

**Proceedings
of the
2009 OSA Mid-Year Conference**

US Policy Towards the Horn of Africa: Opportunities and
Prospects for Change under the Obama Administration

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EDITORS' NOTE

Zakia Posey, OSA Secretary, and **Abebe Adugna**, OSA President

This year's OSA midyear conference aimed at generating discussions on a timely topic of interest: "US Policy Towards the Horn of Africa: Opportunities and Prospects for Change under the Obama Administration." With the incoming Obama Administration in the US, many including the Oromo, hope there is an opportunity for the US to changes it policy towards the Horn of Africa in general and toward the Oromo in particular. The OSA mid-year conference was intended to promote exchange of ideas on the opportunities and prospects for such change, and what might be Oromo's role in it.

It is fair to say that the conference lived up to its promise. It generated a rich and interesting set of presentations and discussions. The panelists included Terrence Lyons, Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution at George Mason University; David Shinn, Adjunct Professor at George Washington University and former US Ambassador to Ethiopia; Ezekiel Gebissa, Associate Professor of History at Kettering University; Asafa Jalata, Professor of Global Studies at Tennessee University-Knoxville; and, Leonardo Arriola, Assistant Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. The discussions were organized into two panels— one panel in the morning and another in the afternoon. The panel presentations were followed by interesting questions and answers.

In light of the rich discussions, and for the benefit of those who could not attend the conference, we thought it would be useful to provide a summary. A key challenge for us however was how to portray a fair account of what was discussed, given that most of the speakers did not deliver a formal paper to OSA (with the exception of Professor Asafa Jalata).

Some caveats about the summary are therefore in order. First, the opening and concluding remarks are based on written notes as delivered. Second, the panel presentations, with the exception of Professor Asafa's, are reported based on notes taken at the conference, supplemented by our audio recording of the conference. They are therefore not full transcripts. Third, the summary of Professor Asafa's presentation is extracted from his full paper prepared for the conference. Finally, for the Q&A sessions, we have made an attempt to maintain the original spirit of the conversations through first person reporting, although these too are not full transcripts.

Despite its imperfections, however, we hope you will find this summary useful.

OPENING REMARKS

Abebe Adugna, OSA President

Good morning.

Hello everyone, my name is Abebe Adugna, and I am President of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA). It is my great honor to welcome you to today's event-- the 2009 mid-year conference of OSA.

First, let me thank all of you for coming—and especially those of you who have taken the trouble to travel from other states.

I would like to also thank our distinguished speakers who have taken the time out of their busy schedules to share with us today their research work and analysis of the US policy in the Horn of Africa. I am hopeful that their insights on the topic would lay the foundations for further discussions.

Howard University has, for many years now, kindly hosted OSA conferences. As in the past, today's conference hall is provided to OSA free of charge and we are grateful for that. I am also grateful to the members of the Executive Committee and to Mimi Geleta, Bonnie Holcomb, and DJ Tufa for their crucial support in organizing this conference.

Since its establishment twenty-three years ago (1986), OSA has actively engaged in fostering knowledge and understanding about the Oromo people and issues of interest to them and the wider Horn of Africa region. This conference continues that legacy.

- It has organized 23 annual conferences, covering topics such as history, politics, human rights, economy, culture, language, and social development in Oromia and the Horn of Africa.
- It has continued to publish its signature scientific journal, *The Journal of Oromo Studies* – now published twice a year. It is gaining wider circulation among libraries and universities around the world.

Today's event is entitled: "US Policy in the Horn of Africa: Opportunities and Prospects for Change under the Obama Administration." The conference seeks to address whether and how the US foreign policy in the Horn can play a more supportive and constructive role in creating peace and stability in the region. It also discusses what might be the role and place of the Oromo in that effort.

The Horn of Africa region includes the internationally-recognized countries of Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Sometimes the net is thrown more widely to include Sudan and occasionally, Kenya. The region connects Africa to Europe (through the Red Sea and Suez Canal), and Africa to Asia (through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea).

Ethiopia occupies a predominant position in the Horn because of its demographic importance: about 85% of the population in the Horn of Africa lives in Ethiopia.

Within the boundaries of Ethiopia, the Oromo are central. Numbering about 35 million people, the Oromo constitute the largest national group. Oromia not only lies at the center of Ethiopia geographically, but also shares physical boundaries as well as religious and cultural heritage with all the major populations in the region – Orthodox Christianity with the Northern Ethiopians; Protestant Christianity with the Southern peoples in Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya; and Islam with Northeastern and Southeastern peoples.

The Oromo are thus key stakeholders in the region's peace, stability and economic development. As the region continues to be embroiled in conflicts, the Oromo cannot afford to stand by idly.

Today there are ongoing conflicts between the countries of Eritrea and Ethiopia; Ethiopia and Somalia; and Eritrea and Djibouti, not to mention internal conflicts within each state. While the specific circumstances of each country are different, it is clear that governments in the region are repressive, and continue to inflict significant human rights violations against the civilian populations. This in turn feeds domestic and regional tensions and instability.

The United States has been a leader both on the diplomatic front and in humanitarian and economic assistance to the region. Nairobi hosts the largest U.S. diplomatic mission in Sub-Saharan Africa. Over the last three years alone, data from the USAID indicates that US aid to the Horn of Africa averaged about \$1 billion per year. Of this, Kenya received about 50%, Ethiopia about 40%, and Somalia and Sudan together about 10%.

Clearly, Ethiopia is an important strategic partner for the United States. Yet, many feel that the US policy in Ethiopia has been predominantly focused on counter-terrorism, often turning a blind eye to the lack of respect for human rights and domestic accountability. Despite the autocratic politics, narrow representation, and massive human rights violations in Ethiopia, the government has continued to enjoy considerable external support from the US government in the name of alliance against terrorism.

Many, including the Oromo, feel that if the US were to play a more effective role in stabilizing the region, its policy in the Horn would have to change. With the new Obama Administration, there is a great deal of hope that this change might happen. But this is by no means certain.

We're here today to start the discussion and to begin to think about how we — as individuals, as members of Oromo Studies Association, some of us as citizens of the United States, and all of us as members of an interconnected world — can be involved in ensuring that the United States plays a more supportive role in creating peace and stability in the region.

I am delighted that our conference features several distinguished speakers and authorities on the US policy in the Horn of Africa who can help us understand the key challenges and opportunities for change. We have two panels:

- The first panel will focus on the regional dimensions of the conflicts, and opportunities and prospects for change under the Obama Administration. Our speakers are Terrence Lyons, Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution at George Mason University; David Shinn, Adjunct Professor at George Washington University and former US Ambassador to Ethiopia; Ezekiel Gebissa, Associate Professor of History at Kettering University, in that order.
- The second panel in the afternoon will focus on the US policy toward Ethiopia. Our speakers for this panel are Asafa Jalata, Professor of Global Studies at Tennessee University-Knoxville; and, Leonardo Arriola, Assistant Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. The discussion will be moderated by Lahra Smith, Assistant Professor of African Studies at Georgetown University.

Following the panel presentations, we will have ample time for questions and answers. I hope this will prove to be a very useful workshop to all of us.

Thank you again for coming. I will now hand over to Bonnie Holcomb, Chairperson of the OSA Board of Directors, who will chair our morning panel.

Bonnie Holcomb's introduction of the first panel followed.

SESSION 1: US POLICY TOWARD THE HORN: OPPORTUNITIES AND PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

Ethiopia: Domestic and Regional Challenges

Terrence Lyons, Associate Professor, George Mason University

Lyons discussed the history of democratic elections in Ethiopia and the prospects for change.

The 2005 elections were a missed opportunity for the Zenawi government. The 2005 elections held promise because there was more popular participation than was the case in past elections. The expected outcome of political changes many had hoped would come, however, did not occur. The challenges to the election and the post-election violence lead to the closing of political space in the country. Many people think that the EPRDF stole the elections and that they were discouraged about participating in the future.

If the Ethiopian government wants to achieve stability in the country they must resolve two issues:

- First, the government needs to be able to bring the Oromo constituency into the government in a real way. The OPDO has failed to bring in the Oromo. They are not seen at the legitimate voice of the Oromo people. The OPDO is only in power due to intimidation and surveillance.
- Second, to achieve stability, the government needs to get the support of urban areas that won opposition support during the 2005 elections. Though Ethiopia is still predominantly rural, the country is rapidly urbanizing. Further, the growing engines of economic growth are in the urban areas. The government will not be able to gain stability if it has not incorporated the urban areas.

Because the EPRDF has not been able to bring these constituencies into the government it remains fragile and has to rely on intimidation and violence.

There is growing cynicism and disengagement from the political process here and in Ethiopia. The multiparty and democratic prospects that held promise in 2008 did not occur. In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, many in Ethiopia and in the Diaspora say we fell for the promise of change in 2005 and were disappointed; as a result, they do not want to participate again. When he talked to people about the prospects for the 2008 elections and the upcoming elections in 2010 people saw them as dead ends. This is a very discouraging and worrisome trend because the only other options for political change are violent and destabilizing.

An Africa wide Gallop poll on citizen election confidence stated that only 13 percent of the Ethiopians polled felt confidence in the fairness of the elections and this is low even by African standards. People feel the election process is hopeless.

The 2008 elections, too, were a missed opportunity. We can get a glimpse into how the government interpreted the 2005 elections and their aftermath by how they handled the 2008 elections. In response to the 2005 elections, the government enacted a number of measures to increase the measure of political control and to restrict political and civil liberties.

In the 2008 local elections (at the kebele level) there were millions of seats up for election. There were only 16000 non- EPRDF candidates out of about 4 millions local seats. So you can see the opposition could not get on the ballot in any real way. Many wanted to engage, but the level of violence and intimidation was too much to compete.

The 2008 elections served to deepen EPRDF control even down to the kebele level. 1 in 20 Ethiopians is involved in an EPRDF controlled council. It has worked itself down to the neighborhood level. There are many stories in local Ethiopian news about the expansion. Clearly after 2005 the EPRDF started to recruit and expand. It is a party that is ubiquitous, deeply present, and entrenched and that has implications for what to expect next in Ethiopia. So if it's not you, then your brother or neighbor is linked to the government in some way. This is an extreme amount of control and surveillance.

Further, the charities and civil societies proclamation recently enacted has been designed to further stifle independent voices. This legislation makes it harder for human rights, democratization, and civil society organizations to operate in the country.

Until recently I thought the upcoming election of 2010 would be like 2000 or 1995 (i.e. the opposition may not participate). Now, I have changed my mind. I have talked to members of successor parties to the CUD and they say they are likely to compete in the urban areas rather than boycott. Now I would guess that the opposition will compete in the urban areas in a minor circumscribed way at least so that they do not lose their seats.

While 2010 is a foregone conclusion, 2015 or 2020 may bring opportunity. They don't want to lose registration or give someone else the opportunity to seize the field.

Though this resilient regime is still afloat, in addition to domestic challenges, it has regional challenges. If all the challenges would arise at the same time it would be difficult for the regime to remain in power.

- The Eritrea and Ethiopian dispute is not resolved, but there are more attractive ways to escalate the conflict under the radar. Instead of sending troops to Badame, the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments have displaced their border conflict to wars by proxy by supporting one another's enemies in neighboring conflicts.
- Somalia is a constant source of worry. There is encouraging news about Somali. It is good that the ENDF (Ethiopian National Defense Forces) troops have withdrawn and that will help stabilize the region in the short run. While there is some good news compared to six months ago, I would not bet that the Ethiopian-Somali conflict would stay at a low level. Ethiopia remains concerned about its security from the Islamic Courts, but also how others use Somalia. The government will not sit by while these threats escalate.
- The other challenge is that it is hard to track and get information about, is the Ogaden region insurgency (region 5). There is very little information about the region and what is going on concerning Ethiopia's harsh counterinsurgency campaign. The international organizations that are allowed in the region are restricted from speaking out if they want to remain in the area.

To the Obama administration one can see Ethiopia in two ways as a strategic ally versus Ethiopia as a country that raises issues about Washington's dedication to human rights and democracy. We should also look at Ethiopia's role in creating instability in the region.

- It is my view that Washington has very limited leverage over Addis Ababa and the EPRDF. If you notice, anytime Washington says something critical about/to Ethiopia, soon after a high level Chinese delegation will come to Ethiopia or they reach out to Iran. Washington is not the only game in town. To imagine that Meles sits around and waits for calls from the state department is an inaccurate assumption. Ethiopia has all kinds of other options rather than keeping Washington happy.
- U.S. development assistant is tied to projects: 50% went to HIV/AIDS, 15% to emergency food assistance etc. It is very difficult to say to Meles release Burtukan or we are going to throw AIDS orphans into the streets. This is an idle threat. Ethiopia knows that we are not going to cut off HIV/AIDS funds etc.

While I think Ethiopia faces several challenges, I feel that the United States plays a small role in shaping how things will play out in the medium term not only because of the counter-terrorism. The sources of leverage are fairly narrow and weak.

Transitioning U.S. Policy in the Horn from the Bush to the Obama Administration

David Shinn, Adjunct Professor at George Washington University, and Former US Ambassador to Ethiopia

Some see me as part of the Washington establishment and to some degree I am; and this will influence my perspective.

We need to look at the Horn as a region. We need to cooperate with other players in the region. We are at the point that the role of the United States is such that the U.S. cannot do it alone. It will get into deep trouble if it tries to do it alone. American allies like the European Union, Australia, and Japan play an important role in Ethiopia. China is also a player, Russia is starting to take a renewed interest in the region and it is not always positive. Arab countries are taking a role in the Horn through the financial support. India is also a player. India funds Ethiopia more than any other country on the continent and they have made it their concentration country. Turkey has expressed interest in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Iran is not an ally and it is playing a role in the Horn. These are all players the U.S. has to deal with for better or for worse.

Ethiopia

I have a divided view on Ethiopia. Ethiopia has done a lot for America.

- One of the most important collaborations has been in the form of providing troops for peace keeping in Africa (Darfur and Burundi).
- Concerning Ethiopian involvement in Somalia, from the standpoint of the Bush administration, their cooperation was seen as good. This is the part of the U.S. linkage.
- Another positive aspect has been that the EPRDF has had a fairly coherent economic policy. If you look at the GDP growth rate they have done a good job at the macro-economic level in improving the country. This is the positive side of the ledger.

On the other hand, Ethiopia has major problems in two areas: democratization and human rights.

- The 2005 elections did not turn out well. They were a terrible setback for the country. I hoped they would have learned a lesson from the 2005 about 2008. I had a conversation in December of 2005 with the Sabat Nega where I told Sabat that you guys made a mess of 2005, you should do something to have good honest and viable elections at the local level. I left the conversation feeling as if nothing would change concerning the local elections. Quite frankly, they were a huge missed opportunity.

- I am more pessimistic about 2010; and maybe in 2015 we will see serious change in the electoral situation in Ethiopia. I take rather lightly the claim that Meles might step down and not contest in 2010 (unless he is pressed by his party to do so, which his party will do). He is likely to run.

Eritrea

Eritrea poses a serious challenge for U.S. relations. U.S.-Eritrea relations is at its lowest point since the country became independent in 1993. The new US Administration may take a new look at the country and try to improve the relationships, but there are so many challenges to overcome. First, Eritreans are still involved in Somalia not because they care, but they want to “stick it to Ethiopia directly”. There are other problems with Eritrea. There are human rights issues in Eritrea. Elections? They do not even know what the word elections mean in Eritrea. What does the word elections mean in Eritrea? The Obama administration should try to grapple with and take a renewed look at the Isayas government even if it does not go anywhere.

Djibouti

Djibouti is an amazingly important country for Ethiopia and the United States. Ethiopia is landlocked and needs her economic stability. The U.S. has its only base in Africa in Djibouti. I am not privy to what is accomplished there and unsure of its utility. One recommendation I would give the Obama administration is that they should do an independent assessment of the base to see if we are getting our money’s worth out of that base. Whenever you have thousands of people assigned to a base and you have to pay rent things get very costly. Djibouti’s embassy is growing to be one of the largest in Africa when it used to be the smallest. This is scary and in 10 years it will be small again. I am not sure if we are getting anything for our money. As I mentioned earlier Djibouti is cozying up to Iran and we need to be mindful. Is the U.S. closing one eye when dealing with Djibouti?

Somalia

The U.S. policy there has been botched since 1994 when we left the country. We pretty much abandoned the country. Only when there was a terrorist threat stemming from the area did we return, but we gave it excessive attention and ended up making a lot of wrong policy decisions. We supported warlords in Mogadishu, we tried to neutralize the Islamic courts and they lost to the courts, and finally Ethiopia and U.S. went into Somalia. I believe we need to stay out and let the Somali sort things out on their own and give development assistance to the combination government in place. We also need to avoid the airstrikes in Somalia.

Sudan

The U.S. has 4 goals in the Sudan:

1. To make sure there is peace in between the North and the South
2. End the chaos of Darfur
3. Improve the human rights situation of Sudan
4. Continue the counter-terrorism support of Sudan though this is controversial

Though the Sudanese government has problems, it is the government that is there that we have to work with and we are not into regime change.

The U.S. continues to refer to what is going on Darfur is as genocide and I do not see it as such and we should not center our policy on this issue of ongoing genocide.

The other issue I have with our policy on Sudan is that the U.S. still lists Sudan on the list of state sponsored terrorism and has done so since 1993. Things have changed and now Sudan is cooperating and it should no longer be on the list. So on the one hand, the state department says on its own list that Sudan is cooperating and at the same time, it has not taken it off the list.

The last point I will mention is a recommendation by the Obama team to establish a no-fly zone in Darfur. Why would you want to establish a no-fly zone? Who is going to do it (we do not have the capacity and we expect NATO to do it). Why is it necessary and who will do it? As far as I am concerned, I think this came out of the campaign but it should be forgotten.

The Challenges of Change: Obama Opportunities, Oromo Options
Ezekiel Gebissa, Associate Professor, Kettering University

The Bush administration dismissed the utility of soft power; Rumsfeld and others felt the U.S. could do what it wanted around the world and that other nations had to accept what the US wanted. The administration not only saw soft power was oxymoronic, they used hard power in its most extreme form when they invaded Iraq. It was a demonstrative measure to other would-be enemies. The aftermath of these kinds of policies led to a global increase in anti-Americanism.

This hard power perspective has yielded negative consequences for many citizens around the world including Ethiopia. Ethiopia latched onto the war on terrorism arguments. Soon after the Bush administration waged a war on terrorism, the Ethiopian government utilized similar arguments to hide its human rights abuses under the name of anti-terrorism. It unleashed wanton attacks on presumed OLF and OFDM sympathizers and pursued scorched-earth policies in the Ogaden (ONLF).

The Ethiopian government was also encouraged by the bad example of US in Iraq. Ethiopia used similar excuses in Somalia as Washington had done in Iraq. In 2007, it was reported that the Ethiopian government allowed the U.S. to question prisoners held in secret detention in Addis Ababa. The fact that the Ethiopian government cooperated with the United States in Somalia is no secret.

The Ethiopian government and other governments used the opportunity created by the Bush Administration to deal with their own political oppositions with impunity.

This is the past, now to the change.

The Obama administration has repudiated many of the doctrines of the Bush administration and has taken a number of steps to distance itself: the closing of Guantanamo and the closing of CIA prisons were instituted as attempts to project a clean break with the Bush administration.

Obama has learned lessons from the Iraq war. We can infer from comments Obama made as a state senator, during the campaign, and after his administration took power that he would no longer support "stupid wars". The Obama administration will hopefully wage smart wars. Let us hope that Obama will not support anymore stupid wars like the Ethiopian war in the Ogaden and in Somalia. He remembers Somali scholars saying that invading Somalia would be bad for Somalia and bad for the United States. The perspective that comes from the Horn of Africa is not antithetical to those of the United States.

Another difference is that the Obama administration is utilizing a soft power. It is taking an alternative perspective of listening to others, even enemies. It will talk to its enemies. Hard power created new and more terrorist, rather than less, by its policies. This change by Obama may have “denied states like Ethiopia the opportunity to brand political opponents as terrorists” in order to imprison them or kill them and make them disappear. This is evident in Obama’s inaugural speech: “to those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict or blame their society’s ills on the West, know that your people will judge you by what you build not by what you destroy”. For all the change Obama stated he would pursue, however, he is not going to knock down states and governments. He feels governments are the key to keeping stability in the world. We will not know the extent to which he will go to implement his visions.

The fact that Obama knows Africa, and has been to Ethiopia is important. The fact that he has lived outside of America gives him an expanded perspective. The fact that he has assembled a team of people with international experience is very promising. Obama mentions in his speeches in 2007 that he has a better sense of how *they* are thinking and what *they* are like and this is unprecedented.

Obama’s personality is important. He has all the qualities of a leader that can use soft power: charisma, communication, persuasion and exemplary behavior. The Obama administration seeks to listen to leaders of other countries. When people listen rather than lecture, this is definitely a change.

We can expect Ethiopian leaders to respond to this in two ways. First, from now on they may not expect the U.S. to support the confrontational way they deal with politics in general and with political opponents in particular. Another way is that the Meles regime may ingratiate itself with the new US administration by showing a willingness to dialogue with opponents. This is not just wishful thinking. The Ethiopian government, probably spurred by local factors, seems to have recently initiated contacts with the OLF. Those who were mediators were talking about it. The atmosphere of politics has changed if not the substance of politics.

Challenges

The president stated he had a commitment to assisting with the emergence of a stronger and fairer society in the developing world. He made a point of this in his inaugural address and when he addressed the poor nations of the world and stated that we pledge to make your farms flourish and to provide clean water. This is a promising vision.

Obama’s promise and what he can deliver may, however, be undermined by the global economic crisis. The recession could be used by repressive governments

around the world as an excuse to increase their power and suppress opposition, probably in the same way that the 1930's great depression led to a questioning of liberal democracy. Many at that time discredited democratic capitalism as a viable political system. We have seen some of this kind of reaction against democratic capitalism in Latin America with leaders like Chavez and others in Nicaragua and Belize. Even in Europe, some question the magic of the market and talk about the end of the Washington consensus. There is a slight move away from neoliberal democracies.

How is this relevant to Ethiopia? I think that European countries and America will ride out the recession; and their political systems tend to be self-correcting. Obama's election shows that the country can change course. In Ethiopia, the recession may have different results.

- Even before the recession began, Ethiopia was not doing well. Ethiopian leaders embraced a capitalist model suddenly in 1991 and capitalism was ushered in without developing the rudimentary institutions needed to sustain it. Without the capitalist ethos of fair competition, commitment, and the belief in personal achievement and in hard work, the system cannot work as it does in the West. The results have been growth benefits that don't percolate down to the masses; a rampant corruption where nothing in the economic sector works without patronage or kickbacks; an oligarchy of economic and political elites rule everyday life. In short, a crony capitalism unregulated by personal ethics or government supervision that has spawned tremendous inequality. You have people who take vacations on the Tunisian Riviera while school children go to schools without benches. The Ethiopian government always touts its economic growth and state that political stability flows from economic growth, but the lack of fair distribution of this growth beyond the elite class may get even worse with the current recession.
- With regards to the elections, the problems are deep. The government is reacting to the recession by instituting fiscal austerity measures. For example, recently the government has centralized tax collection from chat. Regional governments were able to levy taxes on chat and Oromia state used to get 150 million Birr from chat. The nationalization of coffee exports has also occurred. Further, there is limited lending from the central bank and private banks. This will impact business. As the recession deepens and the effects widen the Ethiopian government may try to institute authoritarian measures to cope with economic disruptions.

Because of these factors, if we look to recent history, Ethiopia, unlike Western nations, does not have the capacity to self-correct. In Ethiopia, governments tend to hold onto

power until they collapse rather than reform or step aside. With these kinds of profound social disruptions and deep economic problems the political system cannot respond appropriately. But what will happen? The same thing that happened in Ethiopia for the last 100 years: the only time a new government emerges is because the existing one collapses. The potential for this to occur is there.

There was a glimmer of hope for peaceful democratic transition in Ethiopia in 1991. However, with the failure of that transition, the Ethiopian prime minister dismissed the neoliberal paradigm and prescribed first a revolutionary democracy and recently a democratic developmental state. Today Ethiopia's democratization seems to be to pursue the dominant party democracy, where in essence political competition takes place only to confirm the government in place. According to this democratic developmental state model, the EPRDF remains in power until the country has achieved economic growth and gets out of poverty. As the recession deepens, it makes a case for strengthening the government. The Recession will only help the EPRDF justify further interventions in the economy and more control in politics.

Oromo Options

There are two options for the Oromo. The U.S. has its own national interest to pursue in the region and they will continue to do so. Either Oromo political organizations can keep expecting Obama to embrace their agenda, or the Oromo can embrace Obama's vision.

I do not think Obama will embrace the Oromo vision. Obama has a predilection toward dialogue rather than confrontation.

- If the Ethiopian government aligns itself with the Obama administration's agenda and opens up for dialogue, then the Oromo can press the Obama administration that this process not be a charade, but to really resolve issues and conflicts.
- The Obama administration has promised to double U.S. annual investment and foreign aid. I think that this initiative can be important for Oromos in many ways. The Oromo could take this promise seriously and can press the Obama administration to make it conditional that if aid is delivered that it should be delivered in a proportional way. Obama stated that he would expand prosperity and we can argue that the Oromo deserve these opportunity. We can push for the aid to distributed equitably by embracing his agenda rather than him embracing ours.

We can respond by realizing that Obama is unlikely to embrace our agenda; he is, after all, an America president. But we could benefit from embracing his agenda.

Q&A Session

Audience Questions: Round 1

How do we bring a majority government to power in Ethiopia?

You said that the OLF missed an opportunity in 2005, do you still believe this after what happened to Kinijit? What different opportunity would they have had if they participated? What do you suggest for the 2010 election?

How can the Oromo influence the Obama Administration? What advice would you give the Oromo?

What does the panel have to say about U.S. support of dictatorial regimes like the Meles regime?

Why does the US want to keep the Meles regime in power?

Panel Responses to Audience Questions

T. Lyons: As I have mentioned in other texts, Ethiopian is becoming increasingly totalitarian. I do not call it a democracy and that is relatively easy to respond to. About the coming transition, transitions are always coming. At some point a regime will change. Regimes in time get tired and this fact lies ahead of us in Ethiopia. How is this going to happen in Ethiopia? Is it going to be slow, will they have a managed electoral transition where the regime would become broad and less military etc.. I feel 2005 was an opportunity for this form and the opportunity was lost. Is there an opportunity for a military transition? It is out there, but the costs are too much and we need to avoid this. What I found intriguing was Ezekiel's comments. They could develop a compromise and this would be a way to manage the transition. A transition is coming, is it going to look like 1991 or 1974 which would be extremely violent and full of suffering or are there different options and that do not lead to country and regional instability?

On this question of U.S. support, I have a different perspective. I do not think that Meles sits around waiting for Hilary Clinton to give him a call saying yes, give such and such support to the OLF now, yes thanks for giving me that direction. Ethiopia has its own sources of power and resources and in fact U.S. support is not a major source of EPRDF power. This may be an area you all disagree with me on, but this is my view.

E. Gebissa: With regard to democratization, I do not know of any place in the world where this process progresses from autocracy to democracy, it is not evolutionary.

There is a tendency to lump all Western nations together. The European nations provide direct budget support to the Ethiopians; the U.S. does not. One should look at the support of the regime during its early days as a three-legged stool. 1) Eritrea provided security services to Ethiopia after the Derg period. Eritrean commanders were there. The military apparatus was supported by Eritrea initially. 2) After the Derg, there was nothing in the coffers, whatever sustained Ethiopia was foreign. The change we see in Ethiopia is not internally generated. Either foreign aid or Al Amoudi. 3) During the early days the EPDRF/TPLF government rested on Tigray. The bureaucracy was manned by those loyal to the TPLF. Loyalty was not based on talent or merit, but on ethnicity.

When Ethiopia fought with Eritrea the first leg was broken. After the war, foreign governments warned that aid would stop coming, but they did not keep their promise and aid kept coming.

After the war, there was a split within the TPLF and this leg of support was also broken. At that time, the government could have collapsed. There is an ebb and flow in terms of its strength and this is a crucial moment in Ethiopia. Their sources of power are precarious.

In terms of the Oromo and how they can be united: the Oromos need to find a way to unify; the Americans cannot do this for the Oromo. If the Oromo can provide the stability the U.S. is looking for, they would get a second look. I don't think the U.S. is particularly wedded to Meles.

D. Shinn: Let me try to address a number of questions. The opening issue about the U.S. dealing too frequently with the symptoms of problems rather than the real cause is accurate to a degree. This does happen and this has increasingly happened since the war on terror. I have been critical of the U.S. counter-terrorist policies. In the Horn of Africa our policy has been based on a military response and catching bad guys instead of dealing with those elements that spawn terrorism that are internal and also those that come from the outside. I hope that the Obama administration will try to deal with root causes and not the symptoms.

On the good news side, I think we will see an increased attention and push from the Obama administration to focus on issues that deal with democratization and human rights that will go beyond rhetoric. In the Bush administration, this was part of the rhetoric and sometimes there was also some follow-up, but oftentimes these issues fell by the wayside and the political issues realities on the ground trumped human rights. How this will play out in Ethiopia Today is difficult to say. Whether it will go as far as you would like it to go is not likely; however, it is likely to go beyond where the Bush administration went.

In terms of the OLF, this gets back to my running arguments with Asafa. I have tried over the years to stay in touch with them occasionally and I have had my arguments with them as well. I have a sympathy for them. I have urged them to participate in the political process and many members said that they tried this back in 1991 and look where that got them. I felt that they should have participated in 2005 and even though we all know how badly it all went. Even if they did well and it might have been for naught all over again. But, it may have advanced that process a step further than it did by staying out of the election and it would have created a certain dynamic that would have made it that much more difficult for the EPRDF to carry on business as usual. By simply boycotting the election this may have gotten them nowhere. Instead, they are carrying out their armed movement in Eritrea, which is a pretty discredited place to be carrying out their business. I understand why they are located in Eritrea, there is no other place to operate. But the military success of the OLF, in my view, has been pretty minimal. And I do not see this changing. This is not the future of how the Oromo improve their status in the country. I am taken by Ezekiel's comments and Ezekiel may know something that I am not aware of and if discussions are going on now, I hope that this is right and that they are serious. I have raised the issue of the government talking to the opposition on a number of occasions and in my last visit in 2005 there was no interest from the EPRDF side. They stated that if OLF wants to talk to us that is fine, but we are not seeking them out; if something has seriously changed that is great.

As for the dictators that collaborated with the U.S. that were ticked off by questioner, I had nothing to do with all those dictators. The only one I have had anything to do with was Meles. It is a fact that the U.S. has dealt with its share of dictators and will continue to do so in the future. When it comes to political interest, if a country provides you a significant share of your oil you will probably have a good relationship with that dictator. This is just the way life is.

When it comes to GDP growth rate in Ethiopia, if the EPRDF is saying they have achieved a 14% growth rate this is a very anomalous figure. On average, the GDP growth rate has been 5 or 6 percent. There are some offsetting issues here that deserve mentioning. If you make it a per capita growth rate then the rate is low due to the high birthrate. If you figure in the issue of corruption, that changes things. Ethiopia comes out pretty low in the ranking of transparency international corruption perception index. Further, inflation is also an issue. In terms of inequality in Ethiopia, if it is as serious as you say it is, that is very worrisome. He stated he was not sure if there is a lot of inequality there because he does not study this and he is not sure how much of an issue this is.

There was a question of how can the Oromo make an impact on the Obama administration. The only way to do it is the way every other interest group does it in

this country and that is through the American political process; by working through your congressional representative in your home districts where you have a significant number of Oromos living and you bring pressure to bear on them. You will be surprised at how many African governments have had impacts in a handful of congressional districts in getting their attention, to get them to focus on problems.

You have an added problem in a way because American politicians do not think of ethnic groups as much as they think of countries. They will think of Ethiopians rather than Oromos. It will be hard for the average American politicians to dissect the fact that there are 85 different ethnic groups and yours by far is the largest. But American politicians do not understand this element, they may say “so yeah you are 1 of 85 and why should we bust our backsides for you?” You have to make that case and it is up to you and no one is going to do it for you. You can try the media, but this approach is scattershot and does not get you very far. The only way to do it through the political process.

To answer the last question concerning the idea that the U.S. wants to keep Meles in power and not allow the Oromos to achieve power. This is not phrased right; it is not that the United States wants to keep Meles in power, but the United States does not want to remove him from power. There is a difference. If we wanted to keep Meles we would provide him with lots of military aid and training and there are things that the U.S. can do to keep him in power. The U.S. takes the position that he is there and we will work with him. We made the decision not get into regime change in Ethiopia. He agrees with Terrance that U.S. assistance does not keep Meles in power. He hears this from all sorts of groups. He has been in conversations with him and Meles has almost said take your aid and get out of here because we are not his sole source of power.

Audience Questions: Round 2

How do you strengthen democracy in Ethiopia?

How does the U.S. make long term and short-term policy decisions?

What does the ICC arrest warrant of Bashir mean for human rights in Africa?

Hillary Clinton went to China and declared human rights issues were not on the table. What does this mean for Obama Administration’s focus on human rights?

What is the policy analysis of aid to Ethiopia?

What is going on in the mind of Meles?

You said Sudan is not genocide. How many people have to die? How do you define genocide?

Why haven't the Oromo and other oppositions succeeded in Ethiopia?

What advice would you give the new Obama administration?

Panel Responses to Audience Questions

D. Shinn: A questioner raised an important point that deserved mention directly. His comment is on the issue of American financial support to Ethiopia. As an Oromo when we say that America is funding Ethiopia, we are not saying that the United States is funding Ethiopia directly through military aid; however as we all know, the United State plays a majority role in the decision making practices and policies of major international organizations that gave funds to Ethiopia for example the World Bank and the IMF. They can use our funds for humanitarian issues and then save their funds they get from Russia and China to buy arms. We are saying America is the majority leader among international organizations and Ethiopia will not have funds to sponsor developments and improvements without our assistance. America has an indirect influence in that sense.

Let me say something I should have said at the outset, I do not speak for the U.S. government. I only speak for myself. About this power I supposedly have, I am an adjunct professor working on an adjunct salary from my house. Sometimes people do listen to me, but only occasionally.

How do you strengthen democracy? I think the best way to do this is to strengthen civil societies across the board. Those Ethiopians that have an independent voice i.e. women's lawyers and HUNDAE was supported by the U.S. in the past. You do not get instant democracy, it is a long term effort. This is a country that has had two millennium of highly concentrated power, you are not going to get instant democracy anyway, you have to work with what you've got and you won't get instant democracy anyway.

There was a question on how does the U.S. make long term and short term policy decisions? What are the precepts? This is a good question and it varied from administration to administration and even within an administrating depending on the situation. The Carter administration put greater influence on human rights and democratization. These issues did not dictate policy, but they played a larger role than they did in any subsequent administration. Under the Bush administration after 911, the major precept has been anti-terrorism. If you major precept is counter-terrorism, then human rights issues gets pushed to the side at best and pushed off the table at worst. This does happen from time to time. He also alluded to the issue earlier that

any major supplier of oil or any other critical raw materials will get a break that other countries do not get. Ethiopia does not fall in this category and it does not provide any critical resource, but where Ethiopia fits in relates to their collaboration on counter-terrorism.

On the question of the ICC arrest of Bashir and what this means for human rights in Africa. I feel that the ICC botched things here and with Kony in Uganda. I agree with reverend Franklin Gramm and he said it was a bad idea to issue an arrest warrant he warned them not to do it. It is better to push for reconciliation between the parties in both Darfur and Southern Sudan. I am more concerned about ending the crisis in Darfur and insuring the success of the CPA.

There was a paraphrasing of Secretary of state Clinton's comments in China concerning human rights. This is not totally accurate there was a statement to that effect, then there was another statement clarifying the issue afterward which stated we did talk about the issue, but it was not on the public agenda. They appeared not to be on the agenda in China. There was a downplaying of the human rights issues in China, it was not a dismissal or a total rejection of a discussion on the topic, though the impact may not be significantly different. The world may react and think that the U.S. may not be interested in this issue in China.

What is the policy analysis of aid to Ethiopia? This is a good question. We have all talked about what the aid is going to in Ethiopia. Much of it goes to HIV/AIDs. When I was working there much more of the aid went to education, but this has decreased. Another piece that has decreased, though it was not that large in the first place, were funds to democratization projects. There was not a lot of cooperation from the Ethiopian government and so they drew back. Obama may bring some of this funding back if they can convince the Ethiopian government to go along with it.

What is going on in the mind of Meles? Oh, boy! Meles is a very smart guy and some of you may not want to hear that. He reads voraciously especially in economics. He likes to talk about things he has read. From his view what is going on in his mind while talking to you is the following: He is sizing up the other side. He is trying to say things that are not untrue, things that will not totally piss off the American ambassador, but he can still get his point across. By and large he was pretty successful. He can play them like a Stradivarius and he can play all these countries.

Genocide? What is genocide? Not a very good question. It is not just numbers that determine genocide? Everyone would agree that Rwanda was a genocide. What about the Congo, 5-6 million have been killed over years. He does not see this in Darfur, yet the world is not calling the Congo a genocide. No other country in the world has called Darfur genocide beyond us. We have to deal with the situation on the

ground and not get caught up in the emotion of the word genocide if you cannot justify it any longer.

On the suggestion that asylum seekers and refugees are being discriminated against because of affiliation with the OLF. The state department does not have the OLF on their list as a terrorist, though some people have tried to get it on the list.

Why haven't the Oromo and other oppositions succeeded in Ethiopia? The environment is terribly difficult in Ethiopia. If opposition groups cannot compete in any even way this will be difficult. Another criticism that he would level is that some of the opposition groups are terribly disorganized; there is a lot of factionalism. It is not all the fault of the EPRDF simply not letting them participate. If you take the CUD for example, who was being funded by and large by the Diaspora. How did the average Ethiopian see this organization?

What advice would he give the new administration? More support should be given to democratization and we pay less attention to the counter-terrorism. This would weaken the link between the EDRDF. Annual food aid is not the answer. You do not always have a famine, but there is a food deficit. Ethiopians have to figure out how to do this. Obama talked about a new green revolution for Africa. If we gave more agricultural aid and development assistance/funding we could help Ethiopia wean itself from food aid and this would be important.

**SESSION 2: THE CASE OF OROMIA AND ETHIOPIA: HOW CAN THE US
BALANCE SUPPORT FOR COUNTER-TERRORISM WITH DOMESTIC
ACCOUNTABILITY?**

**Shortcomings in U.S. Foreign Policy towards Oromia and Ethiopia: Will the Obama
Administration Introduce Change?**

Asafa Jalata, Professor of Global Studies, Tennessee University-Knoxville

Global strategic interests and geopolitics rather than the mutual benefits of the American and African peoples have mainly shaped U.S. foreign policy objectives and priorities on the African continent. As the U.S. emerged as the global hegemonic power by replacing Great Britain after the World War II, it used Africa as “a strategic stepping stone” to the Middle East, and during the Cold War as “a pawn in East-West struggles” (Carter, 2009: 1). Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the U.S. has been using Africa for its objective of the so-called war on global terrorism by allying with some dictatorial and terrorist African regimes, such as that of Ethiopia, that engage in state terrorism and gross human rights violations while giving lip service to the issues of democracy, human rights, and economic and social development. Consequently, the U.S. government has been building relations with the parasitic African ruling classes and their repressive and exploitative governments at the cost of the ordinary African peoples.

Paul Henze (1985: 74), one of the architects of the American-Tigrayan alliance, argued in the mid-1980s that the Tigrayans “as much as the Amhara, are an imperial people who, despite their loyalty to tradition, think of themselves as having a right—and perhaps even a duty—to play a role in the larger political entity of which they are a part.” While promoting the Tigrayan ethnonational interest, the same American ideologue dismissed the political significance of the Oromo people, the largest ethnonational group, by arguing that Oromo grievance “is both territorially and politically diffuse and unlikely to coalesce into a coherent ethnic resistance movement” (Henze, 1985: 65). In a multinational empire like Ethiopia, to identify and support one ethnonation to dominate and exploit other ethnonations claiming that it has the right to rule or it is culturally superior is racist (Jalata, 2001: 89-132). In justifying this racist action, Henze (1985: 74) asserted that the Tigrayans recognize “the need to reconstitute Ethiopia and establish a just government recognizing regional rights and ethnic distinctions” as “a natural outgrowth of . . . [their] view of Ethiopian history.”

Just as the Tigrayans are justified to rule and dominate other peoples by their sense of “fairness,” they are also seen as pro-West because “they do not try to claim they are Arabs and they do not seek the support of Arab governments,” according to Henze (1985: 74). Implicit in these arguments is that other peoples in the Ethiopian Empire,

such as the Oromo, are pro-Arab and anti-West and lack a sense of fairness to deal with other peoples. Henze (1985: 65) dismisses the Oromo struggle for national self-determination as the following: "The claims of the Oromo Liberation Front of widespread organization and effectiveness inside Ethiopia cannot be substantiated by firm evidence. *Oromia* as a territorial entity has no meaning inside Ethiopia. It is an exile construct." Based on such false assumptions, U.S. foreign policy experts like Henze advised the American government to invest in the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and dismissed the relevance of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and other liberation fronts in the Ethiopian Empire.

Because of its perceived strategic national interest and the wrong advice it received from experts and racist assumptions about the Oromo (Jalata, 2001), the U.S. government has allied with the Tigrayan minority elites to form a colonial government and to suppress the Oromo national movement. As Douglas Hellinger (1992: 80) notes, "What is missing from U.S. policy toward Africa is a basic respect for the people, their knowledge and their right to collectively determine their own future." Will the Obama administration respect the rights of African peoples in general and that of the Oromo in particular? Will President Obama (2009) respect his inaugural promise and make African dictators in general and Meles Zenawi in particular accountable because they silence dissent and "cling to power through corruption and deceit?" For sake of clarity and critical understanding of the essence of the U.S. foreign policy in Oromia and Ethiopia, let us historically explore the relationship between the U.S. and the Ethiopian state.

The U.S. and the Meles Government

Currently the main rationale of U.S. policy makers' involvement in Ethiopia is to maintain political order and to fight against global "terrorism." The major reason why the U.S. government cannot effectively deal with global terrorism is that it practices double standards, and ignores the terrorism of friendly states such as that of Ethiopia whilst complaining about other forms of terrorism (Jalata, 2005). Eqbal Ahmad (1998: 7) comments that as a global power the U.S. "cannot promote terrorism in one place and reasonably expect to discourage terrorism in another place." Supporting the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian regime that engages in terrorism and massive human rights violations on various population groups in general and the Oromo in particular demonstrates that the U.S. is not committed to promote democracy, human rights, and social justice.

Will the Obama Administration Introduce Change in U.S. Foreign Policy?

Considering his political slogan of change and his African heritage, some political observers, experts, and African activists expect that the Obama administration will introduce some reforms in U. S. African policy. Suggesting that his "administration

has an opportunity to fundamentally remake U.S. relations with Africa during its tenure," John Prendergast and John Norris (2009: 1) state the following: "As the first president of the United States with immediate African roots, President Obama not only has an important reservoir of goodwill on the continent, he also has the ability to move beyond the tendentious 'North-South' debate between developed and less developed countries that has made more transformational policies difficult to attain. Efforts by the dying generation of Africa's strong men who believe they should rule for life . . . to portray President Obama as a former colonial master will have little resonance in Africa or elsewhere." Nikki Duncan (2009: 1) also notes that "President Obama's African heritage naturally invokes the expectation that an Obama Administration will bring a certain cultural sensitivity and understanding of the challenges that face the African continent, and thus will be likely to address challenges in a more pro-active manner." Or will the Obama administration do more of the same when it comes to U.S. policy in Oromia and Ethiopia?

As a legislator, Senator Barack Obama expressed his concerns on the issues of ending the genocide in Darfur, promoted conflict resolution and peaceful elections agendas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, supported the idea of bringing Liberian war criminals to international justice, proposed the policy of formulating a coherent strategy for stabilizing Somalia, and advanced the agenda of fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa (Duncan, 2009: 1). As a presidential candidate, he outlined three main objectives, namely, intensifying the integration of Africa into the global economy, enhancing peace and security of African states, and consolidating relationships with governments, institutions, and civil society organizations by increasing commitment to promoting and deepening democracy, accountability, and reducing poverty (Duncan, 2009: 2). After Obama became the president of the U.S., Phil Carter, Acting Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, revealed four U.S. foreign policy priorities: 1) Financing security assistance programs for Africa on continental, regional and country levels; 2) promoting democratic systems and practices in the continent; 3) facilitating economic development; and 4) financing African health and social development.

The priority of providing security assistance programs at the level of the African Union (AU), at the sub-regional level, and at the level of an individual state is a serious problem at this time because most of the citizens of Africa are denied their democratic and human rights and social justice. Under these circumstances, the main beneficiaries of such programs are the African heads of state and their henchmen. Therefore, promoting security assistance programs for the AU and most African governments is tantamount to supporting dictatorship and human rights violations. For instance, the headquarter of AU is located in Finfinne, the center of Oromia, and this continental organization does not oppose the political repression, state terrorism, and gross human right violations of the Oromo and others by the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government. According to Associated Press (2009: 1), Meles Zenawi and his

followers are possible targets of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as many leaders of African countries. The president of Genocide Watch, Gregory Stanton, wrote on March 23, 2009, an open letter to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights to admire the action that the ICC took in issuing a warrant for the arrest of President Omar al-Bashir of the Sudan and to investigate the crimes Meles and his government committed against humanity in the Horn of Africa:

The action that the International Criminal Court has taken in this situation has restored hope to peace and justice loving people, affirming that international human rights law not only exists on paper, but in reality. It also sends an important message to perpetrators throughout the world that impunity for their crimes is not assured forever; which may be a primary reason that one of the first leaders to defend Omar al-Bashir and condemn the warrant was Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, whose government has also been implicated in a pattern of widespread perpetration of serious human rights atrocities in Ethiopia and in Somalia. He and those within his government may be keenly aware of their own vulnerability to similar actions by the ICC in the future that could upend a deeply entrenched system of government-supported impunity that has protected perpetrators from any accountability.

Gregory Stanton demonstrated how the Meles government has committed heinous crimes through involving “in the inciting, the empowerment or the perpetration of crimes against humanity, war crimes and even genocide, often justified by them as ‘counter-insurgency.’”

The AU and most African heads of state oppose the indictment of the Sudanese President al-Bashir by the ICC for allowing the committing of crimes against humanity in Darfur; these leaders fear that they may face the same fate because of their engagement in similar practices (Associated Press, 2009: 1). Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa on March 2, 2009 in a *New York Times* editorial chastised the AU and African leaders for rallying behind al-Bashir who allowed genocide to take place in Darfur. So if one of the Obama priorities is to maintain these reactionary and oppressive African continental and state institutions without introducing reform, U.S. foreign policy on Africa is going to be more of the same. As the East African analysts (2009: 1) states, “Africa will not rank high on Obama’s global agenda.” If the Obama administration wants to introduce some changes in U.S. the two requirements that Prendergast and Norris (2009: 3) advance are helpful:

1. African regional institutions need to become increasingly responsive to the needs of African citizens and not just the prerogative of African heads of state.

2. The broader international community must recognize that war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide are not 'African problems.' They are international problems that demand international solutions.

All the objectives and priorities of Barack Obama as a senator, presidential candidate and the president reflect the general policy objective of the U.S. toward Africa; these objectives and priorities focus on the perceived national interests of the U.S. and its African governmental partners regardless of their positions and practices on democracy and human rights. When he was a senator, he selectively focused on the genocide in Darfur, the problem of democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the political crises in Somalia by ignoring the political tragedies in the Ethiopian Empire. His priorities of facilitating the further integration of Africa into the capitalist world system and promoting the security of African states without the prerequisites of implementing the principles and practices of democracy and human rights protection are tantamount to endorsing the previous U.S. policy on Africa.

There is no clear indication from the Obama Administration that the U.S. foreign policy on Africa in general and Oromia and Ethiopia in particular will be reformed. As Nikki Duncan (2009: 3) asserts, "while the elements of Obama's Africa policy look familiar, the mechanisms and manner of implementation will determine the actual impact." At this time, the priorities of President Obama do not have mechanisms of reforming U.S. policy on Africa. Furthermore, the appointments of the former foreign policy operatives and experts of the previous U.S. administrations who lack the critical understanding of Africa in general and Oromia and Ethiopia in particular indicate the continuation of the previous U.S. foreign policy that did not take the African peoples seriously. Susan Rice, Michelle Gavin, Tony Lake, Aaron Williams, Johnnie Carson, and others "are just a few among several distinguished actors that have been brought on to Obama's team to help carve out the administration's policies and stances on Africa and related issues" (Duncan, 2009: 3). These individuals lack concern and commitment for promoting democracy and human rights in Africa.

Conclusion

If President Obama wants to stick to his slogan of change, he should not leave his administration's foreign policy on Oromia and Ethiopia to the bureaucrats in the U.S. Department of State and at the African Desk. Such bureaucrats, experts, and operatives lack deep knowledge and commitment for the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights. President Obama needs to provide genuine leadership from the top by giving priority to the promotion of democracy and protection of human rights in Oromia and Ethiopia if he wants to fulfill his promises of making accountable corrupt, criminal, and deceitful leaders who cling to power through violence. Rather than continuing the U.S. relation with the authoritarian-terrorist regime of Meles Zenawi, the Obama administration should establish strong

relationship with liberation fronts and opposition political parties and civil society organizations to promote genuine democracy and accountability to protect human rights and to reduce poverty.

We hope that President Obama will not listen to forces and voices within the American foreign policy establishment that try to maintain status quo in the Ethiopian Empire by supporting the ethnocratic and terrorist government of Meles Zenawi. The president “has a historic opportunity to fundamentally reshape relations between the United States and the African continent [in general and Oromia and Ethiopia in particular] in a way that will be truly transformational” (Prendergast and Norris, 2009: 7).

Of course, the Oromo people and others who oppose the Meles Zenawi’s government should intensify their various forms of struggle and combine with diplomatic efforts to convince the Obama administration by demonstrating the horrific crimes that have been committed against humanity by this regime with the support it has received from the West in general and the U.S. in particular. On his part, Obama as a transformational president has a serious moral responsibility to promote the principles of democracy, human rights, and social justice by stopping financing African criminal regimes such as that of Meles Zenawi.

As he has denounced genocide and human rights violations in Darfur, President Obama as the reformist president needs to denounce state terrorism, hidden genocide, and massive human rights violations in Oromia and Ethiopia, and to assist the efforts to make Meles Zenawi and his henchmen accountable for the horrendous crimes they have committed against humanity. Any credible U.S. foreign policy should reverse the previous policy that only focused on the U.S. national interest and the interest of the Ethiopian government at the cost of the colonized and oppressed peoples. The U.S. will benefit in security and economic arenas by genuinely promoting democracy and social justice and protecting human rights in Oromia and Ethiopia rather than protecting the interests of the corrupt and repressive Tigrayan ruling class and its state.

Opposition and Repression in Oromiya: Assessing Patterns in the Post-Election Crackdown

Leonardo R. Arriola, Assistant Professor, University of California, Berkeley

I spent a year in Ethiopia during the 2005 elections. I was interested in how the government responded to popular unrest in the country in general and in Oromia in particular. My paper is an analysis of an investigative report on the post election violence conducted by officials of the Oromia state. In the paper, I analyze the report's data on policing and also make recommendations.

After the 2005 elections protests broke out across Oromia, not just in the capital city. We heard very little about the post election violence in Oromia in the mainstream media. The unrest in Oromia happened over a period of months. The protesters were not just targeting anything and anyone. The protests were highly targeted. In fact, 90% of the protesters targeted the government and/or its property. When local organizations tried to bring attention to the violence and publish it, they were thwarted in many ways. The Ethiopian government responded at various levels (i.e. depending on the region they sent in local, state, or federal police forces).

The data I am using is problematic, but still useful. In 2006, the Oromia state government did an inquiry into the post-election violence. It was a government inquiry and of course it was biased but some of the data was still very useful. The investigators went out to protest areas and gathered information from people about the protests. Outsiders would not have been able to get this information. They collected all kinds of information. The report was of course whitewashed and blamed some of the policing problems on lack of training, but by and large, the report found the result that the police did a good job.

I took a sample of all the events (protests) that occurred when I did this analysis. I do not have the exact number of incidents that occurred, but the shape and distribution of the killings and incidents is relevant and fairly reliable in providing information about the violence in Oromia. What I found in my analysis of the data from the aftermath of the violence is troubling.

- The most disturbances occurred in districts where the opposition won. One exception, however, is that there was little violence in areas won by CUD in Oromia. However, when Oromo opposition won, the situation was different. People in opposition areas were being detained more than in other areas. In terms of the number of protest events across the districts, some districts appear to have experienced more violence than others and this in part has to do with who was doing the policing.

- Whenever the government sent in the federal police to quell the protests, the federal police were not being sent in on the basis of the initial level or severity of civilian unrest, or because they do a better job at policing. The local and state police are just as good at policing and do a better job of pacifying the unrest.
- However, whenever the government sent in the federal police to quell the protests, their response was excessively violent. In Oromo districts that had protests and the federal police came in, there were **ten times as many wounded** and **two times as many people killed**. Further, in addition to the federal police force wounding and killing more protesters, the protests lasted on average two weeks longer than was the case when local police were sent into quell the protests. The data shows that the federal response created a whole other dynamic and it seemed to exacerbate the situation. This had something to do with the identity of the protesters as opposed to the local population.
- On the other hand, when local police were sent into Oromia, the Oromo police were able to better contain the situation. In-group police are usually more restrained and the people understand them. They understand the local population and language more than out-group police. The protesters comply more when given commands. Out-group police use more violence and the people listen to them less because the local populace sees them as a form of external subjugation.

In terms of who was being detained and why, the data states that the federal, state, and local police were focused on detaining students.

The federal police beat people more when they did the detaining. The federal police operate and behave the way they did because they were not Oromo or local at least Oromos. There is no mutual respect. If I am an Oromo and I see outside people coming in I will see these people as invaders in a sense. The army detained very few, but when they did detain people, they were excessively harsh.

The data also show that the difference in violence relates to whether or not the federal police were sent in to do policing. In my view, this is clearly a policy choice that the Ethiopian government had the option to change. I would argue then that the policy choices of the Ethiopian government in this area fueled unrest rather than extinguishing it.

If we set aside our outrage about the situation and simply looked at the issue from the standpoint of efficacy, the government's response did not work at all in limiting protests or violence in the aftermath of the 2005 elections. The policing was politicized and the choices of the Ethiopian government to send federal police made the situation worse even from a selfish, self-interested government perspective. The argument by the government that the police needed more training (which is what Worku Gebeyehu stated) was a misplaced argument not supported by the data. When it comes to the issue of federalism, the Oromo police should have been used in the first place and it would have been a win-win situation both for the government and the Oromo protesters. I would recommend that Oromo be able to do their own policing.

Q&A Session

Audience Questions and Panel Responses

Question 1: An audience member stated that Jalata's presentation was in a sense counter to what was discussed during the morning session (external factors that helped explain change in the region). Jalata seemed to be asserting that we look inside concerning creating change ourselves instead of expecting change from the outside. What can Oromo organizations do better? The question is *how* do we improve our organizations?

A. Jalata: We have not established foreign relations and collations with other people to gain support. For example, between the 16th and 19th centuries the Abyssinians were unorganized and were on the defensive against the Oromo; however, by the 19th century, because of foreign intervention, they became organized and the balance of power shifted. You have to consolidate your forces in your own nation. When it comes to the Oromo struggle, it is very complex, many people misunderstand it and many Oromos misunderstand it... Despite the fact the Oromo struggle has been trying to change the conditions of the Oromos for the last 30 years or more, there is no struggle in the world that sustains itself without foreign assistance or without getting support from its neighbor....Enemies try to dismantle the OLF through a number of different angles. The Abyssinians target the liberation front, other Oromos target the liberation front, and minorities target the liberation front. Despite all these challenges it has survived....We Oromos rather than focusing on the enemy, we sometimes miss our target and we mix-up the contradictions between the primary and the secondary enemy.

I think it is time for Oromos, no matter what political affiliation, to find out where we have been, where are we now, and what we want to achieve? Particularly, if an opportunity comes at this time, we will miss it again while we are fighting each other. Can we postpone fights, over secondary contradictions within the community, and look at the main contradiction we face so that we can consolidate our forces as an

alternative to the regime...It is a time to ask ourselves serious questions, it's time to forgive each other for what we have done to one another and to stand up as one people and one nation that has a common destiny. Despite past mistakes (what we have done to each other), if we try to present ourselves as serious nation who can take care of itself and go beyond itself by bringing stability to the region, people will listen to us.

Question 2: To Dr. Ariolla, you mentioned there is a win-win kind of policy if the government uses local/in-group to settle/quell local resistance. From the Oromo viewpoint, this is not always a good thing. However, you can think of a situation where widespread conflict could emerge at a scale sufficiently large that the government could not control it anymore. Using the local police may not be a great idea when people are interested in more radical change. Local policing then is a good idea in a situation where the state wants to maintain its equilibrium. On the issue of the violence of the federal police, the government makes a judgment depending on the kind of strength and political resistance that is happening in the localities and if they feel that there is strong resistance in a local area, then they send the federal police to that area.

L. Ariolla: As was mentioned, there are limitations to in-group policing. However, if you follow the government's logic that only the federal police can take care of problems, then you will get a self fulfilling prophecy and whatever additional resources there are will go to federal police. As a result, then the government will funnel their resources to the federal police and starve the local and state police. Let us look at Laalu. Laalu is where you saw the worst property damage. When local and state police took care of a situation, there was less violence. There is a peak and then it declined; however, when the federal police came in things got out of control.

A lot of the districts that got a federal response were in opposition areas, in particular, in areas that supported Merera. It is clear why the government would choose to try to destabilize areas that voted for the opposition, but what does not seem clear is why the government would try to destabilize areas of a supporter. The Ethiopian government wants national legitimacy and they want the international community to see the opposition in the parliament, so why punish the one guy willing to play by the rules. Further, the logic of destabilization does not make sense in the larger context if we look at Kinijit as well. Kinijit areas that won did not have a lot of violence and the reason why is unclear. You may want to destabilize the OLF, but why send the police to his area when he is the only guy who is working with you?

He feels that just talking about democracy and human rights will not get anyone far in a discussion with the Ethiopian government. He has a very narrow and limited agenda. In killing and maiming people the government is doing a disservice to its

citizens and its own agenda. He can play his role in addressing the problems there. The only way to get their attention is to show that them that the way the they handled the post-election situation is against human rights and also counter to their interest if it is true that they want stability.

Question 3: Who should be in charge of uniting the Oromo community?

A. Jalata: The Oromo community should unite itself in the Diaspora. All the institutions should work for the Oromo community at large. We should make Oromos accountable. It should be a new environment where people can talk and debate. We should strengthen and work through the Oromo community that is the platform we must use. We should make people accountable for what they claim and what they do. There is always a gap. People should be dazzled by what people in the community do, not just what they say. We need to have a balance sheet. We should work together. Those who do not want to work with others do not have to.

In fact, he suggested before, we should address the Obama administration on moral grounds. For the United States government, it is wrong to support a terrorist government who violates human rights law and engages in genocide. This is against the rule of law, against morality, against American democracy. If they refuse it, we have to still continue to push our message forward. No one should make a choice for the Oromo concerning how their relationships with others should look.

Someone said TPLF was selected because it was strong. This is not true; they were selected when they were very small. Through famine support, Western countries intervened in the Tigray region. The United States is the only super-power and there is no poor nation that can stay in power without the support of the United States and we have to understand that reality.

Question 4: What are we asking the Obama administration? What is it that we want? What is our script? It seems that we have not defined our problem adequately. We need to define our plan. The reason Meles continues to send the federal police is because he does not trust the local police. If the foreign policy of America does not agree with our agenda, we should work on a Plan B. We should continue with our struggle. If he (Obama) helps us that is great, if not, we should not be discouraged, we should move on. The Amhara have been very active here, yet they still have not been terribly successful.

Question 5: Americans care about American interest and Americans public figures are concerned with American people's views. If you talk to pastors and get the issues into the church we can make headway. The average American on the street does not know who the Oromo are. We focus on the government and not the people! What do

you think we can do to come to the people, the American people? Can we explain our problem to the average American? How many people know about the Oromo problem? Let us try that rather than just trying to get to Obama.

A. Jalata: Feels we wasted our time creating conflict among ourselves. Practically, we are ambassadors of the Oromos. Rather than this, our roles have been distorted by arguing, creating conflict among ourselves. I hope we learned from our past mistakes. We need to bring friends to the Oromo. Can we liberate Oromos by creating liberation fronts outside the country? No, those who want to fight, let them go to Oromia.

On changing things in Oromia by those living outside? We are wasting our time fighting amongst ourselves. One thing we can do is bring people to the Oromo. Those who are here need to understand we play a *supporting role*. We need to bring 5 or 7 friends to the Oromo. We have to be the friends of politicians, their wives, and their daughters. We need to also work through churches and mosques. Particularly, pastors have very big roles. Rather than doing this, some pastors take Oromos from the struggle to make them keep quiet. We are spending our times on unproductive things. We want to be leaders here. There is no power here, where are we going to be leaders if we do not have a country? Let us influence through American foreign policy. In front of our eyes, the Amhara are doing that and when the Tigreans go, the Amharas will take over.

Audience Comment: Together we can do a lot. We now have an Oromo community and Oromo restaurants in this area. Can we change the neighborhoods where we live in to make ourselves more visible? Can we make an Oromo day? To get our message out, we could ask for a day in a church or a mosque, ask for a day in a university to spread the word about who we are and our interest.

L. Ariolla: There are very effective models of Diaspora communities that impact the foreign policies of their respective communities. In particular, look at the Cubans and the Vietnamese. What is interesting is how they made it work. They organized and pooled their money and made strategic donations to certain congressman who made it clear that their issues are important issues that we need to follow up on. This is how the diaspora can shape State Department and White House policy. It is hard to get the average American to care and to learn about another area. They think Canada is a foreign place; imagine trying to explain Oromia and the complexity of the place. Look at what the Amhara opposition is doing. They met with Al Gore in 2000 and with senators. Unfortunately, we do not like to think of democracy working that way, but that is the way it is.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bonnie Holcomb, Chairperson, OSA Board of Directors

It is my pleasure to adjourn our event today. Let me begin by thanking all who participated in the discussion, including our guest speakers, Oromo Studies Association members and guests. As I said at the outset, by opening up the floor for discussion of issues of common concern, OSA continues a strong Oromo tradition of inviting everyone to have a say in matters that affect him or her.

This mid-year conference venue lends itself to this more relaxed direct exchange. If there is interest, OSA is considering sponsoring similar events mid-year in cities where there are large populations of Oromo. That and other initiatives require expanded membership and requires that members support the association by paying membership fees early in the year and volunteering to ensure that programs can go forward and succeed.

- In that vein – Let me invite all of you who are interested in the advancement of Oromo studies to join the association and to participate regularly in its activities. Membership requires financial support of the association in the form of fees and also participation in the activities of OSA.
- Also I urge all members to pay membership fees today rather than wait until August, which is what most members have been doing. If you are interested to see the work of OSA go forward. Early payment gives support to the planners of the annual conference in August. Zakia is now at the back to receive those payments.
- Also to keep the data base up to date, submit your most recent email contact information today.

For this conference today we acknowledged the leadership and hard work of President Abebe Adugna, and the Executive Committee of OSA, President-Elect Haile Hirpa, Secretary, Zakia Posey, Treasurer Redwan Hamza and Public Relations Officer Mosisa Aga. We do appreciate the long hours, regular meetings and devoted efforts these officers give to the association. For this event we especially thank Mimi Geleta of Howard University for her key role in arranging these facilities, and DJ (Jim) Tufa for publicity.

The Highlight of the year for OSA is the annual conference. This year the Oromo Studies Association's 23rd Annual Meeting will be held August 1-2, 2009 on the campus of Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia. The Annual Conference theme is **"Looking for Opportunity in Crisis: The Challenges of Political Freedom, Stability, and Economic Development in Oromia and the Horn of Africa."** The Executive Committee planners have deliberately chosen a theme broad enough to

accommodate wide-ranging interests, but we propose the following sub-themes as a guide

- Regional perspectives: Political freedom, human rights, and the vicious cycle of conflict
- Oromia: Economic and social developments
- Oromia: History, culture, and language
- Oromia: Human rights: The plight of Oromo prisoners and refugees and what we can do to help
- Oromia: Health Challenges: HIV/ AIDS, Malaria, Iodine Deficiency, etc
- Looking to our future: Oromo Youth perspectives
- Please suggest a Panel _____

Forms are at the back table and were sent to everyone on the email list. The form can be completed and emailed to aadugna@verizon.net no later than April 15, 2009. That is less than two weeks away. If you plan to participate, talk to your friends here today about the prospect of participation in the conference. If you are considering multiple presentations, please complete a separate form for each. OSA will notify you by April 30th the outcome of your proposal.

OSA is as strong as its membership and the active involvement of those members. That can be taking part in the conference, suggesting ways to promote Oromo scholarship in the university setting, the public arena in the United States and abroad and in Africa.

Thank you for your attendance. It is a pleasure to spend the day with persons who support of Oromo studies and continue to participate.