

RANSACKING WIKILEAKS

What you see is what you get!

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From the word go, the hardcore among EPRDF's detractors have been ransacking Wikileaks to unearth incriminating evidence against the higher echelon of the ruling party. Many were confident that their effort would yield some grist to jumpstart their otherwise stalled counter-state mobilization project. The shrewdest, in fact, had hoped that if they were only to dig a little deeper, they would uncover an equally, if not, an even more explosive hidden secret. A hidden-weapon or sorts, as it were, by which they reckoned they could instantly discredit the legitimacy of the federal republic along with its founding personalities. Whereas the true-believers were even more upbeat that the recovery of such hitherto tightly-sealed secret could, at least retrospectively, validate the opposition's groundless claim to have won the 2005 elections. But, to their bitter disappointment, it was never to be. In vain, then, the desperate wasted a great deal of time and energy plowing through tones of unintentionally declassified US embassy cables, courtesy, no doubt, of the ultimate frightening computer hacker -- Wikileaks. For there was never anything in these suspense-filled disclosures the opposition could have possibly retrieved and parade as a shocking indictment on the leading figures running the government. Alas since, as it turned out, no decision of long-term consequences was ever made behind the Ethiopian people, it is only fitting to say that, where the EPRDF is concerned: What you see is what you get!

Apparently, the Sudan Tribune too must have been sifting through Wikileaks to gather what neighboring states might be quietly thinking about the head of the only Islamic state in Africa. Subsequently, in an irresponsible editorial decision, the Sudanese English daily ran a sensational headline, implicating Meles Zenawi of tempting US officials to give Omar Basher the boot. Understandably, hardly anyone who matters, not least the Sudanese president, gave much attention to this distorted rendition of what Meles purportedly counseled the USA, regarding his Sudanese counterpart. Even among the anti-EPRDF political fringe abroad, the only exception is the émigré polemicist, Prof. Hailemariam Gebremariam: A man who, uncomfortable as he must be with his *Geze* name, prefers to call himself, Al Mariam. And who, in a self-depreciative manner, tries to pass himself off as a purebred Yankee no less than, say, Al Gore. As if to compensate for his manifest lack of confidence when it comes to honoring his lineage, Al Mariam is apparently on a demonization crusade against African leaders in general and the Ethiopian prime minister in particular. Vehement as his hate campaign is, especially against

Meles, his nonetheless betrays a hidden obsession apparent even to the uninitiated. It is clear from his Africa bashing that he feels an irresistible internal urge to prove his worth to those who granted him a new hyphenated Ethio-American identity. After, of course, and not before he solemnly renounced his Abyssinian origin, which after all the troubles he went through to discard and forget, it still seems to cause him embarrassment.

No wonder Al Mariam chose to bandwagon the media spin on Meles' remark as a godsend opportunity for pitting the Sudan against Ethiopia. His current mean-spirited haste to sow seeds of discord between the two neighbors in fact tallies with his earlier Iago-like machination. Recall, if you will, the length he traveled to provoke Washington's wrath against Ethiopia, in the guise of the now-forgotten sanction (HR13). But to Al Mariam's dismay, president Bashir knows that Meles would not have come to his defense during his hour of difficulty with the ICJ only to switch sides and stab him in the back. Nor would Bashir have repeatedly called on Ethiopia to help consolidate Sudan's uneasy peace, had he felt that the man he embraced as a friend-in-need was scheming against him behind the curtain. No wonder, then, in his recent interview with the Ethiopian prime minister, Omer Bashir said "*Meles is a friend keen on peace and stability in Sudan and a strong advocate of Sudan in regional and international occasions.*" Likewise, it has not been lost on Bashir that the full text of the said Wikileaks, in fact, conveys a markedly different message than what, in his spitefulness, Al Mariam made it out to be. Granted the note-taking as Meles spoke may have left room for an honest misreading as it did for dishonest misinterpretation. On close reading, however, the spirit, if not the letter, of what Meles is reported to have remarked on the Sudanese leadership is consistent with his government's well-known foreign policy directives and practices. Indeed Ethiopia has repeatedly protested any and all externally-driven regime change agendas, regardless of what the justification might be. For the Ethiopian government firmly believes that the right to choose or change government lies with the people, and the people of the concerned sovereign nation alone. If proof need be, one can cite numerous instances that demonstrate Ethiopia's unflinching adherence to this principled stand. A case in point is the 2004 Four-Point Meles Peace Plan, formulated by the prime minister to meet his government's obligation to bring an end to Ethiopia's eleven-year stalemate with Eritrea. Apparently the Plan still stands as Ethiopia's peace offer, despite initial domestic pressure for a final showdown with the tropical variant of Il Duce, Issayas Afeworki — a regional menace that most people in Eritrea and Ethiopia prefer to have seen long gone.

Such, then, is the extent of Ethiopia's commitment to peace and international law throughout the region. Surely no state could be more pleased than Ethiopia if the Eritrean president were to be internally replaced by at least a less aggressive head of state than the megalomaniac despot currently in office. Yet, to this day defaming Ethiopia as a second fiddler in Washington's aggressive global project continues unabated. The instance often cited to back this baseless allegation is, of course, Ethiopia's 2006 expulsion of the UIC from Mogadishu. Nonetheless evidence

abound that this was a purely Ethiopian mission conducted with the blessing of the UN-recognized TFG as it was an autonomously arrived Ethiopian decision. Fortunately Wikileaks has finally confirmed that Ethiopia's unilateral but defensive move against the Jihadist threat was in fact made against US misgiving. Absent in the embassy cables, however, is even a line or two about how the US high brass tried to steal the show no sooner than Ethiopia's victory was imminent. The importance of restating these intentionally suppressed facts cannot be overstressed. For partly at least, it explains the widespread disbelief which greeted Ethiopia's reasons for halting the Jihadists in their track. Indeed up until recent days, Western and extremist Arab media, not to mention the domestic opposition, were unanimous in discrediting Ethiopia's side of the story.

The same concerted willful incredulity explains the loud objection that is often heard whenever the Ethiopian government nips in the bud state-sponsored terrorists plots on its own soil. Without exaggeration, every public safety measure that the Ethiopian government is forced to take is met with second-guessing. Mostly the skeptics are the usual suspects who deny that Ethiopia face serious global terrorist threat no less than, say, the USA or the UK for that matter. Yet ironically every explanatory statement that Ethiopia issues *vis-à-vis* its counterterrorist actions is received with suspicion among transnational actors. Full of hubris, they figure that they alone have the right to sit in judgment on which country's words is to be trusted when accounts of measures taken against terrorism is involved. The so-called global human rights advocates in particular have made it a habit of dismissing what Ethiopia says on its behalf as nothing but a smokescreen intended to mask the country's narrowing political space. A glance at the September 8 US embassy cables posted by Wikileaks underscore the level of mistrust towards Ethiopia's preemptive legal action against threat to national security. For here the US embassy, Ethiopia's supposed ally in counterterrorism, tries to cast doubt over the government's official explanation regarding the raid on a group of terrorist OLF infiltrators. As it happened, two of the suspects died of self-inflicted fatal injury following the accidental explosion of the very lethal device they had planned to plant and detonate at a busy public square. Whereas contrary to this credible account, the US embassy cable says: *"an embassy source, as well as clandestine reporting, suggests that the bombing may have in fact been the work of GoE security forces."* Well, as it turned out, one of the clandestine sources which the embassy considers 'reliable' is none other than Merera Gudina. This may come as surprise to some who take his public image at face value. But, if truth be told, few could be more reliable than Merera when disinformation is needed to tarnish Ethiopia's image. Wikileaks does not say what or how much Merera Gudina was paid by Uncle Sam for his troubles in this particular case. At any rate, since he is by no means a disinterested snitch, the reward for his secret service can't be more than thirty pieces of silver.

Neither does Wikileaks say what the embassy thinks of Merera's occasional anti-imperialist ranting. Apparently his benefactors are indifferent to his occasional relapse to his Me'son days. Why shouldn't they be, knowing that their man is

capable of stooping to the level of an informer, to a US- embassy information window no less? On reflection, this might be unfair and harsh on Merera. After all, he is not the only reliable source the US embassy and the auxiliary outfits embedded in its compound claim to rely on when an unofficial version of any information is needed. Sad as it is, it is, in fact, an accepted norm among many opposition figures to not only run with their complaints to foreign embassies. But also to pretend to know ‘inside scoops’, which they gladly divulge to any foreign mission interested in what passes through the grapevine. Apparently, for most opposition leaders in Ethiopia the notion of -- a loyal opposition—is either an altogether alien concept or a contradiction in terms. That is why they frequently consort with external-actors in the hope of delegitimizing the EPRDF government in the international community through sanction. And subsequently incite a colored-coded revolution or, as the vogue is in recent days, an Arab revolt. Myopic as they are, they are callously indifferent to the long-term negative implications of sanction to the country long after the EPRDF is gone. They are equally clueless that the more they rely on external support the less respect they gain in Western eyes, not to mention in the eyes of those who matter most, the Ethiopian people. Read, for instance, in the September 20 2009 cables what American officials say about Medrek during the first meeting they had had with Merera Gudina, Beyene Petros, Negasso Gidada, Gizachew Shiferaw, Boh Hussein etc. The cable records that “...*the group (i.e. Medrek)... did not articulate a particularly coherent vision of an alternate future, and certainly had no unified position in terms of political or social program.* Apparently, what seems to unify them is a deeply-held common desire to see termination of US humanitarian aid to Ethiopia. If prove need be, the same cable notes, ‘Both Hussein expressed disapproval of continued U.S food aid would enable the EPRDF to remain in power use humanitarian assistance as a political tool....’” Lest there is any doubt that this might only be Hussein’s personal opinion, the text adds further “*Several opposition leaders have expressed this sentiment to*

informants. No doubt each one of them is presented in the documentary as paragon of credibility whose words must be taken as impeccable testimony on how emergency relief in Ethiopia is conditioned on the voting records of the recipients.

However, concerned by this allegation, deftly -- though unethically -- orchestrated by the BBC Newsnight, the British government conducted its own investigation. Again, as in all previous cases, the inquiry found no evidence to support the BBC's so-called investigative reporting much less the testimonies of its informants who inadvertently perjured themselves in the process. Shortly after this melodrama was aired, a senior British government held an interview with the same Newsnight, and categorically said

Well one of the allegations which you mention is about the misuse of food support and we had that investigated by officials in some detail about six or seven months ago and they found no evidence at all of systemic misuse of food support.

This is not the first, but the third time at least in recent years that the Ethiopian government has been cleared of such morally indicting misconduct. It won't come as a surprise if yet another accusation of impropriety is leveled against Ethiopia's political leadership. Again, as it is has become a fixed and predictable pattern where Ethiopia is concerned, the donor community would be compelled to commission another investigative probe. Yet one can say with certainty that, so long as the EPRDF is in office, any future inquiry into allegations of misappropriation of Western fund is bound to yield the same result as all previous inquests did. Alas, had such abuse were to be directed against any other aid-recipient government dimmed pliant as an ally of the West, its leaders would have been flooded by retractions and apologies. Whereas in the case of Ethiopia, no apology was ever offered, despite repeated injustice done to its government. Be that as it may, there is an irony in this seemingly unending cycle of allegation, probe and exoneration that the Ethiopian government has to contend with every so often. And that is, on the one hand, its leadership is accused of being too self-assertive to the point of spending Western money on programs of its own choosing rather than on priorities set by the donor community. And, on the other hand, it is spoken of as an underling of the West that does what it is told. It is the latter reading, in particular which misleads the opposition leaders into thinking that they could have their way by lobbying for Western pressure to bear on the EPRDF. Witness how, spurred by such glib thinking, for instance, many opposition leaders banked on donor support during the 2005 post-election showdown only to regret it in the end. Consider too how, despite its flag-waving parades and shrill nationalist rhetoric, the diaspora chauvinist naysayers plead with US congressmen to levy sanction on Ethiopia. The upscale among them, no doubt, hire lobbyists to have the Whitehouse apply a rigorous carrot-and-stick policy towards the EPRDF government. But even these sophisticates, Al Mariam included, who flaunt their academic pedigree and fluency in American culture, suffer from the same delusion. They delude themselves that

with the backing of the Oval Office, they can force the incumbent to give in to their unacceptable demands. Foolish and irresponsible as this strategy is, it is accurate to say that it stems from projecting one's own sense of impotence vis-à-vis the West on to the EPRDF. Sadly, little do they know that the EPRDF leadership is not as a pitiful weakling as theirs is which, when told to jump, asks: How high?

Well, perchance the current Wikileaks release sheds some light on the contrast between the opposition and the EPRDF when it comes to bonafide patriotism as opposed to jingoistic mumbo-jumbo which hallmarks the kind of politics that the opposition pursues in Ethiopia. Consider, for instance, Vick Huddleston's assessment of the inner EPRDF leadership and its rivals which is available in Wikileaks. Keep in mind that Huddleston first came to Ethiopia as a US envoy to help resolve the 2005 pos-election crisis. Obviously she had several occasions to meet with both EPRDF and opposition figures to make first-hand observation of which side could rise above partisan-politics when graver matters are at stake. In the subsequent years in which she stayed in Ethiopia as an acting ambassador, she had opportunity to acquire a closer understanding of the host country and how it is governed. In one section of her farewell letter sub-headed "*Right and Wrong ways to Persuade the GoE*" she warns:

If we have the courage to strengthen our commitment to Ethiopia, we have much to gain. But if we aggressively and publicly press Meles in order to appease the Diaspora, some members of Congress and some civil society groups, we will lose Ethiopia... Meles was willing to forego \$300 million in World Bank and European Commission assistance because he believed that they had broken their partnership with Ethiopia. The GOE, despite its friendship with us, remains unsure about whether rebuilding its partnership with the West is worth the effort if the relationship will break down when the going gets rough. Meles has already turned to China as a more reliable partner than Europe, even though EU assistance levels have been restored. But Meles will always do what he believes to be in the country's national interest rather than accepting our demands.

By any standard this is an astute observation of the nature of the Ethiopian political leadership. Obviously she understands that objectivity in appraising policy-makers is vital if an enduring partnership is to be forged between the United States and the host country. More so as there are powerful forces in Washington who only understand diplomacy in terms of US hegemony and not partnership. The paradox is that this ideologically-driven perspective is shared, nay, promoted by certain Ethiopian-Americans. Strange as it may seem, these turncoats appear to be threatened by the prospect of cordial parity between their adopted 'land of the free' and their country of origin. The reader has guessed

right. Al Mariam is not only one of them. But, the most prominent advocates of heavy-handedness in matters of US foreign policy, especially in regards to Ethiopia. A country, though infinitely weaker in comparison to the United States, Al Mariam, nonetheless, for some not easily explainable psychological reason, is determined to punish through the long arm of the Whitehouse. Witness how he hit the roof in his latest posting against a November 2007 NY Times op-ed piece where Vicky Huddleston shred to pieces the argument for HR13. Much to the shame of any Ethio-American of Al Maria's stripe, Huddleston deftly exposed HR13 for what it really is: an ill-advised anti-Ethiopian Act which, worse still, runs counter to the long-term interest of the United States. Incensed beyond control that the Ambassador debunked the only political cause that he ever embraced in his life *i.e.* sanction against his country of birth, Al Mariam went after Huddleston with vengeance. Sizzling with rage, he employed the most abusive language that even Rush Limbaugh might find a bit harsh to discredit her. But, (barring linguistic flare) lacking the intellectual ability to refute her arguments, he takes satisfaction in labeling her as a diplomat 'gone native.' For some who might not be familiar with the expression, Al Mariam quickly decodes the meaning for us. He tells us that, *'the phrase is sometimes used to describe US diplomats who work so fully inside a foreign culture that their policy recommendations become those of the host country'*.

What did Huddleston do to deserve this mocking term of ridicule? From what is known, all she did was warn the US that sanction could only drive Ethiopia away from the United States. As a loyal public servant, she felt duty bound to express her true opinion that Ethio-American relation could only be best enhanced by mutual respect. It follows from her vantage point to caution against hubris, which in her view, could only embolden the opposition in the diaspora and at home. For, as far as she is concerned, the opposition is neither democratic nor capable of holding the country together as it lacks what it takes to accommodate Ethiopia's ethnic and religious plurality. Besides, she was not alone in airing objections against HR13. Many congressmen, who have never set foot in Ethiopia, have also voted against the bill for many of the same reasons as she did. Are we, then, to conclude that these congressmen too have gone native? Granted, what is eating Al Mariam is Huddleston's depiction of the Ethiopian leadership as a tough customer. One can imagine how Al Miriam's stomach must have turned upside-down when he heard what, in her recent public address, Hilary Clinton had to say about Ethiopia. Though jarring his ears, Clinton had nothing but praise for Ethiopia's determination to end its seemingly unending dependency on food aid. To Al Mariam's chagrin, the first-secretary's positive evaluation tallies with Huddleston's sound observation of the assertiveness of the Ethiopian government. To repeat, in her view, the Ethiopian leadership only does what is in the best interest of the Ethiopian people. Regardless, that is, of the opinion of outsiders however much powerful they might be. or whatever ideology they may seek to impose on Ethiopia. In this too Huddleston is not alone.

The litany of complaints her immediate successor, Ambassador Donald Yamamoto, compiled against Ethiopia, lends credence to her description of EPRDF's fierce sense independence. Since for obvious reasons, Al Mariam will never mention Yamamoto's cables released on the Sept. 5 2011 Wikileaks, we recommend this document to the reader. It is indeed an eye-opener in the sense that it reveals how the EPRDF can be defiant when it feels that the US is placing unacceptable demands on Ethiopia. Space does not permit us here to repeat Yamamoto's long list of grievance against the Ethiopian ruling party. For brevity's sake, suffices to paraphrase the salient ones only. For instance, Yamamoto begins by lamenting that Ethiopia is the first country in 20 years to expel the IRI and NDI which on his words, effectively eliminated Washington's political participation. He then adds. *"For more than a year the GoE has delayed the registration and launch of an American Chamber of Commerce in Ethiopia and rejected Embassy advocacy for the diversification of the telecommunications sector.* Subsequently he cites the Ethiopian government's rejection of *'a US-proposal to address 'the threat of Man-Portable Air Defense System in Ethiopia'.* And how it denied the US access to *'a North Korea-supported munitions factory in Ambo' including 'FBI's request to question a detained person of interest'.*

All this goes to show that, the opposition's shallow reading notwithstanding, the Ethiopian government is not a pushover. Regardless of any inducement or threats of retaliation, the government tolerates no outside interference that compromises its authority to govern Ethiopia as it sees it fit, needless to say within the limits of the law. One only hopes that the opposition would take a good stock of what a super-power of America's stature is quietly saying about the resistance against its hegemonic project in Ethiopia. Surely, then, the opposition would abandon its futile strategy of outflanking the EPRDF by playing the nationalist card. And, since Huddleston's testimony about EPRDF's patriotic credentials has been indirectly seconded by Yamamoto, hopefully too Al Mariam will retract his warrantless name-calling. If there is anyone who, in the broader sense of the term, has 'gone native, it can only be Al Mariam. For starters, Huddleston only lived in Ethiopia for a few years. By any reckoning, this is not a sufficient time span for anyone, even the impressionably, to 'go native'. Al Mariam, on the other hand, has been living in America for over 40 years without once returning to Ethiopia at least during his last 37 years of absence from a country which he has the temerity to write about with certitude. The sheer massive contrast in longevity of residence in a foreign land, therefore, makes him the likelier candidate than Huddleston to 'go native'. Besides, it is not the ambassador, but the naturalized immigrant Al Mariam who, dying to recast himself as American as apple-pie, switched nationality after pledging allegiance to the American flag with his right hand placed on his chest. Huddleston, on the other hand, had neither any need to be identified as an Ethiopian-American. Nor has she ever felt any burning desire to add a prefix to her name like, say, *Lete* to appear Ethiopian. But Al Mariam dismisses her as a diplomat 'gone native' lest in the eyes of an imperial reader her remarks on the

integrity of the EPRDF leadership shatter what he has been scribbling from an impossible distance with smug certitude. Perhaps Al Mariam would have called her a true American patriot had Huddleston sent a cable, advising Washington to invade Ethiopia. Maybe then, after Ethiopia is erased from the global map and historical memory, he would live out his remaining years without the stigma of — *Ethio* -- attached to his preferred unhyphenated American identity marker. Relieved of this unwanted baggage, he could then go on swearing by every run-of-the-mill American political writer, as he repeatedly does, and endlessly quote from their texts (to the exclusion of African philosophers) to justify US sanction against Ethiopia. Better still, in this way he could also be pardoned for being the only black man of African origin who shamelessly opposed compensation owed to the continent for damage done to its environment by Western carbon pollution. Who then can be said to have ‘gone native?’ By any logic, it is not Huddleston, but Al Mariam. *Mea culpa!* The correct term that can best describe his sort is either *House Nigger* or *Uncle Tom*. Since Al Mariam has an uncanny mastery of both literary and colloquial American terminology, we leave it to his desecration to determine which of these unflattering ascriptions fits his pitiful political profile.