



Ethiopia in Crisis:

Is Ethiopia a country giving birth to a multinational democracy, or is it a country on the verge of collapse?

Abstract: In the words of Major Dawit Woldegiorgis: *"Ethiopia has now become a rudderless ship floating on troubled water"*. This describes the facts on the ground. There are widespread conflicts that government forces appear unable or unwilling to manage.

Objective: To highlight the root causes and underlying circumstances of instability in Ethiopia and encourage public discussions to find negotiable solutions.

Fundamental questions to analyze root causes: Lots of speculations to explain the critical situation in Ethiopia:

- Is the government exercising an intentional, non-interference policy so that armed rebels are eventually ostracized and rejected?
- Is the government being sabotaged by internal party elements and domestic political opponents sympathetic to groups that want the government to fail?
- Is the government unable to counter rebel tactics of inciting ethnic hatred and violence, hence appearing weak?
- Is the government efficiently handling the diplomatic pressures of countries like Egypt and the U.S.?
- Does the government favor one ethnic group while marginalizing others?
- Are the instability and chaos the price Ethiopians have to pay for the birth of democracy?

Public perceptions and items for discussion:

- Non-interference policy, which translates into an inadequate or weak presence of the central government in the various regions, will undermine the confidence of the people it governs and encourage radicals, anarchists, and rebels to freely impose their evil deeds.
- There is a growing sentiment that the government, or a significant portion of the ruling party, is filled with saboteurs and holdovers that must be immediately purged. Regime change, which

some voices are calling for, is not realistic at this time of crisis and will devastate the democracy-building process.

- To fight crime, inflation, corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement, the government needs to strengthen its institutions.
- Promoting and organizing self-defending communities will ease the burden of responsibility for maintaining safety and creating stability and can help in creating détente and rapprochement. This, together with imposing a state of emergency and strict policing in vulnerable areas of the country, will be synergistic.
- Negotiations, not appeasement of armed rebels, should be encouraged. Mobilizing to continue the war with rebels until they are 'completely destroyed' is not a realistic option and only serves to start a vicious cycle of violence.
- Diplomacy has to be strengthened by using the services of seasoned professionals, winning back the U.S. as an ally, and settling the issues with Egypt and Sudan. This will help curb proxy conflicts against Ethiopia by cutting the sources of material and moral support.
- There is no turning back from the wide-open flood gates of democracy. However, the transition needs to be managed and kept from spiralling out of control. In case of the worst scenario of threat to national security and break up, a nationwide state of emergency may be necessary.
- Wolkayit/Tegede and Raya controversy should be negotiated, putting all options on the table—including a self-administrating region, joint administration by Tigray and Amhara, special federal administration, and a referendum.

Recommendations: The following short term and long term recommended solutions need to be discussed and refined through input from Ethiopians:

- Conflict resolution experts and Individuals without political agendas, religious leaders, civic organizations, responsible media, and prominent Ethiopians should work together to reduce tensions and de-escalate conflicts.
- Opposition parties should provide constructive alternative solutions to Ethiopia's problems and provide checks and balances to the ruling party.
- To fight crime, inflation, corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement, the government needs to strengthen its institutions.
- The government should root out known saboteurs within the ruling party and regional administrations.
- The government should encourage and support genuine citizens and stakeholders to advance inclusive and robust institutions.
- The Ethiopian government should immediately stop arrests of journalists and political protestors over flimsy charges. It should be tolerant of personal insults, satires, and criticisms.
- The Ethiopian government needs to have a dialogue with insurgents to resolve the current crises, and it should do so pragmatically to ensure lasting peace.
- The government needs to strengthen its institutions to fight crime, inflation, corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement.

- The National Dialogue Commission should work towards a well-conducted, structured and comprehensive dialogue. It needs to identify issues and recommend solutions by including all political parties, prominent Ethiopians, civic organizations, and other influential individuals.
- Wolkayit/Tegede and Raya controversy should be conveyed by respecting historical rights before TPLF's annexation. The agreement must include the rights of any ethnic group to co-exist with no discrimination and also consider the outcome of the border commission.

Conclusion: Ethiopia is facing numerous problems. The Ethiopian government needs to address citizens' concerns and be open to constructive criticism. Furthermore, the government should take charge of managing the perception of the global community and take a leading role in shaping the response to the escalating crisis.

INTRODUCTION

In the words of Dawit Woldegiorgis, "Ethiopia has now become a rudderless ship floating on troubled water." This image reflects the many outstanding problems facing the country. There are widespread conflicts that the government forces appear to be either unable or unwilling to contain. The conflict in the north is still far from over. The rebels are trying to create a separate state and destabilize the whole country by creating chaos and upheaval with the sizable arms and armed men at their disposal. Abiy's words and some of his actions, which initially were soothing and hopeful, have increasingly been ringing hollow. Abiy's government has taken measures to dismantle the clandestine security and marginalize the old ruling clique by replacing the EPRDF by the new Prosperity party. But even these measures, widely hailed at the time, are now being questioned. Were they done without adequately assessing the impact of such swift change?

However, the Ethiopian government has far less benefit to receive from the harsh criticisms and second-guessing, given the dire situation that it is trying to cope with. What the government needs now is constructive criticism. Politics can be discouraging given its daily reversals, uncertainties, and wild ups and downs. But rather than resignation, cynicism, or contempt, concerned citizens must do their best to participate in the most constructive way possible, to try and help shape a response to Ethiopia's worsening crisis.

OBJECTIVES

Our objective is to highlight the root causes of Ethiopia's instability, stimulate open discussions, and suggest negotiable solutions. The ideas identified and discussed here attempt to avoid wishful thinking and partisanship and instead contribute to the airing of many different Ethiopian opinions and voices.

What are the ROOT Causes of the problems in Ethiopia?

What is happening now in Ethiopia? Below, in the form of questions, are the essential points by some of the many different Ethiopian voices. They address the root causes of the problems causing the current crisis in Ethiopia.

- Is the government's non-interference policy purposeful and intentional, designed to expose the armed rebels' corrupt, self-serving, and violent short-sightedness so that the Ethiopian people will reject them? In other words, is the government playing a calculated political game to show the armed rebel groups for what they really are? Is the government giving the rebels enough rope to hang themselves, thereby undermining their political viability?
- Is the government being sabotaged from within by internal party elements and domestic political opponents sympathetic to various groups working to destroy the Ethiopian government?
- Is the government weak and overwhelmed? Is it unable to counter the rebel's tactics of inflaming ethnic hatred and provoking ethnic violence? Is the government allowing the rebels to seem stronger and to even attract followers and supporters as the increasing conflict descends into a civil war between Oromo, Amhara, and other ethnicities?
- Is the government failing to handle the diplomatic pressures from countries like Egypt and the U.S.? The diplomatic war is contributing to the chaos facing Ethiopia by representing her as a rogue state rapidly heading towards failure.
- Is the government driven by extreme nationalist ideology favoring one ethnic group and marginalizing others?
- Are the instability and chaos the price Ethiopians have to pay for the birth of democracy? Are ethnic nationalists worried that democracy will undermine their political agenda, trying to make the democratic process fail?

DISCUSSION

The Ethiopian problem is a complex one. It helps not to seek a simple solution that revolves around the capacity of Dr. Abiy Ahmed. His philosophy and policy revolve around 'Medemer', the togetherness of conflicting and sometimes irreconcilable dreams of various 'nations and nationalities.' Included together are honorable dreams of freedom and democracy but also less dignified ones of domination and separation. At the moment, the negative elements seem to have the upper hand. The country seems headed towards dissolution. Ethiopia's delicate situation is not just about the civil war that is threatening to overwhelm and break up the country or just about Abiy's leadership. It is also about the painful birth of democracy.

The conflict in Tigray, Wollega, and Benshangul: a non-interference policy will undermine the confidence of the people it governs and send the wrong message to radicals, anarchists, and rebels that they can freely impose their evil deeds due to ineffective or weak government

protection. If the government's passivity in the face of atrocities committed by insurgents is a calculated gamble to demonize them, then it is an unlikely and dangerous gamble. Expecting the Tigray and Oromo people to revolt and reject TPLF and OLF' shene' is unrealistic given the people's daily living pressures. They are less concerned about the atrocities committed against other ethnicities and more concerned about their well-being. This would be true for anyone. A passive policy will undermine the confidence of the people it governs and send the wrong message to anarchists and rebels that they can do what they please because the central government is ineffective and weak. The evil and chaos, once fully unleashed, will be difficult to control. A more active view by the government, which includes informing the public on unfolding events, and making regular statements of its stance regarding the unfolding events and crisis, would be very constructive.

The peace and reconciliation commission and other experts in Conflict resolution should identify issues and ideas that contribute to the conflict, initiate dialogue with the various parties to the conflict, and continually work to find a solution. Similarly, Christian and Muslim religious leaders, civic organizations, responsible media, and prominent Ethiopians should work to lessen tensions and de-escalate conflicts. The commission can make suggestions that might eventually become institutionalized through amendments to the constitution. Concerned Ethiopians would like to see issues listed in its Position Paper [Concerned Ethiopians Statement on The Ethiopian National Dialogue](#), dated 01/14/2022 discussed by the commission.

Opposition parties such as the OFC, NAMA, OLF (legal), Balderas, and others need to discuss ongoing conflicts leading to displacement and bloodshed. In addition to criticism of the ruling party for not tackling the country's problems, it is their duty also to provide alternative solutions to Ethiopia's problems and confront P.P. with those ideas. Political protests need to be carefully managed so as not to incite violence. The most fundamental expectations of citizens from their government are safety and security. Ethiopians must be safe and secure anywhere in Ethiopia and not face any prejudice or danger due to their ethnicity.

Regime Change: There is a growing sentiment that the government or a significant portion of the ruling party is filled with saboteurs requiring an urgent purging. As some are voicing support, regime change is not realistic at this time of crisis and is contrary to the infant democracy-building process. Suppose a critical mass of these saboteurs or PM Abiy and his close confidants are suspected of being saboteurs. In that case, the top rankings of the government are ethnic federalists promoting ethnic dominance of a specific group at the expense (and targeted weakening) of other groups and the Ethiopian people. In this case, it is pointless to talk about solutions other than a regime change. Of course, an avenue with a dead end and solution impractical, considering the dire circumstances the country is in now. Regime change during war and instability is unthinkable and to be abandoned. However, if the saboteurs can be rooted out, the effort must be expedited, and an urgent purging is necessary.

Self Defense: Organizing self-defense groups into manageable militias is a tricky and potentially dangerous gamble for the government, but managed properly, it can extend the central government's power and control to provide security for the communities. The national government and the national army have already declared that some regions, especially in Amhara and Afar, have to defend themselves from the TPLF rebels. Therefore, it is understandable for the government to leverage all militants and compatriots to fight for the survival of their country in times of national interest. The question and doubt from the government are that these citizen militias will grow to be big and become a threat to the country at a later stage.

Law Enforcement and Protection: Using the national army to protect vulnerable communities is expensive, and the logistics are cumbersome. It stretches the army thin making it less effective to tackle the Tigrayan rebels and the Sudanese army in the north. Imposing a state of emergency and strict policing is necessary to counter human rights abuses. It might, however, push young people from majority communities in those areas to join the rebels. Imposing a state of emergency in such regions with tough policing must proceed with caution and must be coordinated with finding the root causes of the problems that led to insurgency movements. For example, why is the OLF "shene" finding it easy to recruit Oromo youth to its violent cause, given Dr. Abiy's ethnicity?

Negotiations, not appeasement: Here is an article in foreign policy that draws a road map on how negotiations are rolled out between the Federal government and rebels.

[\(https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/12/ethiopia-peace-blueprint-tigray-conflict-resolution/\)](https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/12/ethiopia-peace-blueprint-tigray-conflict-resolution/)

Negotiation with rebels on peaceful resolution must be done from a position of strength and national interest and must not appease the rebels. Appeasement will only result in a false and temporary peace that will last until the atrocities and criminal demands resume.

Military Option: there are many who want to continue the war with rebels until the rebels are completely destroyed. But this repeats the mistakes of Mengistu. Ethiopian history has many violent rulers, Tewodros, Yohannes, and Mengistu in particular, being good examples against the use of force. Abiy has been trying to experiment with the rule of law and some freedom for the people but slackened policing and dismantling the clandestine security network too swiftly has been costly. That may be one reason why his government has been unable to control the massacres. By working together with Individuals, religious leaders, civic organizations, responsible Media, prominent Ethiopians, and opposition parties, the government must end violence and end the activities of armed insurgents.

Diplomatic Efforts: Ethiopia's diplomatic corps must be a priority. With Egypt and the U.S., Ethiopia faces pressures that diplomacy can help alleviate. Egypt's leaders, for example, have always used the 'Ethiopian Nile threat' as a bargaining petition for public support for themselves.

Their attitude and strategy have always been populist rather than rational and realistic. Ethiopia should push on collaborative rather than competitive approaches. The U.S. is against Ethiopian national interests for several reasons: Egypt is seen as a much more important ally; the U.S. is using punitive measures to reduce the influence of China in Africa, and Ethiopia is being made an example; the U.S. is siding with the TPLF rebels because it perceives that its national interest is better served by siding with them. The Ethiopian government should try to engage in wise diplomacy, not belligerence so that both countries can reach an agreement on the above three issues.

State of Emergency Option: A nationwide state of emergency to close down social media, arrest bloggers and activists that are tools and pawns of rebels, or instigate mass hysteria and anger through agitations such as 'rise up for your rights and freedom'.

Strengthen Institutions: Civic Organizations, influential individuals, religious organizations, and others concerned about Ethiopia need to be proactive and try to lessen tensions and de-escalate conflicts before they turn into full-fledged disputes.

Birth of Democracy: Ethiopia's delicate situation is not just about the civil war threatening to overwhelm and break up the country or about Abiy's leadership. We are not the first country or people to discover a fundamental and deadly contradiction in the democratic setup. A democratically-elected leader might destroy the country he is elected to lead or at the very least abolish the democratic form of government that got him elected. This contradiction has been at the heart of democracies from the beginning. It is just that we are now coming to terms with the possibility. It would have been better if Ethiopia's democracy had started at a less turbulent and chaotic moment in her history. But (and here again, there is precedent) Ethiopian democracy was born at a challenging time in history.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above problems and solutions are not exhaustive. But the solutions should be proposed with an eye to their immediate and quick implementation and eventual institutionalization:

1. Conflict resolution experts and Individuals without political agendas, religious leaders, civic organizations, responsible media, and prominent Ethiopians should work together to reduce tensions and de-escalate conflicts.
2. Opposition parties should provide constructive alternative solutions to Ethiopia's problems and confront the ruling party.
3. The government needs to strengthen its institutions to fight crime, inflation, corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement.
4. The government should root out known saboteurs within the ruling party and regional administrations.

5. The government should encourage and support genuine citizens and stakeholders to advance inclusive and robust institutions.
6. The Ethiopian government should immediately stop the arrests of journalists and political protestors over flimsy charges. It should have a thick skin for personal insults, satires, and criticisms.
7. The Ethiopian government needs to have dialogue with insurgents to resolve the current crises; and it should do so pragmatically to ensure lasting peace.
8. The National Dialogue Commission should work towards a well-conducted, structured and comprehensive dialogue. It needs to identify issues and recommend solutions by including all political parties, prominent Ethiopians, civic organizations, and other influential individuals.
9. Wolkayit/Tegede and Raya controversy should be conveyed by respecting historical rights before TPLF's annexation. The agreement must include the rights of any ethnic group to co-exist with no discrimination and also consider the outcome of the border commission.

CONCLUSION

The above short-term and long-term recommended solutions need to be discussed and refined through input from Ethiopians. The likelier solutions need to be implemented as soon as possible to prevent the loss of even a single Ethiopian life due to political conflict.

About US:

Concerned Ethiopians (CE) is conceived as a non-partisan, non-religious and not-for-profit civil society by concerned Ethiopians. CE arose out of concern over the observable reality of unrelenting ethnic-based violence, genocide, ethnic-cleansing and accompanying human trauma and economic deprivation in many parts of the country. CE will exert genuine effort to address the gap in direct citizens-government dialogue, truthful understanding and accountability between citizens and their government.