

Are Colorado's Ethiopian's stampeding from the Democratic Party? What's the deal?

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View from the Left Bank: Rob Prince's Blog tags: Hybrid Warfare



Ethiopians and Eritreans of all stripes celebrating the removal of the Tigray People's Liberation Front from power and the possibilities of a more united, prosperous countries with peace between them. Aurora High School, July, 2018, 7,00-10,000 in attendance (R. Prince photo)

Washington's endgame in Ethiopia remains unclear. Is its goal to limit the emergence of a regional Horn of Africa hegemonic power, whose politics will be more independent of Washington? Whose potential for energizing the entire region are a threat to U.S. interests? To partition Ethiopia in a divide-and-conquer manner that has marked the history of both European colonialism and American post war neo-colonialism? Counter Chinese growing influence in the Horn of Africa? Support Egypt (and Israel) in that country's irrational fears of the consequences of the completion of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam?

1. Colorado Ethiopians Stampede from the Democratic Party?

Large numbers of Ethiopians in Colorado are bolting from supporting Democratic candidates to seek their fortune with Republicans. Anecdotally, it is nothing short of a stampede that would effect politics in the state long term. In a state where swing voters often make the difference the tens of thousands or so Coloradans of Ethiopian descent, who tend to vote as a block can make the difference between who gets elected to higher office.

There is a misconception that the community is split down the middle between the supports of the Abiy government in Addis Ababa and those who stand with the Tigray People's Liberation Front. This is the stuff of which fantasies are made. 95% of Ethiopia's diaspora community in Colorado (and elsewhere) stand with Abiy Ahmed, less than 5% have thrown their lot with the TPLF.

I recall a meeting several years ago between members of the mainstream Ethiopian Community of Colorado in an Aurora Ethiopian restaurant with the state's Democratic Party leadership. There, the Party leadership heard many versions of "you only show up at election time and then

we never hear from you till the next election” Increased focus did follow that produced temporary electoral results.

Much of that good will however has evaporated. Increasingly the Dems are persona non grata in Colorado’s Ethiopian churches, mosques and restaurants given the Biden Administration’s support for the Tigray People’s Liberation Front’s separatist offensive. The brief honeymoon between elements of Colorado’s Democratic Party leadership and key Ethiopian personalities is coming to an abrupt end.

Colorado Ethiopians helped elect Biden nationally and Jason Crow (D – Colorado) to the House in Colorado’s District 6 are now moving in droves into the Republican fold. Not that long ago here in Colorado, the then anti-Trump sentiment among Colorado’s Ethiopian community helped Jason Crow unseat his conservative, Mike Coffman in their contest for the U.S. Congressional seat in Colorado’s District 6. This swing to the Democrats came after then-President Trump urged Egypt to bomb Ethiopia’s Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam as the dam nears completion.

The brief honeymoon between Ethiopians-USA and the Biden administration is over. Its policy of increasingly hybrid warfare against Addis Ababa, Colorado Ethiopians are swinging to the far right. If the Coffman-Crow congressional contest were held today, it’s hard to say how it would play out as the support the Democratic Party, and Crow himself, enjoyed is shrinking. In a few states – Colorado, Georgia and Virginia electoral contests are close and Ethiopians, who vote in large blocks can be a critical swing vote.

Certainly a good part of the reason for the shift is a result of the Biden administration’s opportunistic and irrational support for the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Another factor is the Colorado Democratic Party’s on-again/off again focus on the issues of its Ethiopian immigrant community, the second largest in the state after Latinos. The party courted a few figures in the Community only to essentially dump them for whatever reason not long afterwards leaving bitter feelings.

2. Washington’s short-sighted support for the TPLF

As with Colorado, so goes the rest of the Ethiopian Community in the United States!

From 1991 to 2018, the TPLF ruled Ethiopia with an iron hand till they were finally politically sidelined and isolated. The post-2018 government headed up by Nobel Prize winner Abiy Ahmed has strong support from much of the Ethiopian population. Ethiopians everywhere, at home and in the diaspora (including all over North America) – celebrated the sidelining of the hated TPLF with massive public displays

Washington’s full-scale offensive against the Ethiopian government has provoked strong negative reactions among Ethiopia’s American citizens, who have alternated between criticism of Republican and Democratic administrations. Concerning Ethiopia, the policies pursued by Washington are bipartisan.

For the moment, these winds are blowing from the right, the far right in fact. Recently the Ethiopian community nationally has formed a lobbying firm, to some degree modeled on the Zionist lobby, AIPAC. The word “on the street” is here in Colorado, such luminaries as Ken Buck, one of the state’s more rightwing members of Congress, are being encouraged to carry the torch and come out publicly in support of the Abiy government. There is even talk in certain circles of contributing to the main Congressional gunslinger and January 6 White House trasher enthusiast, Lauren Boebert.

At the moment, Biden administration policy offers the Ethiopian diaspora virtually nothing given its open hostility to Ethiopia's current plight. Ethiopian Americans are especially miffed by the Biden administration's shaping its Ethiopian narrative giving credence to the illusion that the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) are the victims, rather than the instigators and perpetrators of their country's chaos, disunity and separatism.

Taking the lead on its hardening line against the Abiy government are a circle of foreign policy specialists within the Biden Administration. Secretary of State Blinken, National Security Adviser Jack Sullivan plus that coterie of neo-liberal Africanists within the State Department, the ideological offspring of Herman Cohen preferred the previous authoritarian rule combined with neo-liberal economic policies to Abey Ahmed's somewhat more independent Ethiopian diplomatic path. Somewhere in the background, but still involved former National Security Adviser Susan Rice appears to be the behind-the-scenes stage manager.

Hardly the neutral mediators where it comes to Ethiopia, the Biden administration has encouraged a broad-based misinformation media campaign to undermine the legitimacy of the Abiy government. Some examples:

- Both the government and the American media have engaged in a misinformation campaign against the Ethiopian government not unlike those that preceded the U.S. military offensives in Iran and Libya
- There are two resolutions in Congress, one in the House, the other in the Senate that weigh heavily in favor of the TPLF
- It has initiated sanctions against certain personalities in the Ethiopian (and Eritrean) governments; supported calls to indict Prime Minister Abiy before the International Criminal Court (which Washington refuses to participate in); and spearheaded a move within the Horn of Africa to isolate Ethiopia from its neighbors.
- Three Biden administration representatives, U.S. Senator Chris Coons and (un)retired State Department diplomat Jeffrey Feltman have both gone to Ethiopia, not on fact finding missions as reported, but to essentially dictate policy. More recently US AID Administrator, Samantha Powers did likewise. Powers was a key figure in the 2012 U.S.-led NATO invasion Libya that resulting in the shattering of that country that ignited a decade of North African instability.

Powers was a key figure in the 2012 U.S.-led NATO invasion Libya that resulting in the shattering of that country that ignited a decade of North African instability and one of the main architects of U.S. humanitarian intervention, using humanitarian pretexts as excuses for military intervention. Feltman, something of a hatchet man for U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East, since has been named the U.S. Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa.

Viewed with deep suspicion for his diplomatic role in Lebanon where previously stationed, Feltman has a reputation of a master of fanning sectarian tensions he is claiming to resolve. His recent comment that Ethiopia's tensions could make Syria look like child's play in comparison was viewed as a (not very) veiled threat to the Addis Ababa government to "fall in line" with U.S. policy or suffer the consequences.

There is something odd about this current anti-Ethiopian offensive. From the vantage point of political economy, there is very little difference between the approaches of the disposed TPLF government and that of Abiy. Both follow neo-liberal approaches, encouraging foreign investment and privatization of government assets. Like the TPLF, the Abiy government has shown no signs of leaving the U.S. security umbrella provided by AFRICOM.

It makes one wonder: does Washington prefer allies, tools that it knows like the TPLF, to an Ethiopian administration whose goals and directions are less predictable?