

Solution for Ethiopian Crisis

by Imru Zelleke

24 August 2007

The main tenets of United States policy for Ethiopia have been:

- Fight against terrorist penetration in the Horn of Africa.
- Political stability and democratization in Ethiopia and the Horn area.
- Humanitarian aid, development assistance and good governance.
- Avoid getting involved in the quagmire of local ethnic and factional politics to insure the success of the above objectives.

The rejection of the EPRDF regime by a very large majority of the people of Ethiopia, if not by all, is clear and does not leave room for any doubt. Popular protests, which the regime counters with extreme violence, indiscriminate killings and mass detention, have become a daily occurrence. Extensive efforts exerted by the US and EU countries to mediate some peaceful solutions have failed, because of the extremely negative response of the regime, that wants to stay in power at all costs, even the cancellation of some vital aid programs. Moreover, the United States unqualified support of the regime because of its alleged anti-terrorist alliance, has further bolstered its uncompromising position. Donor countries and International Institutions treats to stop development aid were in the process of stopping all development aid unless of democratic reforms and respect for human rights, have been reversed and aid has continued to be given, even at a larger scale. In return to their pressure the regime seems to give more attention to developmental problems than hitherto.

According to Meles, Ethiopia can do without foreign assistance to further her development. An absurd assumption, considering the country's extreme conditions of poverty and all-around underdevelopment, and its dependency on the huge amounts of foreign aid it receives, including substantial budgetary subsidies. This kind of vain statement attests that Meles's commitment to democracy is sham, and contingent to the survival of his regime and its nefarious practices. Fearful of the donor countries growing apprehension over the failings of his regime, Meles has been playing the China card, and possibly that of Iran, Cuba, Venezuela and other anti US regimes. In partnership with EPRDF corporations China is already becoming the dominating power over the Ethiopian economy and eventually politics, as in the Sudan. China will likely pick up the tab of any donors aid to Ethiopia that will be cancelled, like the 375 millions dollars budgetary supplement. Whatever the case, the priority for the regime is not the welfare of the people but its own survival.

After an initial Pyrrhic Victory the anti-terrorist military campaign that the regime has undertaken in Somalia in conjunction with the United States, is now bogged down, and the warfare is extending into Ethiopia proper. In spite of their boastful treats to carry a jihad, the Islamists in Mogadishu were not a real treat to Ethiopia. The real Islamists treat was already within Ethiopia, where with the deliberate sponsorship of the regime Saudi supported Wahabists, Iranian and other Islam extremists have had a free hand for the past sixteen years.

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As soon as the EPRDF came to power in 1991, the first diplomatic measure they took was to close some embassies as in Greece, and establish diplomatic relations with Iran, Syria and Iraq. Since that time these militant Islamic groups have had free hand all around Ethiopia. The Wahabist from Saudi Arabia were taking thousands of Ethiopian Muslims for so called work to Saudi Arabia and various Arab countries. Some, especially women were employed as domestics servants, many of the men were indoctrinated and sent back to Ethiopia. It is rumored that they have trained some sixty thousand, probably much more, Indifatta fighters. In Addis Ababa where there were a dozen Mosques, there are 134 today. Similarly, hundred others have been built around the country.

Christians and Muslims have lived in peace and harmony for over thirteen centuries. The last serious religious conflict did occur in the 16th century during the invasion of Mohamed Gagn. It is only after the EPRDF came to power that a possibility of religious conflict between Christians and Muslims has emerged. Serious and very cruel attacks and murders have been made against Christians in recent years in various parts of the country as early as this year in Jimma. Moreover the new intervention of the Meles regime into Somali affairs is likely to exacerbate the potential danger of a religious confrontation. Let's not forget that over thirty percent of the Ethiopian population is of Muslim faith, and the vast majority of them do not share these radical views and have not given-up their historical national identity and traditions.

Thus, day by day the instability of the country has increased, thereby endangering conditions of the whole area of the Horn. Despite of an infusion of 21 billion US dollars in aid, during the past thirteen years, social and economic development has not improved significantly the dire poverty of the country. As observed by the riots occurring all around the country, intense discontent and frustration is plainly visible amongst both the urban and rural population. Evidence of armed rebellion has begun in various parts of the country. During last year the desertion to Eritrea of a battalion of the Armed Forces led by a Brigadier General and some officers, and statements made these officers that there is a growing discontent in the army caused by ethnic discriminations, is symptomatic of the diminishing loyalty of the armed forces to the regime. As these defections will undoubtedly continue, the reliability of the defense and security capability of the regime is becoming precarious.

In view of the above it is evident that the US must make a serious revision of the policies followed hereto, and adopt a radical and pragmatic approach to the problem. The assumption that peace and stability can be maintained by terrorizing a whole nation of seventy-seven million people, by few military contingents, whose loyalty to the regime is precarious, is unrealistic and doomed to fail. Neither, the injection of huge amount of financial and humanitarian aid will quell the deeply set animosity to the regime, whose violent, corrupt and incompetent governance has provoked. Sustaining and imposing an unpopular regime against its own population will not work, nor will it stop its eventual demise.

Therefore, I would like to suggest the following steps to be taken, both by the US and the opposition elements, in order to find a viable solution to the Ethiopian crisis.

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The United States

In order to have the required credibility and acceptability by all concerned, this must be primarily a US initiative with its full endorsement. EU countries and other donors will undoubtedly follow suit.

The US must seek an alternative to the EPRDF regime and support overtly the opposition as it has done in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries.

It must insist on the liberation of all political prisoners and the freedom and resumption of all political activities, freedom of expression of assembly, full access to mass media and freedom of all newspapers and magazines, release of all restrictions on legitimate civic organizations.

It must help to organize an ad-hoc government representative of the various political factions and civic organizations in and out of the country.

The regular Defense Forces of Ethiopia and the Civilian Police must be guaranteed their status by both the US and the opposition parties. Militias and cadre must be disbanded and criminal elements prosecuted.

Human rights and the Rule of Law must be enforced vigorously with a restructuring of the judicial system and the election board.

New elections should be held within one year. In the mean time joint commissions should be established pro-tempore to manage major government departments and act as caretaker administration.

In order to achieve the above the US must adopt appropriate measures, including the resources of the substantial and influential Ethiopian community in the US and abroad.

The Opposition

a. The opposition parties must agree with the above conditions and concur actively to establish an all inclusive National Provisional Council.

b. It must guarantee emphatically the establishment of Plural Democratic System of Government, the respect of Human Rights, the Rule of Law and a market economic system conducive to rapid development. For instance the adoption of Bill of Rights as suggested in the Citizens Charter presented by a civic group concerned about the future of the country.

c. It must guarantee to fight against and struggle any terrorist activity in Ethiopian national territory and abroad.

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- d. It will cooperate fully and transparently with the US and other countries to achieve this end.
- e. It will respect all international obligations and seek peaceful solutions to all outstanding problems.
- f. It will seek national reconciliation and refrain from any vengeful acts against anyone, and will prosecute criminal cases with proper judicial process and transparency.

Consequences

Politically this new policy will be a big plus for the US initiative to promote democratization in Africa, which has momentarily faltered in Ethiopia, Uganda, Egypt, the Sudan and Nigerian, and given lieu to suspicion and incredulity. A freely elected democratic government is likely to conduct an effective campaign against terrorism than an unpopular dictatorial regime.

There is no material or financial cost involved. Hopefully there will not be any reductions in aid granted to the country, but probably for an in-depth revision of projects and their implementation.

The ultimate result of the new policy will be the permanent stability of Ethiopia and the area of the Horn of Africa, a promising future for the people as whole and a lasting friendship and respect for the United States.

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