

There is no Case for a Paradigm Shift: Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs & National Security Policy & Strategy is Pragmatic Part I

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This article is a reply to a piece, titled "Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy: The Case for a Paradigm Shift" by Alemayehu Fentaw that Aiga Forum posted on November 22, 2009. In his piece, Alemayehu argues for a paradigm shift from "state-centric" to a "public-centric" foreign and national security policy of Ethiopia. The thrust of his argument, as he puts it, is premised on a contention that "...the central purpose of Ethiopia's foreign and security policy has remained the same, in spite of the shift in orientation. A change in discourse has not brought a change in practice. Human security should have been made to constitute the bases of the Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy (FANSPS.) Moreover, the government should work aggressively to get critical mass of women into leadership positions in the foreign affairs and security sector."

Although the primary purpose of this article is to refute Alemayehu's presumptions and underscore that there is no case for a paradigm shift in Ethiopia's FANSPS, also, making this article comprehensible to most readers equally entails its purpose. And thus, it is a must that this article elaborates on the nature of the few major concepts that Alemayehu raises tacitly and otherwise, which some readers may find new and strictly academic.

Paradigm, nation-state, state-centric, public-centric, school of thought or worldview are concepts of interest in social science that relate to issues of security and relations in political-economy of national and international scope. These concepts are human perceptions to a degree of quantifiable or unquantifiable nature. They're helpful tools, but yet, they remain as notions of understanding for which a physical science inquiry is absent—to value their importance—as significant as a leap in scientific discovery of the kind that knowledge unravels in genetics. Aphoristically put, these concepts are no more than the descriptions of human perception, brought by social interaction in a given setting that are not the subject of inquiry to a protocol in physical science.

Perception is an integral part of the human psyche and it affects everyone from a layman to a seasoned academic. What is perceived by a layman and a seasoned academic cannot amount to anything more than the synthesized understanding of both respective experiences, which formulate the worldviews of both persons. A layman may not systematically categorize his views into school of thoughts or paradigms, to elaborately explain what he daily perceives through his own experience as a layman. However, dictated by his social interactions and the environment he lives in, a layman perceives his own world in the same natural way as a seasoned academic. By extension, what ever is perceived by a seasoned academic cannot be proven to be qualitatively that dissimilar from what is perceived by a layman, unless that which is perceived by a seasoned academic is replicable in a physical

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science lab or, unless the patterns of outcomes favor consistently—the truthfulness of that which is perceived by a seasoned academic.

Till now, social scientists are not accustomed to the exact methods of inquiry used in the physical sciences. Consequently, any effort by these scientists to distinguish between perceptions cannot yield validity that worth more than a degree of contrast. With this in mind, the school of thoughts that are being debated here should be taken for their relative values—in terms of their feasibility, workability, achievements, durability and more. With regards to Ethiopia's national and foreign security policy, what seems to be working and what's not should be the question, and both Alemayehu and this writer have utilized differing line of arguments to answer this precise question.

To either support or constructively critic the FANSPS of Ethiopia, the school of thought that gave Alemayehu the basis for his contention, and the paradigm by which Ethiopia filters and crafts its policy with reference to its national security concerns, should be discussed. In other words, where is Alemayehu coming from in terms of his worldview with regards to national security threats to Ethiopia, and why is Ethiopia's foreign affairs and national security policy and strategy is crafted in such a way to give primary concern to its survival, are issues of debate in need of resolve.

A perception on national security concerns may be triggered either by real or imagined threat. To a greater or lesser extent, school of thoughts or worldviews in part are made out of these two forms of perceptions—real and imagined. And on some occasions, what is real for one school of thought is what is imagined and unsubstantiated for the other and vice versa. In other words, what this writer sees as a real national security threat to Ethiopia, Alemayehu sees as imagined, unsubstantiated and misplaced threat and vice versa.

For Alemayehu, the waves of hostile forces and detractors of Ethiopia since its inception are less concerning compared to a threat posed by its economic woes. OLF, ONLF, the one-man state of Eritrea, Al-shebaab, Al-quaeda and the rest constitute no security threat greater than what poverty and the lack of abundant democratic institutions may bring forth. Still more, for Alemayehu, the physical threat posed by all these detractors' lives in the vacuum and has no impact if Ethiopia is to relegate this same threat to a second or third tier security concern. In other words, if Ethiopia is to trim its national defense forces and military expenditure to match its "Human Development Index" (HDI,) which is roughly by ninety percent, the four to five hundred thousand forces of the one-man state of Eritrea in the North will be at peace and the FANSPS becomes sound.

Presumably and based on Ethiopia's "Human Development Index," Alemayehu is suggesting that Ethiopia's defense forces in the Northern frontier be cut roughly to ten thousand, thereby, relegating the physical military threat posed by the megalomaniac Afewerki to second or third tier. Alemayehu further argues that the number of defense forces that are deployed in other areas of concern should also be cut by such percentage. His reason: economic, social and environmental threats are more concerning than the threats posed by all of Ethiopia's detractors. This writer disagrees vehemently and the debate at the end will sift the threat that is real from that which is imagined, but for now, the two conflicting worldviews of this writer and Alemayehu's will be discussed—so that readers can have inputs to further a constructive public discourse over Ethiopia's national security concerns.

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Alemayehu has a misplaced and untimely worldview that he should have checked before applying it to the national security concerns of Ethiopia—a country with disparate security concerns to that of the developed nations of the Western world. He has simply borrowed a line of argument that academics with similar worldview to his, have been using to describe the national security concerns of Northern industrialized nations.

Since the early 1970's, the Western world seem less concerned about conventional military-type national security issues and more concerned about a variety of economic and environmental threats to its societies, as some international relations academics argue. The extreme of this line of argument today is of course that economic threats to nations in the Western world have virtually replaced physical military threats—the exact same argument that Alemayehu is making. It is no wonder then that Alemayehu is arguing in favor of “public-centric” foreign and national security policy, by highlighting the economic insecurity of Ethiopia as more threatening than any physical military threat that may cost Ethiopia its national identity. The major flaw with this worldview is this: Ethiopia is neither Sweden nor England and the line of argument that Alemayehu adheres to is something anachronistic.

It is this writer's worldview that Ethiopia's national security concerns are by far daunting and directly related to its survival first and foremost. Because, war is as yet a routine feature of its detractors that Ethiopia is forced to deal with daily. And for this reason and by virtue of our existence in one of the volatile areas of the world, Ethiopia cannot mimic England or Sweden not to think about its survival first and foremost. The hostility of state and non-state actors has not ceased, and in fact, it has become as impending if not as certain a threat that the need for primary concern is as self-explanatory as ever before. If FANSPS is to second tier its primary security concerns, ethnic, religious, and cultural differences that may generate a great deal of tension may brew a war that may cost Ethiopia its national survival.

It's further this writer's worldview that, Ethiopia never chose to have a security gesture that it has now for the simple fact that a good deal of war in our region is a product of the imperialist endeavor of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. Who is to say for sure that the stupid war between us and our cousins in the North is not fueled by left over spark from colonial times? Who is to say that the extraordinary policy of FDRE in asserting the rights of nations and nationalities to self-government is not “public-centered” aimed at remedying past horrendous misdeeds of Ethiopia?

Furthermore, Ethiopia's prolonged economic woes haven't ceased its national identity, and equally, the emphasis given by FANSPS to primarily protect and keep Ethiopia as a nation cannot in any way hamper its economic and other social development plan, that one day may lead Ethiopia to reprioritize its national security concerns accordingly. But for now, Ethiopia cannot feel as confident as Sweden and England, to second tier threats that may cost its national existence. And, Alemayehu should have saved his line of argument for a developed nation in the Western world that primarily crafts its national security concerns to meet other than economic and environmental threats.