

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

Kilil is the Solution by

Adal Isaw

adalisaw@yahoo.com

September 13, 2009

As its stated in Part I of this Article, “aggressive advocacy” is used to compel what is otherwise a sovereign state into accepting ICG’s prescribed policy. Before ICG employs its “aggressive advocacy,” it conveys the prescribed policy to the leaders of the state with the assumed impending threat on their shoulder—to effectively “advise” them as to what it is they should do to avert the calamity.

For adamantly sovereign and highly discerning leaders of a country such as Ethiopia, “to advise” is a euphemism for “order,” especially if what is being advised is followed by “aggressive advocacy.” The distinction between the need for ICG’s “aggressive advocacy” and the purpose of its policy prescription is blindingly blurred. Why advise if the intent of ICG is to compel the state by “aggressive advocacy” into accepting a policy that it has prescribed?

In reference to the recent “policy prescription” about Ethiopia, ICG’s procedure is simply an either or proposition. Either the Ethiopian leaders should do according to what has been prescribed by ICG or they may be dealt with aggressively. This ICG approach is arrogant and it is also a great reminder of President Bush’s “you’re either with us or with the enemy” foreign policy folly. Much like the foreign policy of the Bush administration on terror, ICG dictates to a sovereign state “you are either to do as I say or face what I will aggressively do onto you.”

Both of these seemingly disparate but identical approaches are laughable diplomatic gestures even to those with mediocre knowledge of international relations. This is how ICG carries its Think Tank academic dispensation in the form of a “policy prescription” mashed with “aggressive advocacy,” to “protect” and “save” Ethiopia from Ethiopians, by dictating to a sovereign state of Ethiopia to do as it says.

What will ICG do to coerce the Ethiopian people abandon their political living arrangements? Would it solicit donors to block grants? Would that be aggressive enough? What is aggressive and what constitutes aggressiveness in the first place anyway?

According to ICG’s mother tongue, the noun “aggressive” is defined as “the act of initiating hostilities or invasion; the practice or habit of launching attacks hostile or destructive behavior or actions.” Likewise, the adjective “aggressiveness,” is described as the possession of “...behavior that is intended to threaten or inflict physical injury on another person...that may include such categories as verbal attack, discriminatory behavior, and economic exploitation.”

Aggressiveness is the typical manifestation of a culture that the Western world is known for living and for which the weight of history is the witness. It’s the product of a culture that

EPRDF-Supporters Forum

self-righteously declares its superiority from within a box that to learn from others outside the box is never an option or an alternative. This is a culture with an attitude that prefers to die acting insane than to live with sanity by learning from those which it considers inferior. It is just the superiority complex that does this and ICG is just that—the manifestation of such a culture that is not yet ready to learn from people that are free, sovereign and at the helm of their own destiny.

Who gave ICG the authoritative bird's-eye survey, coupled with a superior knowledge about how Ethiopians should live? What makes it superior relative to what's known by Ethiopians about their own informed choice? The fact is, by virtue of having lived many years of deprived lives, Ethiopians know better on matters that relate to their own living arrangement. The “ethnically based states” are here for reasons, and the intent of such an administrative structure is “to create more just, prosperous and representative states” as ICG precisely stated it in its Executive Summary.

To fundamentally revamp centuries old socially, economically and politically depriving living arrangement requires a bold informed action. The uncontested available knowledge, siphoned from the Ethiopian experience by those who were to take bold actions to revamp the political living arrangement of Ethiopia was this: For too many years, the traditional and historical edifice of Ethiopia stood on the premise of royal and aristocratic privileges and was imposed on fourteen political provinces.

To aggrandize and give the appearance of immutability, the historical and traditional edifice of Ethiopia was justified through ecclesiastical authority. For this relatively lasting reason, many still remember, and great many may still believe that our Kings were appointees of the almighty God—not subject to any law. Not surprisingly, those who dare to challenge such royal and aristocratic living arrangement within the fourteen provinces of Ethiopia were dealt mercilessly. In spite of sustained merciless measures, the coercive living arrangement under royal and aristocratic administration brew local resistance and nationalist movements—paving a boulevard to Kilil—what the opposition and the West love to call “Ethnically defined states.”

What about the role of Derg? Some of you may pose to ask. Succinctly put, Derg was simply the bloodying catalyst to what was an inevitable consequence of centuries old deprivation that led Ethiopia to what is today—a loosely organized Federal Democratic Republic—composed of nine administrative regions that Ethiopians call Kilil.

Kilil is one of the contentious political issues of Ethiopia that can easily be demagogued by any critic to mean the dismembering of Ethiopia into ethnic miniature states. However, facts about Kilil bespeak something else. By all measures, Kilil has enclaves of larger areas that are homes for people who would have been otherwise defined narrowly to live in Gojam, Begemidir, Wello, and Shewa. In fact, instead of allowing accent differences in speaking Amharic define where people live, bringing people together who speak the same language into a larger enclave has brewed unity unseen in the past.

The similarity of a people in speaking the same language instead of their accent differences has brought a larger administrative area that we call “Kilil Sewost.” As much as it brings people of the same language, tradition and culture, as in the Amara Region, Kilil also brings as many nations and nationalities with differing languages and culture to reside on a

EPRDF-Supporters Forum

bigger enclave of land. The Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region is the typical example, signifying that Kilil is not that extremely and narrowly defined ethnic-based political arrangement as critics jump to suggest. Remember, what would have been thirteen provinces are now nine Kilils, and deductively, the Ethiopian people are brought together into a larger enclave of land than they're driven apart into miniature states. It's just simple logic. Kilil is thus a very acceptable political living arrangement—not a political knife that is dismembering Ethiopia as some disingenuously suggest.

Neither the living arrangement nor the contest to choose one arrangement from another is immutable. The fourteen provinces that made up the political unit arrangement of Ethiopia were never meant to stand for ever. The same is true about Kilil; it's just another possibly changeable political living arrangement being used for now to fairly and squarely distribute political rights, economic interests and social benefits among the many people of Ethiopia. It's those who are standing to lose from such a political living arrangement in which power, privilege, duties, and rights are distributed who are creating a made-up problem out of a contemporary Ethiopian solution.

Seeing from this Ethiopian vantage point, ICG's support for coercive centralized state that mimics the royal and aristocratic privileges of the old days in the name of averting an assumed violent eruption is thus appalling. It's not Kilil but it's the lack of fairness and equality—the prevalence of social, political and economic deprivations that may brew violent outburst—not only in Ethiopia but in any other country of the world.

In place of Kilil, ICG has made it clear through its prescribed policy that it wants a centralized government bent on quelling the increasing self-awareness of a people in Ethiopia. ICG assumes and believes that enhanced self-awareness in Ethiopia is the culprit to future violent outburst. In so believing, ICG confuses the true self-awareness that's brought by many years of struggle with the false awareness that some Ethiopians have about themselves and Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is not and had never been a nation-state irrespective of the many false claims propagated by many including some PhD holders. ICG is buying into this very weak argument from which it prescribes its policy to structure the Ethiopian society into a political living arrangement akin to a nation-state. It's therefore up to us Ethiopians to enlighten this supposedly Think Tank group, with an introductory lesson about state, nation and nation-state, so that ICG realizes that its primary assumption about the state of Ethiopia is utterly faulty.

Nation is a word often confused to mean state as often as state is confused to mean nation likewise. States and nations make up our contemporary political world. The greater numbers of countries in the world are states composed of many nations, and these include our country Ethiopia. And by definition, a state consists of an area of territory which is under the single rule of a government, and nation is a hard to define sociological, political and philosophical concept often loosely and incorrectly used to mean 'state.'

Oromos, Basques, Amharas, Scots, Tigreans, Catalans, Ukraine, and Hungarians are nations, but of these, only the Ukrainians and Hungarians have states where most of the citizens are members of the nation; the other six, that is, Tigreans, Catalans, Oromos, Basques, Amharas, and the Scots nations are citizens of states which contain members of other nations.

As Ethiopians, we have argued passionately and to no avail so far, as to what it means to be an Ethiopian. At times, the question of who is Ethiopian is foretold for others by those who

EPRDF-Supporters Forum

know little about whom they ask a pledge from. Even those Ethiopian PhD holders of social science discipline and now including ICG, have erroneously define what it means to be an Ethiopian, mistaking state for nation and nation for state in a spiral unenlightened avenue to create a nation-state out of Ethiopia. Enlightened heads of the majority of Ethiopians would leave this impossible task of creating a nation-state out of many nations to America—the Headquarter of ICG.

America, which was built on an immigrant culture of people from many nations, explicitly promotes the idea that immigrants become American, that is, become members of the nation, so that a nation-state with Anglo-Saxon deeply held values, culture and language becomes the end result. ICG is prescribing to Ethiopia an identical idea that America is explicitly promoting in its backyard to form a nation-state with a dominating Anglo-Saxon value, culture and language.

As it was evident in our own history, a nation in our country had risen to dominate other nations by way of tradition, culture and language to create asymmetric political, economic and social power structures. To correct this injustice, we have made most of the necessary changes. The new Ethiopian state has been born, where all of the nations of the state stand equally at the same pedestal of political, social and economic power. To restructure Ethiopia into a centralized singular sense of belonging, by setting aside the political sociology of other nations and nationalities is in and itself that which will bring forth a violent outburst. Kilil respects the political sociology of the many beautiful diverse nations that we have had for years, which we nevertheless managed to ignore and ridicule for a long depriving time.

To accept the advent of a centralized state with the propensity to quell the increasing self-awareness of the diverse nations of Ethiopia, is to succumb to that old prevalent tradition of lifting up the concept and perceptions of one nation to the zenith while depressing another to the bottom of the pit. The new Ethiopia will not adhere and give prevalence and dominance to one and only one part of its history—in order to mold the rest of nations and peoples of the Ethiopian state into what some opposition call the "classical Ethiopian personality." The contemporary Ethiopian personality is just and inclusive, and takes the values of Kilil as solutions not problems that will gear Ethiopia towards a violent outburst. Contrary to ICG's faulty assumption, therefore, Kilil is not the culprit but the solution to any assumed violent outburst in the future.