

## A Few Notes on Ben's Note on Somalia, ONLF, CUD, AFD

By

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Owing to the recent development in Somalia, I have been visiting sites including EthiopiaFirst at least as frequently as during the elections. Today (January 4), I read Ben's note of sympathy for the families of those Ethiopians who were ambushed near Qabri Dahar. Assuming the story is true, I do the same because I believe anybody's death in any war is regrettable.

Opinion as to whether Ethiopia should have invaded (whether the word "invasion" should be used here or not is mere academic) is as divided as on the viability of the AFD and the diaspora CUD's decision to be part of it, which you also commented on. I don't see a winner on these issues. In your note, you also talk about the soldiers who died "defending Ethiopia's national interest".

No one should refrain from expressing their praise for "our national defense forces" who die defending Ethiopia from foreign aggressors. Now, I have to confess to you that the argument that we are actually defending ourselves and not invading anyone did never and doesn't fly as far as I am concerned. In the backdrop of all this is of course the Prime Minister's (Mr. Zenawi) analysis that we have already been attacked and, therefore, "we are not invading as much as we are defending" has not worked for me. The arguments are the same: that (1) the Islamists have declared Jihad on Ethiopia more than one time (2) they and Eritrea have tried to infiltrate OLF and ONLF into Ethiopia and (3) the Islamists have indicated a claim on the Somali regions of Ethiopia and Kenya. Therefore, the argument goes, we have been attacked.

As much as I am surprised at the quick military defeat of the UIC and the splendid military performance of Ethiopia, I still maintain that we should never have gone in there particularly when we consider Ethiopia's desire (since has no choice) to leave soon.

First, the declaration of Jihad on Ethiopia by the UIC followed Ethiopia's decision to send soldiers protecting the Transitional government of Somalia. Ethiopia's military might was in the way of the UIC's success and all their leaders could do was declare Jihad. The UIC is not a government and all extremists around the world do it all the time against many countries. Declaring Jihad has been in town (world) for many, many years. Now, did we need to jump on that? I have no sympathy for anyone who declares Jihad against my country; only that I wouldn't regard that as Ethiopia's sovereignty being breached. This is especially so when we need to avoid conflict by all means and focus on democratization and development.

Second, the OLF, ONLF, AFD, Eritrea, etc are all lumped together with our intervention in Somalia. How the intervention in Somalia and a short-term military success there would be an answer to dealing with these forces is beyond me. We are in Somalia and as you just reported, government forces are being attacked in Qabri Dahar, inside Ethiopia. The problems, particularly the internal ones, will not just go away.

Third, the government has felt that the assertion by one of the UIC leaders that they will push for the unification of Somalis in Ethiopia and Kenya is a serious threat. I share that it is a threat and will remain so. The only reason why Somalia has not succeeded in fulfilling this dream of “Greater Somalia” is not because we have had friendly and good governments in Somalia. It is only because of Ethiopia’s superior human and military power. Honestly speaking, the majority of the Somalis believe that the Ogaden region is theirs; so do the elites in power or those who aspire to be in one. The current Transitional Government of Somalia needs Ethiopia’s help for its protection from the UIC and is using Ethiopia effectively. However, I guarantee you that even members of the transitional government themselves aren’t and cannot be free of the dream of “Greater Somalia”. We have to remember that this question has its own historical roots. Therefore, the recent assertion of this “dream” by the UIC should never have been a sufficient reason to go in because it has and will always be there. I do understand that the PM, Meles Zenawi, and others have ridiculed critiques who have opined that we should have waited and acted only if we were invaded. The fact of the matter is that to not invade others unless we are invaded has been our history that we all should be proud of. It is now out the window.

#### To sum Up

The last few weeks have shown us how this thing we call “sovereignty” could stir up nationalism/patriotism in us and turn citizens, including those who claim to wish only peace for their country, into war drummers. Some have wiggled from side to side- opposing the invasion first and supporting it after learning Ethiopia’s military success last week. Opposing or supporting any military action by Ethiopia should be based on solid principles and not on opportunistic hind sights. I have more respect for those who have consistently made their case for military invasion.

Ethiopia’s government has every reason to be concerned about the elements of the leaders of the UIC but Somalia’s Transitional Government is not ours to save. That is for the Somalis and for the UN and the AU. In fact, had Ethiopia’s government been wise and forward-looking, it would have realized that its real concern, including that is seemingly external, is actually an internal one. Because, united, we Ethiopians will always have the capacity to defeat any external aggression and oppression and have the will to die defending our nation. Right now, we are mixing oranges and apples (ONLF, OLF, AFD, CUD, UIC,

Eritrea, peace, war, development, military expenditure, etc.). What we are just doing is turning a blind eye to our real issues at home.

### Now what in Somalia?

I don't profess to be a political or military analyst because I am neither. However, this is what I think/predict:

- The major threat to the Transitional Government of Somalia is no longer an organized political group such as the UIC at least in the short-run.
- The main problem for the Transitional Government will be asserting its power and winning legitimacy among the Somalis (particularly considering their hate for Ethiopia)
- That assertion of power and legitimacy is an uphill struggle for the Transitional Government whether Ethiopia and others remain in Somalia or not. In other words, stability (which needs building infrastructure, security and conducting legitimate elections, etc) is not an easy venture. We will see a lot of lawlessness and factional wars, including by disappointed UIC sympathizers. The only hope is that this won't be the case for too long because of the recent shift in power and because of the lesson from Iraq which interveners will try to heed in their approach.
- There will be a lot of pressure on the US to help out Somalia as early as possible and the US government will jump on the opportunity created by Ethiopia favoring the transitional government. The US is licking its wound in Iraq and Somalia provides yet another opportunity for a cosmetic surgery on its ugly look. Financial and other humanitarian aid will flow to Somalia
- Saving Somalia from its hysterical gun culture will require not only a very strong Somali government but also months and years of peace keeping work by the UN and the AU.
- With the UIC might gone, the external pressure on Ethiopia to get out in fact will diminish because without a speedy and strong presence of AU peace keepers in Somalia, no one would want to see Ethiopia out other than a few elements within Somalia. Ethiopia will remain in Somalia for pretty long time (certainly not just 2 weeks) perhaps with financial support from the US, before it starts a staged withdrawal.
- Wise people in Ethiopia will advise Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to use the opportunity created by the recent military victory in Somalia to unite the nation and start releasing the detained CUD leaders and others. He will say NO and history will repeat itself. Ethiopia will go on longing for the closure of this ugly chapter in our recent history. My wish is for the PM to make me eat my words by doing the right thing and send me to hospital in SHOCK.

Thanks

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