

Facts why Ethiopia does not fit “The Failed State” Status

Response to Major Dawit Woldegiorgis: (Part 1)

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“You are entitled to your opinion. But you are not entitled to your own facts.”
Daniel Patrick Moynihan

I read Major Dawit Woldegiorgis’ article titled “Ethiopia: A Country on the Brinks” posted on Borkena.com with great interest. There are valid points in the article that should concern all of us. Unfortunately, however, like many of our politicians, intellectuals like Major Dawit twist facts and omit essential information to fit their opinions. I am not sure how our society can remedy such endemic willful blindness and intellectual dishonesty in our political discourse. Ethiopia cannot afford a “political game” at this juncture; we must be mindful of the effect of such cheap propaganda presented as fact-based realistic “assessments”. Particularly at this critical moment in the history of our nation, what we say and will have grave consequences and could threaten the survival of our nation. We can disagree in our opinions, but there is no need to use false assertion and twist facts to debunk the positive accomplishment that the entire world is witnessing today. We have failed time and again to put our nation’s interest above our self and organizational interest. We prolonged our people’s sufferings for many years because we did not put our nation’s interest first. It seems we have not learned from our past, and once again we are back to muddy the political water to protect the interest of few who care more about their narrow political agenda than the country at large. It is disappointing to see someone like Major Dawit becoming part of this dangerous and disingenuous political machine that is hell-bent to be a barbwire in our path towards democratic Ethiopia.

Before I go any further, I would like to state in full disclosure that Major Dawit wrote flattering statements about my late father in his book titled “YEDEM MERET”. He was also one of those individuals who wrote very kind words about my father in his condolence message after the passing of my father. I am very grateful for that. My opinion and criticism of Major Dawit is related only to the aforementioned article. In no way, my criticism is ill intent and it is not to diminish the contribution that Major Dawit made to our country. However, he seems to fall in the trap of the extremist elements who are doing everything possible to undermine and belittle the leadership of Dr. Abiy Ahmed; and I make no apology for my harsh criticism of his baseless article.

There is no denying that Major Dawit has valid points in criticizing the Abiy administration. However, his “grim” assessment and conclusion about Ethiopia’s current status is based on false assertions, the omission of material facts, and twisted references from organizations that have no credibility. In fact among the indicators that Major Dawit mentioned in his article that fits the “failed State” countries status, there are only two indicators that can be attributed to the current Ethiopian situation. These are Lack of control over armed forces, militias, etc. within the country and massive displacement. The rest of the criteria that are

mentioned by Major Dawit does not apply to the current Ethiopian situation at all; he simply used them to fit his foregone conclusion before the facts. Ironically, at the time Major Dawit article was published, the Abiy led government was improving the conditions in Oromia, Benishangule, Somalia, Amhara, Gurage, and other regions. Moreover, many people who were displaced in Gonder, Southern regions, Somalia, Gurage, and Oromia regions were returning to their homes or placed in another more stable part of the country.

Major Dawit began his article by stating **“As instability and violence spreads across much of Ethiopia, with most recent incidents getting close to the capital in Northern Showa, it is becoming a matter of grave concern to Ethiopians and regional governments, whether there will be a full-fledged civil war in Ethiopia.”** (Emphasis added). Major Dawit did not cite any credible reports or mentioned what regional governments have indicated any concern about the fear of “civil war” in Ethiopia. As a matter of fact, what Major Dawit failed to mention is that the “conflict” in Northern Showa lasted for about a week, while the government restored orders in West Oromia, Benishangule, Gondar, Jijjiga, and other areas. The conflict in Northern Showa did not last long enough to be considered “a crisis” by any account. The fact is, instability and violence were not spreading across Ethiopia when Major Dawit published his article; what was taking place is quite the opposite. It is sad to see a person of Major Dawit’s caliber falling in the propaganda trap of extremist elements and write such dishonest article that is devoid of facts and a narrative that does not reflect Ethiopia’s condition of the time. The news posted on February 25, 2019 on Borkena.com and other outlets, the Amhara region security officials clearly indicated that “The security situation in central Gonder Zones, in North Western Ethiopia, is improving”. Moreover, the federal government took control of the border between Benishangule-Gumuz and Oromia regions and was able to restore order. These are the facts on the ground.

Major Dawit invoked the statement of Herbert Hoover where it does not belong hoping that his comparison of Herbert Hoover and Abiy Ahmed will make his point clearer when in fact the experience of Hoover and Abiy have no comparable traits. Herbert Hoover presided in the United States for four years and failed to provide a solution to America’s economic problem of the time when Abiy Ahmed is providing a vision that will change Ethiopia’s chronic violent past. How does one compare four years failed leadership in the United States with one-year leadership of Ethiopia that gave enormous hope to the people and followed by concrete actions? The comparison of Hoover and Abiy is nothing short of comparing apples and oranges.

Major Dawit, in his comparison of Hoover and Abiy, he stated “The single most significant criticism levied against Herbert Hoover is that he did not do enough to combat the Great Depression. Many historians believe Hoover underestimated the severity of the Great Depression.” He continued to say “Like Hoover, Abiy underestimated the severity and complexity of the problems of Ethiopia.” This clearly shows Major Dawit’s lack of understanding of the vision and policies of Dr. Abiy Ahmed. I admit that it is very difficult for those who spent their lives in a violent political culture to believe that Ethiopia’s politics can change. Dr. Abiy’s new approach to our centuries-old political culture is hard to grasp especially to those who have been part of our violent political culture. As they say, “you can’t teach an old dog a new trick”. Despite the relentless efforts of those “old guards” to undermine the most important accomplishment that is changing our political culture, we are now witnessing conflicts between various ethnic groups solved through dialogue without bloodshed. Abiy’s vision is to build a nation that is inclusive of all stakeholders. The “MEDEMER” principle is basically a principle of inclusive. Our political elites, who have been killing each other for years, are now seating in one table drafting a road map to make the political playing field fair and equal to all involved. Dr. Abiy is not underestimating our problems, he is laying out a new approach to bring a lasting

solution to our violent political culture. More than anyone, he clearly understood our vengeful politics and the cycle of political violence. He also clearly understood this dangerous political culture can be only solved through inclusive policies, dialogue among conflicting parties, and by leading with an example that loudly states “violence does not solve our problems”. It is for that reason, Abiy is not resorting to military action whenever people like Major Dawit demand it.

This maybe a lot difficult for people like Major Dawit who grew up in a “militarized culture”. Our political elites, whether in the government or as opposition, used violence believing their violence would solve our political problems. We grew up in a political culture that believes Ethiopia can only be saved if we implement exclusionist policies and with the thought of “only I can solve the problem”. Our politics always has been “My way or the Highway”. Hence, it is not surprising to see Dawit and company in a confused state of mind. Their approach is always to use force to solve our problems. Sadly, we have seen such failed policies in many countries. Major Dawit and most of Dr. Abiy’s critics are unable to see that violence only begets more violence. It is in the antithesis of this violent political culture, Dr. Abiy made military action only as a last resort. As he has repeatedly said, it would not have been difficult to deploy a military force to quash any protest or militant activities; however, he understood that such forceful action would be repeating the past failed approach. Violent and forceful action by the government could have stopped the militants’ brutal action temporally, but that would not solve the chronic violent struggle that the country traveled through for decades. Thus, Major Dawit’s criticism is prompted by his lack of understanding and his own past experience in the Ethiopian political arena, not by Dr. Abiy’s lack of action. Time and again, we have witnessed Dr. Abiy bringing different fighting factions to the table and demand to solve their problems through dialogue. This is a true quality of leadership.

Major Dawit, in his article, stated “Ethiopia is a failed state by all indicators. The concern now is how intense and how tragic it is going to be.” This statement clearly shows that Major Dawit has become one of those who listened and read only negative news about Ethiopia. Clearly, he is out of touch with reality in Ethiopia. There are those who have become “opponents” of Dr. Abiy because he did not say “how high” when they demanded him to jump to their tune. As those who watch Fox news only see “the better side” of Donald Trump, those who are captive of our version of “Fox News” are blinded by our “Fox News” pundits’ propaganda. Just like those Fox news’ captive audience, we have people blinded by the propaganda machine that is working overtime to undermine the current leadership in Ethiopia. One example that clearly indicates that political pundits like Major Dawit are out of touch is the claim that Mr. Habtamu Ayalew, who now has a title of “political analyst” on ESAT TV, made during his interview on April 21, 2019, on a Radio program broadcast. Mr. Habtamu claimed that it is no longer possible to hold a protest in Ethiopia and asserted that Dr. Abiy’s regime has become a dictatorial regime. Ironically, Medical College students held a protest in Addis Ababa on April 22, 2019, and Addis Ababa merchants held a protest in front of the PM’s office on April 23, 2019. These are the type of people predicting a “doomsday” in Ethiopia.

Major Dawit mentioned eight criteria that are indicators for any given country to be considered as “Failed State”. These are:

- Lack of control over armed forces, militias, etc. within the country
- Lack of free participation in politics
- Lack of control over territory within national borders
- Massive displacements
- Failure to provide public services food, health, shelter etc....
- High level of corruption
- High numbers of refugees seeking to leave
- No or poorly functioning economy

Let us take each one of them and compare it to the reality on the ground.

1. Lack of control over armed forces, militias, etc. within the country

There is no question that there are armed forces and militants in the country that have become a challenge for Dr. Abiy's administration; however, these challenges are not unique in Ethiopia. Every Ethiopian regime, in modern time, has to deal with rebel groups and militants. In fact, there are fewer militants in Ethiopia today than a year ago. It is an enormous achievement for Dr. Abiy's regime to bring organizations like the OLF, ONLF, Ginbot 7, TPDM, and other armed groups to the table so they can be part of the political process that will shape the future of our nation. Compare to the number of armed groups in Ethiopia before Dr. Abiy came to power, we now have a fewer militant and armed rebel groups. More than the rebel groups, the challenge for Dr. Abiy is the Youth Group in many regions that have become lawless. Instead of using force to crackdown these youth groups, Dr. Abiy's administration approach has been to handle the problem in a peaceful manner. I, among many, have been advocating for the government to declare "State of Emergency" nationwide so the government to pursue its main objective which is handing power to the people through a fair, free, and peaceful election. I agree the government lacks full control over armed forces and lawless youngsters.

2. Lack of free participation in politics:

I am not sure what Major Dawit is implying here; however, in the Ethiopian political history, there has never been a time where political participation is encouraged and where the political arena has been open. Every citizens' right to take part in any political organizations activities is respected; journalists are free to practice their profession, exiled political groups are "invited back" into their country and they are taking part in their country's political affairs. Dr. Abiy's regime has established an Election Board that is considered nonpartisan by all, and it has paved the way to make the judiciary independent. So, where does Major Dawit's claim that there is a lack of free participation in politics comes from?

To justify his assertion, Major Dawit quotes a newly formed Human Right organization that no one is heard of. He is unable to mention any credible human right reports about "lack of political freedom" in today's Ethiopia. According to Major Dawit, this "unknown" Addis Ababa based Human Right Organization report states the following as "lack of political freedom" "the irregular appointment of a mayor in Addis Ababa and its fall out; the Burayu Massacre and its fall outs; the imprisonment of individuals seeking to establish a civic advocacy group in Addis Ababa; the Addis Ababa resident identity card scandal; the Legetafo displacement of people by government; the Addis Ababa question; and demographic engineering." Even if we take this on its face value, how is this considered "lack of free participation in politics? As Major Dawit knows even in countries where democracy is practiced for many years, power abuse is not absent. The difference is, when the government engaged in power abuse, citizens go to court to remedy the situation. Addressing all these senseless points is a waste of time; none of those mentioned above are examples of lack of free participation in politics. The people of Ethiopia have the freedom to take part in their country's political affairs today more than at any time in the history of our country. It is sad to see Major Dawit falling to the "anti Abiy" political pundits' pressure and engaged in such deception. There is no credible report anywhere in the world that indicates there are political prisoners in today's Ethiopia. In fact, Human Right Watch in its 2019 report stated **"Many of Ethiopia's repressive laws used to silence dissent and restrict citizens"**

meaningful engagement—including the Charities and Societies Proclamation, the Media Law, and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation—were being revised at the time of writing” emphasis added. This is what credible Human Rights organizations are saying about political freedom in Ethiopia. Major Dawit’s travel to Addis Ababa by itself is a testimony to the type of political freedom Ethiopians enjoy today.
.....to be continued.