



## Ethiopia: The Present and the Future

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Ethiopia is raking billions of dollars in investment from every direction, and it has all the appearance of a middle power that is ascending. However, that appearance is misleading. Ethiopia, as I am going to show shortly, is like the Soviet Union in 1984. No one then thought such powerful superpower would collapse in seven years. But it did.

Sometimes states go through a period where everything falls into place just right, and they should attain the most prominent period in their history. But for whatever reason, they don't. And instead of living in the best time in their existence, the very existence of those states becomes in jeopardy, and they start struggling for survival.

The best analogy that I could find for Ethiopia's situation is that of the State of Israel. For over 60 years, Israel was surrounded by powerful Arab governments that repeated over and over they wanted to destroy the Jewish state. But through its wit, strategy, and powerful friends, Israel survived all those threats. And today, the situation is completely different. All the powerful Arab governments that once threatened Israel's existence have all disappeared. And what is left of Arab states and governments is now in the back pocket of the Israelis. Therefore, logic would suggest that the Israelis should be living in the best and the most peaceful time in their history. But they don't. According to some of the best Israeli and Jewish minds, the threat to the Israeli security and existence has never greater than it is today. The reason is that the threat to Israeli security is now coming from different direction: From the Shiites, who were never in the calculus of being a threat to the Jewish state. And one clear difference between Israel's old nemesis and the new ones is that Arab regimes, especially the most overrated among them such as that of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasir, used to fear Israel a lot, but the Shiites apparently don't!



If your enemy fears you, you are already halfway to victory. But if your enemy is not afraid of you, that puts you in real predicament.

Similarly, Ethiopia appears to be living in the best time in its history because its traditional adversary Somalia is in shambles. And the lesser adversary, Eritrea, has reconciled with Ethiopia. However, as I alluded to earlier, the rosy picture that makes Ethiopia appear as a rising power is clearly misleading, because the threat to Ethiopia's very existence is much bigger today than it ever had been. The difference is that today's threat is no longer coming from traditional adversaries such as Somalia, Eritrea, etc. Instead it is coming from a different direction: from the center of Ethiopia.

The root of this threat started with Ethiopia's first incorporation when many nationalities, without their consent, were forcibly incorporated in the configuration of modern Ethiopia. Thus, this problem was always there, but it was dormant so long the privileged Ethiopians had the sway in the country and managed to suppress the wishes of those whom the Ethiopian identity was imposed upon. However, any time the balance of power shifted from the minority to the majority that were oppressed, Ethiopia was going to face an existential crisis that threaten the country's unity and its very existence. That day has arrived.

Because of the makeup of the country which forced the majority of the people to be part of a country, they neither wanted nor consented to, Ethiopia was always at risk of falling off a cliff edge of disintegration. In fact, the path to the disintegration of Ethiopia is so clear that even the stages that would lead it to such disintegration can be easily observed and pinpointed. For Ethiopia to fall off the cliff edge of disintegration, three stages were required.

- 1—Failure of the Ethiopian government to control the whole territory of Ethiopia.
- 2—The power shifting from the ruling nationalities, to the oppressed nationalities.
- 3—The historically ruling Ethiopians engaging in subversive or hostile actions to regain power.

Two of the three stages have already taken place, and they are:

A—The secession and the independence of Eritrea in 1993.

B—The shift of the power from the historically privileged Ethiopians to the oppressed in April 18, 2018 and the ascendancy of Abiy Ahmed and the Oromo people.

-When Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1993, the country lost access to the sea. The Eritreans were the last people to be conquered, and the first to secede and attain freedom. The secession of Eritrea also started the process of Ethiopia's inching to the cliff edge of disintegration.

-When [Abiy Ahmed took power in April 2018](#), the inching to the cliff edge transformed into Sprinting to the cliff edge of disintegration.

-The third stage will occur when the historically privileged Ethiopians (The Amharas and the Tigrayans) attempt to wrest power from the Oromos by subversive or hostile means.

Any day those two groups attempt that, their attempt will usher the third stage, hence, Ethiopia will speed into the cliff edge of the disintegration. Thus, whether it is inching, sprinting, or speeding, the direction Ethiopia is heading is the same: The cliff edge of disintegration!

This process that is pushing Ethiopia to the cliff edge of disintegration cannot be stopped, because it is determined by the country's oppressive history. And that history cannot be undone. However, the process can be slowed down. In my view, the best way, and perhaps the only way to slow down the march to the cliff edge of disintegration would be if two conditions are met:

1—The historically privileged Ethiopians must refrain from engaging in any subversive attempt to undermine to wrest power from the Oromos.

2—The Oromo rule must be fair and equitable to all the peoples of Ethiopia including the Amharas and the Tigrayans , and, even more so, to the oppressed peoples of Ethiopia.

If any of the two conditions is breached, the slowing down of the country's sprinting to the cliff edge of disintegration would not be materialized. Instead, the country will speed up into the cliff edge of disintegration.

What pushes the country into the path of disintegration is a natural phenomenon: The historically privileged Ethiopians would want to regain their privileges. The newly liberated Oromos would want to hang on to their liberty. Hence, you have a clash of interests and goals. And it's that inevitable clash that will push the country to speed into the cliff edge of the disintegration.

Ethiopia, as we all know, is populated by two groups of people. Those who are Ethiopian by choice and by the power they exercised throughout history. And those whom Ethiopian-ness was imposed upon. They had no say in it. They never consented to the arrangement. But it was imposed upon them. They became Ethiopians at the barrel of the gun.

All the conquered peoples of Ethiopia suffered, but the Oromos were one of the peoples who suffered the most. Their territories were invaded, their land taken, and their people oppressed so much so that even their faith wasn't spared. Many Oromos were forced to change their religion. Those were the dark days when Mohamed Ali, the famous Oromo chief, was forced to become Ras Mikael! This oppression hasn't been forgotten, because Mosques turned into churches in Harar and in Oromia are constant reminder of it. That oppressive history ended on April 2, 2018, when Abiy Ahmed came to power, and the torch was effectively passed from the privileged to the downtrodden for the first time in Ethiopian history! (Haile Maren Desalegn was from downtrodden roots, but he never exercised any real power, so his rule was simply an extension of the Tigrayan regime).



The Oromos can be forgiving. And instead of holding grudges for the oppression their people suffered for more than a century, the Oromos can play a positive role in the country's future. However, this could happen only under a new arrangement where the numerical weight of the Oromos would be recognized, and hence, they would be allotted the lion's share of resource allocation, development projects and decision making. In addition, their identity, the Oromo identity, must be recognized in the country's name. So, something like Orothiopia just like Czechoslovakia could be adopted as new and more inclusive name.

This is only fair. If the privileged Ethiopians accept these new arrangements, the process that is pushing Ethiopia to the cliff of disintegration would be slowed down. If, however, the historically privileged Ethiopians refuse to make significant concessions to the Oromos, then the country will keep sprinting to the cliff edge of disintegration.

In addition, it is not enough for the Oromos to be forgiving. They must be fair and just to everyone specially to the oppresses peoples. This fairness and just policies are not as tempting or as easy as dictatorial decision making. Just policies can be burdensome. And a lot of patience, and resourcefulness are needed to pursue them. However, you would get the dividends when you need it the most.

Historically, it is known that an oppressed soldier is the most unreliable in the battlefield, because the moment he sees danger, he tends to wave the flag: He doesn't see any reason why he would sacrifice his life for people who oppressed him and his community. whereas, a free soldier would fight to the last bullet, and sacrifice his life for the sake his ruler and of his country, because he happens to have a stake both in the rule, and in the country's independence.

In modern times, the oppressed soldier and the free soldier symbolize two kinds of men: a stooge and a free man. Each man has benefits and drawbacks. And the way to approach these two men are entirely different.

It is really easy to deal with a stooge. He would dance to your orders; prostrate in a wink; and bow down when you tell him. Dealing with a free man, however, is more challenging. For instance, if you try to order him around, he would balk. So, how best to deal or approach a free man? The first thing is to check yourself, and Think before you do anything else, and show him respect. And he would respect you back. Focus on the bigger things that unites you, instead of the minor issues. He would pay attention and appreciate your thoughtfulness. Show him that he has a stake in your success. He would work very hard to become a reliable and solid ally.

While dealing with a stooge is so easy, the drawback of having a stooge as an ally is that he is unreliable, for he would dance for your enemy in the same way he was dancing for you! When goings get tough, a stooge would go with whoever has the upper hand because that is what the stooges are: they have no principals or morals. For instance, if Abdi Iley was calling the shots in Jigjiga today, he would have been the harshest critic and the worst enemy of the Tigrayan regime, his former masters. No surprise there, for that is the nature of the stooges.

While dealing with a free man has the challenges we pointed out, having a free man as an ally would mean the world to you. The free man would appreciate the respect that you show him, the opportunities you offer, and the stake he has in your rule.

Thus, in the times of danger, when the goings get tough, he would not backstab you, or hide when the situation gets ugly. Instead, he would give you a reliable and solid support, an impenetrable wall that your enemy could not crack or penetrate. Since the free man has stake in your rule, in the time of danger, his interests and yours would become intertwined. Thus, would stand with you, side by side, to the last bullet.

It is really interesting how the phenomenon of the free soldier vs oppressed soldier, the stooge vs free man played out in Ethiopia's recent history. When the Tigrayans came to power and took over Ethiopia in 1991, they implemented a plan and an agenda whose aim was to accumulate all the power and the resources in the country solely in the hands of the Tigrayans. To that end, they announced that all the 9 regions of the country would self-rule, use their own languages, and run their own affairs. This was appealing in the beginning. However, in every region, they appointed a stooge who run the region, not for the benefit of its people, but for the bidding of the Tigrayan elite. In addition, all the knowledgeable, and the experienced people in all fields were essentially banished from the federal system either into exile or into the periphery of their regions. And by doing that, the federal government and all its power had become an exclusive Tigrayan domain. Only a few hand picked lackeys, who were adapt at dancing and prostrating were allowed to come to the corridor of the federal government. Thus, the Tigrayans had total control of the federal government, and complete control of all regions through their appointed stooges, and therefore excluded all the peoples of Ethiopia from having any say in how the country was run.

However, the Tigrayans were clearly short-sighted. By grabbing all the power in the country, and by surrounding themselves with stooges, they alienated all the peoples of Ethiopia, and thereby dug their own graves. Hence, when the tide turned, and goings got tough for the Tigrayan elite, and Abiy Ahmed started hunting them, one after another, the Tigrayan elite had no supporters, or a place to hide, or any means to defend themselves. They ruled the country for more than a quarter century, and they were decimated in few months! This is a historic lesson for any regime that is bent on placing its eggs in the basket of the stooges.

If the Tigrayans had the foresight, and the courage necessary, and instead of stooges surrounded themselves with free men, who truly represented their regions and their peoples, and who had stake in the Tigrayan led government, when the goings got tough, those leaders and all the peoples they represented would have risen up, and fully supported the Tigrayan leadership at the hour of their need. Thus, instead of being hunted they would have been hailed as Ethiopian heroes by their powerful allies from all regions. And as such, neither Abiy Ahmed nor Oromo leadership could have dared lifting a finger against them. Even if the new government was uncomfortable in having the Tigrayan leaders around the corridors of the federal government, they would have offered each and everyone of them the best ambassadorships to the US, Germany, China, the UN, the EU, Japan, etc.

However, just as in economics, political actions have a cost associated with them. That is, if the Tigrayan leaders wanted to make an alliance with free men who represented their peoples and their regions, they knew that would have necessitated a compromise, and would have forced them to cede some of the power and some of the resources to their new allies and to the people they represented.



So, the choice facing the Tigrayan leaders was: should they make an alliance with leaders who represented their peoples, who would demand concessions both in power and resource allocation? Or should they choose stooges who would allow the Tigrayan leaders to control everything and all the power and the resources in the country? The Tigrayan leaders made a conscious decision:

They chose stooges. And since the stooges were there only to do the bidding of their Tigrayan masters, they were given full authority to practically terrorize all the peoples of Ethiopia, in all regions, as if there was no tomorrow.

Therefore, when the tide turned, the house of cards of Tigrayan regime, built in cooperation with the reviled stooges, collapsed so quickly! And as the Oromo led government started hunting and rounding up the **who is who** of the Tigrayan leaders, one after another, the only response from all the peoples of Ethiopia was emphatic: Good riddance!

### **History repeats itself so soon!**

The dust hasn't settled yet at the collapse of the Tigrayan regime, and some of its top leaders are still being hunted as I write. However, while Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Oromo led government has undertaken some unprecedented, historic reforms in all other fields, when it comes to the issue of the kind of leadership they want to work with at the regional levels, or more accurately whether they want to work with stooges or with free men, who represent their peoples, the Oromo government immediately grabbed the Tigrayan playbook!

There is an irony here. And it seems both the Prime Minister Ahmed and the Oromo leadership are oblivious to it. The irony is that it is this very Playbook that is responsible for alienating the entire peoples of Ethiopia from the Tigrayan led government. And it was that alienation from the people that deprived the Tigrayan regime any support when they needed the most. And it was that alienation and lack of support from the people that caused the Tigrayan regime to crumble in just 5 months, and its leaders hunted one after another.

Now, the question is: have the Oromo leaders including the Prime Minister so quickly forgotten the calamity this playbook inflicted on the Tigrayan regime?

The fact that the Oromo led leadership are toying with the Tigrayan playbook, and their willingness to use that stinking relic ESPDP (Ethiopian Somali People's Democratic Party) as an instrument underlines *the Poverty of ideas on the part of the Oromo leadership*. This is not, and was never Somali or Democratic Party. It was one of the most criminal tools used to terrorize the Somali people in the region, by stooges who had no dignity, morality or conscience. This ESPDP must be disbanded immediately because it is a symbol of cruelty, and corruption. It is a symbol of Tigrayan rule with all its notoriety and ugliness.

Since the Oromo leadership are calling for the peoples of Ethiopia to move forward, why on earth they themselves are moving backward and clinging to the dirty relics such as ESPDP of the Tigrayan regime? It doesn't make any sense! Let the Somali people establish a new party, with a new name, new blood, new vision and ideas.

As for the man in Addis Ababa, it is Ok to give him a top job in the federal cabinet. The more Somali members in the federal cabinet, the happier we would be. That said, the fact remains the man is a remnant who used to dance with the old Tigrayan regime. And today he is dancing with you. And if any group comes after you or challenges you, he will change sides in time, in the same way he did the last time, and start dancing with the new group. Imposing such person on the Somali region, or using him as a tool to frustrate the wishes and the interests of the Somali people in the region are unacceptable! This is the failed Tigrayan tactic, and why the Oromo leadership and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed want to imitate them is really mindboggling. The idea that a lone man, a stooge, who has no support whatsoever, and represents no one, would be entrusted with the fate of a region of millions of people is absolutely repugnant!

But as already noted, the man is just a tool. And this act of hiding behind a tool would give a bad name to the federal government, to prime minister Abiy Ahmed and to Oromo leadership. When dealing with the Somali region, or for that matter any other region, the federal government and the Oromo leadership can communicate with them directly, and discuss any and all issues. No middleman is necessary. None is needed.

The thinking in Addis Ababa seems to be that the man, or the tool, is kept at hand as plan B, just in case. But this is the Tigrayan mentality. And if you think like the Tigrayans, and act like the Tigrayans, sooner or later, you will end up like the Tigrayans: hated and hunted!

### **No Margin for Error:**

The biggest difference between the Tigrayan regime and the Oromo led government is the obstacles they faced and the advantages they had. The Tigrayans essentially had a free hand to rule Ethiopia. There was no serious opposition inside the country, and no one in the outside world wanted them to fail. That is the reason why the Tigrayan rule lasted for so long, even though they were awfully corrupt and incompetent.

The Oromos, however, don't have that luxury. They must be alert and on their toes all the time. If the Oromos commit half the blunders made by the Tigrayan regime, it is doubtful the Oromo rule would last even for five years. The Oromos are lacking a critical Card that hugely helped the Tigrayan regime and contributed to the longevity of its rule. That Card is that of religion, which had been the Centre of Ethiopian survival and politics, since time immemorial.

Now, many if not most of the top Oromo leadership today are Christians. And they may dismiss the religion issue as none existent, since they themselves happened to be Christians. However, the issue is not how those Oromo leaders think of themselves, but how they are perceived by the west and by the Christian world. When the western governments and the Christian churches and organizations look at the Oromos, all they see is a sea of Muslims, sprinkled with few Christians at the top. And even those are suspected to have Islamic roots. In other words, they could be wio treated another Lij Iyasus with American, Canadian, and European degrees, who could revert to the religion of their forefathers any given day.

Thus, complacency is a luxury the Oromos cannot afford. The world and especially, the western world, would never give the Oromos the latitude they gave the Tigrayan regime.

There is a well organized propaganda campaign against the Oromo led government that wants to paint the Abiy Ahmed's government ineffective and unstable. There are widely disseminated reports about huge cache of weapons smuggled into the country. There are well coordinated fake news reports everywhere that is sowing suspicion, chaos and instability. It is quite likely that some of the well publicized bank robberies in Oromia and elsewhere were staged, to give credence to the propaganda about the presumed instability in the country, and to scuttle the peaceful negotiations between the government and former rebel movements such as the OLF and the ONLF, etc.

In any confrontation between the Oromos and the historically privileged Ethiopians, everything will depend on how the Oromos treat the historically oppressed nationalities in Ethiopia. If the Oromos treat those nations and their peoples with respect, and allow them to run their own affairs, and show them they have a stake in the Oromo led government, then the Oromos wouldn't have any problem garnering the support of all other oppressed groups because the oppressed have affinity with one another. If, however, the Oromos treat the historically oppressed nations and people as semi-slaves just as the Tigrayans did, and select from every region a stooge that dances to their signals just as the Tigrayans, then all bets are off. In such circumstances, it is quite possible that all the people of Ethiopia, privileged and non-privileged, will gang up on the Oromos just to stick it to them and spoil their premature triumphalism! This would be bad for the Oromos. But it would in no way save Ethiopia. Rather it will only make the resultant upheaval that much uglier.

The push and pull will continue for some time. But ultimately, the center would not hold. So, if we carefully look at the dynamics that are shaping Ethiopia's future, the push and pull will lead to the eventual breakup of the country into five regions:

A—Oromia state

B—Amhara

C—Tigray State

D—Afar State

E—Somali State

How well each of these regions would fare would, to a large extent, depend the kind of leadership each region has at the time of disintegration. Able leaders would be able to unite the people in their region, and create peace and harmony with their neighbours. Less able leaders will stoke tension and chaos in their own region, and with their neighbours as well. The rest of the Ethiopian regions would most likely gravitate to one of these regions, or to the neighbouring countries.

Ethiopia today is pregnant with many possibilities. Whether those possibilities become disastrous, manageable, or beneficial, would depend on the wisdom or the recklessness of the Oromo led government. If the Oromo led government shows foresight, patience, alertness to the many conspiracies from the remnants of the old regime, but also tolerance toward others and



inclusiveness, and give the Ethiopian people in every region a genuine stake in the country's rule and resources, they would indeed snatch a victory from the jaws of messy environment.

If, however, the Oromo leaders adopt the attitude of it is our turn, and fill their pockets, surround themselves with stooges, and forget about the painful lessons of the recent history, the disintegration of Ethiopia will arrive faster than anybody anticipated!

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