

The Biden Administration's Policy Move from Ethiopia as an Ally to that of Adversary is Provocative and Dangerous

Aklog Birara (Dr)

"Without unity, there is no peace"

President Joe Biden, Inaugural Speech, January 2021

Part I of III

I was in high school when Senator William Fulbright, Chairman of the United States Foreign Relations Committee that is today chaired by Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey wrote **"The Arrogance of Power"** and became the strongest voice against America's invasion of and atrocities in Vietnam. Research shows that the United States has initiated 201 wars since the Second World War. The death toll and economic costs from these wars are incalculable.

As we celebrate **"Africa Day,"** African youth understand this track record of the United States; and recognize the costs of wars regardless of their origins and sponsors. Africans do not want a reckless and "Imperial like" America to inflict pain and suffering in Africa under the pretext of a "new scramble" for the continent's natural resources and huge emerging market. The Biden Administration must recognize the hopes and aspirations of Africans, including Ethiopians.

The new scramble for African natural resources, investments and markets must not occur at the expense of more than a billion and 300 million African people, most of them young.

I refer to the **"Arrogance of Power"** and the war in Vietnam for a reason. It was unjust. It was unjust because the United States violated Vietnam's territorial integrity and sovereignty. It was unjust because the United States inflicted pain and suffering on innocent civilians. I refer to this devastating war because it showed the arrogance that emanates from a Superpower. By arrogance, I also mean not living purported **values or not walking the talk.**

The Biden Team needs to walk the talk.

President Biden to whose campaign my compatriots and I contributed our share, spoke passionately about the **need for unity as a prerequisite for peace in the United States.** I said "Amen." This same utterance of "unity" in policy applies equally to Ethiopia. Does it not? He also said this at his inaugural. "Recent weeks and months have taught us a painful lesson: there **is truth, and there are lies. Lies told for power and for profit.**" He then urged fellow Americans "to defend the truth and defeat the lies." A great deal of untruths and lies have been uttered about Ethiopia. So, why embrace them as a basis of policy on Ethiopia?

Tragically, these untruths and lies that have never been vetted by credible and independent sources are now used to take punitive measures against one of the most steadfast allies of the United States not only in the Horn but the entire Africa and the Middle East.

It is vital to remember that the atrocities in Vietnam that are still fresh in the minds of Vietnamese and other peace-loving people across the globe had energized and unified the indigenous population as never before. Today, Vietnam is a unified and fast developing country. There is one Vietnam; and not two as was proposed then.

The people of Vietnam fought fiercely and heroically in defense of their country's independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. They won against all odds because they had a national purpose. They united, fought back hard; and finally preserved their homeland.

Today, Ethiopians face a similar situation. They must set aside their differences in ethnicity or faith or other differentiation and save their homeland. They have done this numerous times before, including at the Battle of Adwa 125 years ago. The Biden Team must not ignore the notion that when cornered and threatened, Ethiopians revert to what they possess: unity in the face of adversity.

Some independent sources question the Biden administration's punitive measures against Ethiopia for the right reasons. For example, Foreign Policy magazine quotes Cameroun Hudson of the Atlantic Council who said rightly that the U.S. Department of State's May 23, 2021 imposition of sanctions against **Ethiopia is a game changer.**

This punitive measure is a hostile act by "an ally" that decided unilaterally, with unreliable and partisan data and information; and in just a few short months after President Biden took office, to degrade more than 120 years of friendship between the United States and Ethiopia. "This is a major strategic shift in the Horn of Africa, to **go from an anchor state for U.S. interests** to become a potential adversary to U.S. interests." I never imagined this would happen at all.

This is the reason why I characterize the U.S. sanction against Ethiopia as a game changer. It is a game changer for the following reasons:

The Biden Administration and the chorus of resolutions by the U.S. Senate and the draft resolution in the House:

1. Fail to respect Ethiopia's sovereignty by interfering in the country's internal affairs.
2. Fail to refrain from treating Ethiopia as a "colonial" and aid-dependent country.
3. Fail to respect Ethiopia's territorial integrity and its sovereignty as a country.
4. Jeopardize or put at risk Ethiopia's legitimate rights to harness its vast water resources including the filling of the GERD that potentially benefits 117 million people 66 million of whom live in darkness.
5. Fail to recognize Ethiopia's unparalleled contributions to Peacekeeping operations in the Korean Peninsula, in Burundi, Rwanda, Darfur, South Sudan and Somalia, and in the war against terrorism.
6. Neglect to acknowledge Ethiopia's commitment to global partnership and collective security.
7. Ignore the notion that, as a sovereign and independent country, Ethiopia is committed to reform its body politic, governance and the advancement and institutionalization of democracy in its own ways, harnessing its own domestic cultures and institutions.

8. Sideline to entertain Ethiopia's just demand that external forces must refrain from framing their programs and policies on manufactured lies, untruths, and misinformation.

9. Fail to recognize the fact that Ethiopia deserves to establish governance that is fair, equitable and inclusive of all ethnic and faith groups; and deserves international support to propel its national development in a sustainable and equitable manner.

10. Ignore completely to acknowledge the fact that the TPLF that ruled Ethiopia with an iron-fist is gone; **and that the TPLF cannot be restored to power** by any external entity regardless of its resources.

The distinguished political analyst and expert on Africa, Dr. Lawrence Freeman wrote and posted a commentary in Africa and the World on May 24, 2021. The aptly titled assessment, "**New U.S. Hostilities Against Ethiopia Threatens Horn of Africa**" highlights the unintended consequences of the Biden Administration's unexpected shift in diplomatic relations with Ethiopia. The most critical point to which I subscribe is the author's conclusion that the Biden Administration does not show "Respect for Ethiopia's sovereignty" at all. Respect for Ethiopia's sovereignty in this case includes the imperative that there cannot be durable peace without national unity. Treason undermines national unity to the core.

Equally disconcerting is the fact that members of the U.S. Senate and House authoring resolutions do not possess ample knowledge of Ethiopia's history or the current situation on the ground. "Despite the fact that very few, if any U.S. Senators have a deep-seated knowledge of the complexities of Ethiopian culture and society, they did not refrain from encroaching on Ethiopian sovereignty, which obligates the central government to act in the interest of safeguarding the nation." I know of no responsible government on the planet that would allow internal or external forces or a combination of the two to destroy its nation.

President Biden underscored the imperative of "unity" as a corner stone for "peace." Is that not the reason why Abraham Lincoln, one of America's celebrated heroes, led the Union Army and saved the Union. Had he failed, the United States would have morphed into two countries.

Dr. Freeman underlines the flaws of the Senate Resolution that passed. "S.Res.97, ignores the responsibility of Prime Minister Abiy to defend his nation, demanding instead: an immediate cessation of hostilities in the Tigray Region; strongly disapproving of the escalation of political tensions between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) into armed conflict; and most egregiously urges the government of Ethiopia to engage in a full cessation of hostilities. In essence, S.Res.97, rebukes the Ethiopian government for defending its nation from an insurrection, and demands reconciliation with the insurgents."

Would the Biden Administration sit and negotiate with the "Oklahoma Bomber? With terrorists who assaulted the United States 9/11. With insurrectionists involved in assaulting the Capital on January 6, 2021? Is the standard different for African nations including Ethiopia?

Freeman rightly points out the below summation that the Biden Administration, the U.S. Senate, and members of the U.S. Congress either forgot or completely ignored for reasons that will be debated for decades to come.

“Breaking up the Union, only weeks after President Lincoln took office, was the explicit intent of the southern states, who insisted that the U.S. government, no longer represented them. President Lincoln would not allow the republic to be divided. He waged a relentless war that ultimately led to the deaths of upwards of 750,000 Americans. He ignored all pleas to come to the peace table and negotiate with the enemy of the Union, who he would only refer to as “rebels.” The only negotiation President Lincoln would accept from the “rebels” was unconditional surrender. Under no condition would he allow some other country to dictate to him, the President of the United States of America, how to conduct the war to save the Union.”

Why would the European Union and the United States expect Ethiopia or any African state to accept terms and conditions that affect their domestic or sovereign affairs? Did not African nations, with the pioneering lead of Ethiopia, shake the yoke of colonialism?

I shall summarize part I of this series with a set of questions:

1. Who anointed the United States or the European Union to dictate policies to a sovereign nation that is defending its very existence? Are they not aware that colonialism is gone?
2. What is the strategic reason why the Biden Administration treats the TPLF, a terrorist organization, at par with that of the Government of Ethiopia? Is this not unfair and unjust?
3. Does not America’s punitive action against Ethiopia embolden the TPLF to continue terrorism; to prevent humanitarian aid; to make Ethiopia ungovernable; to dismember Ethiopia; and to destabilize the entire Horn and Eastern Africa?
4. Does this not in turn severely harm the long-term interests of the United States in the Horn, Eastern Africa, and the rest?
5. Does not this intervention in the internal affairs of an independent Africa nation by the U.S.A. create precedents that will affect the world community? Does it not induce realignments in the region? Who benefits from this realignment? Who loses?
6. Does not cut of U.S. aid to Ethiopia harm the poor, including Tigrean-Ethiopians the most?
7. Does the U.S. A. recognize that its action against a pillar country and an ally of the American people invites and emboldens terrorists such Al-Shabab, Boko Haram and others in one of the most volatile and strategic regions of the world?

May 26, 2021.

