

ETHIOPIA'S CONFIDENCE MAN AT WORK STRENGTHENING HIS TREACHEROUS PATH: WOULD IT BE ACCEPTABLE TO SEE OUR COUNTRY SLIP?

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We need to remain informed about what is happening in our country. This is tremendously significant because we are living at a profoundly dangerous and seriously worrisome time. What worries our people at present are too many to list, but to treat the situation with the gravity it deserves, we need to raise the question: ***What are the biggest concerns of our people at this particular time?***

Though the country is in a crucial situation, where everything and everybody have been ruined and devoured, and the painful reality is enough to cause scary alarm and fear, thanks to one rotten human being (Atse Isias), the developments that have recently become the most overwhelming and the most frightful of all include the following:

- The motive behind leaving the delimitation of the Ethio-Eritrean borders indefinitely pending, while keeping the borders on both sides indefinitely open.
- The alarming level of the flow of refugees to the neighbouring country, Ethiopia, and their possible displacement that some Eritreans suspect might have already started.
- What is going on under the scene concerning our ports and their daunting future fate, with the Gulf greed working hand and glove with Ethiopia's imperial expansionist aspirations, compounding our objective fears.

- The unregulated flow of goods between the two countries, coupled with the flow of the favoured Ethiopian investors to Eritrea, raising the question: *Who is benefiting most from all that?*
- What the Eritrean Defence Forces are going through in the name of restructuring.
- The developments unfolding daily in the suspicious personal relations and the unholy alliance between Eritrea's Atse and Ethiopia's Prime Minister.
- The purpose of the Atse's frequent visits to Ethiopia, that one would take as hinting that he is inserting himself in Ethiopian politics: alliances and counter-alliances.
- The unmeasured statements of the leaders of the two countries that have raised the eye brows of the Eritrean citizens (these statements are well-known to everybody), leading to wild speculations about the future relations of the two countries. In this connection, one would ask the readers: *What goes to your mind when you hear them say all of the scary things? What signal do those statements coming from both leaders send to the people (s)?*

Though the supporters of the regime could see these concerns as “much ado about nothing” or perceptions (not truth), for any person who is not socially blind or who could look at them without political lenses, he/she could easily see that the new developments have complicated the already complicated situation, bringing back floods of bad memories about the Ethiopian occupation to the people, who see those new developments as acts adding salt to their unhealed wounds.

Simply put, we are in front of developments that we cannot read short of being concessions at the expense of Eritrea's national interest and encroachment on the country's national sovereignty, all in the final analysis amounting to national treason. The fact that the Eritrean people have no role whatsoever in the peace agreements, as they have been taken away from the equation, and that everything is taking place in full secrecy, reinforce the fears and suspicion of the people. Here the looming questions are: *Do all Eritreans see the developments listed above in the same way? To which side does the majority tend?* These questions are incomplete unless accompanied by the question: *Who should help us get closer to the answers?*

Nobody would disagree with me if I answer the last question above, saying, "the Eritrean media outlets standing for freedom, justice and democracy or "the opposition media", as we usually call them. Nevertheless, it seems the Eritrean opposition media (again, I mean all standing for freedom, justice and democracy) are either not interested in conducting polls that could help one determine how Eritreans feel about these developments, or they think the developments are too insignificant and that the media outlets have more important issues to worry about, though it is difficult to imagine what those issues could be outside the urgent concerns of their people. As individuals cannot do that, it is the media that should help us quantify things and know the alignment of forces on these issues so that we could shape our struggle and direct it according to the information about the enemy camp. To drive the point home, we would ask: *Should our struggle to bring about change be a leap in darkness?* However, it is fair to say that some of our media outlets are overburdened and overwhelmed by each current issue coming to the forefront (breaking news), and they are working day and night to keep us well-informed and shaping our

interactions with the issues, whereas others are nowhere or “Chirp outside the squadron”, as the Arabs say. This is to say that all media outlets should not be equally criticized. In other words, some should be more criticized than others because we do not see them be reflective of the daily developments of the struggle (breaking news).

However, one would jump in and put on an argument in the form of the question: *Are we sure that they have the necessary human and financial resources to do that?* In theory, that argument could be valid, but another one would argue back asking: *Are all activities they carry on more important than doing an occasional public survey on an urgent issue? Can't they prioritize things on basis of their enormous consequences for the country? Can't they pull their resources together and do some joint work?* To wind up the issue here, the reasons could be a blend of many factors, but whatever they are, the purpose here is not to blame but to indicate what is missing so that we could use our media outlets effectively and to the maximum.

I have no doubt that many of us have met some (like Negussie, the character in the Friday show of Radio Erkena, “Elal Mes Negussie Arkey”, who would tell us these worries only exist in our imaginations because we are biased against the regime. We wish that could be true, and we would say “Assey”, if we find somebody who could convince us that we are making up things and that everything is fine since the day of the peace agreement. As a matter of fact, we are dealing with deniers and demagogues like those in Deborah E. Lipstad’s acclaimed book entitled, *History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier*. It is by no means entertaining to have a discussion with such demagogues who manipulate, obscure or distort political issues with emotionalism and prejudice, provoking their counterparts to end the

discussion in total disruption or a fight. But the question is: *How should we handle them?* I like Solomon's cool approach, the host of the Radio Erena show, "Elal Mes Negussie Arkey". Moreover, it is appropriate to indicate here, first we have to admit that the fight against the regime includes such uncomfortable encounters with its supporters, and then do our best so that they would not pull us as low as to end up in a fight.

Perhaps most importantly, though no honest Eritrean could deny how bad and genuine all concerns listed above are, our people had seen and had been on the receiving end of worse situations during the pre-independence period, more often than not, coming out of those dark times hoping for the better. In particular, the saddest of all is that, after independence, the feeling of hope that had existed during the pre-independence period was taken away from our people by the leaders they had put unlimited faith on and thought they would enable them to make up for all past miseries, losses, misfortunes and calamities they had to go through during the pre-independence period. As hope is the last thing one could possess, the pressing question is: *What should happen when the traitor-in-chief tries to take away that hope from us?* In theory, the answer is that we either hit back harder and turn the table upside down on *him and his gang*, or give up and succumb. However, the central issue remains: *Is giving up and succumbing to the situation the logical reaction expected from a people known for their glorious history of long and bloody national struggle?*

All indicators on the ground show that the next season of Eritrea seems to be some pretty dark times. Nobody knows how bad the situation might get, but we do know that, if we see this plot for where it is going and get involved to stop Ethiopia's confidence man

from achieving his agenda, no doubt we would end up making it to the finale of the struggle: the removal of the nightmare and by doing so putting an end to the threat hovering over our national sovereignty.

In this struggle, the first thing we need to do is to remind ourselves of the seriousness of it all by contrasting what is going on in front of our eyes with the lofty sacrifices our people had paid for decades to achieve freedom and justice, if not democracy, mentally registering the magnitude of what we see today in its full: the devastating truth. To come to grips with the devastation that has occurred and the cloud over our sovereignty, we need to ask: *Who is Atse Isias to Ethiopia and who is he to Eritrea at this particular moment?*

The current Ethiopian leadership seems to be very happy that an old foe has turned into their Trojan horse, excited to handover all fruits of the thirty-year bloodshed in a golden plate. Though it is clear for any patriotic Eritrean, let us raise the question: *Is he a hero or a heretic?* The answer is, “He is both”. For Ethiopians, he is a hero because he is before our eyes committing unbelievable and unforgiveable acts of thinly-veiled treason against the country, as the deep-rooted concerns of the people listed above have shown, but for Eritreans, he is a heretic or a traitor who has crossed the red line because he has deviated from the goals, aspirations and values of the Eritrean people, whose sons and daughters had paid with their lives for freedom. In few words, it is pretty sad and is the biggest embarrassment in our history that the leader who had entered the capital, Asmara, as a liberator in 1991 actually fits the definition of “the Ethiopian Trojan horse”. The surprise was like a heart attack to the Eritrean people.

If the biggest concerns of our people are as bad as detailed above: *Did the horse leave the barn or is it too late to do anything about the*

problem? Not at all. To stop the traitor we need two things. The attitude which says, “We are for the country”, and the structure to do things collectively. The attitude is definitely there, but the structure lags behind.

Many different organizations and prominent Eritreans have presented proposals on the issue of structure and working together. We did not even get together to pull all proposals and reconcile them to get out of the bottleneck with something on which all of us could agree. Until now our sole preoccupation has become putting political affiliation, religion, ethnic or regional interests above the national interests. Nobody is against organizational independence, religious, ethnic or regional identities. But primarily, we need to have a country before we think about political affiliation, ethnic, religious, or regional identity. I ask with a loud voice so that everybody hears me loud and clear:

- Where do we want to seize and practice power if there is no country to be ruled?
- Where do we want to build the mosque or church if we do not have a country?
- What is the sense of being proud about my ethnicity or region if the framework inside which it could exist is not there?

Put another way, the problem is that we failed to build a big tent by combining both national unity and other identities, wrongly believing that national unity and identity of any sort are contradictory, and putting the cart before the horse. It is more than 27 years and we could not grasp the unity between these two factors packed in the issue. I am not sure, after all developments detailed above as the concerns of our people: *What more do we*

want to hear and see? Aren't we collectively committing suicide? Is this time for a gamble?

There are more favourable conditions than ever before, if we are really patriotic enough and determined to stop the Atse and his agenda. As the multidimensional treason the Atse has been committing is turning into a double-edged sword, there are condemning reactions and defections from his supporters. These reactions and defections are getting stronger every day, proving that Traitor Isias is becoming the best unifier for all Eritreans, irrespective of their political differences.

Nevertheless, since our efforts as justice seekers are scattered, unreliable and fragmented, they are hindering the effectiveness of the struggle to stop the on-going acts of treason and are becoming vulnerable to the risk of diversion by the adversaries. As the examples for the ineffectiveness of our approach are obvious and do not deserve space here, putting the pieces of the puzzle together, one would focus on the question: *What are the missing pieces in the fight?*

I cannot answer the question in a better and more comprehensive manner than EPDP's proposal 2017 did, recommending the following three joint tasks:

- Joint foreign delegation
- Common media centre
- An organ for mass mobilization

Nobody would disagree on the significance of the three and how their absence have affected the struggle, but the problem is: *Are we ready*

yet to accept proposals on basis of their merits regardless of who came up with that, modify them, and give them the final shape, before taking off to work together? If we are really united in our shock and anguish at this critical moment, we should have sleepless nights to bring all forces, organized or independent, on board to start a real joint work. *Are we doing that?*

Furthermore, there is one myth that needs to be corrected here. That is to think that Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, could put pressure on Atse Isias so that he liberalizes things and puts Eritrea on equal footing with Ethiopia. No doubt, the Ethiopian Prime Minister could have become vocal in demanding some democratic reforms in Eritrea, in line with what he is doing in his country, and could have helped the Atse implement the necessary reforms. This is a logical expectation because the current situation in Eritrea will inevitably affect Ethiopia now and on the long-run. That is only possible if there is a political will. In fact, since his early days, we thought Dr. Abiy Ahmed will decide the course of democracy in the region, but recent developments have proved us devastatingly wrong.

It was inspired by that hope that many Eritreans addressed Dr. Abiy Ahmed verbally and in writing, including letters and direct messages, in addition to protests, requesting him to put some pressure on the Atse to make some reasonable reforms. On the flip side, some argue that the Prime Minister should not do that, surprising us with their lame excuse that he understands the sensitivity of national sovereignty. In response to that argument that does not hold water, all Eritreans who are deeply resentful of what is going on in the name of peace agreements, would rise up loudly asking: *Since when did the Ethiopian*

Prime Minister start respecting the sovereignty of Eritrea and give up Ethiopia's old imperial aspirations?

Eritreans should read the situation on the ground objectively and away from wishful thinking and naivety, and stop addressing Dr. Abiy Ahmed, who is the engineer of all what is going on concerning the relations between the two countries, trying to understand that he is an Ethiopian leader, not less resentful of the sovereignty of Eritrea than Emperor Haile Sellassie and Mengistu Hailemariam. Any Eritrean who doubts this truth, should make himself/herself ready for a big disappointment tomorrow.

Please do not make a mistake, for Dr. Abiy Ahmed, freedom, justice and democracy are only for Ethiopians. Regarding Eritrea, it is all about ports and nothing else. As a matter of fact, he is strengthening the hands of the butcher and conducting a campaign to bring him out of regional and international isolation. He did reconcile him with Somalia and Djibouti, and now efforts are underway to reconcile him with the Sudan. We should be mindful that it was the Ethiopian representatives who lobbied for the election of Eritrea as a member of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations. Efforts and campaign are also now underway to see to it that the international sanctions on Eritrea are lifted. Further, it is no more a secret that the Ethiopian Prime Minister had raised the issue of the sanctions on Eritrea with the leaders he met during his current European tour.

Simply put, Dr. Abiy Ahmed wants to bring democratic change in Ethiopia, while standing with a butcher and helping in prolonging the unprecedented pains and sufferings of the Eritrean people. To expect him to listen to us is a bit too optimistic. In a nutshell, what Dr. Abiy

Ahmed has been engaged in is nothing but sheer doublethink, which George Orwell describes as follows:

“Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.”

I hope the attempt here would remove the illusion that the Ethiopian Prime Minister could do something that the Atse does not like or something counter to his own immediate interest as a populist: winning the support of the people who see the glory of Ethiopia only in restoring access to the sea at any cost. This is to say that we should focus on the struggle against the gang in Eritrea, and stop wasting our time and energy writing letters and making verbal calls to Dr. Abiy Ahmed. Dr. Abiy Ahmed and his team will only stop flirting with the Atse and give us the respect we deserve only when they know that the Atse is really under serious threat and that the ship is sinking. The rule of the game is to fasten our belts to speed up the sinking of the ship.

On the contrary, we can do our part to inform and raise awareness of the Ethiopian people and their representatives in the national parliament of the country so that they could easily see the danger coming from Eritrea due to the wrong policies of their government, that could constitute serious obstacles for the permanent peace between the two countries and peoples, and erode the goodwill Eritreans have towards Ethiopia, confirming to them that governments come and go but peoples live forever. We tend to ask them: *Did the self-destructive policies of Emperor Haile Sellassie and the Dergue bring results so that they could tend to repeat them again? Can’t they see things differently in retrospective?* By doing so, we can throw the ball on

their quarters and let them deal with their government. That is what we saw the protesters at Frankfurt did on October 31, 2018 when they staged a protest around the stadium, where Dr. Abiy Ahmed met with the Ethiopian citizens. This does not mean that the Ethiopian people think in a different way from their Prime Minister when it comes to a sovereign Eritrean state.

Nonetheless, there are few Ethiopians who have the foresight to understand that it is impossible for the Eritrean people, who fought a war of liberation for over thirty years, to compromise their sovereignty and that any adventurous moves by the Ethiopian government, in concert with the Atse, could mean another thirty-year war. This approach increases the voices of reason or Ethiopian scholars like Professor Bruk Hailu, the first Ethiopian to suggest that Dr. Abiy Ahmed should interfere to bring change in Eritrea (Refer to his interview with the Amharic VOA News, reproduced on www.assenna.com on October 27, 2018, with a Tigregna translation), showing the danger the ruling gang and the current situation in Eritrea represents to the relations of the two countries. Here a big question is: *Is Ethiopia going to be alright with the way to peace followed?* We leave that question for the Ethiopians to assess. We have our own assessment, but we have clearly warned against what could come when the pains of the Eritrean people are ignored, unprincipled peace is made with unelected self-imposed ruler who acts single-handedly, isolating the people from the process, and the Ethiopian leaders become the defenders and the protectors of the dictator against his own people.

There is another question that needs to be raised here. *Is the current situation in our Red Sea region favorable for our national struggle?* If

we have monitored the regional developments these days, the murder of Jemal Khashoggi has made Saudi Arabia the target of scrutiny, and is drastically changing the international image of the Kingdom and the situation in the region. To mention a few among the changes:

- International pressure is mounting on Saudi Arabia from all angles and on all issues.
- Closed files of domestic human rights violations have started to be opened.
- There is change of heart of the West towards that country, the source of evil in our region.
- The House of Saud seems to have heard the alarm bell clearly and reports have it that there are serious moves to put their house in order, which could mean many things.
- Urgent calls to end the war on Yemeni and lift the blockade on Qatar are coming, with a very strong pressure, from many different directions, including their closest ally, the US.

All of these fatal blows to the Atse's primary patron, the Saudi Crown Prince, Ibn Salman, could lead to change of the alignment of forces in the region. Even if the Crown Prince survives, the end of the Yemani war would be enough to render the need for mercenaries, like Atse Isias, irrelevant. If the flow of the "Gulf rice" (petrodollar) and the support for mercenary regimes in the region stop, the struggle for freedom, justice and democracy could get oxygen. But again we ask: *Are we ready to capitalize on these positive developments and speed up the sinking of the ship?*

There are many brave Eritreans who are standing up against the agenda of the Atse. It is time for all of us, who love their country, to forget our differences and join them to fight the major battle. But as scattered efforts did not take us anywhere, we need to have a structure that enables us to work together in all three areas suggested by the EPDP, remembering that it is too much to ask Dr. Abiy Ahmed for consistency in his approach. After all, what makes sense to him is not human rights of the Eritrean people, but their ports. However, we can force him to change his position, if we prove to be a real threat to his Trojan horse and a force to be reckoned with.=====