

Eritrea under Ethiopian Suzerainty¹: Regression and the Reversal of Eritrean Sovereignty in Action

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A cursory revisit to the politico-economy history of the Horn of Africa where Eritrea is found informs us that this strategic region of Africa has served as a theatre of war for a very long period of time and it still features armed conflicts and political and social instability. It is important to note that instability has been occasioned not only by internal conflicts and by those that flow across borders but also by the clashes of national interests of big and small, near and far international power players. The Eritrean people have been victims of this unfriendly geopolitical dynamics and have had to conduct a long bloody liberation struggle to claim its legitimate self-determination as sovereign people and country. That is to say, the Eritrean people had to pay this huge cost to rectify the wrongs that were done on Eritrea by these geopolitical actors in the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s. As we all know, these actors under the aegis's of the UN created a system (the Federal Act) where the legitimate rights of the Eritrean people for self-determination as sovereign people and country was slowly but surely subverted by the Crown of Ethiopia. The final act of this subversion occurred when the King of Ethiopia unilaterally dissolved the Eritrean parliament and consequently annexed Eritrea on 14 November 1962. What followed was anyone's knowledge and does not merit presenting it here in this short piece. Besides, I hope Eritreans will not be forced to do it all over again. But, there is something which seems very familiar to Eritreans, though. It looks like Eritrea is actually suffering from a ***"backtracking syndrome"***.

Carefully analyses of what has been happening to Eritrea during the last two plus decades in general and to the relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea recently (during the last 8 plus months) in particular, show that it is ***"deja vu"*** – history is repeating itself. As it is widely documented, without the expressed consent of the Eritrean people and against the national interest of Eritrea, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to tie Eritrea to Ethiopia under a faulty federal arrangement in 2 December 1950 (Resolution 390 (V)). The adopted Federal Act and the subsequently drafted and ratified 1952 Eritrean Constitution (the first 7 Article of the Federal Act were made to be part of the Eritrean Constitution), for instance, have the following specifications (Provisions):

1. Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown (Article 3 of the 1952 Eritrean Constitution);

¹ *This means a relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea where the foreign policy and international relations of Eritrea is controlled by Ethiopia, while the jurisdiction of Eritrea is limited to its domestic or internal affairs only.*

2. The Eritrean government shall possess legislative, executive and judicial powers in the field of domestic affairs (Article 4 of the 19952 Eritrean Constitution);

3. The jurisdiction of the federal government shall extend to the following matters: defense, foreign affairs, currency and finance, foreign and interstate commerce and external and interstate communications including ports. The federal government [the Ethiopian] shall have the power to maintain the integrity of the federation, and shall have the right to impose uniform taxes throughout the federation to meet the expenses of federal functions and services. The jurisdiction of the Eritrean government shall extend to all matters not vested in the federal government, including the power to maintain the internal police, to levy taxes to meet the expense of domestic functions and services, and to adopt its own budget (Article 5 of the 1952 Eritrean Constitution).

It is safe to say that recent events and developments concerning the relationship between Eritrean and Ethiopia are redolent of the history of Eritrea during the federation era. As was the case back then, today, Eritrea lacks a legitimate, legal and honest national government to defend and protect its legitimate sovereign rights and its national interest in the regional and global geopolitical forums. Similar to what the King of Ethiopia had been doing to Eritrea, Issaias and his regime have been [undermining the integrity of Eritrea as a nation-state](#) – undermining its institutions, norms, culture, rule of law, way of life and livelihood. Moreover, as if Eritrean sovereignty does not reside in the Eritrean people, Issaias has been making secret agreements with the leaders of Ethiopia without the expressed consent and knowledge of the Eritrean people. Although, to date, the Eritrean people do not have any clues about the whole depth and breadth of these secret agreements and what their implications to the sovereignty of Eritrea are, there are concrete evidences that show the slow process of transferring the jurisdiction of key sovereign functions of the State of Eritrea to Ethiopia (reminiscent of the item expressed in **(3)** above) is underway in full swing. This is very troubling and, we, Eritreans should better believe our eyes and ears. It is very real and it is happening. As if Eritrea were under Ethiopian suzerainty, Issaias and his regime have relegated the disposition of key state sovereign functions pertaining to international (foreign) affairs, national defense, and international economic agreements, just to mention but a few cases, to Ethiopia as the following examples could unmistakably show:-

1. In line to what Issaias has told the Ethiopian leader recently, namely **“I have given you the authority to handle Eritrea’s foreign affairs” and as was also confirmed and agreed by Dr. Abiy in his statement “I have been given an official authority by President Issaias to represent Eritrea in international affairs, Eritreans do not get surprised when you see me doing so”**, the Ethiopian leader and Ethiopia have been making and signing agreements on matters pertaining to Eritrean sovereign and national interest with other governments. The signing of an agreement concerning the



building of railroad that connects the Eritrean Port City of Massawa to Addis Abba, Ethiopia, between Ethiopia and Italy, in the absence of the Eritrean part, is a flagrant violation of international norms and undermines the integrity of Eritrea as a sovereign country. Ethiopia also signed an agreement with United Arab Emirates to construct an oil pipeline from Eritrean Port City of Assab to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in the summer of 2018. Again, Eritrea is not a part to this agreement, and one wonders how this could happen without undermining the sovereignty of Eritrea. It



Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have agreed to build an oil pipeline linking Eritrea's port city of Assab with Addis Ababa.

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seems that Eritrea no more exists as a sovereign contry with solemn sovereign rights among the community of sovereign nations. International entities are also learning that fact and they start to internalize it and consider it as normal state of affairs in the [international geopolitical forums](#). The sad thing about this is, it is done by a design. In cae you forgot it or did not hear it at all, this was what Issaias said: ***“I have given you my authority: from now on wards, you, Dr. Abiy, are our leader; now that I am old and I don’t have much long time left to live; but I am content and satisfied because I am leaving Eritrea in your hands”***. Has Issaias put Eritrea under Ethiopian suzerainty already? It seems so, at least to the Ethiopian leader as indicated by his recent actions as described above and by his expressed suggestion to create the same embassies, armies, custom taxes, etc. for both entities.

2. Ethiopian leaders, military and civilian, currently active and retired, have been bold in expressing their plans to rebuild Ethiopia’s Naval Forces with the intension of controlling the Eritrean Red Sea Basin. News that is coming from Eritrea indicates that the members of the Eritrean Naval Forces are sent home and Ethiopian Naval Forces are stationed in the Eritrean Red Sea islands and are making training in the Eritrean waters of the Red



Sea. (ንበራላት እንታይ ኢድላዮ ሚዶ ንበልናዮም፡ ግን ካላ እቶም በራላት ናይ ልቃሕ ጸጉሪ ተኼሎም እንደገና ጸጉሪ ዘብቑሉ ኢዮም ዝመስሉ'ም፡ ህዝቢ ኤርትራ ከም እንደገና ንኸላጽዮም ኣብ ካላኣይ ገድሲ ምእታው ከየድልዮ ንፈርሕ። ህዝቢ ኤርትራ፡ እዘን ጸጉሪ ሱር ሰዲደን ከይጸደቑን ከይጠግግን ከለዉ፡ ጊዜ ከይወሰድካ ንኣለቃሓይን ንተልቃሓይን ሕጂ ምብጋስ ከድልዮካ ኢዩ)

In concluding my remarks, I would like to be honest with the Eritrean people about my hopes and my fears about Eritrea and its future as sovereign people and country. My fear is that the current state of affairs of Eritrea (what has been going on in Eritrea recently) is reminiscent of what happened to Eritrea before, during and after the federation era. Our enemies (both domestic and foreign) have been trying to weaken us by dividing us along ethnic, religious, regional and other ascriptions to achieve their evil objectives. Despite all these, my hope, on the other hand, is that the Eritrean people have already learned from this divide and rule history and hence will not fall into this wicked and evil scheme of our enemies. I have the utmost trust that the Eritrean

people will ultimately come together and unify its activities in its efforts to save Eritrean sovereignty and Eritrean Identity. Eritreans are now sensing that Eritrea is in real danger of losing its independence and national sovereignty unless we act in unison to avert that danger.. The above itemized intransigencies of Ethiopia in clear violations of international laws and norms have already started to undermine Eritrea as a sovereign Nation-State. Consequently, Eritreans, both currently alive and future generations of their descendants, are in the danger of losing their Eritrean Identity. Hence, the burning issue today is **“creating national harmony”** to safeguard Eritrea from these dangers. This is a national issue and concerns all Eritrean in both camps (the Justice Seeking Camp/Opposition Camp and the Regime Supporters Camps).

As a matter of fact, after the recent episodes that exposed the true colors of Issaias and his regime, many Eritreans who used to support the regime have since come out to express their opposition to what Issaias and his regime have been doing to Eritrea. Many more have shifted their loyalty and have since expressed their displeasure about the path the regime has started to take. Many more are still in the process of shifting their loyalty from the regime to their people (to the Justice Seeking Camp). Given the way Issaias and his regime have been holding their supporters (*like captured preys*), these are significant developments. The Opposition Camp should welcome these developments and **create an inclusive, accommodating, caring, and welcoming environment for those who exit the “Regime Camp” and join the “for Justice Camp”**. Few months ago, for most, if not all, regime supporters, exit was not even an option available for them. Their loyalty to the regime was so intense that they almost have remained blind to the evil deeds of the regime for so long. Besides, the regime uses severe punishments such as **“social isolation, blackmailing, outright threats of physical harm or even death, etc.”** for those who dare to voice their displeasures or oppositions to the regime’s policies or deeds let alone for those who dare to exit the “Regime Camp”. The regime is continuing this kind of acts unabated. Hence, it is incumbent upon the Opposition Camp to embrace and to be a home for these Eritreans. The Opposition Camp needs to get out its modus operand - the urge to be vindictive, name calling, character assassination, and exclusion. It is high time to grow up politically, engage in real politicking and avoid emotional outbursts of political disposition.

Last but not least, those of you who have already done your high school education might have come across with the following from your chemistry lessons: **“Like dissolve like” or “polar substance dissolves in polar substance; non-polar substance dissolves in non-polar substance”**. A similar Tigrigna saying goes as: **“ገረብ ብሓኸላ”**. The morale of this saying is that we can defeat the regime if we can effectively use the current significant shift in loyalty against the regime. This can easily be done if we can encourage and create an environment where the recent defectors can play key roles in furthering the shift in loyalty against the regime and towards the Opposition Camp. The support base of the regime can significantly be eroded if the opposition Camp were to use the **“ገረብ ብሓኸላ”** model.

