

A Premature Debate on the Future Role of an Extraordinary Leader

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No matter how much the odds of winning are favoring EPRDF; debating the future role of Premier Meles Zenawi is not that urgent an issue, which requires our energy and time at the expense of other pivotal issues that we have on hand. It's also too early for any of us to convince ourselves for Meles's wish to be granted or otherwise, without having the facts surrounding the serious talks between him and other leaders of EPRDF. To formulate a not-so-firm stance on a not-so-urgent issue of the future role of this extraordinary Ethiopian leader, before all the facts are out for public consumption is thus premature. However, the fact that we have a dialogue on this issue is positive and accretes our democratic culture a plenty.

By virtue of a very privileging historical coincidence and from what I know earnestly, I attest that our Premier Meles Zenawi is one of the greatest leaders of Ethiopia, who has been sharpened by the helping hands of his lifelong comrades who share his entire attributes with the slightest degree of variation. Meles's greatness and genius is the product of the Ethiopian people at large and any presumption to personalize it misses the point by eighty million light years. It's with this in mind that, **Meles should not necessarily prove to anybody to become the greatest man in the world for he has proven to be one of the greatest Ethiopian leaders from whom the world is learning more as time lapses.**

So much has been said about what makes a leader great. America's "Founding Father," George Washington, for example, is tagged with greatness for vacating his commissioned office of Commander in Chief when he had a chance to occupy it for as long as he wanted. Many writers and historians tell their readers. A quote attributed to King George III of England in reference to George Washington is often presented to certify how great Washington was; and, it's true that King George III have said, "If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world," after learning that Washington had left his office for his passion.

However, it should also be known that George Washington accepted the authority that Congress commissioned onto him with his own stated condition: a promise if you will; that he will vacate his position after peace prevailed America and the British Empire is fully defeated. It's after this fact that George left office for his passion to enjoy life as he knew it by horse-riding and what have you. **Had the war continued with the prospect of peace taking the bleakest turn and with an emboldened British Empire terrorizing American lives, George Washington would have stayed in power for as long as it takes and for as long as he can to fulfill his objectives.** Because, from his gesture, one can only decipher surely that Washington was a promise keeper. But, for Joshua Micah Marshall, a respected American journalist, for instance, Washington's decision to vacate his power "...was all a put-on, an act." In any case, the fundamental question to which we should seek answer in relation to our issue at hand is this: does

greatness in leadership necessitates vacating a position of a democratically commissioned power?

Greatness does not necessitate vacating a position of power for its obvious that which is necessary may not be sufficient and also that which is sufficient may not be necessary. It's just simple logic and since you're reading this article from a website in your computer, I will refer to your computer to explain what this simple logic is all about.

You may plug your computer into a power outlet hoping to check my future article on AIGA FORUM, HEBRE ZEMA, or at EPRDF-SF.org only to find out that your computer is not working. What seems to be the problem is your first question to yourself, and, this logical question, if you answer it correctly would give you the clue as to what is wrong with your computer.

Although it's a necessary course of action, plugging your computer into a power outlet is not a sufficient condition for your computer to be in working order. The other parts that make your computer work should also be in working order for you to be able to check my future article. If your computer is in working order, then, plugging your computer into a power outlet becomes necessary.

This simple logic holds true if one chooses to extrapolate it to check whether to vacate the office of power is a sufficient or a necessary condition for a leader to be tagged as great. As I have mentioned earlier, greatness does not necessitate a leader to vacate his democratically held status of authority. At most, for reasons that are subjective and unquantifiable, to vacate a status of authority may be is a sufficient course to follow but not a necessary one. **Had vacating power peaceably for any number of reasons is a necessary condition for greatness, Richard Nixon would have joined George Washington within a split second of time in history.**

In any case, what's so great about leaving office if you're the democratically elected leader of a country in need of your immense experience? What is so great about vacating a democratically bestowed power while millions of citizens are valuing your penetrating talent and are hoping with fervor that you lead them further into their bright future? **What is so great about leaving office with your proven Commander in Chief skill intact and your country is at a crossroad with all its enemies salivating venom that you're the antidote for?** Tell me, what is so great about jumping off this mammoth train of development, peace, and prosperity that you have steered with skill and passion for the sake of correcting a twisted impression that people might have? The answer: nothing quantifiable I contend.

The issue of Meles possibly vacating his democratically commissioned authority is not as easy as it seems and I aver that it is being tailgated by drivers of diverse interests and liking and otherwise. Who's to push for it and who's not? What kind of a new single-issue union will be formed no matter how ephemeral that union may become? Are we to see members of Ginbot 7 having a common issue to debate and pressure for in conjunction with harmless good citizens and non-citizens of Ethiopia? Will I be the only Ethiopian envisioning the great smile on the face of the megalomaniac Isayas Afewerki and those others who were humiliated by Meles with the Ethiopian people at his side?

In principle, the faculty of Meles and our democratic mechanics that we have in place should be the point of discussions, and, anything else that we do may be is to correct the impression or the appearance of what people with inundated Western notion of democracy think is counterintuitive. Proposing to amend the democratic procedures

that may give a genius leader of Ethiopia and his dandy party many years of power may be is a reasonable thing to do. But, to overlook the democratic procedures at play and to indirectly ask for resignation without deeply analyzing the overreaching implications of the issue is a cosmetic approach that defies characterization.

Making a cogent argument one way or the other while leaders of EPRDF and our Premier are in series and serious talks is an impossible and illogical task to overcome. It is true that Meles has said “I had enough.” But, to think that the phrase will amount to an inevitable “no” answer from Meles when a solemn plea by the majority of the Ethiopian people waits at his desk is incomprehensible. If there is nothing that imminently is threatening Meles’s well-being health wise, he is not the type of leader that disposes his responsibility while the majority of Ethiopians are asking for his leadership earnestly.

A plea to those responsible EPRDF leaders to grant Meles his wish asserting that Meles has repeatedly asked for it forgets something with much greater value—the interest of Ethiopia as well as the interest of the majority people of Ethiopia. It’s true that Meles has said “I had enough.” But, if we weigh the phrase “I had enough” for what it worth in a single word, it will be frustration. Keep in mind that frustration is the common behavioral currency that we all human beings fill the pockets of our stress-inducing neurons with. Some of us are teased by frustration on the periphery and some of us endure it but we nevertheless utter words to express the overflowing stressful chemicals in our brains. Go figure how leading Ethiopia in such testing times will do to you. Seen from this angle, it is normal for leaders with extraordinary passion and nearly unbearable endeavor to utter “I had enough.” But then again, great leaders think twice three times and many times some times to serve their people and country and to fulfill their vision.

Great leaders are open to cogent arguments that may sway their beliefs and make them reconsider their hasty decisions. From the very limited information that we have, Meles is hoping that he has cogent reasons but nevertheless is open to hear what the other great leaders of EPRDF have to say. As for me, I will wait till I hear at least most of our Premier’s reason(s). Once I have that, and if I am not convinced, I will sharpen my pencil as I have never had before and I will write extensively to convince Meles to reconsider his decision. The problem: he may have a cogent reason, and, if he doesn’t, he will give due consideration to stand corrected, and by that time, I will have no need to sharpen my pencil as I have never did before. Meles will hear no counter argument either from me or from many million Ethiopian fellow citizens, if his reason is not short of an imminent life threatening health issue.

The suggestion, plea, or push by some for Meles to vacate his position with or without conditions also incorporates in it an age-driven agenda. This age-specific soft and seemingly benign quasi movement has become another means to ask the seasoned leaders of EPRDF to vacate their democratically bestowed authority in the name of old age. The funny thing is that, those who will not write an article without mentioning the ages of these great leaders of EPRDF find themselves at times asking these supposedly “elderly” leaders in their fifties to pardon those who transgress the law of the land in the name of youthfulness. It is this kind of argument that induces a heartfelt big smile on my face, which then leads me to say, our leaders in their fifties are too young to pass the baton of authority in the name of old age—provided they’re elected fairly and squarely.

What is it the “old guard” can’t do that the “new guard will?” Has age caused EPRDF to fail in keeping Ethiopia safe? Had fifty-five caused Meles from being who he is—a genius? Or, is it simply EPRDF fatigue that’s causing people with very soft conviction to seek for a new abbreviated face? What if an able leader in his fifties from EPRDF is the next in line who knows when? What about in twenty years? Are we to say, he’s seventy years old and he has been with EPRDF for over fifty years and he is “too old a guard” to be the Premier? The ends of the politics of age, I am afraid, can at times wander on the edge of discrimination and discrimination is absolutely undesirable and illegal in any of its forms.

Meles may or may not become the next Premier if and when EPRDF wins in this upcoming Parliamentary Election. The ball is in the hands of the Ethiopian people and for that to become apparent we will be waiting for less than a year. Once the Ethiopian people decide who their leader party will be, it will be up to that party or coalition of parties to choose who will become the next Premier. This democratic mechanics is in play in our Ethiopia and it is perfectly legal, democratic, and sound for EPRDF to choose Meles again and again if it wants to. The consequent negative impression and nagging thoughts that some people may have as a result of Meles becoming the Premier is tantamount to doubting the choice of the Ethiopian people.

To push, plea, argue for the vacating of a democratically bestowed authority by having nagging thoughts is out of the bounds of the mechanics of democracy that we have in place for now. Unless an elected leader is willing to abdicate his power by his own personal choice for which he may face a rebuke from his own party and the Ethiopian people at large, and unless an elected leader has a life threatening medical reason, who ever is the leader of the winning party might become the next Premier with the responsibility to lead Ethiopia in these very challenging times. To plea for Meles to vacate his democratically bestowed power directly or indirectly, without having all of the information and also by disregarding the democratic procedures in play for not-so-cogent reason(s) is therefore premature at best and wrongheaded at worst.