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ETHIOPIA: THE STATE OF TERROR AND WAR IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to your 2007 festival to provide my analysis on the possibility of bringing peace and stability to the troubled Horn of Africa. I have no doubt that your nation, Eritrea, as it has become a revolutionary model for the colonized nations in the Ethiopian Empire, can play a central role in bringing peace, democracy, and stability by strategically allying with Oromia and other colonized nations in this region.

My discussion focuses on two central issues. First, I will demonstrate how global connections, war, and terrorism have been used as the main political tools in creating and maintaining the Abyssinian/Ethiopian state. Second, I will assert how there cannot be peace, democracy, stability, and development in the Horn of Africa without removing the Tigrayan-led minority Ethiopian government that intensifies terrorism, external dependency, and war in the Horn of Africa.

Background

For the last five centuries, conflicts and wars have been well recorded in the Horn of Africa. Because of religious and economic connections, these conflicts and wars have had international dimensions.[1] Successive regional and global powers have dominated this region. Both the Arabs and the Ottoman Empire dominated the commercial activities of the Horn until European imperialism expanded to the region in the second half of the 19th century. With the Turko-Egyptian forced withdrawal from the Horn, European imperialism became more active, and the three western powers, namely, Britain, France, and Italy became involved in the region.

Between 1839 and 1840, France began to show interest in the Horn of Africa. During the same period, Britain established its agent on the Arabian side of the Red Sea. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 directly linked the Mediterranean and Red Seas and further intensified the commercial and political activities and colonization of this part of Africa. Italy also began to play an increasingly important role after 1879 both in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean coasts. Britain secured a dominant position on both sides of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. France and Britain curved their colonial territories in the Horn of Africa. Italy occupied Assab in 1869 and Massawa in 1885 and gradually curved its Eritrean colony.

The partition of the Horn, the alliance between the European imperialists and the Ethiopian colonialists, the creation of the Ethiopian Empire, and the colonization of Oromia went hand in hand. With the help of the U.S. and the United Nations, Ethiopia federated Eritrea in 1950 and annexed it 1952. The U.S. supported Ethiopia to colonize and oppress the Eritreans until the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) military defeated Ethiopian colonialism in 1991.

The Emergence and Maintenance of the "Modern" Abyssinian/Ethiopian State

The "modern" Ethiopian state has been formed, consolidated and maintained primarily through state terrorism, war, and global connections. The Ethiopian state was formed by the alliance of Abyssinian (Amhara-Tigray) dependent colonialism and European imperialism during the late nineteenth century. This state emerged through massive social and cultural destruction and political violence. The

[1] See Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992,* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), pp. 47-108.

Ethiopian elites and society that have dominated the political structures in Ethiopia have racialized their identities and the identities of the Africans they colonized. These racialized identities have facilitated the processes of Abyssinianization/Christianization in Ethiopia and the consequent Africanization/marginal- ization of the indigenous population groups in the Ethiopian Empire.

The capitalist penetration of the last decades of nineteenth century laid the foundation of the modern Ethiopian state. When Oromia (the Oromo country) was partitioned between Britain and Ethiopia, Somaliland was divided among Britain, France, Italy, and Abyssinia. The Afar country was partitioned between France, Italy, and Abyssinia. The creation of the centralized state dependent on European weapons, trade, expertise, and investments tied the economic resources of the Ethiopian Empire to European interests.[2] The practice of creating and supporting a neocolonial state in accordance with the interests of global imperialism started with the emergence of the modern Ethiopian state.

Because of Christian ideology and the willingness of the Ethiopian ruling class to collaborate with the European imperialist powers, successive Ethiopian rulers got access to European technology, weapons, administrative and military expertise and other skills that were needed for the construction of the modern state. Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa note that "`Ethiopia' is the name that was eventually given to the geographic unit created when Abyssinia, a cluster of small kingdoms in northeast Africa, expanded in the mid-1800s by conquering independent nations in the region using firearms provided by European power."[3]

The main reason for this colonial expansion was to obtain commodities such as gold, ivory, coffee, musk, hides and skins, slaves, and other agricultural products that were valued in the international market.

Since the creation of the Ethiopian Empire, the Ethiopian state has been the domain of the Amhara-Tigrayan ruling classes; successive Ethiopian ruling classes with the collaboration of Euro-American allies have effectively excluded the colonized peoples and the Ethiopian masses from decision-making positions. The racialized Ethiopian state controlled the colonized peoples by establishing the local colonial administration in garrison towns that were built in various strategic places; it also created local intermediaries that served between the colonialists and the local population.

European imperialism and the imperial interstate system have created, consolidated, and maintained this "authoritarian-terrorist" state. This state has been authoritarian to Amhara-Tigrayan peoples from which it emerged and terrorist to the colonized nations in the Ethiopian Empire. Therefore, I characterize it as an authoritarian-terrorist government. This authoritarian-terrorist state is highly militarized and repressive, and it tightly controls information and resources in the form of foreign aid, domestic financial resources, and political appointments. It also directly owns and controls all aspects of state power including security and military institutions, judiciary and other public bodies, and financial institutions.[4] The current authoritarian-terrorist regime of Meles Zenawi is still supported by the United States and the imperial interstate system while practicing terrorism on the colonized populations and conducting recurrent wars on its neighbors, such as Eritrea and Somalia.

The U.S. and the Ethiopian State

The US policy towards Ethiopia has been influenced by racism and disregard for the principles of democracy and human rights. Ethiopian racism and White racism have conveniently intermarried in the U.S. policy formulation and implementation in Ethiopia. When policy issues are discussed on

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[2] Asafa Jalata, *ibid,* pp. 47-74.

[3] Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*, (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1990), p. 1.

[4] See Catherine Besteman, *Unraveling Somalia: Race, Violence, and the Legacy of Slavery,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999), pp. 2-25. Asafa Jalata, "U. S. -Sponsored Ethiopian 'Democracy' and State Terrorism," in *Crisis and Terror in the Horn of Africa.* Edited by Pat Lauderdale, A. Zegeye and A. Oliverio, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 64-89.

Ethiopia Semitic civility, Christianity, antiquity, bravery, and patriotism of Amharas and Tigrayans are retrieved to valorize and to legitimize Ethiopian dominance and power; moreover, the alleged barbarism, backwardness, and the destructiveness of Oromos and other indigenous Africans are reinvented to keep them from access to state power.[5] The US supported the creation of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and with Israel, it financed the flight of Mengistu in 1991, and endorsed the emergence of the Meles regime. It still provides all necessary assistance to the regime. US foreign policy makers mainly support regimes like that of Ethiopia for perceived strategic and economic self-interest.

Unfortunately, the EPLF also built the TPLF/EPRDF and assisted the Tigrayan state elites to capture the Ethiopian state in 1991. Both the Tigrayan and Eritrean soldiers dismantled the Oromo Liberation Army in the early 1990s, when the OLF was forced from the transitional government of Ethiopia.[6] It was then that I argued with a few Eritrean intellectuals and asserted that rebuilding the Ethiopian Empire by the EPLF was a great strategic mistake since the empire would strike back again. After consolidating its power with the help of EPLF, the Tigrayan government started attacking the Oromo Liberation Army. Then within a short time it initiated the process of undermining Eritrea and building Tigrayan hegemony. Consequently, the TPLF opened war on Eritrea in the late 1990s. This shows that the Ethiopian state and its empire are the enemies of national self-determination, peace, and democracy. The Ethiopian state has been enjoying the blessing and the support of successive super powers to engage in such criminal behavior. Now, I will focus on the role of the US in undermining the principles of national self-determination, peace, and democracy in the Horn of Africa.

As far as US policy-makers believe that the US self-interest is promoted, they are not interested to have a deep and critical understanding of the political context in which they involve. Currently the main rationale for US policy makers to involve in Ethiopia is to maintain political order and to fight against terrorism. The major reason why the US government cannot effectively deal with global terrorism is that it practices double standards, and condones the terrorism of friendly states such as that of Ethiopia and complains about other forms of terrorism.[7] Eqbal Ahmad comments that as a global power the US "cannot promote terrorism in one place and reasonably expect to discourage terrorism in another place."[8] Rather than finding a just and democratic solution, the U.S. has openly allied with the Meles regime that practices state terrorism and engages in gross human rights violations and wars.

Ethiopian State Terrorism and War

State-terrorism is a systematic policy of a government through which massive violence is practiced to impose terror on a given population group to change their behavior of political struggle or resistance. The main assumptions of such a state are that it can control the population by destroying their culture of resistance and leaders. States that fail to establish ideological hegemony and political orders are unstable and insecure, and hence they engage in state terrorism.[9] Under the regimes of Haile Selassie and Mengistu Haile Mariam, the Eritrean people were exposed to Ethiopian state terrorism for more than four decades. However, these terrorist activities had also increased the determination of Eritreans to intensify their national struggle for liberation.

The TPLF/EPRDF government also practices state violence against Oromos, Sidamas, Annuaks, and Somalis as a legitimate means of establishing political stability and order. Today,

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[5] See Asafa Jalata, *Fighting Against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements,* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 89-106.

[6] Despite the fact that the EPLF supported the OLF until 1991, it changed its policy and fully supported the Meles regime after 1992. This was a great political and strategic mistake on the part of the EPLF.

[7] See Eqbal Ahmad, "Terrorism: Theirs and Ours," A presentation at the University of Colorado, Boulder, October 12, 1998, p. 7.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] See Annamarie Oliverio, "The State of Injustice: The Politics of Terrorism and the Production of Order," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology,* Vol. Xxxviii, numbers 1–2, June 1997, pp. 48-63; Annamarie Oliverio, *The State of Terror*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999).

Ethiopian colonial settlers led by the Tigrayan-led regime have dominated cities in Oromia and segregated the Oromo national majority in urban and rural areas and kept them under "Ethiopian political slavery" by using the army, modern weaponry, the media, the telephone, the fax, the Internet, and other communication and information apparatus and networks. Using political violence, the Tigrayan authoritarian-terrorist regime has totally dominated and controlled the Oromos and denied them the freedom of expression, association, organization, and the media, and all forms of communication and information networks.

In this 21st century, the Oromos and other peoples are denied the freedom of self-expression and self-development, and are forced to provide their economic and labor resources to the Ethiopian colonizers and their supporters, and live under deplorable conditions. The Tigrayan state elites try to hide the true characteristics of the Ethiopian regime that include state-terrorism and other forms of violence that terrorize and control the colonized population groups, particularly the Oromo people. While engaging in political violence in the form of state terrorism, state rape, and hidden genocide to control the Oromo people and loot their economic resources, the Tigrayan gangsters claim that they are promoting democracy, federalism, and national self-determination.

Since the Tigrayan-dominated Ethiopian government is weak, illegitimate, and lacks accountability and professionalism, it engages in terrorism and hidden genocide to protect its power. Bridget Welsh suggests that since weak states "lack the capacity to meet the demands and rights of citizens and improve the standard of living for the majority of population," they involve in political violence and engage in genocidal massacres to suppress the population groups that struggle for political and economic rights.[10]This regime is committed to improve the living standard of the Tigrayan population group at the cost of the colonized population groups, particularly the Oromos.

Since most of the Oromo people, under the leadership of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), are determined to challenge the racist policy of this regime, this government mainly targets to destruct and devastate the Oromos. As Lisa Sharlach attests, a politically "dominant group, frightened by what its members perceive as an onslaught of international and internal movements for democracy and socioeconomic change, harnesses the state apparatus to destroy the subordinate group together. This is genocide."[11] The Oromo and others have no protection from political violence. They do not have personal and public safety in their homes and communities. Because of the magnitude of this problem, it is impossible to provide a numerical face to devastating effects of political violence, hunger, poverty, suffering, malnutrition, disease, ignorance, alienation, and hopelessness.

State-terrorism is associated with the issues of control of territory and resources and the construction of political and ideological domination. Annamarie Oliverio explains two essential features of state terrorism: "First, the state reinforces the use of violence as a viable, effective, mitigating factor for managing conflict; second, such a view is reinforced by culturally constructed and socially organized processes, expressed through symbolic forms, and related in complex ways to present social interests. Within increasing economic and environmental globalization, gender politics, and the resurgence of nationalities within territorial boundaries, the discourse of terrorism, as a practice of statecraft, is crucial to the construction of political boundaries. As such, terrorism is invoked in the art of statecraft when multiple, often conflicting versions of the past are produced and, at particular historical moments, become sites of intense struggles."[12]

State terrorism manifests itself in the Ethiopian Empire in different forms. Its obvious manifestation is violence in the form of war, assassination, murder, castration, burying alive, throwing off cliffs, hanging, torture, rape, confiscation of properties by the police and the army, forcing people to submission by intimidation, beating, and disarming citizens.[13] Former prisoners

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[10]Bridget Welsh, "Globalization, Weak States, and Death Toll in East Asia," Violence *and Politics*; Globalization's Paradox. Edited by Kenton Worcester, Sally Avery Bermanzohn, and Mark Ungar, (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 67-68

[11]Lisa Sharlach, "State Rape: Sexual Violence as Genocide," *Violence and Politics: Globalization's Paradox, ibid,* p. 107.

[12]Annamarie Oliverio, "The State of Injustice," *ibid,* p. 52.

[13]See Sue Pollock, "Ethiopia- Human Tragedy in the Making: Democracy or Dictatorship?" *The Oromia Support Group,*

testified that their arms and legs were tied tightly together on their backs and their naked bodies were whipped. Large containers or bottles filled with water were fixed to their testicles, or if they were women, bottles or poles were pushed into their vaginas. There were prisoners who were locked up in empty steel barrels and tormented with heat in the tropical sun during the day and with cold at night. There were also prisoners who were forced into pits so that fire could be made on top of them.

For more than five decades, Eritreans have also encountered systematic Ethiopian state terrorism and frequent wars because they rejected Ethiopian colonialism. In opposition to the annexation of Eritrea to the Ethiopian Empire, the Eritrean Liberation Front emerged in the early 1960s. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front evolved from within the ELF in the 1970s and started to intensify the Eritrean national liberation struggle. Because of the development of the relatively strong working class and educated leadership under Italian and British colonialism, the Eritrean liberation movement became a political cancer for the Ethiopian Empire and a revolutionary model for other colonized and oppressed peoples.

As the liberation struggle was intensified, the Ethiopian government unleashed its terrorism and massive human rights violations against Eritrean citizens both in Eritrea and the Ethiopian Empire. That is why more than one million Eritreans are scattered around the globe. I lived in a Greece refugee camp with a few of them. I admire the Eritrean Diaspora because of their commitment for the freedom of their people and country. When the Meles regime attacked and opened war on Eritrea between 1998 and 2000, Eritreans in the Diaspora stood with the Eritrean government and defended their country. Eritrea lost 19,000 soldiers during this war.[14]

The Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government and the Amhara elites have attempted to undermine the Eritrean independence that was achieved by Eritrean tears and blood. They still try to overthrow the Eritrean government through conflict, war, intimidation, and the mobilization of global powers against Eritrea. Of course, global powers like the U.S. government have problems with the Eritrean government because it attempts to maintain the Eritrean autonomy and engage in self-reliant development. Eritrea also supports the liberation fronts that fight against Ethiopian colonialism, such as the OLF. These global powers use the rhetoric democracy to hide state terrorism and human rights violations in the Ethiopian Empire while criticizing Eritrea for not promoting democracy and protecting human rights.

Recently, the Tigrayan-led regime has started a proxy war against Somalia claiming that the Islamic Court, an organization that established order in chaotic Mogadishu, was a branch of Al Qaeda and would expand terrorism in the Horn Africa. The Meles regime started this war for three reasons. The first reason is to serve as mercenary to receive financial and other support from the Bush administration. The second reason is to link Eritrea and the OLF to terrorist organizations so that the US and other Western countries can label them as terrorists.[15] The third reason is to expel different liberation forces, particularly the OLF, that fight against the Meles regime form Somalia.

Some analysts argue that if Meles will be successful in Somalia by establishing a puppet regime and receive a green light form the Bush administration, he will restart war with Eritrea. Time will tell about all of this. One thing is clear though. As long as the Ethiopian Empire remains intact under the leadership of Tigrayans or Amharas, independent Eritrea will continue to face danger.

Conclusion

Despite their minor differences, all Eritreans must defend their national sovereignty and maintain

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1996; Sue Pollock, "Politics and Conflict: Participation and Self-determination in *Ethiopia: Conquest and the Quest for Freedom and Democracy*, edited by Seyoum Y. Hameso, T. Trueman, and T. E. Erena, (London: TSC Publications, 1997), pp. 81-110; Trevor Trueman, "Democracy or dictatorship," in *Ethiopia*, *ibid,* pp. 141-150; *Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Africa*, 1997; *Survival International*, 1995; *The Oromia Support Group*, 1997 series)

[14] http://www.afrol.com/News2001/eri005-war-victims.htm.

[15] The Meles regime claimed that the Eritrean government and the OLF supported the Islamic Court.

their independence for which tens of thousands of Eritrean heroes and heroines gave their precious lives. Eritrea needs to develop an enduring strategy alliance with colonized nations, such as Oromos, which have similar experiences with the Eritrean people based on the principles of mutual solidarity, true equality, and peaceful co-existence. Learning from recent experiences, Eritrea should avoid the idea of helping reorganizing or reforming the Ethiopian Empire.

As Eritrea should continue to support the struggles of the colonized nations and other oppressed groups for its national interest, these nations and groups should also support the sovereignty and independence of Eritrea because the threat to the Eritrean freedom is the threat to the rights of all peoples who fight for the principles of national self-determination, self-development, and democracy. Specifically, I recommend that Oromos and Eritreans learn more about each other and establish a strong and enduring alliance since Eritrea is a beacon of freedom, and Oromia has a hope for bringing freedom, democracy, stability, and development to the Horn of Africa because of the size of its population and its democratic tradition and abundant economic resources.

As it is only Eritrea that can defend itself militarily from Ethiopia at this moment in the region,16 it is only Oromia that has the potential and capacity to transform the Ethiopian Empire one way or the other because of the reasons I have mentioned above, the blossoming of *Oromummaa* (Oromo culture and nationalism), the intensification of the Oromo national struggle, and the commitment of the Oromo people for national self-determination and multinational democracy. Long-live independent Eritrea! Long live the mutual solidarity of the peoples of Oromia and Eritrea and others!

[16] The Meles regime even intimidates militarily Kenya and Sudan and manipulates their foreign policies in the Horn of Africa because of its massive military and financial support from the U.S. government. Consequently the regimes of Kenya and Sudan have turned against Oromo refugees and the OLF.