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## **Imperfections in U. S. Foreign Policy Toward Oromia and Ethiopia: Will the Obama Administration Introduce Change?**

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# **Imperfections in U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Oromia and Ethiopia: Will The Obama Administration Introduce Change?**

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that because of its perceived strategic national interest and the wrong advice it received from experts and racist assumptions about the Oromo, the U.S. government has allied with the Tigrayan minority elites to form a colonial government and to suppress the Oromo national movement. Thus, the major question becomes will the Obama administration respect the rights of African peoples in general and that of the Oromo in particular?

## **Introduction**

Global strategic interests and geopolitics rather than the mutual benefits of the American and African peoples have mainly shaped U.S. foreign policy objectives and priorities on the African continent. As the U.S. emerged as the global hegemonic power by replacing Great Britain after the World War II, it used Africa as “a strategic stepping stone” to the Middle East, and during the Cold War as “a pawn in East-West struggles” (Carter, 2009: 1). Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the U.S. has been using Africa for its objective of the so-called war on global terrorism by allying with some dictatorial and terrorist African regimes, such as that of Ethiopia, that engage in state terrorism and gross human rights violations while giving lip service to the issues of democracy, human rights, and economic and social development. Consequently, the U.S. government has been building relations with the parasitic African ruling classes and their repressive and exploitative governments at the cost of the ordinary African peoples.

The tragedy in the U.S. foreign policy toward Africa is that there is no a single standard in dealing with African countries, governments, and peoples. For example when the U.S. criticizes Sudan, Zimbabwe, and other countries for not promoting democracy and protecting human rights, it glosses over the criminal policies of certain governments such as that of Ethiopia that “are falling into line to act as puppets of U.S. imperialism” (Talbot, 2006: 3). Currently, the U.S. government supports the Tigrayan-led minority regime of Ethiopia morally, financially, diplomatically, and militarily by disregarding its authoritarian-terrorist characteristics and its massive human rights violations (Jalata, 2005). How did the U.S. start to support the Tigrayan-led minority government of Ethiopia instead of its Amhara-based client state?

Paul Henze (1985: 74), one of the architects of the American-Tigrayan alliance, argued in the mid-1980s that the Tigrayans “as much as the Amhara, are an imperial people who, despite their loyalty to tradition, think of themselves as having a right—and perhaps even a duty—to play a role in the larger political entity of which they are a part.” While promoting the Tigrayan ethnonational interest, the same American ideologue dismissed the political significance of the Oromo people, the largest ethnonational group, by arguing that Oromo grievance “is both territorially and politically diffuse and unlikely to coalesce into a coherent ethnic resistance movement” (Henze, 1985: 65). In a multinational empire like Ethiopia, to identify and support one ethnonation to dominate and exploit other ethnonations claiming that it has the right to rule or it is culturally superior is racist (Jalata, 2001: 89-132). In justifying this racist action, Henze (1985: 74) asserted that the Tigrayans recognize “the need to reconstitute Ethiopia and establish a just government recognizing regional rights and ethnic distinctions” as “a natural outgrowth of . . . [their] view of Ethiopian history.”

Just as the Tigrayans are justified to rule and dominate other peoples by their sense of “fairness,” they are also seen as pro-West because “they do not try to claim they are Arabs and they do not seek the support of Arab governments,” according to Henze (1985: 74). Implicit in these arguments is that other peoples in the Ethiopian Empire, such as the Oromo, are pro-Arab and anti-West and lack a sense of fairness to deal with other peoples. Henze (1985: 65) dismisses the Oromo struggle for national self-determination as the following: “The claims of the Oromo Liberation Front of widespread organization and effectiveness inside Ethiopia cannot be substantiated by firm evidence. *Oromia* as a territorial entity has no meaning inside Ethiopia. It is an exile construct.” Based on such false assumptions, U.S. foreign policy experts like Henze advised the American government to invest in the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and dismissed the relevance of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and other liberation fronts in the Ethiopian Empire.

Because of its perceived strategic national interest and the wrong advice it received from experts and racist assumptions about the Oromo (Jalata, 2001), the U.S. government has allied with the Tigrayan minority elites to form a colonial government and to suppress the Oromo national movement. As Douglas Hellinger (1992: 80) notes, “What is missing from U.S. policy toward Africa is a basic respect for the people, their knowledge and their right to collectively determine their own future.” Will the Obama administration respect the rights of African peoples in general and that of the Oromo in particular? Will President Obama (2009) respect his inaugural promise and make African dictators in general and Meles Zenawi in particular accountable because they silence dissent and “cling to power through corruption and deceit?” For sake of clarity and critical understanding of the essence of the U.S. foreign policy in Oromia and Ethiopia, let us historically explore the relationship between the U.S. and the Ethiopian state.

### **U.S. Hegemonism and the Haile Selassie Government**

Since the mid-twentieth century, the U.S. government as the hegemonic power of the capitalist world system has supported the Amhara-Tigray governments of Haile Selassie and Meles Zenawi at the cost the colonized national groups, such as the Oromo. Between the early 1950s and the 1970s, the U.S. introduced its “modernization” programs to the Ethiopian Empire and supported the Haile Selassie government (Jalata, 1993: 88-99). Several scholars demonstrated that the U.S. foreign policy toward Oromia and Ethiopia consolidated the racial/ethnonational hierarchy that was formed by the alliance of Ethiopian colonialism and European imperialism (Jalata, 1993; Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990). When the Haile Selassie government was overthrown by the popular revolt of 1974, a military dictatorship emerged and allied with the former Soviet Union until 1991, when it was overthrown. With the support of the former Soviet Union, the military regime protected and extended the interests of Amhara-Tigrayan colonial settlers in Oromia and other colonized regions.

At the end of the 1980s, a structural crisis that manifested itself in national movements, famine, poverty, and internal contradictions within the ruling elite factions eventually weakened the Amhara-dominated military regime and led to its demise in 1991. Using this opportunity, the U.S. government reestablished its relations with the Ethiopian Empire by allying this time with the emerging Tigrayan ethnocentric elites, which emerged from about 7 million Tigrayans. Opposing the Soviet influence in Ethiopia and recognizing that the Amhara-based Ethiopian government had lost credibility, the U.S. started to support the TPLF in the 1980s and prepared it financially, ideologically, diplomatically, and militarily to replace the Amhara-led military regime by creating the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

With the use of Western relief aid and financial support, the TPLF/EPRDF leaders converted the famine-stricken Tigrayan peasants and those militias who were captured at war fronts into guerrilla fighters in the 1980s. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front also played a central role in building the TPLF/EPRDF army.

One of the major reasons why the U.S. government chose the TPLF, as we have mentioned above, was that the Tigrayan ethnocentric elites were perceived as a legitimate successor to an Amhara-led government because of the racist assumptions of the West. Ethiopia, which was created as an informal colony of Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century, maintained its status in the global order with the help of British global hegemonism until the U.S. inherited this role. Despite the fact that the U.S., as the emerging hegemonic power after the World War II, encouraged decolonization and self-determination in the less-developed world in order to gain spheres of influence, it did not care for these issues in the Ethiopian Empire. Since Ethiopia was the first informal colony of Europe and America, there was no need to address these issues. As we shall see below, in fact the U.S. rather helped Ethiopia to colonize Eritrea, former Italian and British colony, and to incorporate it into Ethiopia. Of course, this happened after the Italian fascist occupation of Ethiopia ended with the assistance of Great Britain.

The U.S. government started its direct communication in 1943 with the *de facto* Haile Selassie regime, which was under British indirect control; from then on, the regime requested U.S. economic and military assistance. Because of its interest in the Horn of Africa, the U.S. was receptive to the Ethiopian request and sent a Technical Mission in 1944 to help build the Ethiopian economy. Understanding the nature of the Ethiopian client state under the aegis of British hegemonism and realizing that its interests would be best served by associating with such a government, the U.S. wanted to establish strong relation with this empire. After it obtained Radio Marina, a former Italian facility in Asmara, in 1942, with the help of the British government in Eritrea (where British imperialism replaced that of Italy in the early 1940s), the U.S. interest in the Horn of Africa increased (Marcus, 1983: 83).

With a base in Asmara, the U.S. wanted Eritrea to be incorporated into Ethiopia when the British evacuated Eritrea, believing that its interest would be best served by this conjunction (Marcus, 1983: 39). This position brought together U.S. and Ethiopian interests to determine the future of Eritrea. The provision of the American Technical Mission and support for the Ethiopian position on Eritrea was beneficial for the Ethiopian ruling class (Marcus, 1983: 42-43). Furthermore, in alliance with Anglo-American corporations, the upper crust of the Ethiopian ruling class established import-export monopolies through which it controlled trade (Marcus, 1983: 42-43). Haile Selassie and his officials effectively used the state bureaucracy and Anglo-American connections to accumulate wealth and capital just as Anglo-American hegemonic interests used this ruling class to strategic and economic advantage in the region.

As British hegemony declined in the 1940s, the U.S. started to fill the vacuum in the Horn of Africa. Thus, by the time Britain began to withdraw its sponsorship of Ethiopian colonialism and planned to leave Eritrea, Ethiopian colonialists had already sought U.S. support for Eritrean incorporation. For its part, the U.S. found the Ethiopian client state to be an ally unlikely to threaten its interests in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. The alliance between the Ethiopian colonialists and the U.S. imperialists emerged strongly in the early 1950s. Recognizing that the British had started withdrawing from the Horn in 1951 because of its declining strength as a world power, the Ethiopian government brought arguments before the United Nations to annex the two former Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somalia that were under British rule.

Although Ethiopia reconsolidated its colonial rule over Ogaden Somalia, it could not incorporate Italian Somalia, since the United Nations established a trust territory over it for a ten-year period. But by resolution of the UN General Assembly on December 2, 1950, Eritrea was federated to the Ethiopian Empire in 1952; within a decade it was annexed by Ethiopia. The UN decision was based on a commission recommendation that the Eritreans “were not ready for a self government and that the country was not alone an economically viable unit” (Cumming, 1953: 128). Thus, UN action also facilitated the processes of Ethiopian expansion through colonization; the U.S. strongly supported this process because of its regional and global interests. Ethiopia and the U.S. signed a mutual defense assistance agreement in 1953. As the hegemonic power, the U.S. had the responsibility to maintain client states such as of Ethiopia in the capitalist world economy; between 1946 and 1973, it spent more than \$62 billion worldwide on military assistance programs (U.S. Agency of International Development, 1974: 6).

U.S. hegemony was built in the less developed world through military assistance to the ruling classes and their governments (Magdoff, 1970), and the Ethiopian client state was a beneficiary: The Ethiopian state was mainly interested in dependable security against internal and external opposition forces. On its part, the U.S. was interested in securing continuing base rights in Asmara, and in developing a major military and monitoring station there. Describing the importance to U.S. strategic interests of a base in the Horn of Africa, Peter Schwab (1979: 91) says of the region: “Close to the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, it flanks the oil-rich states of Arabia, controls the Babel Mandeb Straits, one of the narrow arteries of Israel’s lifeline . . . dominates an area of the Gulf of Aden and of the Indian Ocean through which oil tankers are constantly moving, and overlooks the passage at which the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean converge. It is a major geopolitical area of the world.”

As part of its global strategy to secure hegemony in the capitalist world economy and to prevent the influence of the Soviet Union, the U.S. sought to dominate this part of Africa (Schwab, 1979: 92). The U.S. also considered “its political investment in Ethiopia as an investment toward the future realization of its wider interests in Africa” (Agyeman-Duah, 1984: 209).

The defense treaty closely linked Ethiopian colonialism to American hegemonism (Ottaway and Ottaway, 1978: 150). The Americans expanded their Asmara base and modernized the Ethiopian military by training and equipping it with modern weapons. An American military advisory group replaced the British Military Mission in Ethiopia. According to Halliday and Molyneux (1981: 215), “Between 1951 and 1976 Ethiopia received over \$350 million economic aid from the U.S.A. and a further \$279 million in military aid. In the years 1953-75, 3,552 Ethiopian military personnel were trained in the U.S.A. itself.” Most of the U.S. assistance to Ethiopia was seen as rent for Kagnev Station and was estimated as averaging \$10-12 million per year for a twenty-five-year period (Korry 1976: 37).

When the British military mission withdrew in 1951, “the Ethiopian army was still only partially organized and poorly trained and equipped. It was under such conditions that the emperor turned to the United States for assistance” (Agyeman-Duah, 1984: 110). Haile Selassie was successful in obtaining U.S. military aid (Schwab, 1979: 92). As the events unfolded in the 1960s—an attempted military coup, the emergence of various anti-colonial movements, and the appearance of a radical student movement—the modernization approach of the U.S. through state-building strategy proved vulnerable. Consequently, the politics of order began to emerge. “The military, in conjunction with other security forces,” Baffour Agyeman-Duah (1984: 179) writes, “became the instrument for social control and counterinsurgency during the turbulent years of the 1960s, and an active American support in all this was by no means limited.” Despite its claim of democratic ideals, the U.S. helped the Ethiopian colonial regime to stay in power by suppressing the peoples. “The United States sent in counterinsurgent teams, increased its military aid programs, and expanded its modernization and training program for the Ethiopian military. An extensive air force was also created with United States vintage jets” (Schwab, 1979: 95).

There is no doubt that the U.S. military and economic assistance had prolonged Haile Selassie’s regime. Schwab asserts “Without the military weapons received from the United States, it was unlikely that Haile Selassie could have maintained himself on the throne. Half of all United States military assistance to Africa was channeled to Ethiopia, and Kagnev, the American military base near Asmara, quartered some thirty-two hundred of the six thousand U.S. military personnel stationed in Ethiopia” (Schwab, 1979: 101). In the 1960s, the decolonization of British and Italian Somaliland, the Soviet alliance with the newly emerged Somali state, anti-colonial movements in the empire and internal rivalry within the Ethiopian ruling class had threatened the foundation of the Haile Selassie regime. Harold Marcus (1983: 114) points out that “By forcing Washington continuously to increase its commitments, Addis Ababa made the United States an actor in Ethiopia’s internal politics.”

The U.S. alliance with Ethiopia was mainly for strategic and geopolitical reasons, not economic ones, and U.S. business investment was insignificant (Mohammed, 1969: 76). For instance, American-based firms invested almost \$10 million in oil exploration (without success) in Ogaden Somalia (Luther, 1958: 136). The U.S. modernization programs were both economic and educational. To integrate closely the U.S.-Ethiopian ideological alliance, the Point Four program under the U.S. International Cooperation Administration was extended to Ethiopia in 1952. The stated purpose of this program was to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the less developed world through providing technical and administrative expertise (Luther, 1958: 132). But, in practice, the U.S. was interested in consolidating the Ethiopian ruling class, which had little knowledge of the modern world in technical and administrative fields.

Through its Point Four Program, the U.S. trained and developed Ethiopian colonial bureaucrats in the fields of agriculture, public administration, finance, commerce, industry, and health. The program included on-the-job-training and education in the empire and abroad. Agricultural schools, such as those of Jimma and Ambo, and a College of Agriculture in Hararge were established. A Public Health College and a nurse and midwife training schools were opened. In 1958, some 130 U.S. specialists participated, mainly in the areas of agriculture, education, and health (Luther, 1958: 133). The U.S. modernization programs continued in the 1960s and the 1970s. Thousands of Peace Corps volunteers were sent to implement such programs. For almost twenty-six years, the U.S. dispatched its diplomats and intellectuals to apply its modernization principles in building and maintaining the Ethiopian Empire in accord with U.S. national and global interests. In this the U.S. emulated British hegemonism, facilitating the development of colonial capitalism mainly in Oromia.

Between 1977 and 1991, since the Mengistu regime allied with the former Soviet Union, the influence of the U.S. on Ethiopia declined. With the emergence of the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government, the U.S. reestablished its hegemony in Ethiopia by claiming that it promotes democracy. As we shall see below, however, the essence and characteristics of U.S. foreign policy in Ethiopia has remained more of the same. In 1991, the U.S. supported the emergence of the Meles regime. It still provides all necessary assistance to the regime. As far as U.S. policy makers believe that the U.S. self-interest is promoted, they are not interested in having a deep and critical understanding of the political context in which they are involved.

## **The U.S. and the Meles Government**

Currently the main rationale of U.S. policy makers' involvement in Ethiopia is to maintain political order and to fight against global "terrorism." The major reason why the U.S. government cannot effectively deal with global terrorism is that it practices double standards, and ignores the terrorism of friendly states such as that of Ethiopia whilst complaining about other forms of terrorism (Jalata, 2005). Eqbal Ahmad (1998: 7) comments that as a global power the U.S. "cannot promote terrorism in one place and reasonably expect to discourage terrorism in another place." Supporting the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian regime that engages in terrorism and massive human rights violations on various population groups in general and the Oromo in particular demonstrates that the U.S. is not committed to promote democracy, human rights, and social justice.

During the early 1990s, there were scholars and political activists who believed that the U.S., as the only superpower, would promote human rights and democracy in Oromia and Ethiopia and in other peripheral countries. But the practical reality in Ethiopia challenges that position. U.S. officials are more concerned with political stability, economic reform, and the existence of regimes such as that of Ethiopia at any cost, and care less for democracy and human rights. As the *Economist* (1997: 36) notes, Meles Zenawi "is regarded as one of Africa's 'new leaders': he recently won an award in the United States for good government . . . Their [Western] governments tend to give priority to the Prime Minister's economic reforms rather than his record on human rights." Even if the U.S. does not oppose the principles of human rights and democracy in theory, the issues of human rights and democracy in Oromia and Ethiopia are not its priority, and it gives only lip service to them.

The Meles regime is acceptable to the West in general and the U.S. in particular as far as it can suppress popular opposition forces in order to establish political stability and implement the structural adjustment of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Of course, the U.S. and other Western governments do not want their respective citizens to be able to recognize that human rights and democracy are being compromised. Despite the fact that successive American Presidents have claimed that they would promote American democratic ideals in the world, practically they have hindered the progress toward democracy in peripheral countries. For instance, President George Walker Bush, in his second inaugural address promised that the U.S. foreign policy would challenge political tyranny by supporting forces of democracy and freedom in the world. In his words, "So is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements in every nation and every culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."

He emphasized that the freedom of the U.S. is connected to the freedom of others. Gradually it became clear that he asserted this noble political idea to justify his imperial war in Iraq; his government continued to support dictatorship and ethnocracy in Ethiopia and other countries. The Oromo, the largest national group in the Ethiopian empire, meanwhile, struggle to restore their cultural heritage and wounded people-hood, and oppose any dogmatic social or ideological system. They struggle to establish the rule of law, to practice self-determination, and to promote multinational democracy. For the Oromo, democracy is not a new concept, but it is part of their culture and tradition. They do not have the luxury of fighting against the interest of the West, particularly that of the U.S. Since they have been abused in the names of Christianity, Islam, socialism, democracy, and free market, the Oromo take things pragmatically and practically.

In the early 1990s, the OLF and other independent Oromo organizations were ready to work within the system if fair and free elections would take place in Ethiopia. Global powers ignored their own policy of democracy promotion, when the Tigrayan ethnocratic regime declared war on these organizations in 1992 to expel them from the Ethiopian political process. The U.S. policy of “democracy promotion” or democratization of the polity drastically failed in Ethiopia (Robinson, 1997) because the U.S. has no commitment for the promotion of democracy. Another reason why the democratization of Ethiopian polity failed was because of the fundamental contradictions that exist between the Ethiopian colonizers and the colonized peoples (Holcomb, 1997: 73-74). Many scholars assume that the West and the U.S. promote elite democracy when they are sure that those who will come to state power through election are not against the capitalist world system (Robinson, 1996), 1996). This is not true in the case of Ethiopia.

Although the Oromo leadership was ready to promote elite democracy, the U.S preferred to support the Tigrayan dictatorship and ethnocracy. Despite the fact that most international observers concluded that the June 21, 1992, elections “exacerbated existing tensions, reinforced the hegemonic power of the EPRDF while marginalizing other fledging parties, and were a central factor in the withdrawal of the OLF from the TGE and the return to war in the Oromo region,” Western governments have continued to support the Tigrayan-led regime (National Democratic Institute, 1992: 7). The U.S. government has chosen to support the Tigrayan ethnocratic minority regime. The decision by the U.S. to support the Tigrayan authoritarian-terrorist government (Jalata, 2005) has nothing to do with economic or political rationality. Although the U.S. and other Western countries do not openly admit that the strategy of democracy promotion failed in Ethiopia, they have recognized that the Ethiopian crisis is expanding.

Nevertheless, they have continued to back the Meles regime, while at the same time searching for the strategy of establishing elite democracy in case the Tigrayan regime fails to establish political stability. Stevens Trucker (1997: 1), the USAID governance advisor to Ethiopia, says, “Ethiopia’s prospects for long-term stability and sustainable long term-growth are dependent upon the sustained democratization of the polity. Indeed, in the absence of a progressively more accessible, participatory, and tolerant political environment, the future may come to resemble the past.” But, the same official source refuses to recognize the crimes that this regime has committed against the people, and ignores the existence of political dissent. The same official also promises that even if this regime is not democratic now it will be in the future. This official denies the existence of political conflict, endorses Tigrayan authoritarianism, and promotes the idea that this regime can stay in power for decades and later will establish democracy.

The U.S. has been committed to supporting this regime to the extent that it will not be an embarrassment to its international image. In the rhetoric of democracy and good governance, the U.S. is generously financing the Tigrayan-led government. This is an unwise political and economic investment, and has nothing to do with the American national interest. The Tigrayan ruling elites and the U.S. political operatives and theorists have conveniently convinced themselves that the Oromo and other peoples do not understand the genuine meaning of democracy. Receiving the green light from the U.S. and following his blind ambition for personal and Tigrayan ethnonational interests, Meles expelled all independent liberation fronts and political organizations from the Ethiopian political process through state terrorism and replaced them with puppet organizations that he and his group had already created under the umbrella of EPRDF. This is what democracy means for EPRDF and its international supporters.

It should surprise no one that Meles sought advice from Samuel Huntington, whose writings portray him as a Eurocentric, covert racist, and a Christian chauvinist. Samuel Huntington (1993), the U.S. policy ideologue, went to Ethiopia in 1993 as a consultant to advise Meles Zenawi on how to establish a Tigrayan party rule in the name of democracy. It is clear from a reading of Huntington’s book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, that he opposes the principles of democracy and cultural diversity and promotes Christian civilization at any cost. The U.S. policy as articulated by Huntington has intensified rather than solved the historical and contemporary contradictions between the Ethiopian colonizers and the colonized Oromo and others. As a result, the Oromo who were willing to participate in democracy have been forced to intensify their cultural, intellectual, and armed struggles. Rather than finding a just and democratic solution, the U.S. has openly allied itself with the Meles regime that practices state terrorism, hidden genocide, and gross human rights violations.

Just as the Meles regime rationalizes its political practices by asserting that democracy exists in Ethiopia, the U.S. claims that this regime is committed to promoting democracy, civil liberty, free markets, and the rule of law (U.S. Department of State on Human Rights, 1993, 1997). The U.S., other Western countries, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (currently called AU) called the sham elections, which the Meles government used to legitimize its power satisfactorily fair and free (Reuters, May 15, 1995). These Western countries and the OAU never cared to explain how the Meles government managed to expel all opposition political organizations and made its party the only candidate, forcing the people to vote for its ruling party (The Economist, August, 16, 1997). Of course, there are a few collaborators from all ethnonational groups who support the Meles regime and carry out the regime's policies against the colonized nations for their personal gains.

The Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) is such a collaborative group. It was created by the TPLF to do a political dirty job in Oromia for the Tigrayan-led regime in exchange for money and luxurious life styles. Some members of the OPDO were Oromos who were forced to join this organization because they were prisoners of war and were convinced by the TPLF leaders that they would be the made leaders of the Oromo people. Others joined the organization to promote their personal interests or naively believed that they would do something for their people.

The Tigrayan-led regime is still in power mainly because of the financial and military assistance it receives from the U.S. and other industrialized countries. The U.S., other Western countries, and Israel have also used the discourse of Islamic fundamentalism to support the Meles regime and to suppress the struggles of the Oromo and others for self-determination, social justice, and democracy (Impact International, March 1997; Africa Confidential, October 1997). This implies that since some Oromos and others are Muslims, they are Islamic fundamentalists, and are not entitled to democracy and national self-determination. In reality, the Oromo and others are not struggling to expand Islam or to suppress it. They only struggle for their democratic rights that have been suppressed by Ethiopian settler colonialism and global tyranny. That is why the majority of Oromo—Christian, Muslim, and non-Christian and non-Muslim— support the OLF, the secular organization that leads the Oromo national movement (Jalata, 1996: 95-123; Jalata, 1997: 83-114).

In the past the colonization of the Oromo and others was rationalized and justified by various ideological discourses. It was rationalized that since these peoples were "pagans" and "uncivilized" and that *Habshas* were Christians and "civilized," they were entitled to colonize these peoples and impose their civilization and Christianity on them. Now Islamic fundamentalism has become an ideological tool for the rationalization, justification, and suppression of these peoples by the Tigrayan colonial elites and their Western supporters.

The Oromo and other peoples are labeled as “Islamic fundamentalists” and their liberation fronts are implicitly labeled as “bandits” or “terrorists” (The Economist, August 16, 1997: 36). Consequently, the violations of their human rights by internationally financed state terrorism generate no sympathy from the world community. Samuel Huntington (1996: 217) openly expresses the West’s attitude toward Islam: “The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people is convinced of the superiority of their culture and is obsessed with the inferiority of their power.”

Samuel Huntington and others who hate Islam ignore the fate of Christian Oromos who have Muslim sisters and brothers. Similarly, the Oromo national struggle is not supported by the Muslim world because some Oromos are Christians and the Oromo national struggle is secular. Even Muslim Oromo refugees are not welcomed by the Muslim world. The U.S. and other Western countries engage in these kinds of unproductive foreign policy practices for two major reasons. The first reason is that the foreign policy experts of these countries have a superficial or distorted understanding of conditions like those existing in the Ethiopian Empire. In these kinds of situations, these policy experts prefer to side with the elites of one ethnonational group in a multinational society, believing that it is easier to dominate, control, and exploit various population groups. The second reason is that these foreign policy experts do not have a single standard for humanity. In the thinking of these foreign policy experts, the peoples of the world are hierarchically organized because of the superiority and inferiority of genes, cultures, and civilizations.

Such policy practices ignore the consequences of the radicalization of state power and the denial of indigenous and colonized peoples like the Oromo to have access to state power and other opportunities. State terrorism, hidden genocide, and massive human rights violations are used to keep the Oromo and other peoples subordinated and exploited. Today, the Ethiopian colonial settlers led by the Tigrayan regime have dominated cities and towns in Oromia and have segregated the Oromo people both in urban and rural areas and have kept them under “Ethiopian political slavery” by using the army, modern weapon, the media, the telephone, the fax, the Internet, and other communication and information apparatuses and networks, as well as global connections. Using political violence, the Meles government has dominated and controlled the Oromo and their resources. It has denied them the freedom of expression and organization as well as access to the media and all forms of communication and information networks. Consequently, the Oromo are denied the freedom of self-development and are forced to provide their economic and labor resources to the Ethiopian colonizers and their supporters while living under deplorable conditions in the twenty-first century.

The Meles regime has continued the previous policy of settling armed Amharas and Tigrayans in Oromia, and it planned to settle 2.2 million people within a few years (The Oromia Support Group, December 2002, no. 38, p. 13). At the same time, in order to de-Oromize Finfinne, the capital city of the Ethiopian empire, it moved the capital city of Oromia from this city to Adama (Nazareth), and in 2002, it also started to evict Oromo farmers surrounding Finfinne (Addis Ababa) by force (The Oromia Support Group, December, 2002, no. 38, p. 13) to lease the lands to Habasha elites and others. The Oromo have no protection from political violence since there is no rule of law in Oromia and Ethiopia. They do not have personal and public safety in their homes and communities. They are exposed to massive political violence, human right violations, and absolute poverty. Because of the magnitude of the Oromo problem, it is impossible to provide a numerical face to the devastating effects of violence, poverty, hunger, suffering, malnutrition, disease, ignorance, alienation, and hopelessness.

Since the Meles regime is weak and lacks legitimacy, accountability, and professionalism, it could not and cannot solve these massive and complex problems. Because of their weaknesses most peripheral states “lack the capacity to meet the demands and rights of citizens and improve the standard of living for the majority of population” (Welsh, 2002: 67-68). Consequently, they engage in state terrorism and genocidal massacres in order to suppress the population groups that struggle for political and economic rights. State terrorism is a systematic governmental policy in which massive violence is practiced on a given population group with the goal of eliminating any behavior which promotes political struggle or resistance by members of that group. Any state that engages in terrorism is not a protector of citizens; rather, it violates civil and human rights through assassinations, mass killings, and imprisonments. The main assumptions of such a state are that it can control the population by destroying their leaders and the culture of resistance.

States that fail to establish ideological hegemony and political orders are unstable and insecure, and hence they engage in state terrorism (Oliverio, 1997: 48-63). The Meles government accepts state violence against the Oromo and others as a legitimate means of establishing political stability and order. It does this despite its adoption in its constitution of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenants on Human Rights. As Lisa Sharlach (2002: 107) attests, state terrorism and genocide occur when a “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 altogether.” Unfortunately, the international community has ignored the crimes that the Meles government has committed against humanity because of the support this regime has received from the West in general and the U.S. particular.

State terrorism is associated with issues of control of territory and resources and the construction of political and ideological domination. Annamarie Oliverio (1997: 52) 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.” The Tigrayan-led regime mainly targets the Oromo because of their economic resources and political resistance. According to the Oromia Support Group (Nov. 1997: 1), “Because the Oromo occupy Ethiopia’s richest areas and comprise half of the population of Ethiopia, they are seen as the greatest threat to the present Tigrayan-led government. Subsequently, any indigenous Oromo organization, including the Oromo Relief Association, has been closed and suppressed by the government. The Standard reason given for detaining Oromo people is that they are suspected of supporting the OLF.”

The Meles regime has also engaged in looting the economic resources of Oromia in order to develop Tigray, while settling armed Tigrayans and Amharas in Oromia, and enriching Habasha elites and their collaborators. The regime that proclaims in its constitution that democracy and human rights are “inviolable” and “inalienable” in Ethiopia has engaged in terrorist activities and hidden genocide. These activities include the systematic assassinations of prominent Oromos, both open and hidden murders of thousands of ordinary Oromos, the reinitiation of villagization and eviction in Oromia, the expansion of prisons in Oromia, and the incarceration of thousands Oromos in hidden and underground concentration camps. Umar Fatanssa, an elderly Oromo, says: “We had never experienced anything like that, not under Haile Selassie, nor under the Mengistu regime: these people just come and shoot your son or your daughter dead in front of your eyes” (quoted in Fossati, Namarra and Niggli, 1996: 43). In this empire, state terrorism manifests itself in different forms: Its obvious manifestation is violence in the form of war, assassination, murder (including burying people alive, throwing off cliffs, and hanging them), castration, torture, and rape. The police and the army have forced the Oromo people into submission by jailing, intimidation, and beating; they confiscated their properties (Pollock, 1996).

Former prisoners have testified that their arms and legs were tied tightly together against their backs and that 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. Some prisoners have been locked up in empty steel barrels and tormented with heat in the tropical sun during the day and with cold at night. Prisoners have been forced into pits so that fire could be made on top of them.

According to Trevor Trueman (2001: 3), Chair of the Oromia Support Group, “Torture—especially arm-tying, beating of the soles of the feet, suspension of weights from genitalia and mock execution—is commonplace, at least in unofficial places of detention. Female detainees estimate that several soldiers and policemen on several occasions rape 50% of women during detention, often. The Minnesota Center for Victims of Torture has surveyed more than 500 randomly selected Oromo refugees. The majority had been subjected to torture and nearly all of the rest had been subjected to some kind of government violence.” Unfortunately, the successive U.S. administrations of George Herbert Bush, Bill Clinton, and George Walker Bush had fully heartedly supported this criminal regime while giving lip service for the promotion of democracy and protection of human rights. After ruling with iron fist for almost for two decades, Meles and his TPLF/EPRDF party are engaging in genocidal massacres and terrorist activities in Oromia and Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. The Ethiopian state elites who have engaged in gross human rights violations and genocide like other criminal leaders in some peripheral countries “not only go unpunished, they are even rewarded. On the international scene they are accorded all the respect and courtesies due to government officials. They are treated in accordance with diplomatic protocol in negotiations and are seated in the General Assembly of the United Nations.” The U.S. and other Western countries have indirectly financed state terrorism and hidden genocide in Oromia and Ethiopia through bilateral (i.e. governmental institutions) and international institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Hiding this reality and admiring the smartness of Meles Zenawi, David Shinn, former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, claims that U.S. influence in Ethiopia is “not uniquely critical to the Ethiopian government” (Jimma Times, April 08, 2009). This kind of claim is self-serving and refusing to take responsibility since he has been involved in supporting the regime. The Ambassador and other U.S. government officials have sided with the Meles regime and ignored the crimes committed against humanity. For how long the tax money of the U.S. citizens is going to finance state terrorism and genocide? For how long the U.S. government is going to ignore the issues of democracy and human rights in the Horn of Africa in general and Oromia and Ethiopia in particular? Will the Obama administration continue to finance mass murders, hidden genocide, and gross human rights violations? Will it continue to finance state terrorism in the form of war, assassination or murder, castration, burying people alive, throwing of cliffs, torture, and rape, confiscation of properties, beating, and disarming of people?

## **Will the Obama Administration Introduce Change in U.S. Foreign Policy?**

Considering his political slogan of change and his African heritage, some political observers, experts, and African activists expect that the Obama administration will introduce some reforms in U. S. African policy. Suggesting that his “administration has an opportunity to fundamentally remake U.S. relations with Africa during its tenure,” John Prendergast and John Norris (2009: 1) state the following: “As the first president of the United States with immediate African roots, President Obama not only has an important reservoir of goodwill on the continent, he also has the ability to move beyond the tendentious ‘North-South’ debate between developed and less developed countries that has made more transformational policies difficult to attain. Efforts by the dying generation of Africa’s strong men who believe they should rule for life . . . to portray President Obama as a former colonial master will have little resonance in Africa or elsewhere.” Nikki Duncan (2009: 1) also notes that “President Obama’s African heritage naturally invokes the expectation that an Obama Administration will bring a certain cultural sensitivity and understanding of the challenges that face the African continent, and thus will be likely to address challenges in a more pro-active manner.” Or will the Obama administration do more of the same when it comes to U.S. policy in Oromia and Ethiopia?

As a legislator, Senator Barack Obama expressed his concerns on the issues of ending the genocide in Darfur, promoted conflict resolution and peaceful elections agendas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, supported the idea of bringing Liberian war criminals to international justice, proposed the policy of formulating a coherent strategy for stabilizing Somalia, and advanced the agenda of fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa (Duncan, 2009: 1). As a presidential candidate, he outlined three main objectives, namely, intensifying the integration of Africa into the global economy, enhancing peace and security of African states, and consolidating relationships with governments, institutions, and civil society organizations by increasing commitment to promoting and deepening democracy, accountability, and reducing poverty (Duncan, 2009: 2). After Obama became the president of the U.S., Phil Carter, Acting Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, revealed four U.S. foreign policy priorities: 1) Financing security assistance programs for Africa on continental, regional and country levels; 2) promoting democratic systems and practices in the continent; 3) facilitating economic development; and 4) financing African health and social development.

The priority of providing security assistance programs at the level of the African Union (AU), at the sub-regional level, and at the level of an individual state is a serious problem at this time because most of the citizens of Africa are denied their democratic and human rights and social justice. Under these circumstances, the main beneficiaries of such programs are the African heads of state and their henchmen.

Therefore, promoting security assistance programs for the AU and most African governments is tantamount to supporting dictatorship and human rights violations. For instance, the headquarter of AU is located in Finfinne, the center of Oromia, and this continental organization does not oppose the political repression, state terrorism, and gross human right violations of the Oromo and others by the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government. According to Associated Press (2009: 1), Meles Zenawi and his followers are possible targets of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as many leaders of African countries. The president of Genocide Watch, Gregory Stanton, wrote on March 23, 2009, an open letter to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights to admire the action that the ICC took in issuing a warrant for the arrest of President Omar al-Bashir of the Sudan and to investigate the crimes Meles and his government committed against humanity in the Horn of Africa:

The action that the International Criminal Court has taken in this situation has restored hope to peace and justice loving people, affirming that international human rights law not only exists on paper, but in reality. It also sends an important message to perpetrators throughout the world that impunity for their crimes is not assured forever; which may be a primary reason that one of the first leaders to defend Omar al-Bashir and condemn the warrant was Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, whose government has also been implicated in a pattern of widespread perpetration of serious human rights atrocities in Ethiopia and in Somalia. He and those within his government may be keenly aware of their own vulnerability to similar actions by the ICC in the future that could upend a deeply entrenched system of government-supported impunity that has protected perpetrators from any accountability.

Gregory Stanton demonstrated how the Meles government has committed heinous crimes through involving “in the inciting, the empowerment or the perpetration of crimes against humanity, war crimes and even genocide, often justified by them as ‘counter-insurgency.’”

The AU and most African heads of state oppose the indictment of the Sudanese President al-Bashir by the ICC for allowing the committing of crimes against humanity in Darfur; these leaders fear that they may face the same fate because of their engagement in similar practices (Associated Press, 2009: 1). Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa on March 2, 2009 in a *New York Times* editorial chastised the AU and African leaders for rallying behind al-Bashir who allowed genocide to take place in Darfur.

So if one of the Obama priorities is to maintain these reactionary and oppressive African continental and state institutions without introducing reform, U.S. foreign policy on Africa is going to be more of the same. As the East African analysts (2009: 1) states, “Africa will not rank high on Obama’s global agenda.” If the Obama administration wants to introduce some changes in U.S. the two requirements that Prendergast and Norris (2009: 3) advance are helpful:

1. African regional institutions need to become increasingly responsive to the needs of African citizens and not just the prerogative of African heads of state.
2. The broader international community must recognize that war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide are not ‘African problems.’ They are international problems that demand international solutions.

All the objectives and priorities of Barack Obama as a senator, presidential candidate and the president reflect the general policy objective of the U.S. toward Africa; these objectives and priorities focus on the perceived national interests of the U.S. and its African governmental partners regardless of their positions and practices on democracy and human rights. When he was a senator, he selectively focused on the genocide in Darfur, the problem of democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the political crises in Somalia by ignoring the political tragedies in the Ethiopian Empire. His priorities of facilitating the further integration of Africa into the capitalist world system and promoting the security of African states without the prerequisites of implementing the principles and practices of democracy and human rights protection are tantamount to endorsing the previous U.S. policy on Africa.

Most African policy experts such as John Prendergast and John Norris (2009) also ignore the issues of promoting democracy and human rights and overemphasize the significance of using the process of peacemaking as an important tool in U.S foreign policy on Africa by focusing on the conflicts and wars in Sudan, Congo, Somalia, Chad, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Central African Republic, and Uganda. What are missing from their discussion are the issues of conflict and war in the Ethiopian Empire that contributes to the conflict between the governments of Meles Zenawi and Isaias Afewerki and between Ethiopia and Somalia. Since several opposition groups to the Meles regime have been in Eritrea and Somalia, the regime went to conflict and war with Eritrean and some Somali political forces such as the United Islamic Courts.

The Meles government invaded Somalia in 2006 mainly to destroy the OLF base there, when the Bush administration used the Meles mercenary army to uproot the power of the United Islamic Courts. There was the convergence of political interests of the Meles government and the Bush administration. As Ann Talbot (2006: 1) argues, Ethiopia was “waging a proxy war on behalf of the United States.”

In the absence of the practical implementation of the principles and practices of democracy and human rights, financing security assistance programs in Ethiopia is consolidating the Tigrayan-led minority authoritarian-terrorist regime at the cost of the Oromo and other ethnations. The Meles regime uses the massive financial assistance it receives from the West in general and the U.S. in particular to enrich the ruling elites while engaging in political repression, state terrorism, massive human rights violations as well as the exploitation of the dominated peoples. Is the Obama administration going to continue the bankrupted previous U.S. foreign policy in Oromia and Ethiopia by supporting the Meles government? Or is it going to support the proposal of Stanton that is noted as the following: “We ... believe that the Ethiopian people have been waiting long enough for genuine justice and relief from the harsh oppression and brutal tactics committed by a government that purports to be a partner in the War on Terror, while terrorizing their own people. Addressing the EPRDF regime, friendly to Omar al-Bashir, may bring greater stability to the entire Horn of Africa.”

There is no clear indication from the Obama Administration that the U.S. foreign policy on Africa in general and Oromia and Ethiopia in particular will be reformed. As Nikki Duncan (2009: 3) asserts, “while the elements of Obama’s Africa policy look familiar, the mechanisms and manner of implementation will determine the actual impact.” At this time, the priorities of President Obama do not have mechanisms of reforming U.S. policy on Africa. Furthermore, the appointments of the former foreign policy operatives and experts of the previous U.S. administrations who lack the critical understanding of Africa in general and Oromia and Ethiopia in particular indicate the continuation of the previous U.S. foreign policy that did not take the African peoples seriously. Susan Rice, Michelle Gavin, Tony Lake, Aaron Williams, Johnnie Carson, and others “are just a few among several distinguished actors that have been brought on to Obama’s team to help carve out the administration’s policies and stances on Africa and related issues” (Duncan, 2009: 3). These individuals lack concern and commitment for promoting democracy and human rights in Africa.

## **Conclusion**

If President Obama wants to stick to his slogan of change, he should not leave his administration's foreign policy on Oromia and Ethiopia to the bureaucrats in the U.S. Department of State and at the African Desk. Such bureaucrats, experts, and operatives lack deep knowledge and commitment for the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights. President Obama needs to provide genuine leadership from the top by giving priority to the promotion of democracy and protection of human rights in Oromia and Ethiopia if he wants to fulfill his promises of making accountable corrupt, criminal, and deceitful leaders who cling to power through violence. Rather than continuing the U.S. relation with the authoritarian-terrorist regime of Meles Zenawi, the Obama administration should establish strong relationship with liberation fronts and opposition political parties and civil society organizations to promote genuine democracy and accountability to protect human rights and to reduce poverty.

We hope that President Obama will not listen to forces and voices within the American foreign policy establishment that try to maintain status quo in the Ethiopian Empire by supporting the ethnocentric and terrorist government of Meles Zenawi. The president "has a historic opportunity to fundamentally reshape relations between the United States and the African continent [in general and Oromia and Ethiopia in particular] in a way that will be truly transformational" (Prendergast and Norris, 2009: 7). Of course, the Oromo people and others who oppose the Meles Zenawi's government should intensify their various forms of struggle and combine with diplomatic efforts to convince the Obama administration by demonstrating the horrific crimes that have been committed against humanity by this regime with the support it has received from the West in general and the U.S. in particular. On his part, Obama as a transformational president has a serious moral responsibility to promote the principles of democracy, human rights, and social justice by stopping financing African criminal regimes such as that of Meles Zenawi.

As he has denounced genocide and human rights violations in Darfur, President Obama as the reformist president needs to denounce state terrorism, hidden genocide, and massive human rights violations in Oromia and Ethiopia, and to assist the efforts to make Meles Zenawi and his henchmen accountable for the horrendous crimes they have committed against humanity. Any credible U.S. foreign policy should reverse the previous policy that only focused on the U.S. national interest and the interest of the Ethiopian government at the cost of the colonized and oppressed peoples. The U.S. will benefit in security and economic arenas by genuinely promoting democracy and social justice and protecting human rights in Oromia and Ethiopia rather than protecting the interests of the corrupt and repressive Tigrayan ruling class and its state.

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