

ETHIOPIA HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE AN ALTERNATIVE ALLY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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United States of America needs a stable and an established and long term alternative ally in the Horn of Africa to facilitate particularly its regional and global policy implementations. The ideal state, in the Horn of Africa, for this enterprise to take place is Ethiopia. Therefore, instead of sporadic military training, instead of using it for certain sporadic military action, and, instead of, for example, a certain token amount of money here, a certain token amount of money there, in response to a certain favor, by the United States of America, why not help develop Ethiopia economically and militarily into a formidable and self sufficient a long term alternative ally. Do serious investment into, its education, its economy, and into its military system. How much is the United States of America investing in Egypt and in Israel? Given a proportional investment in Ethiopia, Ethiopia, with the potential it has no doubt can become a formidable alternative ally to these above mentioned states, in fact, with a different end results compared to the two.

September 11, 2001 exposed the potential impact of fundamentalists, that is, of religious fanatics, what it could do on world security. The Horn of Africa very close to the hatching grounds of fundamentalists can no longer be ignored and considered strategically irrelevant. The remark, **“Africa does not fit into the national strategic interests,”** can no longer be the foreign policy guideline for the globally and deliberately targeted United States of America. The Commander of Task Force for Horn of Africa, Marine Brig. Gen. Martin Robinson, stated that, **“Any time that you have a global threat, it requires a global presence.”** (US News World Report., Oct. 6, 2003). Vice President Dick Cheney's statement that **“The United States should 'preserve its strategic depth' and should act overseas to 'shape the security environment'”** (Washington Post, March 7, 2004) are still valid and applicable in the Horn of Africa today in 2013 and for many decades to come. The Horn of Africa is unquestionably gaining strategic importance to wage war against terrorists, by using it as **“forward operating base,”** and **“listening posts,”** to adopt the terms used by the proponents of the fight against terrorists. It is here that the people of the United States of America need a long-term, strong, and reliable alternative ally in the region. I argue that, that strong and dependable alternative ally is the people of Ethiopia, with no

animosity, what so ever, towards the people of the United States of America. The United States of America needs Ethiopia, a country capable of playing a dominant role in the region, in the air, on land, and God willing in sea. Both countries can benefit from this cooperative project. The United States of America builds up the capacity of a country that would become stable, formidable, and a reliable alternative ally. The reciprocity can began now with the target of alternative ally building. In fact, to that effect, Ethiopia has already contributed to that type of activity. It is a matter of raising the relationship to a higher level. Ethiopia, undoubtedly, benefits enormously from such investment that would be made by the United States of America particularly in the economy and in the education sectors. To establish a self-sufficient and a reliable alternative ally these two factors must go together. It is the development of these two sectors that raises the consciousness and its maturity, of the society hence its free and independent participation.

The Potential for Ethiopia to be a Formidable Alternative Ally.

The thrust of this proposal is to show that the people of Ethiopia can be a reliable partner and has the potential to play a major role as an alternative ally in the Horn of Africa. I will use two major areas, namely, its history and its stability potential, to prove it.

ITS HISTORY

The credibility and the potential of the people of Ethiopia can be objectively measured and judged by becoming familiar with its history. Ethiopia has a robust history capable of telling its distinguishable cultural makeup and practices, and the fabrics of its society that can be traced back to many centuries. This proposal will deal with specific but limited areas, namely, its diplomatic practices and its world recognition as far back and even before 600 AD, that is, about 1400 years ago. Around 600 AD Ethiopia was, for Muslims, synonymous with freedom from persecution and emancipation from fear. That was the time when the brutally treated Muslims in Mecca in the hands of Quraish took the first Hijra to Ethiopia. Empress Eleni, about 546 years ago, and the following kings that reigned up to 1520, about 494 years ago, had diplomatic relations with European countries specifically with Portuguese. King Fasil, who ruled Ethiopia from 1632 to 1667, was active in foreign affairs and dispatched diplomatic missions to Yemen, Istanbul, India and China. That was about 380 years ago. About 346 years ago, Muslims (Jabarti) and Jews (Felasha) of Gondar were allowed to practice their religion freely in their own quarters. By nineteenth century religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence

was decreed in Ethiopia. To conclude these dynamic and phenomenal practices by the kings of Ethiopia, in 1903 Emperor Menelik signed "Treaty of Commercial Relations" with the United States of America. Commissioner Robert P. Skinner representing President Theodore Roosevelt came to Ethiopia for signing the treaty. This step taken by the United States of America would have not taken place without assessing the standing of the king and the people he was leading. The king could have not been assessed alone without measuring the culture and the discipline of the society that he was leading. To establish, mind you, commercial relationship in that era explains the presence of strong distinguishable cultural practices among the people of Ethiopia.

Here, an important point to note is that, at least, about 1300 years ago Ethiopia was practicing civil rights and human rights and there was an orderly established and identifiable governance practices in Ethiopia. There was respect and dignity of human beings in general and human life in particular. The maturity and the discipline of the people of Ethiopia that we are witnessing today is the outcome of these cumulatively transferred behaviors through the ages. Therefore, I argue that, this maturity and the discipline of the Ethiopian society are prominent factors to qualify it to be a credible and a reliable partner to play, single handedly, a dynamic and determining role in the Horn of Africa.

In addition, this is an aspect of the history of Ethiopian people to be considered very seriously, as the history of Ethiopia clearly shows the Ethiopian people have demonstrated its stamina, its strength of character and courage to deal with its adversaries decisively at different battle fields and terrains a number of times. For example: **One of its heroic performance** was the battle in 1875 and 1876 with Egypt. The army of Khadiv Ismael was annihilated by Ethiopians at the battle of Gundat and Gura under the leadership of King Yonannes IV. The spirit and the heroic determination of the then Ethiopian people is deeply embedded in the current generations. The Ethiopian people becomes galvanized, automatically, with emotion, when external forces challenges their land and air rights. **The second example is the battle of Adwa of March 1, 1896.** In this battle King Menelik II crushed the Italians. Italians suffered about 7000 killed and 1500 wounded. 3000 Italians including General Matteo Albertone were taken prisoners. The 800 captured askaries, traitors, had their right hands and left feet were amputated. The Italians left behind all their artillery and 11000 rifles. The Ethiopians suffered about 4000-5000 killed and 8000 wounded. Vittorio Dabormida's brigade was slaughtered by Oromo Cavalry under Ras Mikael of Wollo. **The**

third example is North Korea participation. Ethiopia fought as part of US 7th Division in South Korea against North Korea and China. The three Ethiopian battalions fought 253 battles with no one Ethiopian soldier taken by North Korea as a prisoner. The Ethiopians never left dead bodies of Ethiopian soldiers in the field. A Silver Star and eighteen Bronze Stars were awarded to the Ethiopian soldiers for their exemplary performance.

ITS STABILITY POTENTIAL

Here, stability mainly refers to the existence of tolerance between the ethnic groups in Ethiopia. It does not refer to instability due to the economic and political issues caused as the result of oppression by the ruling regimes. The later aspect of the political issues should be considered in the equation of the partnership formation. Given the number of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia, except sporadic conflicts here and there, the bond that existed between the ethnic groups in Ethiopia is still intact and stable. One can emphatically say that ethnic conflict, as the potential to disintegrate the country does not exist. The people of Ethiopia resisted the instigation of some power hungry elites. For example, had it been for the desire of Meles and his regime Ethiopia would have experienced total disintegration. The bonding process that started hundreds of years ago is holding it together. It rejected all the divisive intentions. Therefore, there shouldn't be any concern that the society will breakdown into tribes and clans like the one we are witnessing in Somalia, therefore, rendered unreliable.

Five examples to show the strength of the bond that exists between the ethnic groups of Ethiopia.

ONE: The methods used by Meles and his regime to balkanize Ethiopia but was unsuccessful: a) The insertion of Article 39 in the constitution, that permits the declaration of freedom by any of the Ethnic groups; b) the establishment of ethnic and language based federal government; c) the direct and, or, indirect blatant agitation and instigation by Meles himself was unable to turn on and motivate the different ethnic groups of Ethiopia to rise against one another, and, demand their independence. The former president Negasso and the former prime minister Tamirat did try their best to instigate Oromo against the Amaras in Harar. They failed miserably. Here are some of the arguments, very low level and immature arguments at that, that Meles Zenawi used to motivate and instigate the people of Ethiopia:

1) ...a feudal monarchy and a repressive dictator wouldn't hold Ethiopia together, now we are trying another way. If Ethiopia breaks apart, then it wasn't meant to be. 2) ...trying

to bury the differences has always been the problem. It is out in the open. I am not unduly worried about these clashes here and there. 3). ... *The Tigreans had Aksum, but what could that mean to the Gurages? The Agew had Lalibela, but what could that mean to the Oromo? The Gondres had their Castle, but what could that mean to the Walayita?* 4) *The Ethiopian flag is "piece of rag."* This last argument is so low that one could tease down the "rag" to threads, to cotton, and to farm, putting aside the processes in between. A high school level of argument. A mature and far looking leader of over eighty nationalities would not utter such very divisive statements. The flag is a symbol deeply linked to, and loaded with, the sense of heroism, unity, and with deep sense of belonging to a nation called Ethiopia.

TWO: The case of Eritrean People's Liberation Front is another stark example to see the strength of the bond that existed between the ethnic groups of Ethiopia, when one critically looked into the so-called "30 years of struggle for independence." Taking the face value of this mystified thirty-years-war, if the Eritreans truly believed that the way they were treated by the central government was so inhuman and so oppressive one would have witnessed demonstrations after demonstrations, as the result of which the independence of Eritrea would have not taken thirty years. Because people would have come out in thousands with a slogan "independence or death." A concrete example, when people are so oppressed and feeling it to their bones and thought the only way out is to be independent and therefore act vehemently, would be East Timor. The people of East Timor came out in mass, continuously, holding whatever instruments of fighting they could lay their hands on against a well armed forces of the central government. But, this kind of demonstrations did not take place in Eritrea at all, because the people of Eritrea did not feel the economic, the cultural, and the educational oppression more than the rest of the ethnic groups, in fact they were much better off. That was why EPLF did not get the Eritrean mass behind it to demonstrate in support of what it was doing. Independence was simply shoved down their throats by power hungry Elites and of course with the help of Meles Zenawi. A leader with good intention at heart will not let his people lose its sea outlet. Nor one would simply cut off a piece of land and give it away as in the case to Sudan. Just like that. The legacy of Meles Zenawi. There is the potential for anything done during the rule of Meles Zenawi without referendum to be reversed when the people of Ethiopia holds power. When issues are of

ultimate concern of the people in international governmental organizations it is put for referendum. Why shouldn't this democratic and constitutional issues and processes apply in the case of Ethiopian people? Therefore Ethiopia has the full right to exercise this fundamental right when the time comes.

Had the war of 1998 left alone to take its natural course and Eritrea been taken back, the people of Eritrea, the masses, wouldn't have cared a bit. They would have continued their daily routine activities as if nothing happened. The farmers would have continued plowing their lands, the merchants would have continued providing their services to the community, and the bureaucracy would have continued its daily routines, because in reality it was not their war.

THREE: The failure of Oromo Liberation Front to obtain the support of Oromo people is another unforgiving examples. In 1991, when Mengistu left the country, the Oromo Liberation Front had a chance to fly its flag somewhere in Wellega and declare the Oromo people independent. At least for one year, through 1992, TPLF did not have its security structure established down to local (woreda) level. During that period, had the Oromo Liberation Front gotten the cooperation of the Oromo people it was free to do anything, at least, in-and-around the Oromo people. But it did not. Why? Because OLF new then, as it clearly knows now, that the Oromo people was not behind it. The Oromo people in good conscious could not accept that it is not Ethiopian. The Oromo people have shade their blood for the independence of Ethiopia. It was part and parcel in the bonding process that took place in Ethiopia starting many centuries ago, to make Ethiopia what it is today. In my opinion, the Oromo people can say I am Ethiopia, the land and its air. Ethiopia is mine. It can factor in, its size, its investment in blood and sweat, into any social, economic, and political activities oriented equations anywhere in the land of Ethiopia. No one will be in a position to challenge this bold factual statement. Therefore, OLF's political position aught to be to claim it. Not to run away from the truth and its responsibilities. In Oromo Region, 90% of the Oromo society residing in towns and 15% in country side, can speak in Amharic language. (Tobia, 4th year, No. 19, April 30, 1989, Ethiopian Calendar.) OLF is swimming against this tide.

FOUR: The death of Emperor Menelik is another example. The socioeconomic state of current Ethiopia, including its history, cannot be divorced from the interethnic activities that began at least over a thousand years ago. According to Donald Levine (1974), religious activities, migration, intermarriage, exchanging services in market places, sharing a common

culture, and, even war have contributed to the bonding process that took place, still taking place, in Ethiopia.

Through time, the cumulative result of the evolutionary interactions between the different ethnic groups would have made it inevitable for bonding to take place, irrespective of who ruled the country. The latest Ethiopian leaders, such as Tewodros, Yohannes IV, Menelik II, or Muhammad Giragn were simply elements of historical coincidence in the naturally driven social and cultural development in Ethiopia.

The bonding that existed between the ethnic groups, the sense of belonging to a country, I might add, was well manifested when Menelik II died. Emperor Menelik, who ruled for about 25 years (1889 to 1914), died ten years after he completed the *formal* campaign of the *informally* already bound nation. Had it not been for the cumulative interaction that took place earlier, that is for hundreds of years, ten-years is literally “zero” in terms of bonding a society. One would have assumed then, that, when Emperor Menelik died the ethnic groups, particularly of the south would have revolted and would have gone separately. But that did not happen. Here, too, my argument is that the fear of ethnic conflict to the extent of destabilizing the whole nation does not exist.

FIVE: Religion as a binding factor. The mass exportation of books and pamphlets, the building of Mosques in mass by the Saudi charity organizations did not affect the relationship between the people of Ethiopia and its stability, hence, its reliability cannot and would not be questioned. Even though, the tolerance between religion started over a thousand years ago, as late as about 346 years ago, Christians, Muslims, and Jews were allowed to worship their God in their own way. This hidden binding thread that came stretching itself, slowly, all the way to the current generations is positively impacting the religious tolerance in the society. Certain fringe extremists cannot alter this equation already established in Ethiopia. The other striking phenomenon is that, there are Gurage Christians and Gurage Muslims; there are Gondere Christians and Gondere Muslims; there are Tigryan Christians and Tigryan Muslims, there are Wolloye Christians and Wolloye Muslims, and so on. Because of these time-tested relationships that exist in Ethiopia, I argue that in the foreseeable future, for a number of decades to come, religion would not be a destabilizing factor in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, religion cannot become hindrance for the future partnership to be developed between Ethiopia and US.

In conclusion, provided Ethiopia is well organized and well equipped economically, educationally and militarily, given the natural resources, the very intelligent Ethiopian people, and, the presence of the very skilled

manpower, that Ethiopia is endowed with, Ethiopia can be a long term alternative ally, for the United States of America, to any of the Middle East power, including Egypt and Israel.

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June 29, 2013
