

TPLF's Counter Revolution and Potential Antidotes

Part 2

Derese G Kassa (Ph.D.)

In Search of Antidotes

In my previous article, I outlined some of the ideological, and organizational pillars that the TPLF edifice is erected upon. Its unabashed ethno-nationalism, purchase of political violence, and evolution from a Marxist Leninist entity to the party of a propertied, urban ethno-class stood out. I also outlined how the TPLF response to Abiy Ahmed's rise is organized into three major facets. Its military security complex turned to hatching, financing, planning and executing inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence throughout the nation. It is also angling toward recruiting hardliner ethno-nationalists in an attempt to rupture the support base of OPDO and ANDM. It resuscitated Sidama nationalism to break down SEPDM. It is galvanizing its satellites in Afar, Somali region, Benishangul Gumuz and Gambella to join the ranks of the EPRDF and outflank Team Abiy. It seems a "new" EPRDF, perhaps with a different party nomenclature, but under the tutelage of the TPLF is in the making. The third strategy is to dilly dally, defy and stay on a course of non-committal toward Abiy Ahmed's government. This projected "ambivalence", I argued, floats the Federal government undecided between quelling the TPLF resistance in earnest and in time, and being prudent calculating that somewhat aggrieved TPLFites would come around through negotiation.

I then raised three fundamental questions. First, “How does the Abiy government view TPLF’s strategy of inciting chaos and violence?” Does it consider it an act of desperation by a loose band of renegades and their mercenaries or as a premeditated, organized plan of action that spans years?” Second, “What is going to be the strategic response of Team Abiy toward this “new horses for courses” strategy of rupturing the OPDO base and encirclement from the peripheries?” Last but not least, “Is Abiy Ahmed’s government willing to take risk and check mate the TPLF old guards in time? The responses from Abiy Ahmed’s administration to these three fundamental questions determine the path his government will take. As the saying goes, the prognosis is half the diagnosis. Be this as it may, I propose the following antidotes as strategic measures to thwart and reverse TPLF’s counter revolution. I cannot stress enough the fierce urgency of instituting these reforms.

1. National Security Sector Reform

The departure of the former security chief was not an individual affair. A network of intelligence and counter- intelligence officers with a command and control chain have gone underground. From the type of attacks they allegedly conducted this far, we can deduce they have well organized and financed operational units. They also have technical units. They are deeply embedded in the formal state security apparatus and have nodes in the regional states as well as neighboring countries.

All of these mean the national security apparatus has to be cleared from top to bottom. The nature of the business also means you have to hold the chain of command and build a new infrastructure in the shortest time period possible. Otherwise, there will be security lapses, vacuums and failures in many parts of the country and in many competencies. The prime

minister should make this his number one priority. In my opinion, it takes precedence over democratization and economic liberalization. The first order of business to the national security apparatus should then be to thwart and neuter the counter revolutionary schemes and revanchist impulses of the TPLF. Long term, however, Ethiopia needs to develop a new National Security Policy (NSP) assessing domestic and foreign security threats, defining and operationalizing its national interest(s), and developing strategic objectives.

2. Public Involvement to Secure Peace

No matter how dedicated and competent police and intelligence agencies are, they would be overstretched given the scale and sheer number of attacks unfolding throughout the country. This means the general public should take it upon itself to stay vigil, monitor, and safeguard each and every Kebele. The government should double down on Community Policing and Neighborhood Watch programs. A system has to be designed on how to interface these networks and associations with the formal policing institutions and the criminal justice system. Distinct judicial bodies and benches need to be launched that look into indictments that have to do with inciting communal violence, assassinations, creating havoc and disturbances throughout the country. Perpetrators should be brought to justice fast track. This will boost public confidence and also deter would be co-conspirators. Here, civil society organization leaders and opposition party politicians can play a very important role to aid the government's nationwide effort to secure the nation.

3. The Promise and Perils of Ethiopia's Youth

Ethiopia has the second largest population in Africa. This unbridled population growth means more than 60 percent of our population is youth. These young people have unmet and ever increasing demands for economic wellbeing and human security. They live in a country where land is fragmented and farming is becoming less productive owing to such factors like environmental degradation, soil erosion, and desertification. They live in a country where chronic agrarian crisis manifest in starvation and famines are commonplace. Youth unemployment numbers are staggering. Hungry, jobless and frustrated, these young folk also observe the few who have become rich. They witness the massive income and wealth inequality between the corrupt political elite and the general public in Ethiopia. This pent up anger and frustration means the youth are a restive population. They could easily be swayed and enlisted for mob action and vigilantism by rogue politicians. Abiy Ahmed's government is sitting on a powder keg. In fact, the prospect of Ethiopia's democratization is very precarious if the Ethiopian government does not address the promise and perils of the youth bulge and youth "movements" in Ethiopia.

4. Democratic Transition and Deepening

The challenges discussed above and some of the recommendations outlined here demand Abiy Ahmed's government to act rapidly. But most of these challenges are also long term structural problems that require the efforts of successive regimes in Ethiopia. And that can only be realized if we democratize the nation and put in place constitutional, parliamentary, and judicial institutions that enshrine and protect rights; separate powers; check and

balance authority; and enforce the rule of law. Building these institutions is not a one night affair. It should also not be the sole responsibility of Abiy Ahmed's government. It is the responsibility of each and every Ethiopian. In fact, these institutions will only be democratic and legitimate if they are internalized and become the ethos, the values and faith articles of Ethiopian citizens themselves. It is this responsibility of instituting democratic culture and practices that political sociologists dub as "democratic deepening". That balance between liberty and security is always delicate but like Benjamin Franklin once opined, ""Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." We need both.