

Meles Zenawi and His Distortion of Ethiopian History

By Tecola W. Hagos

I watched a truly despicable video of an interview given by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of distorted representations of Ethiopia's history, comments on the decision of the United Nations in regard to the disposition of Colonial territories, and on issues and concepts dealing with self-determination, as part of his bid for Office in the 2010 elections. In lue of the fact that Ethiopia's historians and international relations experts are not engaged to correct such distortions and are quietly allowing Meles Zenawi to keep propagating his lies and distortions of Ethiopian History and vital interests without proper challenge, I have stepped in to defend Ethiopia's illustrious history and its historical and legal rights to all the territories that had been alienated through illegal means.

My tools of research my not be as sharp and as refined as I would have liked them to be, and my readers hopefully would take into account how very little time I have to write this piece in response to a pernicious interview of Meles Zenawi. Meles Zenawi is a traitor no matter how he tried to rationalize his illegal action against the State of Ethiopia in reviving defective and invalid Colonial period international instruments by signing the one-sided Algiers Agreement of 2000 in order to benefit Eritrea [as claimed by some, on the insistence of the Clinton Administration]. No matter who pressured him, he should have stood fast and strong defending the vital interest of Ethiopia. He did not.

1. In the interview he represented the Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in such a distorted and false representation of facts, which left me wondering how on Earth such a person ever succeeded to become a leader of anything. He represented the history of Ethiopia without ever mentioning the history of Italy's war of colonialism against Ethiopia and the status of Ethiopia prior to the Italian occupation of the Ethiopian territory that is now known as Eritrea. He never ones mentioned the historic fact that Ethiopia was the Empire that was an established State with a functioning government that controlled most of the area that the Italians by force alienated from Ethiopia. He never mentioned the types of colonial period international exchanges of notes and treaties or agreements that took place between Britain, Italy, and France individually or jointly at different times with Ethiopia in full recognition of the legitimacy of the Empire of Ethiopia by those Western powers. Italy occupied the Asmara after death of Emperor Yohannes IV in 1888 and ruled an unchartered nebulous territory whose border was never demarked despite the fact that there were international instruments, treaties signed by Italy and Ethiopia for the demarcation of borderlines.
2. The local history of the area now designated as an independent state of Eritrea confirms the fact that it was an extension of the northern territories of the State of Ethiopia. There is no other political entity in the area that may be considered as having precedent over Ethiopia. There was Ottoman Turks presence at Massawa and it was confined to one such small area, and later Egypt claiming succession tried to expand inland but was thoroughly defeated and evicted. The current Eritrean Government and its supporters make a big deal of such insignificant presence of Ottoman Turks as if it is a major historical incident claiming as if the

- whole of “Eritrea” was under the Ottoman Turks. [I have never come across a people anywhere in the World who drive pride in being some body’s colony or servant.] The present day Eritrea was a part of Ethiopia except for the Italian occupation from 1890 to 1941. The Italians came into the picture through some deception buying from a company with a private right of ownership of a piece of land at Asseb and illegally converting such private ownership as if it was a sovereign right thereby starting the Italian ambition of expansion to turn Ethiopia into its colonial Empire. It was defeated in its first attempt at the famous Battle of Adowa in 1896, and later again defeated in 1941 after occupying parts of Ethiopia including the Capital City of Addis Ababa for five years.
3. Ethiopian history like all other histories of the creation and maintenance of states is very complex and with sophisticated state-craft at its base. However, Meles Zenawi in his interview gave us a simplistic and pedantic picture of our history. He falsified and deliberately distorted the history of Ethiopia and its relationship with the West. Meles Zenawi seems to be setting some new standard for statehood when it comes to Ethiopia. He keeps suggesting that Ethiopia is not a state that had a long history. He seems to suggest that Ethiopian history and the creation of Ethiopia, unlike the histories of other States in the World, is a history of war against weak people subjugating them to forge the Ethiopian State. However, it is a fact that the way a state is built is not like a summer-hike. It involves battles, conquest, exploitation, subjugation et cetera. That is the fact of the building of States in Europe, in Asia, in the Americas and, of course, in Africa as well. Meles seems to discount that historical reality and suggests, when it comes to Ethiopia, that the past historical building of the Statehood of Ethiopia should have been through agreement and negotiation.
 4. What is tragic in the interview Meles Zenawi gave is the total suppression of Ethiopia’s reality as a nation that is surrounded by hostile nations and forces. There is not a single reference in his interview how Ethiopia is besieged being landlocked by its historic enemies and such state of affairs is the active work product of Meles Zenawi and his supporters. In fact, there are those of us who believe Meles is caught in his own web of deception. He alienated Afar region for he had aspirations to create a Greater-Tigray thereby controlling the coastal Afar territories. His scheme backfired and is now re designing his destructive schemes directing it at the very unity of Ethiopia by introducing and promoting individual ethnic identity .
 5. Meles Zenawi still persists in representing the issue of the lose of the Sovereign right of Ethiopia on the Afar coastal territories, which includes Asseb port up to Massawa and the Islands in the Red Sea, as if it is a question of economic interest, such as access for port facilities at Asseb. He does not seem to understand the fact that the Afar coastal territory is foremost an issue of Sovereign territorial integrity and a serious issue of national security. He keeps on presenting his juvenile idea of buying port services from neighboring Nations. What the Hell is this man talking about, when we know that Ethiopia has to pay a yearly fee to use the Port of Djibouti between seven hundred and eight hundred million dollars, and when we add the coat of having to do business in such distorted manner because we lost a competitive Port and our Afar coastal territory, the amount easily exceeds a

- billion dollars a year. At any rate we are at the mercy of such coastal states that can control both air space and coastal waters and easily deny Ethiopia access and contact with the outside world. [Appendix I]
6. The United Nations decisions do not overrule historical facts. Facts are independent of interpretations. Meles Zenawi does not seem to appreciate such rudimentary truisms/ideas, and as a result he is constantly sliding back and forth from his wishful thinking to historic realities. He makes references to augment his distorted rendition of the events which led to the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia, the distinguished Ethiopia's Foreign Service expert Ambassador Zewde Reta. If we look carefully at the situation in 1950, the federation idea was not meant to benefit Ethiopia or the highland Eritreans as a priority, but was simply a thread that evolved from the mild treatment (a compromise) made some four years earlier in appeasement to the Moslem Arabs and Pakistan not to oppose vehemently the creation and recognition of Israel as a Member State of the United Nations. Ironically, Britain was the only Veto-power country that abstained. When the Fact Finding Mission of the United Nations in Eritrea was studying the situation, it was already a situation where Britain had seeded its divisive ideas during its ten years administration of Eritrea. Britain had a deep interest in the cotton fields of the Sudan and wanted also to control the Nile basin specially the great rivers that flow into the Nile from Ethiopia. In opposition to the interest of Britain, the United States also had military interest in turning Eritrea at some later date as its main military station in order to control the Middle East, a Middle East that was growing in importance as the source of Oil. [Appendix II]
 7. The mechanism on the ground that was used for the United Nations resolution in 1952 to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia was essentially staged. First of all under international law practice of the time Eritrea should have been returned to Ethiopia in 1941 after the end of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1938-1941). Even if we find legal difficulties with the handing over of Eritrea to Ethiopia due to the legitimate interest of Britain to protect Italian Citizens living in Eritrea, certainly after the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, Ethiopia had the superior Sovereign right to have its old territory returned to her both as a matter of public international law principles and due to bilateral treaty provisions signed between Italy and Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Menilik II.
 8. Meles Zenawi made it his center-piece argument that the Eritrea-Ethiopia Federation was destroyed solely by the Ethiopian Government—the Emperor (*Negusu*). The facts are not as clean cut as Meles represented in his answer. Reports from eyewitness accounts who were present at the Eritrean Assembly that dissolved the Federation, official documentations, statements from scholars et cetera all point to the fact that the Federation was dissolved through political process not just the wishes of "*Negusu*" as Meles asserted in his interview. Meles is simply asserting his desire to see an independent "Eritrea" as if it is a fact shared by all the people living in what now is designated as an independent "Eritreans." There was no democratic process in place to gauge what Eritreans wanted to do at the time during Haile Selassies Government and afterword. It is true Mengistu Hailemariam is responsible for the final alienation of Eritreans from the rest of Ethiopia. However, that does not translate into actively supporting

- the landlocking of Ethiopia as Meles did. Thus, any claim to the contrary is just propaganda. There were millions who cherished their Ethiopian identity and wanted to remain with in Ethiopia.
9. Meles Zenawi and his TPLF Leadership were instrumental in the landlocking of Ethiopia. There was no legal reason for them to allow an illegal organization of insurrectionists to have a freehand in carving out what they deemed to be their territory at the cost of landlocking Ethiopia. The concept of self-determination is a two edged sword, it cuts in all directions. What is good for the liberation movements was no less useful and applicable to fight for the Afar Ethiopians to occupy the Afar coastal territories as part of their patrimonial territory rather than allowing the EPLF to take control of such important territory and abandon the people thereof to be divided and politically debased. In fact, the highlanders Hamssein, Akale Guzai et cetera have very tenuous right to that part of the Ethiopian Territory compared to the Afar Ethiopians now under Eritrea's claims.
 10. The crowning cynicism of Meles Zenawi is his labeling of heroic Ethiopians who do not accept the illegal and treasonous acts of ceding Ethiopian Afar Coastal territories and other territories in parts of Ethiopia especially the Western Border lands with the Sudan. Meles Zenawi is playing a childish game of "Heads I win, Tails you lose," and must stop his polarizing speeches and his lies about Ethiopian history. No one in the opposition is less patriotic when it comes to the Sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia than Meles Zenawi, by a long shot. The most serious problem facing Ethiopia is the persistent presence of Meles Zenawi in the lives of Ethiopians for the last eighteen years. He is the most hated individual in the nation. Except for his immediate family, I doubt if there are individuals who would like to have him in leadership position for another five years. I doubt even his fellow TPLF leaders would have any affection for him. The relationship seems to be obviously of fear and corruption.

What is tragic is the fact that even the few studies that were presented as formal academic writings on the problem of the border dispute and the lose of the Afar costal territories et cetera recently seem to lack the rigor of original research. Often we are faced with secondary sources and Web citations. This is not the way to present a convincing case in correcting the distortions of Ethiopian history. We all know that the enemies of Ethiopia, over the ages and currently, in order to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia, have used all kinds of strategies including the recruitment of fifth-columnists among the population of Ethiopia. Egypt and the Arab World in general have been and continue to be, to this day, Ethiopia's serious enemies bent on destroying Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's vital interest has been continuously undermined, and in few instances actively compromised by Meles Zenawi and his supporters in the last Eighteen years. Such effort was also part of the major subversive and anti-Ethiopia goals played out by several United States Administrations and Presidents among whom the most destructive were Presidents Harry Truman and William Clinton, and the current president Barak Obama is getting dangerously close to that form of designation due to his reluctance from taking steps against Meles Zenawi and his Government for the severely anti-democratic and violent governance in Ethiopia. **Ω**

Tecola W. Hagos
 Washington DC
 May 16, 2010

Appendix I

Prime Minister Meles Speaks at The National Press Club in Washington, DC 20 September, 2000

[<http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/articles/briefings/briefings/press%20conferences%20and%20interviews/Prime%20Minister%20Meles%20Speaks%20at%20the%20National%20Press%20Club%20in%20Washington%20DC.htm>. It is a snapshot of the page as it appeared on Apr 8, 2010]

Q One more last question, if I may. Can you comment on the Assab Port? There is a rumor going around saying that there is a negotiation going on with the former Ethiopian province Eritrea. I mean for Ethiopia to let them use the Assab port. And also as you know, most people, either in Ethiopia or here, are very disturbed about the fact that Ethiopia is very land-locked and there is no way for Ethiopia to prosper as a land-locked country. Can you comment on that?

PM. MELES: Access to the port of Assab is not an item of negotiations in the peace talks, and we do not intend to make it one. It's true that we are a land-locked country now. It's also true that under international law, we are guaranteed access to the ports. We have not raised this issue in the context of the peace negotiations for a number of reasons. I know that there are some Ethiopians who feel that we should have gone all the way and occupied Assab, particularly because the military possibilities of doing so were not beyond reach. We felt that this would not be the right way to go. That's why we stopped the war before we took control of Assab. We felt that this nation, Ethiopia, has been a law-abiding nation; was the only member of the League of Nations in Africa; it's a founding member of the United Nations; it's a founding member of the OAU.

Our prime objection to the aggression carried out about Eritrea have to do with their act of thuggery, with their act of aggression. We do not believe aggression is reversed -- (inaudible) -- aggression. That's why we didn't go for the idea of snatching Assab from Eritrea, after all, Eritrea is an internationally recognized member of the OAU and the United Nations. It may have been a former province of Ethiopia, and indeed it was, but now it's a sovereign, independent state. Now, you don't go around snatching territories from independent states. That would be thuggery, fit only for the leaders in Asmara.

The other option would be to try and negotiate an agreement with them to provide us access to the sea. That option we have not exercised yet, and for one reason; port access is a service, and like all services, it's bought and sold. Now, if we have the money, we can shop around for the best service. We have the money and we're going to shop around for the best service available. Now, before we look into the shop that Eritrea has, we want to know whether that shop is run by a law-abiding person. And so for us, utilization of the Assab port is not the only option we have. For Eritrea, if Ethiopia does not use the port of Assab, the port of Assab will not be a port; as I said once, it will be a watering hole for

camels. So it's their choice, not ours. We have the choice, we have the option, we'll shop around.

When and if we feel that Assab provides us the best option, we'll take it. We do not now feel that Assab is our best option.

Appendix II

The vote

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted 33 to 13, with 10 abstentions, in favour of the Partition Plan, while making some adjustments to the boundaries between the two states proposed by it. The partition was to take effect on the date of British withdrawal from the Mandate Territory of Palestine.

Prior to the vote, the two-thirds majority required for passage of the resolution was not evident, and three countries — Haiti, Liberia, the Philippines — were pressured to consider changing their positions in order to assure passage; they subsequently switched their votes between November 25 and November 29. The pressure came from Jewish and Zionist supporters of partition, including some members of the United States administration and its elected officials, as well as from some private citizens. President Truman later noted, "The facts were that not only were there pressure movements around the United Nations unlike anything that had been seen there before, but that the White House, too, was subjected to a constant barrage. I do not think I ever had as much pressure and propaganda aimed at the White House as I had in this instance. The persistence of a few of the extreme Zionist leaders — actuated by political motives and engaging in political threats — disturbed and annoyed me."



 In favour  Switched to in favour  Abstained  Against  Absent

Of the permanent members of the Security Council, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union voted for the resolution while the Republic of China and United Kingdom abstained. The full vote was recorded follows:

In favor, (33 countries, 59%):

30 countries (54%) initially in favour:

Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Belorussian SSR, Canada, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Sweden, South Africa, Ukrainian SSR, United States of America, Soviet Union, Uruguay, Venezuela.

An additional 3 (5%) switched to in favor:
Haiti, Liberia, Philippines.

Against, (13 countries, 23%):
Afghanistan, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen.

Abstentions, (10 countries, 18%):
Argentina, Chile, Republic of China, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Mexico, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia.

Absent, (1 countries, 0%):

Thailand