

Somalia : another war “Made in USA “

Interview

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INTERVIEW OF MOHAMED HASSAN

This is not a war between Ethiopia and Somalia . This is a war of the USA against all the peoples of the Horn of Africa.

Analysis by Mohamed Hassan

To understand what is happening in the Horn of Africa, the nature of the TPLF-regime of Zenawi Meles in Ethiopia that sent its troops into Somalia last month must first be explained.

The Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was created in 1975. In its first manifesto it said its main objective was to create the Independent republic of Tigray. This is a narrow nationalist and racist approach that makes language the first factor to unite or divide people. There was opposition to this narrow vision within the TPLF itself as well as within the other organisations and fronts that fought against the Mengistu regime, the dictatorship of that time.

The mainstream idea was that Tigray was part of Ethiopia and there was no reason to claim independence for Tigray. The main objective for the liberation struggle in Ethiopia was to create a new Ethiopia based on equality of nationalities and brotherly relations with all neighboring countries. After 50 years of war this very rich region inhabited by poor people desired a new start and the beginning of a developing economy.

Zenawi Meles is a great demagogue and a liar. He uses Marxism-Leninism today and tomorrow he will use Buddhism. The day after he will read a few books and be the champion of Hinduism against Buddhism. He hid his narrow Tigray-nationalist agenda of TPLF and created the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray to gain control of the TPLF and eliminate all opposition against his narrow racist ideology within it.

In the eighties when the struggle against the Mengistu dictatorship became stronger he also created the EPRDF which was a larger front of different organisations representing different nationalities living in Ethiopia , under the leadership of the TPLF. Meles pretended to unite Ethiopian nationalities in the struggle for the liberation of Ethiopia, but all the time its real objective was the creation of a greater Tigray, that controls the other nationalities and regions in Ethiopia.

Once the Mengistu-regime fell, a transitional government was formed. The EPLF (Eritrean People Liberation Front) from te neighboring country Eritrea that was occupied by Ethiopia,

convinced all the other organisations who were members of this government that it was better to give military control of the country to the army of TPLF. When Zenawi saw that in the regional elections of 1992 the Oromo liberation front won they began eliminating its members from the government and the OLF left the government. Instead of following a policy of integration of the different nationalities, Zenawi followed a policy of “divide and rule” against all the other nationalities in Ethiopia

Today Zenawi’s unbelievably narrow and reactionary dream of “a greater Tigray” has become reality. The population of Tigray is only 6% of the Ethiopian population (76 million) and Tigray is a poor region, situated at 800 km from the capital Addis Ababa. But it is Tigray-people who control 99% of public services and 98% of trade.

All opposition and protest is brutally repressed and the rule of the TPLF/EPRDF is maintained by narrow racist nationalist policies that divide the different Ethiopian nationalities.

In reality this is a very dangerous situation first of all for the Tigray people itself. I know many people from Tigray who have lived their whole lives in Addis Ababa and who flee the country, because they feel themselves more and more hated each day by their neighbors of whom the overwhelming majority are non Tigray.

At the same time the regime is very weak and depends completely on the support of the USA .

The May 2005 elections were a big defeat for the EPRDF. The official results published a month after the elections put the EPRDF in a minority position of 45%. The EU observers confirmed the defeat of the EPRDF. However the official election committee did an “investigation” and finally gave 60% to the EPRDF. The leaders of the main opposition parties were put in jail and many people were killed.

In the past year, the opposition inside Ethiopia has become more radical. In August 2006, a group of high-ranking officers led by General Kamal Galchuu joined the Oromo Liberation Front. In the Oromo area a real intifadah started up and a few months ago, the OLF launched an appeal to all opposition groups to join the united front ADF (Alliance for Democracy and Freedom).

The USA is pleased with the situation because this way it has a puppet that completely depends on its financial, political and military support. The Ethiopian state is becoming more and more a CIA-led state that is very isolated.

The conflict with Eritrea.

In fact the military capacity of the EPRDF in the eighties was relatively weak. It was its close relationship with the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) that was militarily strong that made victory over the dictator Mengisthu in 1991 possible. It was the troops of the EPLF that liberated the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. But the EPLF was a liberation movement of a neighboring country, Eritrea, that had been occupied by Ethiopia since 1952 and was annexed in 1962. And the objective of the EPRDF was to liberate Eritrea from the Ethiopian occupation. So it formed a close alliance with the EPRDF/TPLF to topple the Ethiopian government. Once this was done, the EPLF took over the administration of Eritrea and organized in Eritrea a referendum in 1993 where more than 98% of Eritreans voted for independence. While in Ethiopia a transitional government was formed led by EPRDF/TPLF.

The EPLF held on to its ideals of a liberation movement that wanted to develop its country for the interest of its people. So it followed a policy based upon self-reliance, mobilising the population, installing national structures, refusing outside interference via Western NGOs and controlling foreign trade. The EPLF also followed a policy based on national integration and cohabitation of the 9 Eritrean nationalities and the two religions (Christian and Muslim).

This was just the opposite of the policy Zenawi followed in Ethiopia that was based on privatisation, foreign donors and the policy of International institutions such as the IMF and the WB. Confronted with this difference, Eritrea decided in 1997 to stop using the Ethiopian pound and chose to have its own currency, the Nakfa.

From then on, there were many provocative acts and killings of Eritrean officers and soldiers at the border that triggered off a war, which lasted from 1998 to 2000. It was a catastrophic war; on the Ethiopian side 135.000 soldiers died. In fact the Ethiopians lost the war and were forced to accept the Algiers agreement in 2000.

The agreement included three phases: 1. A commission of the International Court in The Hague would decide on the territorial dispute and the exact location of the border. 2. Another commission of the International Court would decide on the claims of the two parties for confiscation or damage to property of citizens that were confiscated by the other side. 3. Finally a commission of the African Union would decide on the question which country started the war and should have the responsibility to compensate for the immense damage that was caused by the war. The two first commissions have already concluded in favor of the Eritrean position and claims. It is almost certain that the third commission will condemn Ethiopia, because the Ethiopian government accused Eritrea of starting the war by an air-attack against the city of Adi-Grat and occupying the village Badima. This story of Eritrean jets bombing this city was a lie; once the commission examines this story, the truth will be crystal clear. What is more: the first commission already decided that Badima was Eritrean territory.

So there is a sword of Damocles hanging above the government of Zenawi Meles. Until now the African Union, under pressure from the USA, postponed the foundation of the third commission. But sooner or later, this third commission will be formed.

The very risky war against Somalia

The extremely fragile position of the Meles-regime can explain its offensive to attack Somalia last December. Indeed, by attacking Somalia under pretext of attacking "the allies and even members of Al Qaeda" Zenawi wants to position himself as a friend of the U.S. and Bush's strong man in the Horn of Africa in the US global war against Islamic terror. But this is a very risky operation.

First of all, Ethiopia and Somalia have had a long history of animosity and wars. For the Somalis the Ethiopian invasion is an aggression of an archenemy. It could be compared to a military intervention by Germany in Belgium or France. Somalis are one people, have one language and one religion. The only factor that is dividing them is the clans. Confronted with a foreign occupation force, however, they can unite and deal heavy blows. It was the Americans themselves who experienced this in 1993. At that moment they had sent 30.000 marines to the country in a military operation called "Restore Hope". But soon they had to withdraw because of their losses and the fact that the dead corpses of American soldiers

were dragged through the streets in front of the cameras.

Second, the Somali people are tired of the chaos and destruction of 16 years of a warlord regime. However it is just the same warlords who have been protected and brought to power again in Mogadishu by the Ethiopian army. The warlords were hated before by all Somalis for their corruption. Now they will be despised as traitors and stooges for the number one enemy of the Somali people, Ethiopia.

Third, The overwhelming majority of Somalis saw the Islamic Courts as a stabilizing factor. This support of the Islamic Courts was not a support for international terrorists. Most jihadists do not speak Somali and few speak Arabic. They stand out too much with their different eating habits and clothing. When the population helped the Islamic Courts to defeat the warlords in a few weeks time and then to liberate practically the whole country in six months, it was because they were tired of the anarchy, the pillage of the warlords. You must know that since 1991, 3 million Somalis have left the country and the Somali diaspora are often modern secular people who try to help their country in spite of the warlords' corruption. And they are very ingenious at doing that. For example, in spite of all the chaos, Somalia is one of the only African countries where every village has good telephone communication facilities. There is an informal banking system (1 billion \$ a year). There are five private airways and so on. A large number of Diaspora Somalis were willing to return to Somalia, and rebuild the country, once peace and security were ensured. When Somali businessmen went to the American embassy in Nairobi to invite them to come to Somalia and see for themselves that there were no Al Qaeda members in the Islamic Courts, the Americans refused. They will never forget nor forgive the USA and their puppet Ethiopia for bringing Somalia back to the reign of terror and chaos of the warlords. And in their eyes it is crystal clear that the talk about Al Qaeda's presence in Somalia is nothing else then the excuse, the lie that must justify the war. Just like the lies about the weapons of mass destruction of Saddam used to justify the aggression against Iraq .

Fourth, all Somalis are aware of the fact that in the sixteen years of anarchic rule by the warlords, there was never any initiative of the "International Community" to intervene in Somalia. However, just when the Islamic courts brought order and stability, they saw in November last year the UN Security council under the instigation of the USA vote the resolution 1752 that opened the door for the Ethiopian intervention that brought back the terror and anarchy they had just chased away. So the only way the common Somali can see this invasion is that of an aggression against the Somali people and nation.

Fifth, The invading soldiers of Zenawi in Somalia are largely from his Tigray Christian tribe. These soldiers do not speak the Somali language; once deep inside Somalia, they will be exposed to attacks by the locals. But also in Ethiopia itself, Zenawi needs these men back as soon as possible because he needs them to confront the growing revolt in his own country. It is true; the Americans are negotiating with Uganda and Nigeria to deliver 8000 troops to replace the Ethiopian army. But who will pay for this operation and will these poor governments take the risk of being sucked into the swamp of a guerilla war? Certainly the different neighboring countries such as Kenya and Uganda take high risks because there are many Somali refugees living in Kenya who will not forget nor forgive a Kenyan engagement on the side of Ethiopia.. The Ugandan economy largely depends on the Kenyan harbor of Mombassa, but 30 km of this harbor there is a city Lamui where Somalis are in the majority... So it may well be that Zenawi's troops will be forced to stay too long in Somalia and that they will be sucked into a swamp that will be fatal for the TPLF/regime.

What is the role of the Americans in this war?

The Zenawi regime is a rogue force used in the hands of American imperialism in the region. Since Antony Lake, Clinton's national security advisor, indicated Ethiopia as one of the four countries (the others were Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt) that are decisive for the defense of American interests in Africa, the government of Zenawi has had all the support it needed.

The Ethiopian army is at present being reformed as a local mercenary force in the service of the Americans that can be used against any country in the region. On one of the American army's websites, Stars and Stripes (<http://www.estripes.com/>), one could read on 30 December the testimony of one of the sixty American instructors who are training Ethiopian soldiers. Sgt. 1st Class Bill Flippo is an instructor based at Camp Hurso near in the city of Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. He says; "I feel that what I'm doing now is really helping to fight the war on terror," Flippo said. "The knowledge we are giving to these soldiers is what they will use if they go and fight in Somalia, Eritrea or wherever."

Many observers note that the invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia was not only encouraged, and protected by the USA, but even paid by USA-money. And after the first successes, American military participated directly with the Ethiopian army in the hunt for leaders of the Islamic courts.

What are the American interests in the region?

There is the presence of oil and gas reserves. Since 1986, four big oil transnational corporations received permission for the first time from the Somali president Siad Barre to search for oil. And they found important reserves. But most of all : Somalia has a very strategic location. It has a coast of 3300km. This is the largest coastline in Africa. One part of this coastline is just in front of the most important region in the world for the moment, the Middle East. Another part of the coastline faces the Indian Ocean. You must know that before the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century, there was considerable traffic between India and Africa that passed by harbors on this coast. 10% of the words of the Somali language are words of Indian origin.

The Emir of the Indian State of Kudjrad had bodyguards that came from the Horn of Africa. In the Somali harbors there were also Somali who spoke Chinese. They were called "Abanas". They were translators between the Chinese and businessmen from the African hinterland.

This century the historical wheel is turning again towards the emerging countries of China and India. Chalmers Johnson, author and president of the Japan Policy Research Institute, cites Javed Burki, a former vice-president of the World Bank's China Department who predicts that by 2025 China will probably have a GDP of \$25 trillion in terms of purchasing power parity and will have become the world's largest economy followed by the US at \$ 20 trillion. (<http://www.tomdispatch.com/index.mhtml?pid=2259>)

This year we also saw important efforts from China to increase its trade with Africa. China urgently needs oil and other minerals for its rapidly developing economy. And Africa can respond to that need. So the Horn of Africa has become a very strategic place for the next twenty years.

Since the Bush-government cannot control the whole world, they prefer a policy of

deliberately destabilizing the whole region for many years, rather than letting it become a wealthy region that can play a key-role in the increasing trade relations between Africa and the new emerging economies of Asia .

There are Somalis living in different neighboring countries such as Ethiopia , Kenya , Djibouti . Somali nationalism has ignited and this war will extend into places like Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, known until now mostly as a safari destination for Western tourists.

The peoples of the region are becoming mature. They see what is happening and their first reaction is that of horror. If the Bush agenda of destabilizing and genocide continues, anti-imperialist feelings will increase and people will unite to defend their homes and countries.

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