

***WHO SHOULD OUR FIGHT CONCENTRATE ON: DICTAOR ISIAS
OR HIS NOTORIOUS OPERATIVES?***

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“A dictatorship requires three things: a man, an idea, and a following ready to live for the man and the idea, and if necessary to die for them. If the man is lacking it is hopeless; if the idea is lacking, it is impossible; if the following is missing, the dictatorship is only a bad joke” (Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister of Propaganda: 29 October 1897 – 1 May 1945)

The article from which the above quotation was taken was written on September 1, 1932 by Joseph Goebbels, one of Hitler’s intimate associates and engineers of the Holocaust. However, the bitter German reality he had candidly displayed to justify dictatorship in 1932 is exactly what we see on the ground in Eritrea today. As a matter of fact, before discussing the issue of whom our fight should concentrate on, as background, we need to show in detail why we call Isias a dictator. This approach seems to be appropriate because Isias being a dictator is an obvious truth some Eritreans with PFDJ re-assembled minds try to fight in their attempt to add lipstick to a pig, failing to understand that no matter how much lipstick they could put on him, a pig still remains a pig.

It is rare for dictators to call themselves dictators. They usually call themselves presidents, prime ministers, kings or chancellors but we know them by the way they wield their powers. Here the question remains: *How do we judge them?* We only judge them for what they do or attempt to do; not by what they say or others say about them. For instance, the claim behind the deceitful thinking that Isias is the

founder of Eritrea does not justify that the entire country should be his property and its people his slaves, or it does not give him a free hand to do as he likes without any accountability. Particularly, saying that Isias is the best leader Eritrea will ever have is, besides being ignorant, it is offensive. Accordingly, it is important to tell the blind herd that Eritrea was before him, as people, geography, and political expression (though not as a state), will exist simultaneously with their “Wedi Afom”, and will live after him. At the same time, they have to know that, whatever garbage they try to spew now by way of praising their “petty god”, as other African dictators before him, Isias will leave behind trails of wanton destruction, horrendous carnage, devastated economies, and human debris in his wake. If this is the reality on the ground: *Could the label “DICTATOR” be enough to describe a man who has the blood of hundreds of thousands on his hands and on his way to leave a legacy described in the previous sentence?*

One of the characteristics dictators have in common is that they hold absolute power and their people mean very little (if at all any) to them. As other dictators, for Isias, nationalism was essential to obtain power and to maintain it. As he is the only one to make decisions and no people are involved, decision-making is fast and efficient (while undoubtedly hostile and anti-people in nature), though he uses fear to control the people whose freedoms are sacrificed. As these descriptions define Dictator Isias and show some of his characters (not all), we need to have a better sense as to how power, governance, laws, freedom, justice and rights look like in his brutal rule. This leads us to the question: *How do we sum up his rule?*

His rule could be summed up as follows:

- As his rule does not constitute a government by the people, Isias is the only person ruling the country, as “petty god”.

- Isias chooses what he thinks is “good” for the people, instead of the people choosing what is good for them.
- All state powers lie in Isis’s hand, with no power sharing or real division of labour whatsoever.
- Isias’s governance dominates the people instead of allowing them to be free.
- Isias creates laws with no say from the people, though it is universally believed that the people are supposed to create, change, and enact laws.
- Instead of been respected, personal freedoms and liberties are terribly sacrificed.
- As there is no constitution and proper laws, people have no justice, as if Isias did not get his copy of the Geneva Conventions in the mail yet.
- Regarding rights, people have no voice or freedom of speech, and Isias controls their whole life, instead of leaving them to live as they wish, in addition to using violence to cripple any opposition or attempt to defy “the word of the Gospel”.

Based on the above general descriptions of the rule of Dictator Isias, it is appropriate to draw a complete picture through some concrete examples. To that end, we need to see the question: *How does Isias manage to control the people?* Experts tell us that fear, deprivation,

information control and personality disorder of a dictator would combine together to enable him to keep his people under a tight grip. Departing from this expert view, one would specifically ask: *To what extent are these characteristics of a dictator applicable to Isias?*

Nobody can deny that Isias had manufactured an external threat called “Wayane”, and placed himself as the only salvation, in just the same way the Jews were to Hitler, the entire West to the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Il, Iran to Saddam Hussain, and Zionists to Idi Amin. This helped him skillfully keep the society off-balance and become collectively paranoid. Add to this, he exploited the instinct which is not exclusive to our culture: feeling safe under the protection of a strong leader or the respect for leaders our people had inherited thousands of years ago due to fierce feudal wars Man had to encounter. In few words, this is respect to authority, including to local school teachers or elders; a respect that passed along from generation to another. Even Darwin talks about this instinct in his theory of evolution, suggesting that “...the people who bonded with the leader survived.” To concretize things more, one would raise the question: *Is not it embarrassing to families and individuals in our cultures when someone does not show respect to elders or authority by not using the plural pronoun, though the person addressed is single?* I think this exists, at least to my knowledge, in Tigre, Tigregna, and Amharic (Semitic languages, including Arabic). This does not mean that it does not exist in other Eritrean languages.

Regarding deprivation as a factor to control the people, there is no need to explain the obvious by writing too much about it. The central idea is that our people sleep on an empty stomach and terribly sick, and awakes in fear. Here it needs to be clear that our people are not poor because Eritrea lacks resources. Here poverty is the result of bad

governance or the policies of the government aimed at making the people stay poor because the Dictator knows well that people who pray for daily bread do not think about power. Just imagine the artificial shortage of food, the electric cuts daily experienced in the capital city (others cities and towns are too hopeless to talk about), the frequency and the acuteness of the shortage of water that has never been seen in Asmara, the uncontrolled price rocketing of food stuff, the banning of food coming from the neighbouring countries (even a kilo of flour is confiscated at the borders with the Sudan or if it is made into dough poured on the ground, as reported), the interference of the government on how much a citizen should withdraw from his own bank account, the corruption that has spread and practiced in broad day light (just remember the 36 kilograms of gold recently caught in the process of smuggling out at the airport in Asmara), and the drama concerning the salary raise for the Eritrean Defence Forces recently introduced. Yet these are few among the many that could be mentioned, all could perfectly be depicted by the Arabic proverb: “Jawe Kalbak Yatbaak” (Literarily meaning: Keep you dog hungry and it will obey you). *Are there such barbaric examples in human history?* I am asking historians to enlighten us on this.

Isias is also able to rule through the control of the flow of information and control of dissent through a heavy security penetration into the life of the people to the extent that even four people talking could be spotted as hatching a conspiracy against the country, which is HIM. The state-controlled media, the ban of private press, cell phones, and the absence of social media are his practical tools anybody could easily see. Further, he has used very brutal punishment against personal disloyalty and dissent. It is because of the control of the flow of information and the control of dissent that our people are living

double lives: the official life in public and the true life residing in their mind and soul, but only in confinement. It is this failure to reconcile the internal and the external lives that have made our people behave irrationally in government and outside it.

Coolidge and colleague Daniel Singer, the Colorado psychologists who studied the personality of Kim of North Korea, using a personality test they had developed for dictators and used to analyze the personalities of Hitler and Saddam Hussain, listed what they called a “big six”. Their list described a dictator as: sadistic, paranoid, antisocial, narcissistic, schizoid and schizotypal." To them, in addition to the six adjectives, all three dictators (Hitler, Kim and Saddam Husain) “...showed the evidence of psychotic thought processes.” *Could we take this analysis of the psychologists as a coincidence or as the commonality of characters and way of thinking with Isias?*

Nobody would claim that Isias personally descends on the ground to do all jobs to subjugate his people. He rather depends on others or his operatives to fist fight, arrest, torture, do surveillance, collect information, mislead, censor, intimidate, propagate or do all other anti-social, anti-people and evil deeds. When we talk about his operatives, it is not only the officials in the ministries, the security apparatus, police, courts, prisons, armed forces, and other coercive organizations that we need to have in mind. Exactly like the Nazi Party in Germany, the Communist Party in Russia and the National Fascist Party in Italy, PFDJ party organizations, the youth organizations under them, in and outside the country, and Kebele organizations, serve as closely aligned central agents for the Dictator’s maintenance of authority and are integrated into the security apparatus by their functions that have nothing to do with the domain of a standard party.

Furthermore, programs like the Sawa training and its staff are also a part of the coercive machinery of the dictator. Similarly, retired or frozen former high ranking government and party officials are undercover operatives whom the Dictator assigns to carry certain anti-people missions or to “put out fire”. In few words, he has turned every single living thing in the country, including grass and leaves (“Sarna Qetalu”), into his service. It was in recognition of this danger that the title of this article was formulated in a way to reflect the tremendous damage the country is going through.

As these operatives are the ones who carry the orders of the dictator and do all jobs on the ground, they are more important to be targeted rather than Dictator Isias. When they know that they are facing resistance from the people in carrying out the orders of the dictator, that have nothing to do the country but based on the personal ego of the Dictator, they will think twice before carrying on his orders. They will finally think (of course, not loudly): *What will happen to me or to my family physically when I take all risks to kill, arrest, torture, and do anything unacceptable in the name of the Dictator who is well-protected and enjoying his life at this moment?* A good method to target these operatives is to reveal their identities and expose what they are doing, hoping this to advance to other more active methods of resistance. This campaign has been going on through leaflets or telephone calls, or by word of mouth, as Arbi Harent is doing, or through radio broadcasts in case of Assena, Erena, Medrek, Wagahta radios and others, or different Eritrean Paltalk rooms. It could also be done on-line as we see it on the social media and opposition websites. Nevertheless, these scattered efforts should be brought together and based on strategies to include all opposition websites and other forums so that the downfall of the dictator will speed up tremendously. As not

all operatives and their families have bodyguards, they would take things very seriously or it will bite.

But to stop the operatives of the Dictator from keeping the status quo by winning, neutralizing, or disabling them, are we really working together? We see clearly in places where we live that working together among Eritrean progressive forces has tumbled to near record lows. I am not talking about the political organizations only. *How about our websites, Paltalk rooms, human rights activists, youth organizations...? How can we have common strategies when we do not talk to one another and synchronize our work?* We are just running like billiards balls. “Parallel lines never meet”, is an important geometric principle we had learned in our high school. *But for how long will this situation continue while the country is withering away?* This has been said a million times by hundreds of Eritreans. In contrast, every year comes and goes, but things have shockingly remained the same: talk but no action. *Would the year 2017 be different? Are we helping ourselves enough to expect others to help us?* It is we who will make things happen. Support will definitely come from those whose national interests coincide with ours, but only when they see us doing enough for ourselves.

As Dictator Isias has ruled by fear and his hands are full of blood of his people, he is struggling to make sure that he dies in his comfortable bed; not at the end of a rope. Though there are giant African leaders who should be emulated when it comes to relinquishing power, such emulation has no meaning to Dictator Isias. But we wonder most about the elites who work as his operatives, ready to live and die for him, as Joseph Goebbels put it in the quotation. Though some of them are educated, yet they are blind to follow a man who is daily irreparably destroying the country, its people, especially the youth, resources, culture, history and name. *Can't they see that he is*

a man prone to self-destruction and taking them with him, putting them in a position to pay dearly one day?

I think most of his important operatives have seen enough to help them conclude that as a dictator, Isias, doubts people and always thinks that some of his intimates, including those who are nearest to him or even his own family, will betray him one day. They are contemporaries to know that Saddam Hussain killed his grooms barbarically as he was distrustful of them someday. From these, it is clear they are not safe: they will be attacked both by the people and the dictator himself sooner than later. I do not know if they are reading events correctly. To articulate the critical situation in which they have put themselves, one would ask them a bunch of questions perhaps they could wise-up. These questions include:

- *Why do they think Eritrean youth attempt to cross the Red Sea or the Mediterranean in anything that floats?*
- *Why are the youth taking fatal risks at borders with the Sudan and Ethiopia, Sahara Desert, and Libyan Desert?*
- *Why are there serious, if not mass, defections in the army that has seemingly been rankled with divisions and chaos?*
- *Is the unprincipled and controversial rapprochement and working harmony of the regime with Ginbot 7 a turning point or simply a continuation?*
- *Can't they see the danger that the military operations of Ginbot 7 using Eritrean territories as the springboard could invite an Ethiopian military intervention which could mean war?*
- *Couldn't they see that a foreign military presence in Eritrean territories is a time bomb?*

In addition to all those situations, it is an open secret that none of the senior operatives has the Dictator's ear or is co-steering the whole ship or is in a position to talk some sense into him because none of them could wholeheartedly be trusted by the Dictator. If this is the way the Dictator looks at them and treats them: ***Aren't they intelligent enough to realize that they will pay dearly one day if they do not take serious consideration of the damage they are causing to the country?*** In other words, it is time for the operatives of the Dictator to side with the people and play a positive role in the movement to rid the country from this monster, leaving positive imprints in the history of the country, and saving themselves from what would happen to them and to their families. If their realization of the critical situation runs high and soberly see the creeping danger, they will be able to turn the dictatorship into "...only a bad joke", as the Nazi operative, Joseph Goebbels, had expressed his fears in the quotation cited above.

On the one hand, I would say that we need visionary people to navigate us through these difficult waters by bringing all scattered contingents together, and winning, neutralizing, or disabling some key operatives of the regime. On the other hand, I express hope that we still see reason that the different opposition contingents (I do not mean only political organizations) would soon realize that working together needs an open heart and mind, though the relations between them might have reached their rock bottom. At the same time, I hope our youth would stop the surrender attitude, fight for their rights and for regime change, instead of leaving the country. Finally, let me conclude this piece by asking: ***Where do we see Eritrea a year from now, if we correct our path and work together as aspired?***

HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON! =====