

Washington Update
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Politicians are quick to grab onto the thinnest branches of hope and reluctant to release their grip, often holding on long after all reason for optimism has withered. This is especially true when the belief that a terrible situation has suddenly gotten better makes it possible to avoid making difficult decisions.

This is happening today in Washington regarding Ethiopia. Members of Congress and State Department officials were pleased that a new Prime Minister was releasing political prisoners, dissolving tensions with Eritrea, and inviting old foes to return and participate in a democratic renewal. All of this happened with little or no assistance from the United States, and without the American government having to make tough choices between promoting human rights and propping up an ally in the war on terrorism.

Now the bitter rivalries and pathologies created by governments that ruled through the politics of hate are again tearing Ethiopia apart. As the country crumbles, Prime Minister Abiy has remained silent. His silence and dithering speak much more loudly than words could.

Despite the massive scale the disaster – ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia on a scale and at a speed that surpass the Rohingya exodus from Bangladesh and internal displacement that dwarfs the horrors of Syria – there has been little notice in Washington and so far no attempt by Congress or the Trump administration to alleviate the suffering. The violence has left more than eight million Ethiopians desperately in need of food aid.

The Oromo Liberation Front has acted with impunity, robbing banks, pillaging and beating people in Wolega and other Ethiopian provinces.

The Oromo Democratic Party is trying to take control of Addis Ababa, and to force Amharas, other ethnic people from the capital city.

The government of Ethiopia lead by Prime Minister Abiy must maintain peace and the rule of law for all Ethiopians. It is very important for the survival of the country.

The system of ethnic federalism was troubled with internal inconsistencies because ethnic groups do not live only in a discrete

“homeland” territory but are dispersed across the country. Nonnative ethnic minorities live within every ethnic homeland.

Prime Minister Abiy can achieve real progress if Ethiopia embrace a different kind of federation territorial and not ethnic — where rights in a federal unit are dispensed not on the basis of ethnicity but on residence. Such a federal arrangement will give Ethiopians a chance to avoid authoritarian dictatorship.

Today’s tragedy for Ethiopia could quickly become America’s and the world’s disaster if a proud nation disintegrates into the world’s most populous failed state.

The U.S. government, and governments in Europe and elsewhere, must focus their attention on Ethiopia. Once again it will be necessary to feed the hungry. But more important, action must be taken to bolster brave Ethiopians who are willing to struggle to halt the slide into anarchy and poverty.

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