

IS ABIY AHMED TESTING OUR LIMIT AS ERITREANS OR WE ARE MAKING MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING?

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“ከአያያዝ ይቀደዳል ከአነጋገር
ይፈረዳል።”

(Amharic proverb)

The messages the Eritrean people have been receiving from Addis Ababa, through the statements and behaviours of the Ethiopian Prime Minister, have never stopped being worrisome, fearful, and bad-intentioned. The statements included the expression of lavish praises, warm approval, admiration and flattery of the tiny Isias (he is small in so many ways that the adjective “TINY” is a perfect nickname for him), a wicked, brutal dictator and butcher, who retains absolute power in its archaic form, by imposing himself on the country and running it as a concentration camp, without constitution, parliament, a deputy (or deputies), election, and free press. Add to that, the indefinite military service, equated to life sentence, and the undisguised level of corruption, remarkably perceptible by the senses, yet denied by the gang, its leader, and unfortunately enough, by Ethiopian opportunists, notably the Prime Minister and some former rebels who had lived in Asmara. Another form the statements took is the exceedingly ridiculous brag that he has been delegated by the dictator ruling next door, to represent him, or the irresponsible behaviours and acts based on that dubious claim. As we are accused by our adversaries: ***Are we really making so much about so little?***

Given the lavish praising and flattery of the tiny Isias by the Ethiopian Prime Minister, one would wonder if the Prime Minister is aware that he is

talking about Eritrea; a country on the verge of collapse because the economy is so mismanaged and totally ruined, youth, skilled manpower, and elites uprooted from their country, forced to flee, the only university closed and the whole educational system militarized, unimaginable shortages of food, medicine, running water, and electricity are not only very common but acute and suffocating, in addition to the total absence of the rule of law, reaching the level close to that of a jungle. At the same time, one would wonder if the Prime Minister is aware that he is talking about Atse Isias, who thinks he owns Eritrea and that the rest are his tenants with no right, whatsoever, to do or say anything.

All statements and claims by the Ethiopian Prime Minister did provoke a serious backlash by Eritreans, who united by their shock and anguish, thought celebrating a brutal dictator was unworthy of the Ethiopian Prime Minister, whom they looked to with optimism (though not a guarded one), from the day he came to power, that he would turn Ethiopia into a shining city on the hill and the beacon of freedom and democracy in the region. In fact, we Eritreans had been naive to think with the coming of Abiy Ahmed to power, freedom and democracy will spread like wildfire in the region. That was the unguarded optimism raised above. Additionally, those statements and claims were baffling to decent Ethiopians (though few), who similarly saw that, in line with the Prime Minister's claim that he is for democratic change, his role requires to be that of regular exaltation of freedom, consistent criticism of oppression, and never holding a dictator, brutalizing his people next door.

The most recent absurd statement by the Ethiopian Prime Minister was that Atse Isias has always been confiding to him his dream to walk in the streets of Mekelle, surrounded by his entourage, including the Prime Minister himself, to see "his people", asking the Ethiopian religious leaders to pray for the realization of Atse Isias's dream. Any objective observer could easily see that the recent statement should be a recipe for re-igniting the Eritrean anger against the Ethiopian Prime Minister, giving the Eritrean fear more oxygen and convincing Eritreans more, if they do not take the statements of the Ethiopian Prime Minister seriously, they should be considered sleeping.

Though the statement about the Atse's dream to walk in the streets of Mekelle could at the surface appear to be too laughable and too silly to take seriously, we will dodge it, only raising the following questions, just to show its riddle-type mystery (the Amharic "Sumena Worq"), and leaving the puzzle to great minds that could understand better the pulls and pushes of politics and have the necessary expertise and the skills to decode it:

- Why could visiting Mekelle be seen as the dream for Atse Isias, though everybody knows that he had visited a number of Ethiopian cities, including Addis Ababa, Gondar, Bahr Dhar and Awasa; some of them more than once?
- Does the description of the Prime Minister using the phrase "his people" and the love he says the Atse has for Mekelle coincide with the way the people of Tigray see their neighbouring dictator and their feelings towards him?
- Is the realization of Atse Isias's dream, as painted by the Prime Minister, the most important concern of the country or its top priority that should deserve the prayers of the Ethiopian religious leaders, in a country rocked by a series of turmoil, misfortunes, and deadly conflicts, daily causing mass displacements?
- Is the concept of "people" in the Ethiopian constitution so elastic as to go beyond the boundaries of a country, making the people of Tigray "his people", in reference to Atse Isias, or is the Prime Minister trying to prepare us for the final phase of the hidden agenda he and his "Isu" have been working on for a year?

We had at different times raised questions about the underlying goals behind the statements and the claims of the Prime Minister, the signals they send to the Eritrean people, and if they guarantee the strategic interests of Ethiopia. However, we will have some miscellaneous remarks, avoiding redundancy.

Every time the Prime Minister opened his mouth about Eritrea, he added to our increased clarity about the hidden motive. ***Why did he fall into this trap?*** We hear some say the praises were the result of poor judgment. Here they wanted to tell us that the Prime Minister lacked discrimination in his choice of praise. This is hardly a defense and it is exceedingly hard to believe that the underlying goal is not deeper than that or is the lack of brightness or knowledgeability (wisdom evidenced by the possession of knowledge).

It should be made clear that the love affair of the Prime Minister with Atse Isias is based on expediency (convenience despite of being improper or immoral) and interest, rather than passionate conviction. To be more specific, the Ethiopian Prime Minister has been entrenched in the belief that such statements of praise would win Atse Isias for his “Medamir” plan, that could also mean integrating Eritrea into Ethiopia, and as a populist and a very ambitious leader, he would think he would be taken as a patriot by the Ethiopian people too, when solving the problem of the landlocked country and leaving a great legacy behind. The other part of the formula was the sinking Atse Isias, who found thick clouds hanging over his political destiny and became aware that his demise is not too far, had to hug Abiy Ahmed as a life raft (a rubber boat used by a sinking person for emergency or to save his life). Abiy Ahmed, to whom the pain of the Eritrean people means nothing, found an old foe, who cannot see past his own nose, excited to become a friend and ready to handover all fruits of the 30-year struggle in a golden plate.

Of course, Eritrean justice seekers thought and still think spreading human rights and democracy, while holding the dictatorship next door to account, has been a geopolitical imperative as well as a moral one, expected from Abiy Ahmed, given his speeches and democratic reforms in his country. Nonetheless, for Abiy Ahmed and other Ethiopian opportunists and hypocrites, who do not believe that every people in the world deserves better, to promote the Ethiopian ambition, as a landlocked country, a pro-Ethiopia king is better than anti-Ethiopia democracy. This is the bitter truth, though their obsession with greed, selfishness, and unprincipled approach

lacked foresight to see the future traps and the bumpy road, full of many dangerous jolts and jerks. Yet, the conspiracy is as ugly as it is obvious.

Coming back to the statements of the Prime Minister, one would want to know: ***Do such statements serve the strategic interests of Ethiopia?*** Making statements for political reasons and without caring for long-term effects is counterproductive. The damage could be profound, severing the relations with the Eritrean people forever, while hastening the demise of his partner, Atse Isias. Moreover, the Prime Minister should have known that Atse Isias is worn out of age and infirmity, entering the last stage of human weakness, while the Eritrean people will live forever. In few words, confounding Atse Isias with the Eritrean people, as to see no difference between the two, or putting him above the people, is a seriously damaging approach, amounting to gambling with the strategic interests of the country, and being liable to academic scrutiny and ridicule. In this connection, the statements of the Prime Minister remind us of an interesting Arabic wisdom, which says, your tongue is like the headgear or bridle of your horse, which will betray you when you keep it loose, but will protect you when you control it with care.

As to the exceedingly ridiculous delegation of authority, the most thorny and pivotal issue, it deserves little pause because there is nothing more fallacious than this brag the Prime Minister repeats, as if he is talking to dumb people who do not know that Atse Isias's authority is a "divine" one, which is nothing but oppression in its medieval form, or the embodiment of the wickedness and the disgrace of human history.

When we talk about "divine" authority Atse Isias has, like any other king or emperor (whether crowned or not), we are talking about someone who looks upon himself born to rule and others to obey; not a person upon whom public honours have been bestowed through elections. It would be wired if one does not wonder what would be the answer of the Prime Minister if he is asked: ***Where did Atse Isias get the power to delegate it to you? Why do you talk about elections in Ethiopia, have created structure for that, set a date, and have started making preparations, if***

you do not think an elected leadership would be either wiser or more worthy of confidence than unelected one?

It is worth noting here that the ridiculous delegation of authority cannot be seen short of being a practical step towards the implementation of Abiy-Isias's joint conspiracy plan to erode the sovereignty of Eritrea, preparing the ground for the gradual but full integration of the country into Ethiopia. Accordingly, two questions peep out here demanding answers: ***How do we Eritreans see ourselves versus the notorious delegation of authority by the Atse to the Ethiopian Prime Minister? Is there something remotely similar in the history of international relations?***

Eritreans see themselves as a nation or a cohesive whole, represented by distinctive traditions, culture, languages and politics. All these boil down to an awareness of difference or a feeling and recognition of "we" and "they" when it comes to Ethiopia or any other country for that matter. What we have in mind here is the national identity of a sovereign state, Eritrea, represented by its symbols, history, blood ties, and all other things that make us different from others, as detailed above. On the flip side, when we talk about the incomplete sovereignty we suspect the two conspirators, Abiy and his friend "Isu" have in store for the Eritrean state or have been contemplating, we remember "countries" known as non-sovereign parts of some states. This needs an explanation for the advantage of some readers, who may not have a bird's eye-view about this category of "countries".

The list of non-sovereign "countries" in our modern world includes Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China), Bermuda (British Overseas Territory), Greenland (an Autonomous Constituent Territory of Denmark), Puerto Rico (under the US administration, governed by the Puerto Rico Federal Act of 1950 but it does not vote for Congress), Northern Ireland (a non-sovereign part of the United Kingdom), Wales (a non-sovereign part of the United Kingdom), Scotland (a non-sovereign part of the United Kingdom) and England (a non-sovereign part of the United Kingdom). It should be emphasized here that each one of these "countries" in the list,

has a particular historical background that led to a special administrative arrangement, limiting its sovereignty. Unlike these “countries”, Eritrea is a complete sovereign state and a member of the United Nations.

In few words, Eritrea’s sovereignty cannot be disputed and that no other government or foreign leader represents it, while its head of state, whether we support or oppose him, is the public persona who officially embodies the state in its unity and legitimacy.

The second component of the question above has been answered by an article, interestingly enough, written by an Ethiopian writer, entitled, “Eritrea is the only sovereign country represented by a foreign leader”. That is why the article has attracted the attention of many readers. The title of the article seems to reflect the contemplated direction of the Ethio-Eritrean relations, but the question remains: ***Can the two conspirators really deliver what they have been contemplating?*** The quick answer is: objects in the mirror are closer than they appear. Yet, our struggle has to rise up to the level capable of completely and effectively foiling the conspiracy, whose symptoms are daily becoming clearer.

There are some basic points worth remembering and taking seriously for Abiy Ahmed. These talking points are related to his relations with Eritrea’s dictator, and the expectations that make up the geopolitical imperative for our region, hoping to save the Ethiopian Prime Minister from wishful thinking, intellectual scrutiny, and devastating embarrassments, if his mind is not stuck on one gear and can process information logically. The basic talking points we need to raise regarding these issues could be summed up as follows:

- Power is only given to any leader by the people, who would take it away when the leader fails to serve the people efficiently, or fails in his duty. At the same time, love affair of an elected leader of an emerging democracy with a dictator, who by his actions clearly shows he was chosen by God (he should not necessarily say it as Emperor Haile Sellassie did), finally leads to a far-reaching disaster. No matter what success is achieved, that success would only be temporary, and

the elected leader should worry about the legacy he would leave behind: the negative impact of his wrong policies and the betrayal of principles. This is an example of a foreign policy that fails to balance national interests with principles and values.

- Any leader could be widely popular with his ardent and steadfast or unblinking supporters, but we should always ask: ***Do his supporters constitute the bigger chunk of the country?*** This is the way the fake “popularity” of Atse Isias, we hear some Ethiopians talk about, should be looked to or reviewed.
- Support for any regime cannot be taken as humanist, if it does not stand with the oppressed. In a nutshell, solidarity with a dictatorship stands against the lives of the people because all dictators are cruel, unjust, corrupt to the core, and wasteful. Solidarity here should be considered to be coolness to human fate, and clearly shows that the conscience is not the sole guide.
- Experience has confirmed, time and again, that any dictatorship would eventually face the eruption of a revolution and that no amount of foreign support can protect the dictator and his gang from the wrath of his own people, when the right moment comes. Though this is common sense, as the American writer Samuel Langhorne Clemens or known by the nickname Mark Twain (November 30, 1835-April 21, 1910) had said, sometimes: “Common sense is not common.”
- The cause of one people against a dictatorship is, in a great measure, the cause of all mankind, and when the dictator declares war against his own people, he is declaring war against the natural rights of all mankind. An elected leader of a neighbouring country, who is an ally of the dictator, should know that he is joining the war against the rights of mankind.
- It is the people who encourage intercourse with other peoples, and promote the common good of the neighbours positively, by uniting

their affections, hopes, aspirations, efforts, and resources, whereas a dictator creates distinctions, and promotes hate and suspicion between peoples of different countries. Making agreements with a dictator, by excluding people from information and participation in decisions, where the highest judgment is required, is a serious betrayal of these principles detailed, and history will be very merciless with the violators of these principles.

- External sovereignty or foreign interference in the affairs of a state has never been an important issue for a dictator, and he will never defend it. On the contrary, a dictator would be concerned about internal sovereignty, which is for the regime to be free from internal institutions (if they exist) or from forces that scrutinize and curb the executive power of the dictator or fight for justice, freedom, and democracy. This is to say, a security agreement with a dictatorship by an elected government means cooperation in controlling all agents of change and supporting brutal repression in the dictatorship. Such partnership with a dictatorship on fateful issues is interference on behalf of a dictator, while it is also the biggest gamble for the country trying to take advantage and get concessions.
- We are not against economic cooperation with Ethiopia. In fact, we see it as something imperative. However, that cooperation should be rules-based, democratic, rights-respecting, and interdependent. Our concern is that Eritrea does not have a government that accepts these principles and defends the national interests of the country. That is why we say the right partner for Ethiopia is the government of the people that has yet to come in Eritrea.

Though no two Eritrean justice seekers would disagree that the Ethiopian Prime Minister has lost all his senses of shame when the issue is Eritrea, blaming only others for what is going on in the Ethio-Eritrea relations is not enough. Until now, a lot of letters and messages have been sent to Abiy Ahmed, complaining about what he is doing to Eritrea, but he still continues his acts to erode its sovereignty. The expression, “Beating a dead horse”

comes to mind. It is futile to insist on continuing sending loud signals to the Prime Minister to stop but doing very little to prove to him that we are doing all we can to hasten the demise of his ally. ***Cannot we “Walk and the same time chew the gum”, as the saying goes in North America?***

“Talk but no action” is making us fools of the highest degree. ***Why are we light on ourselves and hard on others at the time every passing day is raising the pain level of our people?*** If we are convinced that the liberation of our country from the grip of the traitors depends on our own struggle and how fast we move, we have to prove in action to Abiy Ahmed, who is involving in our affairs up to his neck, that Eritrea has owners who will defend it, as they did in the past.

I bet, once we prove to the Ethiopian Prime Minister that the victory over his ally is at the corner and the decades-old regime is going to collapse, he will flip on him because Ethiopians would not accept Atse Isias to be a liability on them. This is the way the dynamic will change, and we saw it happen in the Ethio-Sudanese relations few months ago. To put it candidly: ***Why do we want to learn the hard way or after making mistakes and paying a price when we can learn from the experiences of others and save ourselves from any price?*** Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), one of the US Founding Fathers, had condemned this approach, saying: “Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other way.”

Many things have been said but our struggle could not hasten the demise of the regime because of many reasons, including the following few:

- Retreating to narrow concerns at the expense of the national ones has not stopped yet.
- Our national structure that should serve all as a national umbrella is not yet complete and functional at its full strength.
- Many Eritreans are still reluctant to be involved in the struggle against the regime.

- International solidarity with our struggle is still weak because we have not knocked enough doors.
- We are scattering and slicing our material, financial, and human resources, instead of bringing everything together and doing well-organized, well-planned and executed, synchronized, multi-lingual, all-inclusive, and effective media work that could silence the voice of the adversary and reaches all of our people wherever they are, while giving guidance to individuals going live or using different media outlets. Remember that Ethiopians had only one ESAT; not five or six.
- Too much talk about “identity crisis”, Tigrai-Tigreyn plan, and conspiracy theories is still taking the lion’s share from our time, efforts, and attention at the expense of the real fight against the regime. ***Have we really lost our radar?***
- Collective accusations of treason and support to the regime, mainly targeting this Awraja or that, are still ringing high, forgetting that it is unfair to paint a whole part of the country with one brush. We have to identify the key devils and call their names. ***How could defections from the regime occur when we threaten everybody working for the government?*** Further, though I do not want to be cynical, I have to shoot straight, saying we have to beware of seeking cheap popularity by giving a dreadful picture about any section of our society in the name of patriotism, and making business out of politics. This is not patriotism, but a dangerous divisive and unethical path that spoils political struggle and delays the victory. We have to ask ourselves: ***Who benefits from that?***

Before winding up this piece, one issue needs to be brought to the attention of our folks. We have reached a new level, and I think many Eritreans would see it the same way. The fact that Abiy Ahmed won the Noble Peace prize in the name of the fake peace with Eritrea should add a layer to our caution. Now the Ethiopian prime Minister has the international support,

which may empower his adventurous policies, or he may think that way. Due to his unlimited ambition towards Eritrea, he may interpret the international support as the giving of a free hand or a green light to him. We fear this confidence could engage him in new attacks on the sovereignty of our country. Given the current situation in Ethiopia, where anger towards the Prime Minister is rising in all corners and ethnic groups, including his own ethnic group and “Kelel”, we fear he may pull a rabbit out his hat, coming up with some new plans to contain the anger, by obtaining new concessions from Eritrea. ***Is this unlikely to happen given the treacherous attitude of his “Isu”, who could go to any length to please his sponsor?*** =====