

Meles Zenawi's Action Plan for 2010

By Fekade Shewakena, March 11, 2010

The stabbing of an opposition parliamentary candidate and the brutal beating of another in Tigrai by Meles Zenawi's thugs last week, only days after the latter made a code loaded speech at the TPLF anniversary in Mekele, where he referred to his opponents as the mud, the riffraff, and the enemy, fall perfectly in line with the tactic and strategy set out for "winning" the May 2010 election. All indications, including the rush by government officials to explain how the victim died before even any preliminary police investigation, show that Meles Zenawi's finger prints are all over the killing. Some *ferenjis* may be willfully fooled. We Ethiopians know the drill and we get it. That it happened in Tigrai, the ethnic homeland of Meles Zenawi, seems to have made the brutality more sensational but similar instances occur widely and in large numbers in other parts of the country. What this case may have loudly demonstrated is perhaps the fact that no ethnic elite in power can oppress other ethnic groups and leaves the people of its own ethnic homeland in freedom. I hope our brothers and sisters from Tigrai are getting the message loud and clear, that they are only one disagreement away from the TPLF from being stabbed to death – just one attempt away at making choices and decisions for and by themselves.

As he repeatedly keeps reminding us, Meles Zenawi has taken lessons from the debacles of the May 2005 national election and will not repeat the same mistake. He even boasted that his organization (TPLF) hasn't made the same mistake more than once. The lessons he learnt and action plans derived from the lessons of the 2005 election are simple and least sophisticated. This time there is no taking a "calculated risk" as in 2005 by a slight opening of any door for democracy. The only game left in town now is how to hold something that can be referred to as an election and satisfy the donors, who insist that they need some kind of election to show for their tax payers that they are spending their money on and with an "elected" government. Meles doesn't want this election if it is meant to be a democratic exercise. The Ethiopian people also do not want this kind of election and if asked will prefer to spend the millions of dollars spent on this sham exercise on buying food. Only these lords of our poverty want this election. And it has to be said clearly that it is these donors who insist on a useless exercise and get our people killed, dehumanized and turn their already miserable lives into hell.

Meles knows that he has the monopoly of violence in the country. He also knows the violence he so far perpetrated against the Ethiopian people did not make any dent on his relationship with his Western donors in whose honor we seem to be holding these disastrous periodic elections. Meles has stayed in power long enough to understand that his donors are full of hypocrisy, that none of them pursued their bluff to ask him to account for the crimes he committed in 2005. Deep down in his heart I think he despises them. He at least has seen them how they got all over poor Mughabe for killing a small fraction of the number of people he killed. Meles knows that as long as he gives them the illusion of a stable country, they don't give a hoot for democracy or the rule of law. Armed with this knowledge, Meles has made a plan. It is a simple plan – move the

election violence from the post election to the pre election period and spread it over time. Any serious observers of Ethiopia can identify some six broad forms through which Meles Zenawi's pre election violence is packaged and delivered to the Ethiopian people. Note that these tactics are applied separately or in any combination as the condition presents itself. Here are some of them:

1. The use of direct and blunt force: This involves direct application of force including killings and beating. This tactic is employed by spreading the violence over time and space so that the drip, drip, in blood does not make it look like a massacre. You can kill 100 people in a day at one location and not look good. If you do that over a period of 100 days in different places, you don't look like you have even killed a fly. The reports of Human rights organizations on Ethiopia are replete with this kind of political crimes including torture and other degrading treatments. There are hundreds of people thrown in jail and forgotten. Torturing critics and suspects and forcing false confessions are rampant. We see them daily. Only our donors have closed their eyes.

2. Intimidation and harassment: Anybody suspected of supporting the opposition is harassed as anti people, anti development (as if anybody needs more poverty), pro terrorist, pro OLF, Pro Ginbot 7 etc. As I am writing this, I listened to a UDJ election candidate in Arba Gugu telling the voice of America that he was told by local officials that he cannot be an opposition candidate while drawing a salary from his government job and that some official vowed to cut his tongue and feed it to him if he doesn't stop his candidacy. They have so far succeeded in intimidating independent journalists to self censor or flee the country. Meles makes self fulfilling prophecies such as accusing the opposition of collaboration with terrorists, Shabia etc. This is an important method in TPLF's tool box. It has been used in 2005 and had proven to work. Anyone remember the accusation of the CUD that it is like the Rwandan Interhamwe in 2005? When they took the CUD leaders to the kangaroo court, it was only time that they accuse them of genocide. Such methods are now being used both to intimidate and punish opponents. This time the opposition is accused of harboring ambitions of making this election like the elections in Kenya and Zimbabwe. You know, those bastards who demanded a coalition government and ruined the meaning of democracy!

3. Use the abject poverty in the country as a political tool to recruit supporters and coerce people into falling in line: Zenawi's party has recruited millions of members by making membership a choice without alternative. If you want to rot in poverty and stay unemployed upon graduation you can refuse to fill out the membership forms. Discrimination in employment, promotion on the job based on membership to the party is being practiced in broad daylight. It has been declared that higher education is the exclusive preserve of EPRDF members. Many young people are agonizing over this predicament. Food aid, including food donated by our Western donors is openly used to coerce or lure hungry people into supporting Zenawi's party.

4. Using the law and the courts to make it difficult for political opponents to operate and make free expressions of ideas difficult: This package includes the issuance of the draconian Anti Terrorism Law where even a kid who throws stones during a

demonstration can be charged with, and sent to prison for 20 years. The Civil Society Law that virtually closed down all civic groups in the country, including those that do advocacy for women, children and the disabled. Meles understands that civil society is the pillar of democracy and he has to cut the pillars before embarking on an election. Zenawi has even written a proclamation regulating how international election observers should behave and work during the election. Ethiopians are eagerly waiting to see which groups would agree to monitor the election under this law. The recent accusation of many ethnic Amharas including an 80 year old man of staging a cup de tat and changing the charge into terrorism in the middle of the process is part of this package. In some situations the police and the courts are ordered to make the flimsiest of reasons to send opponents to prison. The most famous case under this tactic is the case of Birtukan Mideksa, the chairwoman of UDJ that Meles condemned to serve life for reasons that is boggling even the minds of some of his supporters. But Meles and his inner clique know what they are doing. They don't want to deal with this courageous and intelligent young woman during and after the election that she was ready to challenge. Meles knows she is a love of the people. More importantly, she has that potent weapon of straddling two of the largest ethnic groups in Ethiopia. She has a mixed Oromo-Amhara ethnic heritage. This young articulate lady and expert in the law was very difficult to box in a political debate. Zenawi's preferred to box her in the small room in Kaliti. He knows that the case against her cannot stand a minute in a country that has rudimentary practices of the rule of law. He faked an outrage out of nowhere and sent her to prison. Had he been serious about the violation the terms of the pardon, that he falsely accused her of, he would have thrown all of the released prisoners who said the same thing at one time or another including Hailu Shaul who told a BBC journalist during an interview that he signed the pardon letter under duress. Zenawi's donors know very well why Bitrukan Mideksa, the icon of democracy and peaceful struggle in Ethiopia, is languishing in jail for over a year now. Meles knows that they cannot risk their relationship with him over the case of "one person", as one anonymous Western diplomat in Addis Ababa is reported to have said recently. Birtukan remains a martyr for her people. The world is getting to know her more with each passing day. She has just begun rocking the consciousness of freedom loving people around the world. We, her brothers and sisters, will make sure that her name and cause is spreading across the globe like a wild fire. She will soon become an albatross on Meles's neck and definitely the necks of the donors who, in the face of this gross injustice, are looking the other way. She is a victim of an election that is being carried out only to satisfy their need.

5. Keeping uninformed public by blocking information and news from the people. A perfect example is the jamming of the Voice of America and Drutche Welle Amharic services, all dissident radio stations from abroad including blocking Ethiopian democracy websites. When caught they don't hesitate to make bold and shameless lies. Officials like Bereket Simon and Shimeles Kemal (it is amazing that his name rhymes with the word shameless) are unleashed to issue blunt denials (aynen ginbar yargew). These guys have amazing capacity to deny even if you catch them with their hands in the cookie jar. Consider this lie for example. "This is absolutely a sham," Shimeles told CPJ, when asked about the Ethiopian government jamming radio stations. He added, "The Ethiopian government does not support the policy of restricting foreign broadcasting services in the

country. Such practices are prohibited in our constitution”. Shameless Kemal also told CPJ that the allegations were part of a “smear campaign” by “opposition web sites in the Diaspora”. That he said all of these with a straight face is staggering. But isn’t it interesting that Meles spends millions of dollars on jamming radio programs broadcast by the US government while at the same time stretching his hand and receiving food aid and other assistances? Blatant lying has always been used by Meles and his cronies. Since we always cut them a lot of slack for lying, they normally think we have accepted it. We are dealing with a group of people who claim they have brought equality between Ethiopia’s ethnic groups when everybody in Ethiopia sees that 95% of the key commanding officers of the armed forces of the country are staffed by officers from Zenawi’s ethnic party, with the Oromo, the largest ethnic group in the country contributing Zero. Zenawi is the quintessential Orwellian and his donors who insist on holding this sham election are willful participants against a crime being committed on 85 million people.

6. Control the Election infrastructure fully: This is the last line of defense. Meles has put the fox in charge of the henhouse. Under this group of tactics comes the staffing of all election personnel from the national election board down to the polling station by members of Meles Zenawi’s party and cadres. They have shamelessly declared that they are neutral while the opposition says they have proof that they are not.

The Endgame: Meles Zenawi’s end game is making sure that the Ethiopian people are a broken and subdued people, incapable of putting up any resistance during and after the election and that the opposition is as broken and as weakened as possible. The goal is to make Election Day and the days that follow as tranquil as possible so that the congratulations from Barak Obama, the leaders of member nations of the European Union will be paraded in fanfare. If the post election time goes by without declaring emergency, killing and rounding up people and herding them in concentration camps, it will be lauded as a great improvement over the previous election by the donors. In the best traditions of Africa’s dictators, Meles Zenawi will be assured of staying at the helm of power for a quarter of a century and, who knows, even beyond.

But then again this assumes that the Ethiopian people may stay broken and suppressed and do not want their rights and dignity back. But what if they say “give me liberty or give me death” as many indicators seem to suggest? What if more and more Ethiopians begin sharing the views of an Ethiopian in Kenya who recently told a journalist, Lauren Gelfand, of World Politics Review “the West thinks stability in Ethiopia is more important than democracy, destabilizing is the only way to change”. Let’s hope the enablers of the misery of the Ethiopian people wake up before this view gets off the ground. Ethiopians are waiting with a thinning out patience. Careful eyes can already see that they are sitting on the fence.

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