earn respect only when we present a united voice. We can earn respect when we understand the power of our collective voice. We can earn respect when we understand how to use our collective voice. We can earn respect when we believe on each other and trust that we can solve our issues by ourselves. Absent of these understandings, we will always be held hostages to our shortcomings. And that will be doing disservice to the poor people of the Horn that desperately need our voices.

**Election 2012 and its Opportunities**

More than any time in the history of people from the region, there exists a window of opportunity for them to make a difference through the ballot box, provided, they understand how to approach it.  The question is what exactly is the better outcome and why. Secondly, who is the better candidate and why. Of course, when we ask these questions we are not talking about their domestic policies. We are talking about the policies that affect the people of the region, their foreign policies. The question then becomes who is better for the region. The answer is, as far as I am concerned, it does not make an iota of a difference. And if is not going to make a difference, why waste time voting?

**The key**

According to Rasmussen Reports presidential poll,

“Virginia remains a nail-biter in the first post-debate survey of the key battleground state, with

Mitt Romney edging slightly ahead. The latest Rasmussen Reports telephone survey of Likely Virginia Voters, taken last night, shows Romney earning 49% support to Obama’s 48%. Three percent (3%) remain undecided.”

This means few votes will determine the outcome of the 2012 election. In this type of a competition why throw away a vote? I recently read an article by a scholar from the region that said,

“Did I enthusiastically support presidential candidate Barack Obama in 2008? Absolutely! Do I agree with everything he has done over the past four years as president? No! Has he carried out all of the promises he made in 2008? No! Am I disappointed in President Obama in 2012? Yes! But so are millions of Americans who supported him in 2008. So are tens of millions of other people throughout the world who saw his election as history making and wished him well.”

The author then proceeded to endorse Obama in a way that implied, better the devil you know… And that is precisely what the Democratic camp has been trying to sell, fear. Instead of running on their record, they want to sell fear of what Romney will and can do if elected. I recently run to one Democratic campaign manager and, after I expressed concerns about the Obama administration, he told me, “Do you think Romney is going to do any better?” I then told him that he cannot sell fear, and that we need to hear his programs to decide.

The question, why vote and for whom? When we vote, are we voting for change or continuity? Are we voting for some fulfillment? Did President Obama bring the change we expected and hoped for, and if reelected, will he undo the wrongs and the mistakes he made?

There is one certainty here; if reelected, President Obama will not be running for office again. Hence, he will be under no obligation to fulfill any promise. Therefore, the devils you know argument is nullified by the saying fool me once… President Obama was voted into office with a sultry voice that sold hope and change that he miserably failed to deliver.

The question, whether it is for Obama or Romney, what is the best reason to vote? This is when we have to throw the traditional thinking out of the window, get bold, become creative, and voice our interests through the ballot boxes.

The election of President Obama has made it clear that it doesn’t matter what one intends to achieve through the ballot box regarding the Horn of Africa. Because, US policies are on blinders designed to go on one direction. To expect it to change on its own is to expect a different outcome by doing the same thing repeatedly, which is impossible. That being the case, it is time to think differently in order to “begin” to make a dent in the electoral process. In order to do so, we have to be clear of what we want to achieve through the ballot box i.e.

Recognition: in order to get recognition we have to be identified as a voting bloc. And in order to be identified as a voting bloc we need to accept and embrace our communities and identify community leaders that can express collective view.

Respect: in order to earn respect through the electoral process any group or community needs to place fear of God to the hearts of the parties and political candidates seeking offices. To achieve that, we need to make a statement in consensus. It is only then that they can start to think twice before they do something outlandish.

Statement: more than any other, this election cycle offers unique opportunity to make a statement of presence. The state of Virginia offers a unique opportunity to make that very statement.  As indicated above, the poll numbers in Virginia are very close. What statement can the people from the Horn make in Virginia?

**Conclusion**

To vote for President Obama and reelect him is to reward bad behavior. I believe it is critical for Virginian’s from the region to vote for Romney. In the past, we gave our votes overwhelmingly to President Obama and the Democratic Party.  And most people voted according to their personal feelings and views. That is exactly what the Obama reelection campaign would want. I do not believe they want the Eritrean, Ethiopian, the Somali and other communities from the region to vote as groups. It is not in their interests to do so because they have seriously mismanaged the affairs of the region and disrespected the people’s cultures and customs as evidenced by the brazen arrogance Ambassador Susan Rice displayed during the funeral services of Meles Zenawi.

Hence, to quote the famed author F.Scott Fitzgerald,

”What we must decide is perhaps how we are valuable, rather than how valuable we are."

How many votes do the people of the region have in Northern Virginia alone? When the collective numbers of the votes are counted, rest assured, it is enough to determine the election in Virginia. Therefore, if the purpose of participating in the election through the ballot box is to make a statement and send a clear message to the parties and candidates, it will be foolish to vote for and reelect President Obama.

It is certain that the Obama Administration “will not” change its policies regardless whether we voted for him or not. However, by electing Romney we can send the message and make the statement that we want future candidates to know, loud and clear. The whole world will know that there is a new voting bloc. It is only then that we are respected and feared. It is then when we are not undermined.

This is a great opportunity for us to start earning recognition, respect, and hopefully that will result in policies that favor the greater majority rather than handful that rule at the expense of the people by dividing, killing and exploiting them. This is the time to decide, “How we are valuable.”

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