

LAST MINUTE ADVICE

(To President Obama)

By Hama Tuma

Having lived in France where delusions of grandeur thrived I would be excused if I imagine that the president of a superpower would listen to my advice or even know anything about it. And yet.....here goes.

My first advice to President Obama is to not cancel his visit to Ethiopia. It is a first for a sitting president and he sure would like to be the first. So, do go. I am not sure of the time he has for the visit but I can imagine it would be short and so every minute counts. He is lucky that the nominal prime minister of the land is a politically challenged element and will hardly initiate an elaborate conversation. Avoid the foreign minister who wants to strike a pose as a savvy, sophisticated, twitter using intellectual. He just talks too much and his field is not politics but health matters. I have read that some people have advised you to visit the Kaliti prison. You have no time for this and you should avoid it for various reasons. To start with, the repressive regime that is your host has made Kaliti a hell hole and will tell you that it holds only criminals. Kaliti stinks of blood, sweat, fear and plain stink. Infection is a real possibility. Moreover, do not cancel the visit to Ethiopia because your 800 or so security detail would lose their special pay. Some have suggested that you meet with dissidents and human rights activists. The regime would tell you that there are no dissidents or political prisoners and that is that. As for human rights activists, even we Ethiopians do not know who and where they are in Ethiopia. You can of course meet the regime controlled Human Rights Commissioner. Make it short even he can weave you funny folktales. After all, your hosts won the last election one hundred percent, all the seats, no dissident, no talk of rights violations please. Even Susan Rice did find it laughable.

I wonder how you would handle the ugly fact that you are being hosted by a particularly nasty and repressive regime. I would suggest avoiding a press conference for reasons that have little to do with security. No embarrassing questions, no answers that would embarrass you. A speech at the African Union is a must--that is the sacred place of all African dictators and you can get a strong whiff of hypocrisy, demagoguery, blatant lies and cynicism by just being at the podium. For you, the scent of Mugabe may overpower but if you

sniff hard enough you can smell out the foul Meles Zenawi, Al Sisi, and other more stifling scents. The chance at the AU is for you to deliver homilies, platitudes, clichés and carefully crafted phrases that mean nothing (Africa is on the move"!) and all at the same time and surpass the African demagogues who had been there before. I do not expect you will bother your hosts with disturbing questions on human rights, free and fair elections. No one will thank you and you will just be causing problems for America. Better to stick with the stance that America is used to--a pat on the back to dictators that obey it. They have sent more troops to Somalia to please you and to beg for more money which you better give them aplenty as China's entrance into Djibouti may make using the base there difficult. You may try to hug but the stiff and grim dictators in Addis are not that keen on men hugging men. And, please avoid the gay issue (Africa has more burning issues than this as Uhuru told you and Museveni would) and focus on the AIDS issue as some of the top generals are infected and often come to your homeland to get treatment.

If I was to give you good advice I would have said do not listen to your ambassador in Addis Abeba, to ignore Susan Rice, Gayle Smith and the pentagon groupies of the existing regime and the late dictator. But, I know beforehand, you will not listen and so I will not bother you. Do not trust the university degrees of the officials--quite a few of them are doctors with fake and bought degrees. This is to say do not use difficult words in English of which good governance, human rights and justice are to be mentioned. Weapons, arms, war--such are the words they cherish and "more aid" is their favorite. You can give them the green light to invade Eritrea or not--it matters not that much. Deep down they are kissing cousins and they deserve each other. Let the Israelis and the Saudis worry about the Red Sea. Meles Zenawi used to tell Kaddafi "I am a Yemeni". Some say he was lying and coning the Libyan dictator but many more said he was serious and so any talk on Yemen and Houthis should be handled carefully, You never know--blood could be thicker than principles and alliances.

This said, I will not hide the fact that I detest your hosts and want to see their demise in a full and complete way. Your intelligence services think that that if shove comes to push they can attempt a coup both in Addis and Asmara. These same services imagined the military regime of Mengistu would be replaced by CIA sponsored feather weight groups. The mind set has not changed. Your America loves puppets more than decent rulers. That

is why I would like to suggest that you ignore the critics that be and just focus on praising the dictators. As you can note, I have said little or nothing on Kenya. That is your father's land and more of concern to you and I am not a Kenyan to give you any advice on that. I focus on Ethiopia which is my country though three regimes have banned me from going to my homeland in a legal manner. This is the fate of many who have now called America their home. They often demonstrate outside the White House as they still entertain the illusion that you have enough time to listen to them. Didn't I start out with delusions? Could be a modern Ethiopian disorder contrary to our ancestors who saved our country from invaders by being real and not delusional .

I have done my share by suggesting some advice to you. Sure, you will not see it ever but that is expected and not the issue. Words that should be written or uttered should be given their chance. To quote your Kenyan ancestors, *There is no cure that does not have its price*. The crisis in the Horn (Al Shebab included) that plague America have their solutions and the people concerned know what to do. Not the tyrants, mind you. America has not been ready to pay the price other than trying to drone many out of existence. America has not been ready to pay the price to find the cure. This being the case, my advice to you is to ignore all advice and plod on, barge in with drones and all as you are used to do. Why try to change?