

ADDIS DIGEST

N°8/9

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1995

Editorial

WHOSE WARS WILL THESE BE?

Of all the players in the crisis now unfolding in the Horn and the Red Sea regions, Ethiopia stands as the country which has practically nothing at stake. But ironically, it is also the country that will suffer most both in terms of material and human sacrifices if the escalating tension develops into all-out armed confrontation. These may be Meles' wars, but certainly not Ethiopia's.

The attempted assassination of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak on 26 June 1995, which was blamed on Sudan,

accused of providing sanctuary to three would-be assassins, can certainly be no cause for two countries to go to war. Most observers in Addis agree that Meles' political, diplomatic and now military posturing vis-a-vis Khartoum is somewhat overblown and out of proportion. Although Sudan's action, if proved, is a clear violation of Ethiopia's sovereignty, opposition forces argue that Meles Zenawi, who in May 1991 allowed Sudanese tanks to violate Ethiopian sovereignty and participate in the assault on Addis Abeba and thus help him to power, would not precisely be the right person to take offense at the fact that three would-be assassins had escaped to and found refuge in that country.

At firsthand, Meles' other argument to justify the escalation of the war of words and the probable armed confrontation with Khartoum looks more serious: TPLF propaganda accuses «the fundamentalist regime of being a main factor of instability in the region». But here again, Ethiopia is the least concerned.

The pattern of distribution of the population by religion - 61% Christian and 33% Muslim - who have traditionally co-existed peacefully - does not warrant fears of fundamentalism taking root (and political power) in a multi-ethnic, pluri-religious and democratic Ethiopia. Moreover, Sudan cannot be accused of «destablizing» Ethiopia for the simple reason that no major Ethiopian opposition movement - armed or otherwise - operates from Sudanese territory.

Cont. back cover

IN THIS ISSUE

FOCUS: The question of accountability: How Westerners are complacently abused

POLITICS:

The escalating tension in the Horn and the Red Sea
The war between Eritrea and Yemen: What is at stake?
Who is Abera Yemane-Ab?
EPLF's attempt on Mengistu

DOCUMENT:

Extracts from two Documents

1. TPLF: The Khmer Rouge of Ethiopia
2. AMORA (The Vulture) Translated from Amharic

HUMAN RIGHTS:

Independent press on the verge of collapse
EFJA Update and Report by Amnesty International
Sixteen people charged with "exaggeration"

UNREST AND MILITARY CLAIMS:

German botanist feared kidnapped
Young man murdered in Dire Dawa
Forced recruitment on the rise ..



GRAPECA

Groupe de Recherche et d' Action pour la paix en Éthiopie
et dans la Corne de l' Afrique.

Research and Action Group for Peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

RAGPEHA

Cont. from front cover

Meles' military posturing can be justified only by an expression of ethnocentric solidarity with the Tigrean-dominated government in Asmara and his urge to participate in the creation of the U.S. led «anti-fundamentalist bastion» in the Horn in order to continue enjoying Western support for his ethnocentric one-party dictatorship.

Neither Sudan nor its «Muslim fundamentalist» regime constitutes a threat to a democratic Ethiopia as they do to the one-party dictatorship in Asmara.

In supporting the TPLF/EPLF drive to dismember Ethiopia, the Sudanese - and the other Arab/Muslim regimes in the region - had their own political agenda for Eritrea. Most of them expected that an independent Eritrea - with Muslims accounting for more than 55% of the population - would turn out to be a Muslim dominated, pro-Arab country. Most Eritrean leaders often went out of their way to give substance to this perception of the Eritrean problem by sometimes going so far as to declare that Eritrea was «part and parcel of the Arab nation». The establishment of a Tigrean highlanders «Habash» regime was a disappointment, to say the least, to the former supporters of the Eritrean cause. The shift in regional alliances and Isayas' rapprochement with Israel and the West only helped aggravate the misgivings of Eritrea's Muslim and Arab neighbours. All hopes of promoting the Arab/Muslim cause in Eritrea through a «democratic process» that would allow the non-Tigrean and non-Christian majority to participate in and dominate the political process were dashed by Isayas' pre-emptive move, which seriously curtailed human rights and prohibited the formation of any «ethnic or religious based organization». As far as Khartoum - and other Arab states - are concerned, this was a move directed against the non-Habasha lowlanders and in the final analysis against Arab/Muslim influence in the country and the region.

The «fundamentalist» danger, deliberately exaggerated by Isayas is marginal, however, compared to his own internal problems resulting from his inability to deliver the promise of «a prosperous and open society» in independent Eritrea. The former guerillas who have become political pressure groups demanding immediate material rewards and opposing EPLF's national civil and military service as a sinister play to marginalize them, the Afars in Danklia who still insist on the respect of their «right to self-determination» and continue to engage EPLF forces, a growing armed struggle in the western lowlands, religious, ethnic and regional cleavages, economic hardships, growing opposition of Eritrea's democratic forces and intellectuals who reject the imposition of a one-party

dictatorship in Asmara, etc. — these are but some of the problems now facing independent Eritrea and which Isayas is trying to sweep under the rug.

The whole exercise has best been exposed by the monthly ETHIO NEWS. After Isayas, who the paper says was «becoming very much like the proverbial baby who bit off his mother's breast» opened a second war front by suddenly attacking the Red Sea islands and capturing Yemenis, it commented: «Isayas Afeworki definitely has his own agenda. He has already occupied some 25 kilometers of Djibouti; he has openly declared his decision to work for the overthrow of the Sudanese government and he has now provoked war with Yemen ... All this has been done to fulfil certain objectives. Primarily to act as Israel's surrogate in the area, thus to gain the largesse of America and the West by posing as «the frontline country against Islamic fundamentalism», and also, and it is very important, to mobilize the internal Eritrean public opinion away from the grave internal problems. All dictators know that such wars galvanize public opinion in one direction: externally.» (ETHIO NEWS, Special issue, December 1995).

Isayas not only takes his role very seriously, but also wants the whole world to know it. In October, he told the ECONOMIST that he was ready «to give weapons to anyone committed to overthrowing the government of Sudan». Commenting on this announcement, the ECONOMIST dismissed Isayas' undiplomatic and provocative offer by saying «As to the Sudan, what could worry it more is the risk that Ethiopia might follow the Eritrean example».

As things stand at present, Meles has already followed Isayas in the drive to destabilize or even overthrow the Sudanese regime and is fast dragging Ethiopia into a war which has nothing to do with the national interests of the country or its people's aspiration for peace and democracy. Undoubtedly, despite differences surfacing within the ruling clique on the issue of EPRDF's involvement in conflicts «that are not Ethiopia's concern», Meles will follow his cousin in the Yemenite adventure too. This not only because Meles will be «duty bound» to help Isayas given the military pact signed between the two countries but also because he himself will need to poise as a «front line fighter» in the struggle against fundamentalism to convince Westerners and particularly the Americans to continue to look the other way as he tries to consolidate his ethnocentric one-party dictatorship.