

The Scramble for Ethiopia

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(Some parts of this article are excerpts from my autobiography which will be published in the first week of July of this year.)

The politics and security of the Horn of Africa has never been so complex. The Horn of Africa is said to be the most complex security zone in the world with Djibouti hosting military bases of France, China, Britain, Spain (a small contingency), Italy (Air Task force) Saudi Arabia. The Navies of India and Russia are conducting passage exercises in the Indian ocean with a possible partnership to establish permanent base. UAE has a military base in Eritrea. Saudi Arabia and its rival Turkey both have their biggest military bases in Somalia.

The US has a military base in Uganda, which is politically part of the greater horn because it is the source of the White Nile. This is a camp operated by US Navy Region in Europe. The US has also a military base in Kenya, Mombasa (expeditionary Sea Base USS Hershel Woody Williams since Feb 2021) Turkey has a base in Somalia and Russia in Central African Republic (CAR) which is only South of South Sudan, therefore part of the complex of the Greater Horn. Russia had struck a deal to establish a naval base in Sudan in 2020 but was torpedoed by great pressure from the USA after the recent change in Sudan. The already complex situation in the Horn has been made incomprehensively more complex by the news of the escalating internal conflict coming out of Ethiopia which involved forces from neighbouring country, Eritrea. These activities herald a new era for **the Scramble for Ethiopia**. The internationalization of the conflicts within Ethiopia and the threat it poses to the region as a whole can easily make it a hot bed of tension and an arena for proxy war.

Turkey and Iran which are ardent enemies of Egypt are getting closer to forming an alliance with Ethiopia. The recent correspondence between Russian and Ethiopian head of states is not a coincidence. It is all part of the calculation for the Scramble for Ethiopia. Egypt has been extremely successful in maintaining stronger relationship with both Sudan's. South Sudan has a very cold relationship with Ethiopia while North Sudan has openly demonstrated its hostility to the government of Ethiopia. So is Kenya, because of the harassment of Oromo extremists along its borders with Ethiopia. Kenya is not in good terms with Somalia's government and just resumed diplomatic ties last month. Somalia's government has accused Kenya of meddling in its internal affairs in the Juba land where Kenya has troops fighting al-Shabab extremist groups. Other issues that have caused tensions have been Kenya's relationship with Somalia's breakaway territory Somaliland and also the dispute over the waters of the coastline they share. Kenya worries about its

relationship with Ethiopia. Most recently it signed a defense agreement with Egypt. This sends, once again, another message to the Ethiopian government.

The relationship between Ethiopian regime and PM Formajoo of Somalia is not based on principles. The Ogaden National Liberation Front's (ONLF) as it succeeded what was then known as the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) declared independence as its objective with the intention of forming the Greater Somalia but that has not changed since it became part of the government of Ethiopia. This policy remains to be tacitly supported by successive Somali governments, though for strategic reasons they do not openly contest their claim over the Ogaden. With a weak Ethiopia and with the support of al Sahabab this could be a huge threat to the integrity of the nation.

Djibouti is not in good terms with Abiy either, particularly since Abiy started flirting with Eritrea. It is to be known that there was a brief conflict between Djibouti and Eritrea over boundary issues. That issue has not yet been resolved. Djibouti has started flexing its muscles and is giving signals that Djibouti can survive without the agricultural imports from Ethiopia and the railway system between the two countries and without the revenues it collects for use of its port by Ethiopia, its only outlet to the sea. With so many military bases, the Djibouti port has become one of the busiest in the region. Egypt sent delegations to Djibouti to explore the possibility of a much closer relationship and recently started flying cargo aircraft to Djibouti. It is certain that Egypt's sudden interest in Djibouti, as is with South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and Eritrea, has something to do with Ethiopia's status as a failing and belligerent state which has refused to give up its position on the GERD. The war the Ethiopian government unleashed on Tigray region has been used by Egypt and Sudan as a means to create pressure. It is no secret that Egypt and Sudan have been arming and organizing the Tigray rebel troops from their bases inside Sudan. Isolating Ethiopia from both its traditional western allies and from all its neighboring countries seems to be working for now.

With this very fragile political situation in Ethiopia a new geo political and security paradigm began to emerge in the region. Though it is difficult to precisely define the alignment of forces it is basically the Gulf Alliance: UAE, Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and to a certain extent Qatar which has recently rejoined the alliance and Russia Turkey and Iran on the other side, both groups trying to have an influence in the countries of the Horn. Eritrea belongs to the Gulf Alliance and supported the war waged on Yemen. Eritrea and Egypt have established a very close relationship and Egypt has eyed on the Nora island seeking to establish a military base in the Red Sea. When the president of Eritrea visited the GERD Egypt was worried that it was losing Eritrea. Eritrea neither supported nor opposed the Arab league resolution condemning the Ethiopian plan on the GERD.

The warm relationship between Isaias and Abiy is bound to expire soon because their only common interest is the elimination of the TPLF and Eritrea's determination to resolve the border issue by securing full ownership of Badme region which had been the cause of a bitter war between the two countries from May 1998 to June 2000. Eritrea does not wish instability or civil war in Ethiopia because the consequences of this will certainly affect Eritrea in more than one way. Eritrea wishes the installment of a government that is friendly and goes in line with Eritrea's interest. Eritrea's emphasis since independence has been to establish a national identity. In that it has become successful. Abiy's policy is completely contrary to that. Abiy has no intention of dismantling a policy that he inherited and seems to be inextricably and passionately tied to the current ethno-centric political system which can only be compared to the defunct apartheid system in South Africa, with his party Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) under the guise of Prosperity Party as the dominant party, like the whites during the apartheid era in South Africa. The policies of the two governments are fundamentally at odds with each other. One is trying to strengthen its national identity while the other is working hard to destroy an age old identity. They are incompatible and cannot coexist.

In this messy situation the role of Europe and America is crucial. Ethiopia is the second most populated country in Africa in a very strategic location. It is the largest recipient of US Aid and one of the largest and favored client of IMF and World Bank. America nor Europe have any wish for a civil war in Ethiopia nor do they wish the partition of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is not Yugoslavia of six distinct republics which had defined borders. Yugoslavia was known as the federal republic of Yugoslavia until 1991. Yugoslavia was created after World War one in 1918 by the merger of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia which were part of the Austro Hungarian Empire. It was a kingdom recognized in 1922. Democratic federal Yugoslavia was only formed after second world war in 1943. The six republics in 1963 made up Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1963. Its case cannot be compared with Yugoslavia.

Ethiopia was always one. It has never been anything else in contemporary world history. When Yugoslavia broke up, though it was bloody, people were exercising their divorce of the patchwork that was created by the victors of world war one and later world war two. The boundaries were clear and they had not integrated to form one Yugoslavian identity. Following the fall of Soviet communism each of the republics held multi party elections in 1990 which gradually led to separation with the dominant powers, the Serbs, refusing to let the republics leave the federation.

Unlike Yugoslavia, the dismemberment of Ethiopia is impossible and any attempt would lead to an everlasting war amongst the various ethnic groups and result in the migration of millions and the death of more and result in the largest humanitarian crisis this world has ever seen. Ethiopia has never been anything else

but Ethiopia over its history spanning 3000 years. Any attempt to do so will affect the stability of each of the neighboring countries, invite proxy war and the rise of extremist movements. From that point, there will be no peace in the Greater Horn. The Red Sea passage will be under siege, war lords will mushroom across the region and any weapon will be used as the trafficking or arms thrives and the Mediterranean once again becomes engulfed by migrants from Ethiopia and from every country that will be affected. It would not be to the interest of any country except the arms smugglers and manufacturers, human traffickers criminal gangs and extremists and extremists like al-Shabab and ISIS . This is a nightmare scenario which America and Europe should certainly try to avoid. In this messy situation the position that America and Europe take is crucial.

The rationale given by the statement coming out from the American Senate, White House and State Department, dismisses the gross human rights violations that has been going on in Ethiopia under the TPLF (EPRDF) leadership and most recently in a more shocking systematic way, since the current PM took over, three years ago. The US has consistently played down the human rights violations and been on the side of TPLF for 27 years either because of sheer ignorance, indifference or misguided policy to have a weak Ethiopia in constant turmoil. Responsible governments in Africa Europe and America should focus more on negotiations with foreign and regional stake holders and separately with the various factions within Ethiopia and find a way forward through a transitional government that could lead to a democratically elected government under a new constitution drafted and approved by the people.

These can happen only if Ethiopians allow it to happen. Why not blame themselves for not being able to be united, for not making the best and most sincere efforts to choose the right leaders, for not shouting for help from AU and the international community instead of shouting at each other, for not contributing critical articles or make public addresses, because of fear of being insulted by rogue elements , for not contributing enough to organize a strong opposition and generally for not being bold enough to impose change on the leadership instead of being timid spectators of an unfolding tragedy. Why leave these essential efforts to only a few who are sacrificing a lot?

It is easier to fault the West and other countries instead of looking inwards and do what needs to be done to create a united people. Amharas have always been the excuses both by the TPLF and the Oromos for such a united country. Yes Amharas have always been for one Ethiopia belonging to all equally, and opposed to ethnocentric political system and the hegemony of one ethnic group. But Amharas are not working towards the establishment of an Amhara led government. Amharas are willing to be led by Oromo presidents, ministers, Prime Ministers, generals, so long as they have allegiance to the integrity of Ethiopia and implement policies of equal access to opportunities and rights that allow peaceful coexistence

and free movement of people without the imposition of the most backward and weird ethnocentric political system in the world that it has today?

Without even having to go back to earlier history, I have in my own life time either met and worked under extremely fine capable Oromo leaders like general Teferi Banti who was the head of state for a brief period of time during the ' dergue', Major General Abebe Gemedo the first commander of the Northern Front, Major General Demissie Bultu and Major General Merid Negussie, one of the most intelligent, visionary and respected leaders in Ethiopia's military history, B. General Lemessa Bedane the veteran commander who commanded troops and police forces both in the North and the Eastern Front, a distinguished officer, loved respected by any who have worked with him and under him, Honorable Major General Jagema Kello, who was one of the founders of the modern Ethiopian armed forces. If we go a little further back, Ras Abebe Aregay is one of the legendary Oromo patriots and first minister of defense after liberation from the attempted Italian colonialism. Ato Yilma Deressa, the minister of Finance under His majesty and a veteran who upon graduation from Oxford flew back to Ethiopia to join the resistance (Black Lions) is also author of the history of the Oromos. I can go on counting hundreds of Oromo leaders in our history who have made a difference in the destiny of Ethiopia and the well being and unity of its people. We never judged them as Oromos. We and history judges them as Ethiopians first. The Oromo people can choose better leaders than what Ethiopia has now, leaders with vision and leaders who can unite not divide the people, leaders who have the wisdom and the selflessness that has characterized many of the previous leaders in many fields.

Soon there will be another fake election in Ethiopia. Every Ethiopian knows that it is going to be fake. The results have already been determined. Ethiopia deserves better leaders, new leaders—wise men and women who will acknowledge when policies are failing, and re-evaluate and re-adjust accordingly. Policies based on ethnicity and the right of homelands to secede are a disaster and should have been rejected long ago. Now it is clear what they have brought about. Ethiopian policies have evolved from ethnic rivalry to crimes against humanity, a policy of ethnic cleansing of non-Oromos, and a publicly declared genocide to exterminate the Christian Orthodox Church and the Amhara ethnic group.

In my work in Africa I have seen atrocities of all kinds that have been inflicted upon innocent victims, not for what they have done but for who they are, what they look like, and who they are associated with. Coming from Ethiopia where culture and religious practices have played important roles in restraining people from this kind of extreme brutality I had always imagined that this sort of crime could not take place in modern-day Ethiopia. But after speaking to so many killers in so many parts of Africa I realized we are all made of the same flesh and bone and souls, that we *all* have the same propensity to be manipulated to become killers who feel that they are justified in killing, that they alone have the right to own the earth and

deserve to live in it. Yes, then I was worried for my country Ethiopia, where ethnic hostilities had flared up as a result of the misguided ethnic-based federal arrangement and a political system that pitched one ethnic group against the other.

Even so, I still never expected it would come to the level we are seeing in Ethiopia today. It is now clear that Ethiopia could sink into a Rwanda-type genocide unless urgent steps are taken. The government of PM Abiy is not willing or is incapable of stopping this escalating feud against the Amharas, the Orthodox Church, and those associated with them. When the TPLF came to power it publicly declared that its primary targets were the Amharas and the Orthodox Church with followers of over 60 million in Ethiopia alone. During the 27-year reign of the TPLF its actions against the Church were subtle and calculated, but the crimes taking place since PM Abiy took over have bordered on the Nazi system of extermination, with the perpetrators making no attempt to hide their arrogance or contempt for their victims.

People are flocking to churches and mosques to pray for peace, they have never experienced such overflowing crowds begging God to give the leaders the wisdom to stop this carnage. That answer has not come yet. The prime minister's party, the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), has committed the most despicable acts of terror, genocide, and crimes against humanity in ways that I have not seen in any other conflict in Africa including Rwanda. Rwanda and Liberia exceeded Ethiopia in the numbers of people killed, but what is happening in Ethiopia is unprecedented in the type of atrocities that have been committed in attempting to eliminate, displace, torture, and punish people for who they are.

Since PM Abiy took over three years ago, horrifying stories have come to light: pictures and videos of someone crucified upside down in public, lynching with cheering crowds, butchering people into pieces, dragging helpless men and women tied behind a moving car, burning children alive in their schoolrooms, slaughtering people like animals, spearing women's breasts, cutting off male organs and showing them in public as trophies, burning churches, identifying Christians by the symbol of the cross tattooed on their head or body and murdering them—how did it come to this? How can these unimaginable crimes be happening in Ethiopia? But they are happening, and in full view of the police and military forces. Listening to these stories from dozens and sometimes hundreds of people has become routine in Ethiopia. Thousands have been chased from the property they have lived on for centuries, their houses destroyed and burnt. With nowhere to go they end up living in church compounds, crowded in with others who have been burnt out. Today Ethiopia has the largest number of internally displaced people in Africa and once again the largest number of political prisoners. This all happened since the emergence of PM Abiy. It's a stark contrast from what he promised the people.

In all this time PM Abiy has never expressed his condolences to the families of victims massacred nor did he try to help those displaced or even visit them except one time in the town of Metekel in Benishangul Region. He went and addressed the crowd then left the place quickly. A day later over one hundred Amharas were

brutally killed. It seemed that his visit helped encourage the massacre rather than stopping it. It has given the impression that this was a deliberate action supported and planned by his party. Of course, since it is not happening in Addis people in the capital are not fully aware of the magnitude of the problem, since the government controls most of the media outlets. It is usually the media stationed outside the country that reveal the extent of the crimes occurring in Ethiopia.

On September 27, 2020 *Meskel*, the Day of the Cross, one of the holiest days for the Ethiopian Christian Church, he addressed the nation and preached with the usual passion of love and peace and what the cross meant to all of us. Even the Patriarch of the Church did not give as good a speech as he did. He mesmerized the people but there was a complete absence of empathy for those victims kidnapped tortured, killed, displaced, and harassed. Many of those who had not yet formed an opinion on who this man is, now adored him, but others wondered at his performance, at his indifference and at his skill in trying to divert the most important issues of the nation and focus on himself and a false vision of a united Ethiopia which in reality is in the process of breaking up.

This is a man who is entirely focused on himself. He has no time to think about the people, even the victims of the most heinous crimes in Ethiopian history. A few days earlier 160 people were murdered in Metekel and their corpses were bulldozed into a mass grave. One hundred sixty thousand were displaced. Two days after his speech seven Amharas were murdered and buried in a mass grave in Welega Region by Oromo extremists. These continuing mass murders and atrocities were not committed because the victims belong to opposition groups but because they were ethnic Amharas Christians mostly, but also Muslims.

There is abundant evidence to show that these crimes were premeditated and that the victims were systematically selected and targeted because of their ethnic origin and religious affiliations and yet the prime minister has never acknowledged this genocide. He has never expressed condolences to the families who lost loved ones. In the same week that hundreds were murdered, and thousands displaced he sent condolences to the victims affected by the explosion of a building in Beirut, then he invited Ethiopians to look at the renovations he has made to the palace! While his pet project was well publicized the massacres were never explained to the people of Ethiopia by the government media.

In all these cases government and regional troops arrive after the fact and shut down the news. The same thing has occurred in the recent action in Tigray against the TPLF. They forbid people from even knowing the numbers killed or identifying them or giving them decent burials. The truth is just being revealed and the sense of insecurity and hysteria of the rural population in Oromia regions where Amharas live, and in Tigray region is growing to a fever pitch. Their cry for justice, for help, for shelters, for protection has been falling on deaf ears. The excesses and atrocities committed in Tigray have now been internationally affirmed and condemned. It has been acknowledged by the Prime Minister himself. But there has been no action from

him except calling it “a conflict” and sending teams to investigate! There has been several such declared investigations of murders, assassinations, kidnappings, genocide, crimes against humanity and acts of terror, but the findings have not been told. Many believe that the stated investigations were all designed for propaganda purposes. The incidents become stories for a few days until other horrifying crimes are committed. Does this look like someone who is in the real world leading a poor country of over 100 million people on the brink of disintegration? What is happening in Ethiopia is a deliberate refusal to feel any sentiment for human life, any sense of its *sanctity*. This rejection of compassion, the core of our humanity, is something that has become a central moral, legal, and political phenomenon of our century.

We must remember the words to the League of Nations of our own Emperor Haile Selassie who was a just and compassionate leader compared to those that have come after him and to all African leaders of his time: “Throughout history it has been the inaction of those who could have acted; the indifference of those who should have known better; the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most; that has made it possible for evil to triumph.”

This Prime Minister must quit and give way to an orderly transition assisted by the Africa Union and the international community to prevent unprecedented disaster in the region and beyond.

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