

**Zenawi's "Report to the House of People's Representatives
of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia , June 1999 E.C."
An Analysis and Commentary**

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A Note of Full Disclosure to the Reader:

This analysis/commentary is written at the behest of numerous individuals and organizations who wanted to hear my views on Zenawi's recent speech presented in the form of a "report" to his "House of People's Representatives"¹.

In the past, I have deferred to the commentary and scrutiny of independent local media sources and opposition political groups for enlightenment on Zenawi's shenanigans. I reluctantly agreed to comment on this "report" now for two reasons. First, since independent journalists and opposition leaders in Ethiopia -- that is, the voice of the people -- remain muzzled in jails and prisons, I thought it my moral duty to "stand in" and stand up for them, and let the world know that though they may be in the belly of Zenawi's dungeons, **THEY ARE NEITHER ALONE NOR VOICELESS! WE ARE STANDING BY THEM!**

Second, I believe there will be wide-ranging conversation on freedom, democracy and human rights within and without Ethiopia following the release of the prisoners of conscience. I am acutely aware of the gamesmanship surrounding their release, and even if they are not released, the **GAME IS OVER** for Zenawi. Beyond that, I believe it is necessary to challenge Zenawi not only for his actions and omissions, but also for his ideas and vision, if he indeed he has any, for Ethiopia. And so, here is my analysis and commentary...

Zenawi's Mantra: Peace, Development and Good Governance

The central themes in Zenawi's report to the "House" consist of the trilogy of clichés he has been tediously harping about for the last decade and half: peace, development and good governance. The "report" is a self-graded, self-serving statement intended to chronicle his achievements on these issues over the past year, and rationalize the "government's action plans" and "implementation of strategies for peace, development and good governance."

Let me say at the outset that this report-cum-speech is one of the most desultory and confusing statements I have ever read by anyone purporting to be a political leader. The "report" is full of platitudes about peace. It is unimaginative about development; and it lacks fresh ideas about good governance.

¹ Official copy of "report" is posted at: http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/ANNUAL%20REPORT.htm

The “report” recycles the same old hackneyed and discredited arguments about why things are not possible in Ethiopia. It contains no creative ideas about healing the great divides -- political, economic, social -- in Ethiopian society, strikes no bold gestures about living harmoniously with neighboring countries, demonstrates no discernable commitments to the rule of law and preservation of human rights, presents no intelligible strategy to deal with the country’s grinding poverty and widening inequality, and above all, it is devoid of any vision for Ethiopia’s future.

Remarkably, the report does not demonstrate the depth of understanding necessary to deal with the current and long-term domestic and foreign policy issues and problems of the country. It reeks with insincerity and hypocrisy. Most importantly, it ignores the people of Ethiopia, and the burdens they face every day. It fails to answer the supreme existential and transcendental question for all Ethiopians today: *How can one chicken cost 80 birr?*

In general, my opinion on the substance of the report/speech is that it is boilerplate hokum designed to hide the stark fact that Zenawi has no solutions for Ethiopia’s current problems or a realistic vision for its future.

In terms of style, the speech/report is dry and uninteresting. It lacks passion, conviction and eloquence. The Amharic audio recording of the speech is unbearably monotonous and robotic, reminiscent of the soporific (sleep inducing) drone of an old time radio announcer reading the news.

So much for general comments. Now, let us now carefully examine the substance of the report/speech.

A. PEACE

Peace In/With Somalia, Peace With Eritrea, or Pax Zenawi?

Zenawi referred to “peace” in one form or another some 22 times in his speech. But much of the use of the word is platitudinous (dull political oratory). Beyond that, his conceptions of peace and associated remarks are confusing, and send dangerous signals to both friend and foe.

Zenawi’s idea of regional peace is anchored in a doctrine of militarization which he describes as “bolstering our defense capacity until peace is realized.” He said he seeks a “durable peace” in Somalia, and a “sustainable peace” with Eritrea. But he wants to guarantee both “by bolstering our defense capacity”.

During the reporting year, it is clear that Zenawi did not find peace in Somalia or Eritrea, and certainly, not in Ethiopia. He said he sent his troops to Somalia to give the Somalis peace at the “request made by the government of Somalia”. But peace remains

elusive because of “threats posed by extremists who have taken refuge in Somalia”. He argued that he “was forced to revise plans for [troop withdrawal in] the third and final phase because terrorists were regrouping and coordinating their efforts with Eritrea.”

He reported progress in disarming Somali militia members and “re-integrating them into the police and defence forces as part of the drive to build the forces” of the Transitional Federal Government” (TFG). He declared Mission Accomplished: “[T]he situation in Mogadishu is one in which the TFG is in control of the whole city making it impossible for terrorists or non-government militia to control any part of the city.” He noted that he is working “whole-heartedly to convene a National Reconciliation Congress in Somalia.” He commended the TFG for “setting-up an independent Commission that freely organizes and oversees the congress”, allowing “dialogues with parties claiming inadequate participation.”

Zenawi cautioned that withdrawal from Somalia under the current circumstances would “prevent deployment of AU (African Union) peacekeepers”, and lead to a “reversal of the process of stabilization of Somalia”. He affirmed that Somalia’s salvation remains with the deployment of African peacekeepers. But that has not been possible because of the “failure on the part of states and parties to release funds they pledged to support the deployment of the peacekeeping force to Somalia.”

He reassured the “House” that he will “completely pull out” his troops “upon the successful conduct of the reconciliation conference and the consolidation of the TFG with the capability of the police and defence forces bolstered and the full deployment of AMISOM realized.”

Courting Disaster in Somalia

As events over the past six months have shown, keeping Ethiopian troops in Somalia is misguided, calamitous and plain wrong. No country has the right to invade its neighbors regardless of the domestic situation of that neighboring country. If Zenawi’s recent comment to the Washington Post is any indication, it appears that he now understands that elementary principle of international law along with the catastrophic consequences of his strategic miscalculations.

Zenawi’s current strategy of “I-will-not leave-Somalia-until-African-Union-peacekeepers-arrive” is a recipe for disaster. He has now put himself in the unenviable position of “cutting and running” or staying in Somalia and sinking deeper into the Somalia quagmire, while needlessly expending the lives of young Ethiopians to sustain a doomed policy of aggression.

The fact of the matter is that the presence of Ethiopian combat troops in Somalia is not a solution to Somalia’s political or social problems. For the past 16 years, Somalia has

been a polarized and fragmented society. It is regarded as a “failed state” because it has no legitimate national government, among other things. It has become the battleground for warlords and militiamen. Zenawi naively believed that he could outmaneuver and outwit the Somali clan leaders into accepting his lackey, Ali Mohammed Gedi, as transitional federal government prime minister. In much the same way as he accused the Eritreans for trying to use “Trojan Horses” to create chaos in Ethiopia, he tried to use Gedi as a Trojan Horse to impose a Pax Zenawi (Zenawi’s brand of peace) on the Somali people. He tried to sell them his brand of peace in the name of national reconciliation and power sharing. But neither the clan leaders nor the Somali people are buying it.

Zenawi finds himself in the cauldron of Somali clan politics. He has learned that it is impossible to trick or coerce all of the clan leaders into accepting Gedi. No Somali regards him as a genuine national leader. He is considered Zenawi’s stooge. He has little credibility.

Now, Zenawi is facing the consequences of his intervention: Somali nationalist reaction to Ethiopia’s occupation and rejection of a puppet government he set up. He can try and justify his intervention by trotting out jihadist bogeymen, but the fact remains that Somalis are rightfully resisting occupation of their country. In all fairness, if Somalia had invaded Ethiopia and made the same claims of terrorist infestation, all of us would be outraged and rise up to defend our country against such naked aggression.

So the twin outstanding problems in Somalia today are 1) the presence of Ethiopian occupation forces, and 2) Zenawi’s support of Gedi’s regime. Until these two issues are resolved, the principal political problem of Somalia -- clan polarization and fragmentation -- can not be effectively addressed. The fact is that since the downfall of Said Barre in 1991, Somalia has degenerated into clan politics, and clan leaders are more interested in carving out territory to control than establishing a national government. It is doubtful that they can be pressured into agreeing to form a national government led by an individual perceived to be an Ethiopian puppet.

By his own admission, Zenawi miscalculated the intentions and integrity of the clan leaders, and underestimated the complexity and severity of Somali clan politics. Whatever political problems the Somalis may have had in the past, it is now trumped by the unwelcome presence of troops from a country many Somalis regard as a historical foe. The inescapable fact is that sooner or later Ethiopian troops will have to leave Somalia, and if persuasive diplomacy is not underway soon to bring about genuine reconciliation and power sharing, we would have to fear about stateless not only in Somalia, but Ethiopia itself. But despite Zenawi’s claims of political reconciliation and power-sharing, there is no evidence that he is genuinely interested in an all-inclusive political arrangement that would include those groups who have been marginalized by his support of Gedi.

In any case, Zenawi has put himself in a “catch 22” situation. He says he can not leave Somalia because African peacekeepers are not there. But the peacekeepers will not set foot in Somalia so long as Ethiopian troops are there. So, he digs deeper into the Somali quagmire.

Stuck in Somalia: No Peace and No Exit Strategy

The bottom line on Zenawi’s peace report on Somalia is: There is no peace in Somalia today. There will not be peace there tomorrow. There will not be peace in Somalia anytime in the foreseeable future because the whole country is infested by “terrorists”, “extremists”, jihadists, Islamists and wild-eyed Al-Queidists. Several days after submission of the “report” to the “House”, Zenawi admitted to the Washington Post that he “made a wrong political calculation” when he intervened in Somalia. Now facing an implacable and tenacious Somali insurgency, and lacking any domestic or international support for his reckless adventurism, the best Zenawi can do is offer half-hearted contrition and meaningless words of remorse.²

And if the “House of the People’s Representatives” were to ask, “So, what is the exit strategy out of Somalia?”, I suspect Zenawi’s answer, with a stiff upper lip, would be: “There is no exit strategy out of the quagmire of Somalia until Mission is Accomplished!”

Somalia faces extraordinary challenges today, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Neither Zenawi nor the international donors have the ability to address these challenges. The solution is in the hands of the Somali people. It is their choice ultimately to have political and social harmony, or fall even deeper into a vortex of political chaos and anarchy. They can not be pressured or tricked by neighbors or international donors. Today Ethiopia’s occupation of Somalia has become a lightning rod focusing Somali rage on their occupiers. And if Somalia should fall deeper into political chaos and violence, the responsibility will be placed on Zenawi’s doorsteps.

The long term consequences of this reckless intervention for Ethiopia will be monumental. Future generations of Ethiopians will have to deal with and pay for this dark legacy of intervention. Suffice it to say that we live in a rough neighborhood in Northeastern Africa. Our friends are few, and our foes many!

Just for the record: There were a few “minor” omissions from the report: How many thousands of Somalis were killed in the violence occasioned by the intervention? What happened to the hundreds of thousands of Somalis who fled the country following Zenawi’s invasion and occupation? Did any countries, international organizations, leaders call for the immediate withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia? There is nothing about these issues in the report.

² “Ethiopian Premier Admits Errors on Somalia,” *Stephanie McCrummen*, Washington Post Foreign Service, Friday, June 29, 2007; Page A16

War or Peace With Eritrea, or the Badimé Quagmire

In the report/speech, Zenawi declared his aspirations for a “sustainable peace” with Eritrea that will allow the border demarcation to proceed. He said he wanted to “resolve all differences peacefully and through dialogue” with Eritrea. He explained that “despite flaws in the decision of the Boundary Commission, we have repeatedly and unequivocally declared our acceptance of the same because it is the Commission's verdict.” He said his problem is with implementation of the “actual demarcation” of the boundary lines, and he will not talk demarcation until “conditions are created for amicable neighborly ties”.

But his lip service to “sustainable peace” with Eritrea is betrayed by his blistering attack on the Eritrean regime. He accused the Eritrean government of plotting to “unleash chaos against our country.” He accused Eritrea for “ostentatious saber-rattling a few years ago”, using armed dissident groups as “Trojan Horses” and for plotting to destabilize Ethiopia. While accusing Eritrea of “saber-rattling”, he did his own saber-rattling by declaring that it is “necessary to make the necessary (sic) military preparation for deterring possible Eritrean invasion and to repulse such an invasion should it occur.” He bragged that he has “the requisite military capability to deter and to effectively repulse (Eritrean) aggression.”

But is there really a disputable issue with the arbitration award of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission? Not really. Both countries submitted their cause to the Commission on the explicit condition that the Commission’s determinations will be “final and binding”. Zenawi initially rejected the border ruling and refused to allow the border demarcation, resulting in long delays. Now, he says he will be willing to implement the decision by allowing demarcation, but only if there is a “sustainable peace” between the two countries.

The fact of the matter is that the Algiers Agreement places the responsibility on the UN to take measures, including under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, against the party that violates the terms of the Agreement. So, Zenawi now sits on the horns of a dilemma: implement the Commission’s ruling or risk U.N. sanctions, and face an even greater risk of war with Eritrea.

Contrary to Zenawi’s claims, the physical demarcation of the boundary lines between the two countries does not entail political or technical/engineering problems. There are adequate legal principles under international law to ensure the demarcation is done consistent with the Boundary Commission’s ruling. There are also sophisticated mapping techniques and technologies to aid in the accurate drawing of the boundary lines.

The peace report on Eritrea is full of excuses and subterfuges. Zenawi attempts to suggest that the boundary dispute with Eritrea is not really settled, and that there are some critical unsettled demarcation issues. That is deceptive and misleading. The boundary dispute is a done deal, and Zenawi stated in his “report” that has accepted the ruling of the

Commission. The only thing left is implementation. But in the final analysis, Zenawi's strategy on the boundary issue is: "say-one-thing-and-do-another-thing".

There can not, and must not be another war arising from the implementation of the boundary commission decision. The fact of the matter is that a boundary dispute that was decided on the battleground was submitted to binding arbitration. Now, the decision of the boundary commission can not be a pretext for war. It is time to face reality, and walk the talk on the boundary line!

Back to the question: When will there be peace with Eritrea? Someday. But until that day comes, Zenawi pledges to continue building "the requisite military capability to deter and to effectively repulse (Eritrean) aggression." In short, Zenawi's message in the report is: The threat of war with Eritrea is Peace!

Peace in Ethiopia or the 800 Pound Gorilla in the Living Room

Peace in Ethiopia! What? Yes, how about peace in Ethiopia?

The report/speech does not contain a single word on peace in Ethiopia. It does not appear that Zenawi has even considered the issue; and if he has, he did not consider it important enough to report on it. Perhaps he thought Ethiopia is a society without memory, and the people have forgotten the withering oppression of the past 16 years. The irrefutable fact of the matter is that his regime is at war with the people of Ethiopia. His troops kill, torture, maim and imprison citizens at will. He has trampled on the human rights and civil liberties of the people with impunity. He has defied, scoffed at and turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the international community to bring reconciliation and harmony among the people of Ethiopia.

Again, what about peace in Ethiopia?

I would imagine Zenawi's answer would be a monologue: "Of course, there is peace in Ethiopia. Look around! Do you hear any opposition leaders complaining? Do you hear any journalists bellyaching about problems? Do you see anybody protesting in the streets? Do you see any real opposition in the "House of the People's Representatives? You don't, and that is because there is PEACE in Ethiopia!"

Zenawi needs to make peace with the Ethiopian people!

B. GOOD GOVERNANCE

Zenawi's remarks on "good governance" are truly confusing. He seems to suggest that the country has good governance and is working feverishly to make improvements. Objective indicators or evidence of good governance are elusive in the report. But there is a whole lot of talk about "plans", "efforts" "reforms" and "studies" related to "good

governance. Zenawi uses the word “plan” in one form or another some 23 times in the report, “effort” 19 times, “reform” 16 times, and “study” 6 times. The report is generous in announcing the existence of a plan for this, and a plan for something else. There is even a plan for a plan. There are all kinds of “efforts” being made to do one thing or another. But nowhere in the report does one see even the ghost of good governance.

As for the “plans” and “efforts”, Zenawi rolled out the big items in the report: a training program for the “federal legislature”, improvements in the “electoral processes so that people could be adequately heard and participate”, and retooling of “the procedural and organizational structure of the Electoral Board by conducting a study on the shortcomings of the 2005 election” (Yeah, right!).

He said he has undertaken various activities aimed at “revising the press law to ensure the implementation of a plan to promote free press based on the principles of transparency, accountability and freedom as is required in a democratic system.” He said “licenses have been issued to 51 newspapers and magazines, out of which 20 are profit-making enterprises, to allow the press to do its job properly.” He declared “significant improvements were registered in creating a healthy democratic media.”

He further reported that various efforts are underway to improve the courts. There is “a plan to strengthen an earlier plan of reforming the procedural and organizational structure of the courts.” Then there is another “plan as conceived to make the federal judicial system transparent and accountable.” There is “expectation” about improving the skills, professionalism and ethics of judicial officers and members of prosecutorial agencies. (By implication, it is obvious that the current prosecutorial and judicial crew lacks the requisite skills, professionalism and ethical standards!)

There is a “plan” to overhaul government bureaucracies. He said there is a “need to change the bureaucratic practice [of the civil service] which has been prevalent for about a century.” He explained that the “professional capacity and experience of the [Ethiopian] civil servant is extremely limited when seen against the demands of modern civil service.” He added that “the resistance from a significant number of people who are skeptical of the [civil service] reform has complicated the whole process.”

It is truly remarkable that after 16 years in power, the best Zenawi can present in his latest report is an indictment against an allegedly fossilized bureaucracy and half-baked plans and half-hearted efforts in the name of good governance. Incredible!

In a comic moment, Zenawi told the “House of People's Representatives” that by giving them “best practices” lessons to enhance their legislative skills, they have now become “one of the best Houses enjoying best democratic practices which have now become operational.” (I nearly fell off my chair laughing.)

But the self-graded report card on “good governance” proves there is no good governance. There is a plan here, and a plan there for “good governance”, but there is No verifiable evidence of good governance.

What is remarkable about the report is the fact that it offers a window into Zenawi’s understanding (or lack of) of the concept of good governance. He seems to believe that good governance is good talk about good governance.

There is nothing mysterious about good governance. Very simply, it is about being good, fair and just to the people you govern. It is about respecting the civil liberties and human rights of the people. It is about the rule of law, and democratic practices and processes.

But, let’s take the gold standard on good governance, the criteria established by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Good governance is an all-embracing effort involving the “exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.”

What exactly is good governance? Among UNDP’s core characteristics of good governance include:

- 1) Participation (guarantees of participatory rights for citizens in societal decision-making built on a foundation of freedom of association and speech).
- 2) Institutionalization of the rule of law (creation and use of legal frameworks based on due process, impartiality and enforcement of the laws on human rights).
- 3) Transparency (institutional and leadership integrity built on the free flow of information).
- 4) Responsiveness (enabling and empowering institutions and processes to serve all stakeholders).
- 5) Consensus-building (mediating and harmonizing competing interests and groups to generate broad agreement on public policy).
- 6) Equity (ensuring that all citizens have equal opportunity in society, regardless of gender, ethnicity, language, income, region, etc.).
- 7) Efficacy and efficiency (establishment of effective and efficient processes and

institutions).

- 8) Accountability (political leaders and institutions as well as private sector and civil society organizations are held accountable to the public and their members), and
- 9) Strategic vision (leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on their social, economic and political well-being).

Based on these universally accepted criteria, has Zenawi achieved or made strides towards “good governance” in Ethiopia? **Let the reader answer this question!**

But let me ask a few questions about one of the central criterion of good governance and my favorite subject: **Accountability**.

Whatever happened to the cold-blooded killers of the 193 innocent men, women and children? And the sadistic triggermen who wounded 763 unarmed demonstrators?

Whatever happened to the hundreds of thousands of political prisoners that the international human rights organizations and the U.S. State Department say are rotting in Zenawi’s jails?

Whatever happened to the leaders of Kinijit who routed the EPDRF from every hamlet and neighborhood, town and city in Ethiopia?

Whatever happened to press freedoms? Enforcing the law on human rights? Judges who perform their duties without political interference?

Whatever happened to good governance?

C. DEVELOPMENT

The report card on “development” is much the same as the one on “good governance”. There are “plans” and “efforts” for development. Zenawi said his development undertakings will be guided by foreign expertise (possibly because much of the local talent has left the country): “In our development activities, every effort is being exerted to employ foreign professionals to reengineer the change, in addition to their own reform programs.”

He said that “in order to be able to build local capacity of designing and executing the civil service reform program and to build the capacity of the civil service college and other similar institutions in implementing this activity, efforts have been exerted to jointly work with similar foreign institutions.”

As an example of the “development efforts” he singled out for acclaim a program involving “not less than 400 youth with first degrees from various regions [who] have started participating in programs designed to train urban development workers for second degrees in collaboration with the Civil Service College and other foreign institutions active in the same area.” Zenawi noted that he has sought to balance the development and military needs of the country: “We have done so by allocating sufficient resources but without allowing our development plans to be adversely affected.”

Development or Underdevelopment in Ethiopia?

I have no idea what “development” Zenawi is talking about in his report. But in the 2006 Congressional Budget Justification provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)³, Ethiopia’s prospects for development are downright dismal:

Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world - it ranks 170 out of 177 countries on the 2004 Human Development Index. Ethiopia has an annual per capita income of around \$100 (less than one-fourth of the sub-Saharan average). Ethiopia has the poorest human development indicators in the world with more than three-quarters of the population living on less than \$1 per day. Despite the 2004 recovery year from the serious drought of 2002-2003, by the end of the calendar year another food emergency began, the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) has requested emergency assistance for 7.2 million people in 2005. Although above the population growth rate, the average 4.5% increase in gross domestic product over the last five years remains below the rate required to achieve the Millennium Development Goal to halve the number of Ethiopians living in poverty by the year 2015. The poverty and vulnerability of Ethiopia's people is also reflected in the inadequate health and education systems and poor access to basic services. Family planning services are under-utilized and under-developed, and the population growth rate of 2.67% is high. HIV/AIDS remains a growing problem....” (emphasis added)

Res ipsa loquitur. Let the evidence speak for itself.

Zenawi Grades Himself

In the last sentence of the report, Zenawi grades himself: “In short, although there are some occasional delays in connection with implementing the plan to realize good governance at the federal and regional levels, the overall performance is satisfactory and is progressing according to plan.” I would be willing to go even further and say that he deserves an “A+” for planning good governance on paper, for making random and haphazard efforts at governance and for talking a good talk about reform and change.

But measured by the gold standard for good governance -- instituting participatory democracy, institutionalization of the rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-building, equity, establishment of effective and efficient processes and

³ <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/afr/et.html>

institutions, accountability and strategic vision -- he gets an "F". I am sorry, but that is all I can honestly give for a report stuffed with doom and gloom, and garnished with mendacity.

I reckon my reputation as a fair and hard-grading professor is well-earned!