**The predicament of Woyane:- when the destabilzer ends up being destabilzed**

**By Tecle Abraham Habtemicael**

When Somalia collapsed in 1990 and imploded into clan based civil war for 27 years, the Derg was celebrating the success of its destabilizing policy against the Somalis. According to a recently publicised research study (professor Belete Belachew Yilhun) based on the analysis of previously secret official documents of the regimes foreign ministry, Somalia was indeed destroyed by Ethiopia`s clandestine destabilizing operations. The Minority TPLF has been using exactly this obviously successful policy in Somalia to destroy Eritrea. Actually Woyane had deployed more resources and have powerful supporters than Derg to make it a success. But to the dismay of the TPLF not only it has not work at all, but in a paradoxical way is working against its very own survival as a regime.

The figurehead PM of Woyane`s regime in a recent speech he made during his visit to the troubled Wolquait area up in arms against its illegal incorporation into Tigrai Kelel, after openly admitting his failing policies towards Eritrea, indicated that a new policy is under consideration. For many who are familiar with the politics of Woyane, although they found it uncharacteristic of the bombastic Woyane to openly admit its defeat, they see nothing changing. For some however, it is an indication of war. In my opinion, one need to figure out what he actually meant by his admission of a failing policy, before tackling the question of what else more it can do to continue destabilizing Eritrea.

Anyone who has followed the Woyane`s foreign policy towards Eritrea understands how much resources and efforts it has invested during the last 20 years to destabilze Eritrea. It is not at all necessory to dig into the secret archives of the Woyane`s foreign ministry to confirm the the clandestine or otherwise destabilzing operations against Eritrea. One can easily trace the hand of Woyane in all the problems or constraints thrown out against Eritrea, especially the depletion of its youth and the UN sanctions and investigations. Diplomatically, economically, poltically, militarily, securitywise, migrationwise has done all it can to see Eritrea destabilized and finally turn it out into something like Somalia. Here, it is worth noting that Woyane has been the beneficiary of the unreserved support of the Obama administration. However, inspite of these enermous investments Woyane has failed to draw any benefit, let alone its desired wish of destabilized Eritrea. So, is the PM indicating a complete U-turn of policies and doing the right thing or has he something new and untried killer up in his sleeves?

In answering this question, it is important to bear in mind the timing and context of the announcement. This figure head PM knows perfectly well that it is heading a country languishing under state of emergency, because the people of Ethiopia in general and the oromos and amharas in particular have revolted against its rule. After 25 years, this minority regime`s backward and cruel adminstration is under serious threat. Although there has been many armed groups for decades fighting this regime, this people`s uprising has created the perfect storm to threaten the regime seriously. The very area, Wolquait, where the PM made the announcement is now turned into a battleground between the Woyane security forces and the armed farmers and armed oppositions. Despite its attempt to crackdown hard, the armed reistance is gaining momentum and following its *sigmoid curve* is expectted to grow for all to see and notice.

The Woyanes actually are sensing the danger coming from an intensivied militiary engagement with the armed oppositions. And they are specially worried with the military ramification of the TPDMs engagement. This group has two remarkable qualities that will have a crtical bearing on the military threat against the regime. First, it is by and large a Tigraian armed group, although Ethiopians from all ethnicities are present. Secondly, it has a well-organized military capability; organized in divisiions and with a fighting capability to wage conventional warfare. This militrarily powerful group has been todate not actively engaged in the militiary activites in the north. This group had been militarily very active up to 2011/2012 in Tigrai, but since then has been not very active. Instead it has been organizing itself into a formidable military force by building up its all round capabilites that would enable it for a conventional strategic military thrust. By reading between the lines of a recent interview by the vice-chairman of the organization, one is left without doubt, what they are up to. Soon, any time they will come to military activites and it may turn out to be a game changer.

When the TPDM come into military action, Tigrai will be one of the major battlefield area. This will be for Woyane embarassing on one hand and threatening on the other hand. It is to be recalled that, following the desertion of the organization`s incompetent chairman together with some tricked followers, Woyane made a propaganda fanfare of it and unwisely lied to the Ethiopian people and the world at large, that TPDM is finished and no longer exist. More importantly that Tigrai, the very home ground of TPLF, would turn to a battleground that would be too much of an embarassment for Woyane to bear. Globally and regionally Woyane would lose face and all its standing and interventionist adventure in the Horn would be thrown in disarray. Its effect will definitely reverbrate across the country and the armed rebels would be encouraged to enhance their activities from Ogaden to gambella, from Benishangul to Afar, and from Bale to Amhara. And in the final analysis, the beginning of the end of its regime would be in full swing. So this is the nightmarish secenario the PM is bearing in mind, when he talks about the failing policies.

This is the paradox Woyane is forced to grupple with; a destabilizer turned destabilzed. In my opinion, that is what the PM meant by the failure of its regime`s destabilzing policies against Eritrea. Typically, any government like Woyane who has lost the hearts and minds of his people, would try to save his skin by negotiating with the external powers it would love to blame for its predicament. According to this conventional wisdom, one expect Woyane reaching out for a reapproachment with the Eritrean government. That is exactly what the Siad Barre government did with Ethiopia under Derg. But, Woyane being such a strange and unpredictable animal, it would be hard to read its mind. Knowing the psyche of Woyane, no one expects Woyane to take a pragmatic approach. But if does, it would look for resolving the outstanding issues regarding its evacuation of sovereign Eritrea`s territory and thereby opening the possibilty of normalization between the two countires and while at the same time responding duly to the legitimate demands of the Ethiopian people. That would be the most rational decision to pursue after 20 years of disaster in the Horn. However, it sounds far fetched to expect that from Woyane, but who knows the heat it is feeling.

If Woyane decides to reach out for reapprochement with Eritrea, it should not come as a total surprise. It is a well documented fact that Woyane has been unceassingly calling for a negotiation with Eritrea and to that end pleading for the help of several intermedieries. This call for negotiation may be dismissed as a public relations exercise designed to deflect the criticism arising from its legally indefensible rejection of the final and binding ruling of the border commission. Or even if it means a serious offer, it will have it only on its own terms ; the socalled 5 points plan. Nevertheless, one can not fail to notice the sense of desperation or insecurity, when the PM cries in every opportunity making himself available to go to Asmara for talks. If the regime really feels secure and strong, it needn`t do that. But it is not, while it knows only too well that Eritrea can influence what it is happening in Ethiopia. So, considering the prevailing worrying situation, the regime may find it neccesory to mend its relationship with Eritrea, in order to save its regime. To this effect, it may withdraw the socalled 5 point plan and agree to withdraw from Eritrean territories while at the same time calling for a parallel negotiation on agenda set by both parties. Just recently the Finnish were approached to enlist their help in this regard. If this request is confirmed, the woyane proposal indicates a complete departure from its previous position.

The second alternative is going to war. However, resorting to full scale war is not an easy undertaking for Woyane to make. It had already tried it in 1998-2000 and has seen it the hard way. The world could not imagine how disasterous the war was to Woyane with 123,000 dead and double that injured, (but the world keep repeating 70, 000 casualties on both sides). In the recent 2016 battle of Tsorona, Woyanes intruding army was beaten so hard that it was compelled to retreat in complete disaaray leaving its dead and wounded as well as prsioners behind. Although Eritrea is under UN military embargo and other constraints, Eritrea is fully ready and capable to defend its border. If any one underestimates Eritrea`s strength, I am sure Woyane knows better. Woyane knows perfectly, that it is not by miracle that there is complete security across Eritrea including the borders areas, despite every destablizing attempt it has made; which has now openly admitted as a failure. On the other hand, Woyane can not depend on a divided, demoralized and otherwise whose loyality questionable seucurity forces. Unlike the war in 1998, this time there are also armed oppositions which threaten its rear base and that is strategically very damaging. So in balance going to war is not favourable to Woyane. It has no capability either for a clandestine air attack on strategic economic centers to harm Eritea`s promising economic progress, although may appear attractive for its deniability of responsibility and evasion attention of the international community.

There is another important legal dimension of war that Woyane has to address before going to war. Eritrea is a soveriegn, independent state and member of the UN as well as AU. According to international law, only in self-defence can one country declare war on another soverign state. When Woyane unleashed its aggression in 1998, the convenient pretext was border dispute or rather being the victim of an Eritrean invasion. Now the border dispute is resolved by the 13th May 2002 ruling of the boundary commision, it has no legal issue against Eritrea. If anything, it is Eritrea that is legally entitled to use force to liberate its illegally occupied sovereign territories including Badme. That means Woyane would be hard-pressed to come up with a legal justification for declaring war on Eritrea; without discounting what Woyane is capable of as a pathological lier. Considering all these facts, it is very unlikely that Woyane would resort to war again. If it has the capability to do that, it could have done it long time ago. Not now, when Eritrea is in much stronger shape than the previous several years since the end of the the 1998-2000 war.

In conclusion, one can not help but notice that Woyane`s predicament is so bad, that it will do anything to save its regime from its probable downfall. As it has itself openly admitted, the long held policy of desatabilization against Eritrea has not only failed completely, but the regime fears the influence of Eritrea in the trajectory of events in Ethiopia. But, its options are limited and none are prospective. The alternatives are either going to war or coming to terms with the decision of the border commission and be willing to handover soveriegn Eritrea`s territories. If this is coupled with appropriately responding to the demands of the Ethiopian people, the regime can save its days. But, Woyane being such a regime that doesn`t yield for rationality, the likelihood of such an outcome is very small. On the other hand, the ratcheting up of the confrontation to war level will not benefit the regime. Considering the prevailing uprisal by the people of Ethiopia, it is in a weaker position to execute effective war campaign against Eritrea and it won`t solve its predicament. If anything, it would compound it. So, what would Woyane do to save its regime. One can predict rational decisions, but one can not predict irrational decisions based on misadventure or miscalculation. So, let`s wait and see what Woyane is up to.