

IN DEFENCE OF EIRTREA:
QUARANTING THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP'S
POLITICAL HOAX

Eritrean Center for Strategic Studies (ECSS),

Asmara, 30 September 2010

The Brussels based International Crisis Group (ICG) has released a report on September 21, 2010 titled “*Eritrea: The Siege State*”. Many have already unleashed a fire-storm of criticism and rebuttals, challenging the report’s title, methodologies, bias, findings, and conclusions. Eritrean Center for Strategic Studies (ECSS), however, instead of issuing a reactionary response, has meticulously examined every detail of the report and hereby gives this detailed rebuttal.

As witnessed in its other reports, the ICG is known to have the inclination to frame historical events and objective facts in a way that fits its corporate crusade. And many have expressly written their disapproving opinions about the ICG and its reports.¹ The ECSS, though warranted, has found it unwise to use such subjective impressions as a foundation for refuting the positions ICG has taken in its report on Eritrea.

General Observations

ECSS in its review of the report, found several areas of concern, beginning with the title, its technical assemblage, its sources, unidentified authors, and not to mention its unfound accusations, passing remarks and unsubstantiated conclusions.

While ECSS believes there are some strong historical facts offered, we assert this report’s sub-points are seriously underdeveloped and full of improbable and hasty conclusions. The report, however, in order to give itself some resemblance of credibility bluntly claims that it “*draws upon more than ten years of work on and field research*”.

The false pretence of the report’s title was all too deceiving and misinforming. To continue in this vein the report has depended, in a nonstop way, on interviews attributed to individuals (which the report declines to reveal the number and representativeness of the interviewees), which it has used them as undisputed facts through out. Furthermore, the report has not provided any

¹ “The North Atlantic Council: Complicity of the International Crisis Group”, *New Left Review*, 63, May-June 2010.

other sound shreds of evidence except voluminous assumptions, opinions, denials and constant use of loaded terms, all devoid of true or fact-based information. Besides, it relies heavily and indiscriminatingly on secondary sources, whose authors are known to have little, if any, direct knowledge with Eritrea and its President.

Therefore, both in substance and in approach; the ICG report contains significant flaws and major dalliances from both science and reality. Unfortunately, this paper would do a disservice to its readers by distorting facts and realities about Eritrea and its political culture.

Hence, trying to go a little deeper in identifying where we agree and where we differ; the ECSS would like to re-emphasize some of the notable factual points made in the report -quoted or otherwise.

1. *Eritrea's critical geopolitical position in the region...has shaped much of its troubled history.*
2. *International considerations were proving more influential than local [Eritrean] desires and aspirations.*
3. *Eritrea's wishes were set aside in favor of Washington's interests in the region. The UN commission, under pressure from the U.S., finally recommended the compromise of federation.*
4. *Under the terms of the federal constitution, the UN Security Council should have stepped in to protect Eritrean autonomy, but it failed to do so, and Ethiopia annexed Eritrea with barely a murmur of international protest.*
5. *The initial goal of the TPLF had been to free Tigray, if it were not for the EPLF dismissed the viability of an independent Tigray and urged the TPLF to become part of pan-Ethiopian revolution.*
6. *... Eritrea has by and large avoided the kind of serious inter ethnic and religious strife associated with the region. Economic lifestyles, cultures, faiths and ethnicities have mostly coexisted peacefully.*
7. *The recent imposition of targeted UN Security Council sanctions swiftly led to angry demonstrations in the diaspora...*

8. *It [Eritrea] has had legitimate concerns about the intentions of both Ethiopia and Sudan. At times, too, it has shown faith in international arbitration and the binding character of treaties that has not always been rewarded.*
9. *Elements within the new Ethiopia did not truly accept an independent Eritrea...*
10. *Ethiopia has reneged on part of the Algiers Agreement that ended the war, in particular by not accepting what was to have been a special commissions binding decision on the border.*
11. *The UN Security Council should pressure Ethiopia to accept the border ruling.*
12. *When it lost Badme in the ruling, Ethiopia equivocated, then demanded renegotiation. Asmara refused-and, from a legal standpoint, they were [we still are] correct.*
13. *Certainly, Ethiopia bears much greater responsibility for recent disasters in Somalia than Eritrea does.*
14. *The UN is seen as a toothless organization, which usually does the bidding of its most powerful members; often does nothing at all of significance; and ignores the needs of small state.*
15. *...it is inadequate and unhelpful to portray Eritrea as the regional spoiler.*

Points of difference

1. *Development assistance and improved trade links should be tied to holding long-promised national elections and implementing the long-delayed constitution.*

This is the main recommendation of the report. What does one expect the prescription to be when the diagnosis is not right. Worse when the patient diagnosed has been misidentified? While the report calls upon the international community and the Eritreans to demonstrate “a new level of imagination and flexibility”, it however, prescribed what amounts ‘an old medicine in a new bottle’.

Holding of national elections and implementation of the constitution are not things that we should be frowned upon. For they have been part and parcel of our national struggle for

independence. As a result, the constitution making, electoral commission...etc have entirely been our initiative. No matter the conspiracy theories the report and its likes bring forward, the natural political development of this country has obviously suffered from the foreign inspired and supported Ethiopia's aggression and the stalemate that has ensued.

If Eritrea were not geared towards constitution and constitutionalism, first and foremost it would not have initiated it. Second, it would not have drafted it with the broadest popular participation possible. Because, where the constitution-making process has been sufficiently deliberative and has entailed broad public consultation, then "the Eritrean, experience will stand out in the history of meaningful constitution making."² Besides making the drafting process as inclusive as possible, the drafters of constitution were entrusted with the task of educating the public about the rule of law, democracy, and the meaning and principles of constitutionalism. In this respect Richard Rosen writes, "Eritreans surely achieved this end."

Indeed, Eritrea is the most civil society in Africa....³ A close analysis of Eritrean history and culture reveals that democratic institution is not new to Eritrea. The problem is not that democracy (in its true meaning) is alien to us or that we do not want it. The real problem is that external powers are trying to impose it upon us, in a way that are often irrelevant to our peculiar circumstances and realities. In explaining the problem of this one-fits-all attitude Robert Kaplan has the following to say. So while [America] needs general principles to give coherence to its values and operations, [America] also needs to be flexible in implementation. There are many Eritreas in the world [countries that want to determine the course of their democratization], and ...each place requires its own strategy.⁴ This is another one good reminder that Eritrean and other African nations do not need the Western powers to validate their political process.

² "Richard A. Rosen, *Constitutional Process, Constitutionalism, and the Eritrean Experience*", 24 NORTH. CA. J. INT'L L. & COMM. REG. 263 (1999);

³ "A Journey into the Future", Robert Kaplan, The 2003 Pitcairn Trust Lecture on World Affairs, Uly 31, 2003. Can be found at Foreign Policy Research Institute website:

<http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20030731.americawar.kaplankuehner.journeyintothefuture.html>

⁴ "A Journey into the Future", Robert Kaplan, The 2003 Pitcairn Trust Lecture on World Affairs, Uly 31, 2003. Can be found at Foreign Policy Research Institute website:

<http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20030731.americawar.kaplankuehner.journeyintothefuture.html>

2. *Eritrea has become, in effect, a siege state, whose government is suspicious of its own population, neighbor and the wider world.*

As far as the relationship between the people and government is concerned; as the report has put it; the EPLF was a popular organization. No doubt about it. This scheme of things hasn't changed much ever since. Because, the primary elements of the concept of national identity are continuity and differentiation, where continuity entails a set of common experiences that "only insiders can fully grasp."⁵ Hence, the society's relations with the government are unprecedented and can only be fully understood by Eritreans and Eritreans only.

Regarding our suspicions towards powers near or afar is well justified both in international relations and more specifically with our recent past and current realities. However, it would be the gravest disservice to Eritrean national identity, to misread it as a mere construct of us vis-à-vis them differentiation. At this juncture we would only like to stress: Eritrean people have established their new society with minimum rancor, even against the Ethiopians or any other foreign peoples.⁶

3. *...while suppressing social freedoms and economic development in favor of an agenda centered on an obedient national unity and the notion that Eritrea is surrounded by enemies.*

The ECSS believes that this is a misplaced observation that does not in any way approximate the reality in Eritrea. Noting Eritrean people's protracted and unrelenting struggle for independence and considering the vigorous efforts they are making for development; for Eritreans politics is a platform where their past meets their future. Politics, simply put, is the synthesis of their past experiences and their collective vision for the future. This is exactly what politics is about in this country. It is not only related to regulating daily life, it is more than that: it aims at responding positively to Eritrean people's demands and expectations. The most important being our

⁵ See *Nationalism: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Montserrat Guibernau, Polity Press, 73 (1996).

⁶ "Constitutional Process, Constitutionalism, and the Eritrean Experience"

collective desire for independence and national unity. Therefore, Eritrean politics has always been and continues to reflect the “emphasis on national unity and inclusiveness”.⁷

4. Above all, its relations with and perceptions of Ethiopia are fundamental to an understanding of much of its [Eritrea's] behavior.

If history is any guide as the report has mentioned here and there; the TPLF (the minority ruling clique in Ethiopia) is largely the creation of the EPLF. It was the EPLF that convinced the TPLF to go beyond its narrow Tigrian (provincial) agenda and become pan-Ethiopianist. The EPLF would not have done it if it were to think the traditional Ethiopia would ever be a threat to an independent Eritrea. In fact, it is Eritrea that currently remains the lone pan-Ethiopianist both from within Ethiopia and outside. Our only regret about Ethiopian regimes is that they always served as Trojan horses for external intervention that seriously compromised this region's peace and security. We simply warn that trying to understand Eritrea through the distorted prism of ‘Ethiopia’ is much like chasing a wind. We suggest, may be the other way round would help a bit.

5. Ethiopia gave its public blessing to Eritrean independence.

ICG is trying to confuse readers yet again, this time making this completely distorted historical fact. The report seems to make the impression that Eritrea would not have achieved its *de-jure* independence without Ethiopia's public blessing. As Ethiopia's Prime Minister confirmed in a recent interview with local Ethiopia TV: there would not have been Ethiopia proper if it were not to agree to this unnecessarily externally imposed precondition. He was reported to have said that “We [TPLF] gave that “blessing” for the sake of Ethiopia; in order to save it from total distraction.” We suggest that the ICG miss not such important historical mile stones whenever contemplating composing serious reports.

⁷ Alemseged Tesfai, 1995.

6. *In most Eritreans' eyes, he is no longer the stout-hearted, beloved leader of the nation-at-arms, but a mentally unstable autocrat with a bad temper and an alcohol problem.*

This claim is wholly unfounded and simply absurd. What is amusing about this accusation is that it simply exposes the ivory-tower-arrogance of the report. The authors are so arrogant that they question the intelligence of a whole lot of a nation and then adds insult to injury by trying to tarnish the image of their President who they dearly hold close to their heart.

7. *EIJ has potential to tap into the alienation of young Muslims, who are increasingly aggrieved at state interference in Muslim institutions, land alienation, the economic domination of highlanders (especially in the western lowlands), the state's refusal to recognize Arabic as an official language, the lack of Muslim representation in the upper echelons of the political and military leadership and the recruitment of Muslim women into the army. Muslims are increasingly alienated from the state, and Islamic identities are becoming more entrenched. Young Muslims are a possible source of serious opposition, awaiting only mobilization.*

This simply ignores or stubbornly denies the reality in Eritrea without a shred of evidence. Such heinous remarks have been the hidden desire of Eritrea's enemies of every denomination to create a wedge between Muslims and Christians. This is not worth responding. However, in order to make the record right, which is the main purpose of this rebuttal, we can only say that these are misinformation whose only motivation is putting Eritrea in the accusation circle, defame with no proof. For the record, Muslims could not and should not be 'alienated' in Eritrea. Because, Islamic identity is Eritrean proper, for Eritrea is the first country to accept Islam, where the first Mosque in the African continent is found. Second, the state is not the preserve of any one social or religious group. In fact, Eritrea may be the only third-world country that has a high level of American-style secular patriotism....⁸

⁸ "A Journey into the Future", Robert Kaplan, 2003.

8. *...it seems increasingly clear that the policy is driven by contempt for education (and certainly critical thinking) and an attempt to control school-leavers.*

This simply crumbles if juxtaposed with the Education Policy of the State of Eritrea and the great strides it has made towards achieving that end. Therefore, the policy which the report is referring to is neither contempt for education nor certainly for critical thinking.

If we take critical thinking, for the record, it is one of the great achievements of the liberation struggle, which has developed to the level of national culture. For instance, the civics texts employed in the Eritrean school system teach students that criticism is a civic duty.⁹ In a questionnaire survey administered to University of Asmara students, most respondents responded to this inquiry that it was “not important” to always support government policies to be a good Eritrean citizen. The survey, in sum, concluded that “good” Eritreans are perceived as those citizens who honestly question the government in furtherance of the national interest. And that, the government deems this practice of questioning, “the culture of critical thinking”.¹⁰

9. *The PFDJ-run “cadre school” in Nakfa is one of the institutions that has largely replaced conventional higher education.*

We have no idea where and how ICG got this information. The truth is, however, that this “cadre school” gives a three-month course twice a year. Specifically, for selected higher school students, in order not to interfere with their formal education, it is given during the summer vacation. We don't see how this has come to be taken as a replacement for higher education. Civic education in Eritrea has its history rooted in our struggle for independence. Admirably, it had made invaluable contributions to the political education and enculturation of the Eritrean polity. Indeed, it managed to bring peasants and some other groups into a level of participation in the broader polity that they had never known, and mobilized them in projects of recasting social

⁹ See Hoyle, *supra* note 109, at 59.

¹⁰ “The Eritrean National Identity: A Case Study”, Peggy A. Hoyle†

organization that were strikingly innovative.¹¹ As a result, Eritrean interest in politics...[has] spread throughout the country and not confined to the urban intelligentsia.¹²

The most recent literature on the treatment of politically disengaged youth focuses on civic education and efforts to make the curricula more “hands-on.” Because it has become evident that civics courses do impart information and foster development of attitudes known to encourage participation.¹³ In sum, civic education contributes to the development of participant attitudes.¹⁴ Hence, in keeping with its tradition and latest trends, the PFDJ takes civic education especially geared to wards the youth seriously.

10. The deep concern for preservation of unity reflects the leadership's worry about the ultimate trustworthiness of its citizens and the country's very viability.

Where does the ‘social capital’ that the report talked about come from? David Pool once wrote the [EPLF's] “development into one of the most formidable liberation movements in contemporary history was a function of its capacity to penetrate society rather than be driven by its social conflicts.¹⁵ Besides, a nation is “a goal rather than an actuality”.¹⁶ Then nationality is in large part “the study of the process by which elites . . . select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group.”¹⁷

This is exactly what the EPLF set out to achieve and has made tremendous strides. In fact, the nation-building project in Eritrea is at a more advanced stage than some African states have reached after decades of independence.¹⁸ Therefore, there is no room for worries in this respect.

¹¹ “Civil Society, Nation-Building and Democracy: The Importance of the Public Sphere to the Constitutional Process”, Craig Calhoun, University of North Carolina, paper for presentation for the First International Symposium on the Making of the Eritrean Constitution, January 7-12, 1995, Asmara-Eritrea.

¹² Michael and Trish Johnson, Review of African Political Economy, Eritrea: The National Question and the Logic for Protracted Struggle, March 1996 No.67 Briefings, p.186. Duncan Cameron Cumming, The Disposal of Eritrea, Middle East Journal, Vol.7 No.1 Winter 1953.

¹³ Niemi and Junn, 1998; Niemi and Campbell, 1999; cross-cultural evidence from 28 countries is summarized in Torney-Purta et al., cited in “Technology and Politics: Incentives for Youth Participation”, Shanto Iyengar and Simon Jackman, Stanford University, Paper prepared for presentation at the International Conference on Civic Education Research, New Orleans, November 16-18, 2003.

¹⁴ “Technology and Politics: Incentives for Youth Participation”, Shanto Iyengar and Simon Jackman, Stanford University, Paper prepared for presentation at the International Conference on Civic Education Research, New Orleans, November 16-18, 2003.

¹⁵ David Pool, “From Guerrillas to Government: the Eritrean People's Liberation Front”, Eastern African Studies, James Currey Oxford, 2001, p.xv.

¹⁶ ALTER, *supra* note 69, at 13.

¹⁷ Paul Brass, *Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity Among the Muslims of South Asia*, in POLITICAL IDENTITY IN SOUTH ASIA ,35, 41 (David Taylor & Malcolm Yapp eds., 1979).

¹⁸ “Nationalism, Nation-Building, Democracy”, John Markakis, paper for presentation for the First International Symposium on the Making of the Eritrean Constitution, January 7-12, 1995, Asmara-Eritrea.

Yet, while many governments try to capitalize on their past, mythical or otherwise, Eritrea's nationalism is a "future-oriented ideology"¹⁹ that looks constructively ahead that advancing the level of national consciousness we have reached. Not backward looking that nurtures hatred and division as some societies that are suffering the vagaries of ethnic conflicts.

11. Contrary to the EPLF's myths, the war of independence was not fought alone and in isolation.

The report becomes 'revisionist' in that it tried to disprove by throwing a single word "myth" to revise a well documented history of self-reliance. In a stark contradiction it then states "*The EPLF eschewed external patronage- none was really on offer- and made much of its isolation in the northern mountains, where it built its military state-in-waiting, unsullied by foreign influence.*"

It is to be recalled that, besides, adopting a radical social orientation in the Marxist mould and a structure geared to mass mobilization; in the absence of foreign support, self-reliance became a major theme of Eritrean nationalist discourse.²⁰ Indeed, their stance on external assistance, for instance, has been one of the major ideological differences between the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front) and the EPLF. Consequently, during the long stretch of the struggle the EPLF managed to become an "organization...impenetrable by external forces".²¹

12. Income anticipated from gold production will likely not be used to restore the ailing domestic economy but rather to enhance military capacity, with dangerous regional implications. The government would likely use the windfall it anticipates [from mining] mainly for armaments, which could, therefore, increase the chance of a new conflict.

This is the most egregious error of this report. At this juncture the report becomes either a wish list or a prophecy-devoid of any academic credibility. The ECSS would not get dragged into the risky business of prophecy. Nevertheless, it suffice to mention that "Eritrea uses its financial aid

¹⁹ "Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity", John Sorenson, The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 29, No. 2, Cambridge University Press, June 1991, pp. 301-317.

²⁰ "Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity", John Sorenson, 1991, pp. 301-317.

²¹ David Pool, "From Guerrillas to Government: the Eritrean People's Liberation Front", 2001, p.26.

efficiently, and the bureaucracy works well, with no corruption.”²² Eritrea has made great achievements, thus far, with its meager resources and the miracle that it can make with the expected revenue would be any ones guess.

Basic social services like health and education are available to all. Since liberation in 1991, 13 new hospitals, 19 new health centers and 112 new health stations have been constructed. This makes there have been an increase of 56 percent, 61 percent and 156 percent respectively over the number of health facilities that existed before liberation.

Eritrea is one of the four African countries said to be on course to achieve Millennium Development Goals five on Maternal Health. Generally, life expectancy in Eritrea has increased from 52 years average in 1995 to nearly 60 years average in 2008. Eritrea has reduced malaria related mortality by more than 82%, making it one of the few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to have met the Abuja "Roll Back Malaria" targets.

The indicators show that huge advances have been achieved in enrolment in elementary school education. It rose from 30% in 1993-95 to 56.2% in 2010, an increase of 87.3%. In the same period, it is commendable also to see literacy rate of 15-24 years old reaching 85.2%. The ratio of girls to boys has declined as we move up the three levels of education. For example, the ratio for primary education has gone up from 80% in 1993-95 to 96.4% in 2010, an increase of 16.4%. The number of people with sustainable access to improved sources of water has increased from 21.7% in 1993-1995 to 57.9% at the present time. This is an increase of 167.0%.

Eritrea has always accorded absolute priority to the fight against illiteracy. Starting in 1999 with 795 stations has, thus far, educated 49,223 adults. Currently, with 1,458 stations is training 75,500 adults. And it has helped increase the literacy level to 57% nation wide. The country has managed to reduce illiteracy rate from 80% in early 1990s to its current levels of 43%.

²² "A Journey into the Future", Robert Kaplan, 2003 .

13. There is a clear relationship between Eritrea's militarized foreign policy and its brand of domestic authoritarianism.

The report which miserably failed to establish Eritrea's 'militarized foreign policy' and 'domestic authoritarianism' deceitfully tries to establish relation between the two. What a mockery of scientific research.

It seems to have escaped the ICG's attention that Eritrea's position for regional peace and stability pre-dates her sovereign existence. whilst Eritrea was awaiting her inevitable victory in 1989, Ethiopia was at the verge of disintegration. The foresighted EPLF leadership salvaged Ethiopia from the eminent disintegration by persuading the TPLF to abandon its regionalist intentions of laying arms when liberated its homeland province (Tigray). This not only gives a clue as to how Eritrea intended to treat Ethiopia, but also indicated that the contrasting TPLF's nationalist attitude that would be the cause for future problems. Eritrea, from day one, has never seen that Ethiopia would be a threat, hence contributed to spare her from total collapse. Therefore, Eritrea's persistent regionalist attitude came to clash with that of the TPLF's archaic nationalist attitude that remains strong and reigns the regime's domestic and foreign policies. Consequently, this has been at the roots of the confusion and instability that rocks Ethiopia, and the recent 'border war' with Eritrea.

The referendum that Eritrea conducted in 1993 was also another important indicator of Eritrea's distastes to the use of force. This signaled that force would not be employed as a strategy in the pursuance of her regional and international foreign policy objectives. Not only that, it was also a practical gesture that Eritrea, as an incoming new member to the international family of states, renewed her pledge that she would respect international laws and agreements. Though the genesis could be traced as far back as the political struggle of the 1950s and beyond, even after the commencement of the armed struggle, Eritrea has always been for political settlement of her²³ conflict with Ethiopia. The EPLF proposal for referendum in November 1980 was one but the formalization of Eritrea's unswerving stand for peaceful resolution of the conflict. Alas, this call was unwarranted by the exigencies of Cold war strategic concern and power calculus.

²³ Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Good Neighbor Policy, in an address at Chautauqua, New York, August 14, 1936. Quoted in Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy 1931-1941, pp. 323-329.

Nevertheless, the EPLF did not forego referendum for its hard won achievement through arms. Rather it conducted an internationally monitored referendum it so proposed a decade earlier. In addition, to the policy continuity it signaled it had another but least appreciated message: it acknowledge the categorical imperative of international law and the nullity of resort to force.

Contradictions

14. The report approvingly writes, “*At African Union (AU) behest, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions in 2009 for its support of the Somali Islamic insurgency.*”

It however, refutes this at much latter stage by boldly declaring; “*there is a powerful sense in Asmara that it has been made a scapegoat for others’ failings in that country*”. The report then gave unprecedented testimony by stating “*Certainly Ethiopia bears much greater responsibility for recent disasters in Somalia than Eritrea does*”.

15. *The enduring impact of colonial rule was the fostering of some sense, often ill-defined, of a distinctive Eritrean identity.*

The report then contradicts itself by writing “*Urbanization and military service contributed to the development of an Eritrean national identity.*”

As elsewhere in Africa, Eritrea is a nation whose existence was set in motion by accident but has been “consolidated by design.”²⁴ Colonialism might have provided both the context and the basis of anti-colonial nationalism. It is this context and basis that Eritrea shares with all anti-colonial nationalisms in Africa.²⁵ Due to these distinctive and well-documented characteristics, Eritreans constituted a nation well before the struggle began. However, the genuine sense of Eritrean national identity and nationalism is deemed, more than anything based on the 30 years war of liberation²⁶ and developed largely as a result of foreign intervention.²⁷ Indeed, it is one of the

²⁴ See generally BEHIND THE WAR IN ERITREA (Basil Davidson et al. eds., 1980). Regarding the evolution of nations, Andrew Smith has maintained that “[t]he West acquired nations almost by accident; in other parts of the globe, nations were created by design.” SMITH, *supra* note 85, at 100.

²⁵ ERITREA, A PAWN IN WORLD POLITICS. By Okbazghi Yohannes. Gaines- ville: University of Florida Press, 1991, p.3.

²⁶ “Nation-Building and the Constitution”, Zemhret Yohannes, A paper presented at the First International Symposium on the Making of the Eritrean Constitution, January 7-12, 1995, Asmara-Eritrea. “Nationalism, Nation-Building, Democracy”, John Markakis, paper for presentation for the First International Symposium on the Making of the Eritrean Constitution, January 7-12, 1995, Asmara-Eritrea.

²⁷ PAPPSTEIN, *supra* note 108, at 39, 41.

remarkable features of Eritrean nationalism that there is as much explicit recognition of the fact that national identity is the result of recent struggle not primordial unity.²⁸

16. *Considering such diversity, and the presence of so many potential fault lines, a history of conflict is unsurprising.*

In a devious twist the report then goes into saying “*Contrary to what might be expected, Eritrea has thus remained at relative peace with itself to a remarkable extent. Some have attributed this to historically-rooted “social capital”- intra-and inter community cooperation-which has usually kept conflicts local and resolvable by networks of understanding and diplomacy.*”

This is not only the objective reality but it also has come a long history. The EPLF’s ‘unity in diversity’ entailed according equal recognition and dignity to all nationalities, which John Sorenson suggested it should appropriately be seen as “territorial nationalism”²⁹ while at the same time allowing “space” for a national culture to evolve. As the result, the struggle brought out the best in the Eritrean people and created a new culture, which is “a mosaic of traditional beliefs, battlefield pragmatism, and political ideology from East and West”.³⁰ Present day Eritrea can now boast of a new culture, which is “based on heightened awareness of collective responsibility, national values, hope, and investing in one’s own people.”³¹ Some of the notable component values of Eritrea’s national culture include ethical behavior, a belief in critical public speech, perseverance, or steadfastness, an emphasis on the community over the individual, and a commitment to self-reliance.³² This attributes of Eritrea’s national identity, which collectively is known as ‘Eritreanism’³³, puts personal sacrifice at its core. That is why, Eritrea has no personality cult and no ethnic tensions among its nine ethnic groups...,³⁴ unlike what the report would like us to believe.

²⁸ “Nationalism and Ethnicity,” Annual Review of Sociology, vol. 19, 1993, pp. 211-39. See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, Rev. Ed. 1991.

²⁹ “Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity”, John Sorenson, 1991, pp. 301-317.

³⁰ “Birth of a Nation in Cyberspace”, John C. Rude, *The Humanist*, Vol. 56, March 1996.

³¹ “The Eritrean National Identity: A Case Study”, Peggy A. Hoyle: <http://www.arkokabay.com/e/The-Eritrean-National-Identity.pdf>

³² “The Eritrean National Identity: A Case Study”, Peggy A. Hoyle.

³³ Eritreanism now has developed as a set of values such as Self-Reliance, Determination, Perseverance, Humbleness, Altruism, African Pride, Patriotism and selflessness. See also “Redefining Eritrean-isms in the Diaspora”, Amanuel Biedemariam: <http://alenalki.com/images/stories/Januari%202010/Redefining%20Eritrea1.pdf>

³⁴ “A Journey into the Future”, Robert Kaplan, *The* 2003.

17. To date, Eritrea has fought, directly or indirectly, with Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti and Sudan and involved itself in various war in the conflicts in eastern Sudan, Darfur and Somalia.

The report casually brought up the warn out factoid about Eritrea going to war with all her neighbors. The report then admits that Eritrea has been “squeezed...in a generally hostile neighborhood...” and advises that the government has “much to do to make the country secure”

Notwithstanding, Eritrea’s contested quest for statehood, and the region’s violent past and unstable present, what do one expect to happen when a new kid shows up in the bloc? For the old ones it was about positioning themselves vis-à-vis the new country and for the minority regime in Ethiopia and its cohorts it was about rewinding the clock. As for Eritrea it was all about ascertaining its sovereign existence and reaffirming its boundaries and identity.

18. Eritrea was defeated ... The war...was far more devastating for Eritrea than for Ethiopia. Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) reputation began to erode in May-June 2000, when the EDF was forced to abandon a third of the country in the face of the Ethiopia offensive.

The gross calumny in the continuing anti-Eritrean bias in the report is the myth that Eritrea lost the war. What criteria was employed to reach such conclusion? There is much deeper issues that the ICG needs to dig out regarding the conduct of the Eritrea-Ethiopia war. What happened on those fateful three Ethiopian offensives are now history.

Yet, if penetration of Eritrean territory was the sole criteria for the “military defeat” we assure you this is very troubled and simplistic analysis. Because, the minority government in Ethiopia employed ‘forced human wave attacks’ against Eritrea's entrenched defenses. This essentially turned the battles into killing fields that verged on crimes against humanity.

Here in Eritrea the human soul is a sacred thing. Ask any Eritrean- *Yikealo* or *Warsai*- how many enemy soldiers they have killed; They won’t tell you. If they have to they would tell with a deep sense of regret. Therefore, though the number of martyrs we have lost in the war is seriously

flawed we do not want to go into that mechanistic accounting of the life lost in the war. Nor do we boast about the number of 'innocent' Ethiopian lives horded into and perished in the war.

Successive Ethiopia regimes have employed forced 'human wave tactics' of World War I against Eritrean forces. This was so for they expressly never cared about the human cost of the battles they waged. Hundreds of thousands were slaughtered in trench warfare by the Eritreans. It is a public secret that all the wars were terribly costly to the Ethiopians. However, in Eritrea the preservation of our human strength has always been and would continue to be our tactics. In the face of the obvious (human wave tactic), the EPLF for instance executed a strategic retreat into the impassable mountainous desert region in the northwest part of the country to continue their resistance from there. Ethiopia has even once used around 200,000 peasant militiamen to make a sort of human-wave assault on Eritrea.³⁵ However, it would be a mistake to think that Eritrea has suffered mire than a battlefield setback. Such a withdrawal is typical of the strategy the Eritreans used in their protracted independence war frequently shifting their forces to gain the advantage in future fighting rather than risk losses to hold particular positions.³⁶

The war was about regime change if possible if not to cut Assab from the rest of Eritrea. If politics is the continuation of politics by other means, surely Ethiopia could not achieve its political agenda. If it ever was about the Badme, then Ethiopia lost in the legal battle ground as well.

19. The military and the separate national security service are also ultimately under Isaias's direct control.

President Isaias as any of his counterparts, including US president, is the commander-in-chief of Eritrea's Defense Forces. So what is the fuss about the military and the national security services being "ultimately" under his direct control?

³⁵ ERITREA: A Raging War on the Horn of Africa, Time, Monday, Jul. 25, 1977
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,919103,00.html>

US Behind Invasion of Eritrea by Thomas C. Mountain US Eritrean Peoples Friendship Association Special to Antiwar.com 6/15/00.
<http://www.antiwar.com/orig/mountain1.html>

³⁶ Behind the Eritrea/Ethiopia War By Dan Connell, Dan Connell is the author of Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution (Red Sea Press, rev. ed 1997). Asmara, Eritrea 12 March 1999 .<http://www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/danconnel.html>

20. Eritrea can aptly be described as a prison state...

As the ICG well know; the promotion of 'democracy' remains the greatest conceptual challenge. The relationship between democracy and participation can be summoned, if you like, as "Where few take part...there is little democracy; the more participation there is...the more democracy there is".³⁷ Therefore, there is strong arguments for a much more 'participatory' democracy, as an alternative for liberal 'thin democracy' or 'politics as zoo-keeping', where 'pervasive privatism' dominates.³⁸ Instead, a 'strong democracy' is needed, which "requires unmediated self-government by an engaged citizenry"³⁹, and which is characterized by the fact that it is "the politics of amateurs, where every man is compelled to encounter every other man without the intermediary of expertise"⁴⁰. In this view, engagement in politics is not to be considered a specific type of activity – it as integral part of social life and essential for every individual.⁴¹ This is what is exactly happening in Eritrea. Full popular participation in all facets of daily life is the goal not electoral participation that comes once in a while, as the ICG's report seems to endorse.

21. At one point more than 10 per cent of the population was mobilized. Eritrea is a highly militarized society shaped by war, run by warriors and in which citizenship has come to be equated with indefinite national service- associated not with rights but with obligations.

The post-colonial state, especially in Africa, the capacity to mobilize human resources at the grass roots level manifestly lacks. This is not the case in Eritrea, however. The quality of organization and the high level of consciousness among its members were among the EPLF's most distinguishing features.⁴² In Eritrean society social psyche rights are not bestowed but earned. Eritrean women participation in the struggle, for example, not only did earn them the respect of their brothers-in-arms but also their right to equality. Hence, in order to replicate this

³⁷ Verba, Sidney and Norman Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972, p. 1.

³⁸ "Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age", Benjamin R. Barber, 1984: 253

³⁹ Barber 1984: 261

⁴⁰ Barber 1984: 252

⁴¹ Even from these very brief quotations, the Rousseauian background of Barbers work is evident. See Behr (1999) for an extensive discussion of the relationships between different conceptualizations of democracy and conceptualizations of political participation.

⁴² "Inside the EPLF: The Origins of the 'People's Party' & Its Role in the Liberation of Eritrea", Dan Connell, *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 28, No. 89, State of the Union: Africa in 2001, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., (Sep., 2001), pp. 345-364.

time-tested strategy the Eritrean government launched both the National Service and Student Summer Work Program simultaneously in 1994.

Eritrea's National Service was initiated as a determination to strengthen the shaky foundation of an economy devastated by decades of war and neglect. Despite the interpretations that promote the concept of nation-in-arms, it is categorically viewed within Eritrea as a "moral equivalent of war."⁴³ National Service is not exceptionally Eritrean as it has been widely used tool in many other nations. Millions of young people serve social needs in China as a routine part of growing up; many [are] commanded to leave the crowded cities and to assist in the countryside. Castro fought illiteracy and mosquitoes in Cuba with units of youth. Interesting combinations of education, work, and service to society are a part of the experience of youth in Israel, Jamaica, Nigeria, Tanzania, Indonesia, Canada, and other nations.⁴⁴ Therefore, even with defense so major a preoccupation, the mission of our armed forces remains as oriented toward constructive ends such as education and the unifying of Eritrean youth through common training and experiences as it does towards warfare.

22. The government appears not to appreciate the full implications of this emigrations, or if it does, appears not to know what to do about it.

Fist and foremost, this is not a problem peculiar to Eritrea, which the reports seems to present it. Brain-drain has been and is the major problem of not only developing countries but of the developed world.⁴⁵ Especially, when it comes to Africa, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has estimated that Africa has lost a third of its human capital and continues to lose skilled personnel at an alarming rate. Recent statistics gathered by IOM and the Economic Commission for Africa show that between 1985 and 1989, 12,000 skilled Africans each year left for what they thought were greener pastures, and since 1990, the rate has skyrocketed to 20,000 annually.

⁴³ *The Moral Equivalent of War?: A Study of Non-Military Service in Nine Nations (Contributions to the Study of Childhood and Youth)* [Hardcover] Donald Eberly (Editor), Michael Sherraden (Editor)

⁴⁴ "National Service: the Enduring Panacea, Doug Bandow, *Cato Policy Analysis*, No. 130, March 22, 1990.

⁴⁵ In fact, the term *brain drain* was coined by the Royal Society to describe the outflow of highly-qualified scientists from Western Europe mostly to the United States. In 2006, over 250,000 Europeans emigrated to the United States.

This is the fight that globalization has made it all too difficult for developing countries. Because, the United States and Europe have devised this 'Green Card' and 'Blue Card' policies seeking to draw million of workers in order to mitigate the effects of an aging population, especially, in Europe. After all, it has mainly to do with economics not politics.

23. ...effectively closed the University of Asmara and replaced it with colleges outside the capital that are run in the fusion of military camps.

The report at some point however testifies that *"The government made a great deal of its human capital in the absence of financial capital, and aimed at a long-haul, gradual rebuilding program."*

Until 2003, the only Institution of Higher Education (IHE) in the country was the University of Asmara which was established in 1958 by Italian Missionaries. In 2007 the University graduated its 37th batch of students since its establishment and its 15th since independence bringing the total number of graduates to 11,665 after independence only.

However, in terms of student population, at its peak, the University of Asmara could accommodate about 6,000 students. The University which had 2,617 students in 1991/1992 reached its maximum level of 5,934 students in 2002/2003.

Primarily the principle of broadening participation in higher education and ensuring equity of access has been the main preoccupation of the Government of Eritrea. University of Asmara alone could not only absorb enough students who completed secondary education but was also not able to fulfill the demand of producing the required qualified human resource for the whole country. Thus, there was a felt need of expanding tertiary education throughout the country. The Government of the State of Eritrea, therefore, cognizant of the extraordinary potential higher education has in promoting socioeconomic growth, initiated a strategy of expanding tertiary education in the country to broaden access to reach a wider distribution. To this end seven higher

The Seven Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) and their geographical distribution is as follows:

1. **Eritrea Insitute of Technology**, Main Nefhi
2. **Hamelmallo Agricultural College**, Hamelmallo
3. **College of Health Sciences**, Asmara
4. **Orotta School of Medicine**, Asmara
5. **College of Marine Sciences & Technology**, Massawa
6. **College of Business and economics**, Halhale
7. **College of arts and Social Sciences**, Adi Keih

education institutions has been established since 2003 and 2004, which helped double the number of students to 12,000 in the last four years alone. What remains is the enhancement of the relevance and quality of higher education.

Conclusion

We henceforth wish to indicate that the report contains major inaccuracies and deletions. The occurrence of many of these errors is inexplicable as they involve information that should be available in public and verified against official sources. The report also contains pervasive evidence of poor investigative method and apparent disingenuous, biased or unfounded information provided to the authors by individuals, whose testimonies the ICG did not care to verify against other sources. As a result, the report has reached erroneous conclusions and, critically, have failed to give sound recommendations.

We must first keep in mind that the ongoing attempt to demonize President Isaias Afwerki is not just about Eritrea, but it is also a campaign against the independent thinking that it represents. Simply put, the fear is that if this Eritrean way of doing things is allowed to succeed, then other African peoples will follow suit. They are waging the same type of demonizing campaign on other presidents that do not bow-down to western dictates. Presumably, anyone who opposes — and has a coherent critique — Western, specifically, of U.S. neocolonialism and imperialism is some kind of a buffoon or imbecile. Hence, slander, invective, and a generalized muddying of the waters, are the tools of such corporatist reports. The ICG seems to be employing the strategy, that if you can't beat 'em, then you might as well throw a whole bunch of mud in their eye.

At the core of the ICG report seems to be demonizing the person of the President. The report's authors apparently must be hopelessly misinformed and/or wildly out of touch with the realities in Eritrea.

The truth of the matter, is, undeniably, the progress that Eritrea has made on all fronts would, of course, be impossible; if President Isaias were to be shepherded by just another one of the stewards of Western dominating mandates. And Eritrea would, irrefutably, be nothing more than a vassal, wholly-owned subsidiary of some other foreign power. Therefore, Eritrea is set to be

further demonized and beaten into submission, ultimately to be dominated by foreign interests, with the willing support of the brainwashed international community.

In Eritrea, the broadside blast against our President is clearly viewed as ruining our national image. The authors of the report are just airheaded academics who are trying to demonize a real person. The extreme criticisms they level at President Isaias are laced with ignorance of the objective reality in Eritrea and of the President's person. Suffice to mention, that President Isaias Afwerki is the humbled son of Eritrea who devoted much of his lifetime in the fight against colonialism and oppression, he is a devoted and visionary leader that has been working with a jokingly nominal salary after independence, he is the leader that often and on a regular basis confer with his people residing at the remotest of areas, he is well-versed about history and contemporary realities of his country and the region to the level of prophecy. He is an astute, savvy and gifted leader, larger than life when it comes to his continuing contribution to this country.

Rather than offering a fair analysis of the toxic geo-political environment in which we find ourselves, the report is both lecturing and professorial-at times even turns to be prophetic. If the Group continues to publish such reports it may be taken as a mere 'deception series', a matter that causes credibility loss, seriousness, and professionalism. It's simple. It all fits an overarching agenda to which the greater international public remains oblivious. As for Eritreans, is just another bad music to their ears. They won't be easily deceived; for they well differentiate their saviors from those who milk their misfortunes. And President Isaias Afwerki, however uncomfortable this may be to some, would remain the legitimate and decisive force in contemporary Eritrea for some time to come.

All in all, the report makes a horrible reading to an informed observer -because of its irrationality. One can not read the report without being filled with boredom and itchy rage that a competent supervisor of undergraduate essays would have stopped the whole thing.

In terms of the report's meats and bones, it is hit-and-run smear campaign that boils down to as the saying goes "why have a dog and bark yourself". This political hoax about Eritrea makes the ICG look to be doing the barking for some other outside entity.