Meles’ “Regime Change” Rationale

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Ethiopian government declared a sweeping anti Eritrean strategy that aims to topple the current regime of Eritrea. In March, Meles Zenawi, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia said, “Ethiopia would work towards changing Eritrea's policies or its government.” [http://allafrica.com/stories/201103190125.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/201103190125.html) . Eritrean government is destabilizing his country by supporting and sponsoring terrorist elements, according to the Ethiopian leader, a reason why his regime is changing from “defensive to proactive” policy against Eritrea.

However, using Meles regime’s rationale for regime change in Eritrea “changing Eritrea’s policy or its government”, a stronger case can be made for regime change in Ethiopia. It is terrorizing Eritrean people by arming and sending extremist groups across the border into Eritrea who use landmines and other devises that cause massive civilian causalities, as well as property damages. Ethiopia is occupying Eritrean territories in violation of international laws. Ethiopia has invaded Somalia in 2006 that engulfed the country to intractable conflict, and by extension to the entire Horn Africa. The point is Meles’ rationale would have made much more sense if it had been directed at his government and not at the Eritrean regime. I am not advocating for “regime change” in Ethiopia – that would be reading from Meles’ playbook. I am just trying to show what would happen if we followed Meles’ line of hypocritical policy.

With this declaration, Meles regime has been pushing the EDA leadership and other Eritrean groups to promote its ‘regime change’ policy through interviews and other media outlets. For example, around the same time it announced its ‘regime change’ policy, it sponsored a demonstration in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia where some Eritrean refugees were forced into buses to Genet Hotel in Addis Ababa to protest against the Eritrean regime. Irrelevant as it is, few EDA leaders and commission members were also interviewed and voiced their support for the ‘regime change’ policy that Ethiopia is relentlessly working to bring to fruition.

Will the new ‘regime change’ policy of Meles regime find support in the Eritrean politics or will it further strengthens Eritrea peoples’ opposition toward the Ethiopian regime? Meles regime, which declared to effect the regime change in Eritrea through invading a sovereign nation, hopes it will find supporters. However, the ground against Ethiopia’s blatant danger towards Eritrea is swelling; it is becoming swift and strong, not to mention that the war of aggression is against international law. Eritrean people have made it clear that the job of regime change is the sole responsibility of Eritrean people; and that Meles regime should stop concocting foolish politics as a selling point to threaten the sovereignty and independence of Eritrea. It is for the interest of both nations for Meles regime to embrace a positive policy instead of being obsessed with nonexistent threat from Eritrea.

But the most relevant and rational statement on Ethiopia’s policy of ‘regime change’ in Eritrean came from EPDP leader, Mr. Ammar, during an interview with VOA in May 2011 where Mr. Tewolde of EDA was also an invited guest in the same interview. When asked to weigh in on Ethiopia’s new policy of regime change in Eritrea, Mr. Ammar stated that resolving the conflict through ‘regime change’ in Eritrea is dangerous and the repercussion could be far destabilizing both to the two nations and to the region (emphasis mine). Mr. Ammar underlined and called on Meles regime to accept the reality that the Eritrean people are capable of shaping their destiny. On the other hand, when Mr. Tewolde was asked to comment on the same question,
he made a startling claim, arguing that Ethiopia does not intend to oust Eritrean regime and that the policy of “changing Eritrea’s policy or its government” adopted by Ethiopia was entirely mischaracterized on the part of the Eritrean public. When pressed to articulate his response, Mr. Tewolde said, “Ethiopia had already backed away from the ‘regime change’ policy and that Ethiopia’s policy is now limited to supporting the Eritrean opposition and not regime change.” It was yet another moment of shame and disgrace for Mr. Tewolde although this mode of concealment and blatant lie is standard among EDA leaders.

Unlike Mr. Ammar of EPDP who performed with depth and wit in the interview, Mr. Tewolde grew not only impatient and beset by ineptness to fashion his responses during the interview, but also became uninformed about the thinking of Ethiopia’s policy of regime change in Eritrea. For example, every time Mr. Ammar tried to put things into perspective, Mr. Tewolde would quickly pull a fast one with his nonsensical talk – the usual dynamic that explains why Mr. Tewolde’s EDA is a terminally ill entity. The truth is that Mr. Tewolde was no match to the keen Mr. Ammar in terms of presenting the danger of regime change in Eritrea and the undesired result that will follow for both nations. No surprise, Mr. Tewolde acted, as a bubblehead as always, and no Eritrean would take him seriously. Bring Mr. Tewolde to any event and he will act notoriously and consistently inconsistent. Every time he says something, it is just Mr. Tewolde acting as a laughingstock of Eritreans, best known as Tewolde-talk. It is Tewolde talking to Tewolde, if you like. Mr. Tewolde does not understand that Ethiopia’s new policy towards Eritrea is not only an utter lack of respect for Eritrean people, but also it undermines Eritrean peoples’ resilience to defeat the PFDJ repressive regime and install democracy in their country.

One wonders why Meles regime keeps pouring its resources into resuscitating Tewolde’s EDA, an organization that increasingly grew irrelevant to the interest of both nations, while railing against the Eritrean national political organizations and civil societies whose views and visions is to bring democracy to Eritrea in which Ethiopia as a neighbor could be a beneficiary. Yet, belligerent in its domestic rule, Meles regime is always threatened by the possibility of having a strong and democratic Eritrea. Both domestic repression and flexing its political muscle against Eritrea to become an unquestioning political animal is the only strategy that Meles regime can do to stay another day in power in Ethiopia.

Yet, this is not about hegemony alone. It is about whether Eritrean people should be left alone. This is about whether Meles regime shifts its decades-long thumbing its nose at the affair of Eritrea to the extent of adapting a regime change policy to invade and perhaps annex Eritrea. This is about whether Meles regime will ever allow healthy ties to grow between the two countries. If Meles regime chooses to adapt a peaceful policy, it might not be as hard as it is now to have a sustainable relationship with Eritrea. However, this goal could be reached only when Meles regime abandons mobilizing Ethiopian people to go to war with Eritrea and changing its two-decade long policy of instigating ethnic and religious conflict among Eritrean people. From Eritrean’s point of view, such change of policy on the part of Meles regime is the only way that would turn Meles regime from meddling in the internal affairs of Eritrea to positive and productive environment. This will also deny the PFDJ regime from making excuses.

Meles regime’s calculation to effect “regime change” in Eritrea is entirely misguided. It is based on the assumption that it would be easy to invade Eritrea now because the PFDJ regime is low in its public support. To restate, the assumption rises from a wrong reading that the PFDJ regime comes before the good of the country and the welfare of the people of Eritrea. Talk about the simplicity of assumptions by Meles regime. Here is the truth that Meles regime frantically keeps evading and/or failing to dig. And that is defending
Eritrea is not rooted in real differences between the PFDJ regime and Eritrean people. In other words, only defending Eritrea from foreign aggressors can make Eritrea safe, and free Eritrean people to define and dictate their own fate. Meles regime should not wonder on the nonexistent divergence or lack of commitment, courage, and love of Eritrean people to stand up for their country. This is the real message coming from the Eritrean people, and a clear-cut fact that should assist Meles leadership to make a fundamental distinction.

Eritreans won their independence in 1991 after 30 years of an Ethiopian occupation. This is a dream Eritreans longed for over half a century. Yet, no Eritrean is obscuring the reality that we have an entrenched homegrown repressive regime in our country that we must face – us Eritreans alone. Having said that we must be cognizant that the undemocratic rule in our country does not blind us to the evidence that we have Ethiopia, a former colonizer, trying to snatch our independence and rule us again. It is with this understanding that Eritreans should approach the state of their national affairs and stand to protect our hard won independence. Undesirable and dragging as it is, if Ethiopian regime pushes for ‘regime change’ in Eritrea, make no mistake Eritreans will stand up. The question is: will they put the democratic struggle at the back burner briefly or will they manage to multi task? Time will tell.

In conclusion, the truth about the “regime change” policy Ethiopia adapted in March 2011 has not escaped Eritreans. Eritrean people know the “regime change” policy of Ethiopia has less to do with the Eritrean regime, and more to do with the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of their country. There is a difference between the two and the latter overrides the former. PFDJ is simply one obstacle for Meles regime to reach its goal. Meles leadership might think to have found a reason to overshadow its war of aggression policy by orchestrating the so-called PFDJ threat to its country, but the real motive is not hard for Eritrean people to decipher. Relevant is since Ethiopia’s “regime change’ policy became public in mid March 2011 and as it continues to be debated by the mainstream Eritrean political parties/civic organizations, sentiments against Ethiopia have hardened and readiness to stand up against Ethiopian possible invasion has grown. Both countries have powerful lessons from the 1998/2000 war and the need for peace and democracy is crucial now than before. But Meles regime is pushing Eritrean people to a war that is not their choice and such belligerence will not alleviate the current conflict between the two countries. Meles regime should stop its political hocus pocus, and seek stability and peace with Eritrea. No amount of pretext and no amount of PFDJ political bent will blunt Eritrean people from defending their country. Eritrea is our country; we fought for it; we died for it; we lived in it; and it must exist.