



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Meles Zenawi: A Terrorist Fighting War on Terror???

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Who is Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia? Is he the free world's partner in the War on Terror or is he a terrorist? The answer might depend upon whom you ask. To his own people of Ethiopia, you might hear stories of human rights abuses, political prisoners, Internet censorship and suppression of freedom, but he is representing himself quite differently to outsiders, especially now that he has diverted the attention of the international community from his own serious political problems to his new war with Somalia, assisted by the United States.

As he publicly is presented as being pro-Christian, pro-democracy and a legitimate anti-terrorist partner, his record in his own country defies these descriptions and instead places him on the opposite side of each.

Even the news coverage has nearly universally failed to emphasize the crisis facing Ethiopians under his own seventeen-year-old regime. As Meles is riding high with public recognition, Ethiopians, especially those who live in the United States, Canada or Europe, are discouraged with one-sided coverage that has not even mentioned the fact that Ethiopia has turned into a repressive and abusive police state where its own citizens live in fear and silence.

As a result, few average Americans, Canadians or Europeans know about the severity of widespread human rights abuses, the hijacking of the National Election of May 2005 when Meles declared his party the winners despite evidence to the contrary, the killing of 193 peaceful unarmed protestors by security forces under the control of Meles, the imprisonment of elected opposition leaders and thousands of other political prisoners and the religious conflict in Ethiopia that eyewitnesses report were incited by government troops following Meles's much used tactic of fomenting conflict. He has been an agent of terror in Sidama, Ogaden, Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, Gambella and continues to perpetrate brutality, oppression and suppression to his people throughout all of Ethiopia.

Neither does he represent any religion. Meles was schooled in Marxist/Leninist/atheistic principles, which he appears to heartily follow while speaking the foreign language of democracy, words of which he seems to have no understanding.

In the last few days of media coverage in the United States, Canada, Europe and elsewhere, we overwhelmingly hear this dangerous conflict in the Horn of Africa called a war between Christian Ethiopia, led by Prime Minister Meles, and Islamic extremist terrorists in Somalia who declared a holy Jihad on Ethiopia. However, first of all Meles Zenawi, according to many Ethiopians, was never really elected in the last election; and therefore, many reject the notion that he can even speak for Ethiopians let alone declare war for them. Regardless, even as the recognized political leader, the basic premises he has offered for engaging in this war are severely flawed.

First of all, Meles states that he was "dragged" into this war to stop the terrorists who declared Jihad against Ethiopia. What is not explained is that Meles had sent 8000 troops across international borders, penetrating into Somalia, before such a declaration of Jihad was made. The New Islamic Courts agreed to have a dialogue if he first removed the troops; however, he would not and even failed to admit until recently, that he had sent these troops across country lines. He called Somalia a threat even though they never invaded Ethiopia.

Secondly, the transitional government he was supporting is made up of persons he was involved in choosing when this government was set up in Kenya two years ago with the assistance from the United Nations. These leaders he is supporting are described as warlords who have been corrupt and unable to establish stability, peace and the rule of law within Somalia over this two-year period of time. The people of Somalia want stability, but Meles has little to offer Somalis as there is little stability in Ethiopia and the potential for further deterioration in his own country is at an all-time high. If he had such concern, why has he not offered constructive help in the past? Why is he doing this now?

Thirdly, news coverage indicates that he is representative of “Christian” Ethiopia despite the fact that Ethiopia is a country where the number of Christians is about equal to the number of Muslims, both of which have been living peacefully, side by side for many years. Instead, the well-accepted opinion is that Meles Zenawi operates as a communist and an atheist who has followed policies more reminiscent of authoritarian and brutal dictators the likes of Stalin. He reportedly has good relations with Omar Al-Bashir of the Sudan who has a notorious history of persecuting Christians in Southern Sudan and of committing a genocide in Darfur while at the same time, upholding *Sharia* law in Khartoum. It makes one doubt Meles’s motives in Somalia.

In addition, reports from eyewitnesses were received in early October regarding the religious conflict in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, between Christians and Muslims, alleging that Meles’s defense troops and pro-government militias incited the attacks, yet these attacks were blamed on Muslims said to have been trained in Somalia. It appears that Meles is attempting to incite a religious conflict that will enrage people from both sides if they fall for it. Without wide news coverage of the truth, well-meaning people will be very vulnerable to believing this calculated propaganda and will take sides that will further divide us on religious lines. We have enough real misunderstanding and threats in this world that we do not need to stir up problems where none or few existed before. Both Christians and Muslims should abhor being used in this way.

Fourthly, Meles states he has been dragged into a war to fight against extremist terrorists, yet he is a terrorist himself! Ask the people who live under him. Ask the Anuak, the Oromo, the Ethiopian Somali in the Ogaden region, the Sidamo people and they will tell you themselves. In fact, he may possibly face charges for crimes against humanity for the murder of 424 educated Anuak leaders in a massacre that began in December of 2003. One of the first men murdered was a devout Christian pastor whose church was growing in Gambella, Ethiopia. Ethiopian National Defense Forces, in a government plan called, Operation Sunny Mountain, also murdered other church members at a prayer meeting in the pastor’s home. Since that time some believe 2000 more Anuak have been killed.

Even this week, we have received reports, yet uncorroborated, that Meles has supplied arms to a tribe in Southern Sudan with the directive of killing Anuak there; however, the plan may have backfired when the guns were used against another group who had cattle. Early reports indicate that the government of northern Sudan gave tacit permission for the arms to be used against the Anuak.

Just look at the recent reports from the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard University and another report completed for UNICEF, released by one of its authors, regarding the ongoing human rights violations against the Anuak. This is not only the case for the Anuak, but for millions of other Ethiopians who live in fear and terror from their own government. How can Meles free others when his own people are not free?

Fifthly, can Meles offer peace, stability and the rule of law to Somalia when these do not exist in Ethiopia? The evidence is plentiful that Meles has little to offer to the people of Somalia and should take care of his own problems first. He and his party, the EPRDF, have not earned the legitimate right to speak for Ethiopians. Instead Ethiopians have been betrayed when the election was stolen in 2005 and excessive force was used to silence the outcry.

Meles is spreading a parasite that has been eating and infecting the Ethiopian people. He is now taking it to Somalia. Ethiopians are faced with a chronic food shortage, high incidences of HIV/AIDS, the widespread lack of clean water and poor educational opportunities despite millions of dollars from donor countries over the last seventeen years of Meles' leadership. Ethiopians were hoping that investments would be made in the people, our best natural resource, improving the lives of Ethiopians, but this has not happened to most. The average Ethiopian lives on less than \$1 per day. Human rights abuses, the imprisonment of journalists, political leaders and opposition leaders and the daily fear of terror and oppression hold our country men and women captive while at the same time, we Ethiopians are forced to invade Somalia with promises that we can deliver something better than what we have ourselves? This does not make sense!

Instead, it only may serve to take the focus off the internal problems and overwhelming popular dissatisfaction with the current government, lengthening Meles's control over Ethiopians and others in the Horn. Meles said Ethiopian troops had killed a thousand Somalis, but never mentioned how many Ethiopians were killed in what appears to be a war for his survival. If he survives, more Ethiopians will die as well, all casualties of this small clan led by another warlord, Meles Zenawi.

What we need is not clans, tribes or ethnic groups competing for political control or we will earn ourselves another terrorist from within. Instead we need to change to becoming a broader, more inclusive **“Pan-Ethiopia”** rather than attempting to be **“multi-ethnic Ethiopia.”** We must see each Ethiopian as being a human being, a unique child of God. We should speak for the rights not only for our family, our ethnic group, our religious group or any other “group,” but we should speak for universal rights for every Ethiopian.

Each of us can speak up for such an Ethiopia! You do not have to be a political leader to influence at least one person around you! May God hold Ethiopia together and allow us to think “big,” way beyond our own groups to our nation, region and continent. God values every life as equal.

However, our biggest challenge right now for Ethiopians who live in the United States is to not become so discouraged by the United States' support of Meles in his war on Somalia that we lose our focus. Instead, as we hear the news repeatedly provide a one-sided report such as has been the case the last few days, take the opportunity to call in to radio stations, TV stations or write letters to the editor of papers and magazines, providing the other side. We can speak up in our communities and churches. We can call our senators and representatives to Congress.

We have an obligation to educate others regarding what is truly happening in our country and urge them to take action. Government policy makers need to hear from us. As individuals, they may be influenced by our individual stories and the information we know first hand. Policies and systems can change because they are the by-products of individuals who can change.

When we speak up, we must speak with respect, patience and honesty if we expect to be heard. Anger and disrespect will sabotage our efforts. Former President Gerald Ford died this week. He was known for his ability to effectively communicate with others and was quoted as saying, **“You can disagree with others without being disagreeable!”** Ethiopians may disagree with American foreign policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, but we must find an effective way to communicate this not only to policy makers, but also to average citizens who probably have little understanding about what is going on in Ethiopia unless all of us take responsibility for getting out the facts.

American citizens need to know that the reason so many Ethiopians and people from all over the world want to come to this country is because of the liberty, rule of law, human rights and opportunity we so cherish here. But right now, it is the US that is supporting this regime because Meles has convinced them that he is needed in the War on Terror. But his partnership comes with a cost, much of which is being dearly paid by the people of Ethiopia who simply want to enjoy basic freedom in their own country.

Those who are citizens of the United States, Canada or Europe should speak out against our own country's policies that hold up regimes such as that of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. We should hold our media accountable for one-sided coverage by doing our best to give them the other side, helping them to see how failing to do so, prolongs an abusive and brutal government where men, women and children are the casualties.

News coverage has been calling the war with Somalia one between **“a Christian nation” and “an Islamic extremist nation.”** But as Meles spreads the message throughout Ethiopia and now to Somalia of hate, division, ethnic cleansing and lies, he does not stand for principles laid out by Jesus Christ. That message is of love, justice, mercy, hope, freedom and redemption. May people of all faiths or of no faith at all, not be confused by a **“wolf in sheep's clothing!”** May those of us who enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, not interfere with others wanting the same!

May God accomplish more than we could ask in this beautiful land of Ethiopia!

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