

Setting Off A False Alarm ICG's (International Crisis Group's) Political Pandering

Part I

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It's a claim; the International Crisis Group is a non-governmental, not-for-profit international organization with a mission to "prevent and resolve" deadly conflict throughout the world. ICG further proclaims that it advises governments, intergovernmental bodies such as UN, EU, and the World Bank on the prevention and resolution of dire and impending conflicts. To help avert deadly threats, ICG utilizes field-based analysis, policy prescription, and aggressive advocacy; we're told.

With a staff that speaks over fifty languages, ICG is likely to assign an employee who speaks the language of a country of interest to work on its field-based analysis. For example, an Amharic speaking Ethiopian employee may be deployed for a field-based analysis in Ethiopia with the assumption that he is a disinterested researcher. After the field-based analysis, ICG's policy prescription will then be drawn to be conveyed to the leaders of the country, advising them what to do with ICG's own word. If the government fails to comply with the prescribed policy, ICG will then advocate the matter aggressively.

A mission to prevent and resolve deadly conflicts requires capital, and ICG gets its work allowance from the US Government and scores of other governments. For example, according to the 2008 financial statement of ICG, 51% of ICG's donated income is accounted for by governments around the world. Governments are quintessential political entities for life. No entity is more political than a government, and no donation by any government to any cause is free of a political-string that may benefit the donating government's political, national security and economic life in the long run.

It's nevertheless commendable to have a motto that states "Working to prevent conflict worldwide." Because, for all what it declares, "it is priceless," as a commercial for a Master Card Company pitches to sell its service. But, to set a false alarm in the name of preventing a deadly conflict based on a political opposition rather than a rigorous scientific case-study is a political pandering---done on behalf of "very important" clients for political and economic benefit.

On September 4, 2009, ICG had a Press Release, in which the first paragraph of its Executive Summary reads as follows: "The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front

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(EPRDF), led by its chairman and prime minister, Meles Zenawi, has radically reformed Ethiopia's political system. The regime transformed the hitherto centralized state into the Federal Democratic Republic and also redefined citizenship, politics and identity on ethnic grounds. The intent was to create a more prosperous, just and representative state for all its people. **Yet, despite continued economic growth and promised democratization, there is growing discontent with the EPRDF's ethnically defined state and rigid grip on power and fears of continued inter-ethnic conflict. The international community should take Ethiopia's governance problems much more seriously and adopt a more principled position towards the government. Without genuine multi-party democracy, the tensions and pressures in Ethiopia's politics will only grow, greatly increasing the possibility of a violent eruption that would destabilize the country and region.**"

It's hard to imagine how a Think Tank group spells the same words of the oppositions' view verbatim and calls it a field-based analysis that the international community should "...adopt a more principled position towards the [Ethiopian] government..." ICG is simply asking the international community to precisely align its principled opposition with the Ethiopian political opposition's view, to pressure what is otherwise a sovereign government. The very fact that this said analysis totally repeats the political complaints of the oppositions' view makes it a suspect--whether or not the study is authentic first and foremost.

Authentic or not, it is imperative that Ethiopia debunks and refutes such an aggressive and erroneous advocacy. The refute should underscore ICG's irresponsible conduct for setting off a false alarm, by debunking each and every assumptions ICG employed to synthesize an unwarranted "prescribed policy." Policy prescription is the code phrase to pressure what is otherwise a sovereign government to change its political and economic policy to date. Self-interested business groups, governments who would like to create ambient business environment for their own multi-national corporations, and some of the opposition groups in Ethiopia are vying for a fundamental change contrary to what Ethiopia is arduously working for. What is hindering this opposing political endeavor from taking hold in Ethiopia for now is EPRDF, and, delegitimizing EPRDF by setting off a false alarm few months before the 2010 Parliamentary Election is now become one of the tactics deployed by ICG to serve its clients.

Setting off a false alarm is not that new a deed to ICG. On November 5, 2007, the first statement of its Press Release in reference to Ethio-Eritrean military buildup reads: **"The risk that Ethiopia and Eritrea will resume their war in the next several weeks is very real."** It has been almost two years since ICG's prediction fall short of its target and one wonders how good ICG is, predicting outcomes that require meticulous and complex scientific study, say, whether or not Ethiopia is to face an outburst of violence for having its diverse nations and nationalities self-govern themselves.

ICG is not new and alone to erroneously predict for a violent outburst to hit Ethiopia. There is nothing new to report about Ethiopia in this regard. Ethiopia is inured by such bad wish from those who stand to lose by the advent of new political living arrangements. It has been almost two decades since five Ethiopian PhD holders wrote meticulously predicting the same fate that ICG is foretelling about Ethiopia today. In fact, the five PhD holders made sure that the title of the article said it all; "Ethiopia; the next Somalia."

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ICG is precisely repeating what the five PhD holders had to augur about Ethiopia's political life almost two decades ago. Careful reading of ICG's Executive Summary, which is the abridged product of its "field-based analysis", brings to light three major reasons that ICG thinks will precipitate "a violent eruption in Ethiopia." One; the "ethnically defined states," two; the "rigid grip of power by EPRDF," and three; "continuing fear of inter ethnic-conflict." Presumably, these are the culprits of ICG's "field-based analysis" to which ICG is prescribing a "genuine multi-party democracy." In part two of this article, we will go through each of ICG's "newly" found reasons to analyze if they are assumptions cogent enough to construct a bridge to warrant what is being predicted—an outburst of violence.

