

A rejoinder on “Kenya Can’t and Won’t be Ethiopia”

Meles A. 04-30-15

Alshebab’s murderous attack on Garissa University College was a coward act that claimed the lives of over 140 innocent students. In solidarity with the Kenyan State and people, students in Addis Ababa University and seven other higher institutions remembered their Kenya brethren with candle vigil. Up on signing book of condolence the Foreign Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Tedros Adhanom (PhD) also expressed Ethiopia’s resolve to continue fighting terrorism and willingness to cooperate with and assist the Government of Kenya in any way possible against this scourge.

Since the Alshebab atrocity in Garisa, many analysts and reporters have contrasted Ethiopia and Kenya’s war against terrorism. On April 10, 2015, the Kenyan Standard’s Mwaura Samora, wrote a commentary entitled “Kenya Can’t, Won’t be Ethiopia”. The gist of his piece is Ethiopia’s success against terrorism can be attributed to a tightly controlled society and a repressive regime whereas Kenya’s failure can be explained by an ill-prepared security apparatus and incoherent State. Samora’s arguments have the following flaws:

First, there is inherent contradiction in arguing that Kenya is suffering and at the same time shouldn’t learn from countries that have relatively been successful in fighting terror. Samora seems to underestimate the importance of drawing policy lessons from each other. Ethiopia has been fighting Al-Itahad and other terrorist organization long before the birth of Alshebab and sharing its experience with Kenya and other brotherly neighbor countries should be encouraged. The fight against terror should be collectively done by countries of the region as Alshebab poses threat to all.

Second, Samora’s assumption that Kenya is a soft target for terrorists is not entirely accurate for two reasons: (1) Kenya, despite suffering multiple attacks for the past few

years, has indeed thwarted many attacks; and (2) Almost all the countries in the Horn of Africa region, including Ethiopia have been victims of terrorist attacks regardless of the system of government under which these countries are governed.

Third, Samora's argument that repression leads to success in fighting terrorism is mythical and misleading. Repression only leads to grievance and alienation, which are recipes for creating an environment that can breed terrorism. In the Ethiopian case, Nations and Nationalities have benefitted from a federal system that devolves resources and functions of the government in a manner that benefits ordinary citizens. This, coupled with remarkable economic growth that trickles down to all communities, is what prevents alienation, and safeguards stability.

It is true that the Ethiopian State is very coherent and its forces are well disciplined. However, the secret behind Ethiopia's success in defending their security is attributed to strong sense of nationalism and patriotism, which dates back to millennia. Keeping peace is not reserved for the security establishment. Every citizen has the moral and legal responsibility to stand in defense of his nation and work with the security forces. With the right policy environment, the same is achievable in Kenya.

What is certain at this moment is that Alshabab remains the premier terrorist threat to Kenya, and the region at large. Indeed, Alshabab is consistently changing its tactics and methods of operation in response to the efforts of countries in the region to deal with the menace. The attack has nothing to do with the deployment of KDF to Somalia. Alshabab has been attacking Kenya before KDF was deployed to Somalia. So defeatism is not an option we can bring an end to Alshabab through concerted efforts of countries in the region.