

***IS THE UNTHAWRTED SYSTEMATIC EROSION OF THE
SOVERIGNTY OF THE ERITREAN STATE A MERE PROPOGANDA TALK?***

By: Abdu Habib

sabbahar@rocketmail.com

It has been over six months since Eritreans started talking and writing about the danger hovering over the sovereignty of the Eritrean state, sounding an alarming bell about the secret agreements between Eritrea's Atse and Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, and the incredibly awkward or bizarre connections between the two, about which the Eritrean people have totally been kept on the dark. That was the beginning of the new nightmare, needless to remind the readers of the 27-year ruin of everything called life or precious in Eritrea. For worse to come, the dangerous path developed further into a consistent pattern of more alarming actions, statements and disgraceful personal behaviours of the Atse, adding new hazards that changed things in a real way and reinforced the suspicion and fears of our people, heralding what is in the horizon.

By way of continuity of that pattern, we daily observe new developments, causing more head scratching and making the cloud hanging over the Eritrean state thicker and darker, to devastatingly land as real assaults on the sovereignty of the country. As Eritrean citizens, whose people paid dearly during the 30-year war of liberation, we cannot be num to all these: we cannot be incapable of action or incapable of doing the bare minimum, feeling emotion. Failing to live up to our responsibility is one form of treason at this particular time, when we clearly see the Atse, at this sunset stage of his life, systematically demolishing everything in plain site. At the same time, our people have gone too long suffering and dehumanized but yet the Atse is making it more painful for them daily. Consequently, the country has gone past the tipping point. This is the way we have started off 2019.

On the flip side, the loyal soldiers of the regime, who have been so brained washed to consider speaking about the sovereignty of Eritrea as a topic off limit,

as usual, pull no punches because they do not have any substantial arguments to defend the multi-faceted treason of their “god”. Their only expertise is to resort to empty “nationalist” rhetoric, insults, defamations and threats, describing the acts of the whistle blowing by the Eritrean citizens who saw the dangerous developments for what they are and have shown the backbone and dignity to raise the red flag, as falsification of truth and Wayne-type fabrications, using all “ist” words in their vocabulary, including opportunist, tribalist, terrorist, extremist, leftist, regionalist, “Agamist” and the like, to give a dreadful picture about the decent and the truly patriotic Eritreans.

It is amid the escalation of this battle between the truth and the campaigns to silence the voice of the truth that this piece is written. It is from this bearing that the topic was formulated and the piece composed the way they are.

The complex question, as formulated in the topic above, has three components. The primary question poses if the erosion of the indivisibility of the sovereignty of the Eritrean state was real. Of a lesser importance are the other reflecting catch words in the topic, added to examine whether the erosion was unthwarted, in terms of purpose, action, and plan, as well as, if it was systematic, well thought of, and meticulously planned. These last two aspects are not treated explicitly, but are interwoven into the primary issue. Before proceeding to the heart of the topic, it seems necessary to see the definition of a sovereign state and other issues that get us closer to that.

It is generally believed that a sovereign state is one which is independent in its affairs and territory, and is complete in itself. To elaborate, this means that it neither answers to another power nor shares powers with others. In few words, it conducts its own affairs without interference and hindrance from others. In other words, the sovereignty of the state should be indivisible or cannot be shared with another power or authority. If the sovereignty of a certain state is divided among two or more authorities, the state sovereignty does not have the indivisibility, which is a necessary condition for the unity of the state. Without the indivisibility of the sovereignty of the state, it is impossible to imagine modern politics, let

alone to justify it. The absolutist conception of the sovereignty of a state was described by the French jurist, Cardin Le Bret (1558-1655), who wrote "...sovereignty is no more divisible than a point in geometry..." (*Judicial handbook of the Richelieu regime*, Paris, 1632). As forerunner questions, one would ask:

- ***Does Atse Isisa's absurd concession to the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, saying, "I authorized you to lead us", mean power sharing or the yielding of power to others?***
- ***Where is the indivisibility of the sovereignty of the Eritrean state if Atse Isias shows readiness to share state power with Dr. Abiy?***

It is noteworthy here that state sovereignty does not belong to the government but to the state, as the political organization of the society. It does not belong to the government because governments, in principle, change due to the fact that they usually belong to a certain group or party but state is permanent. This means that sovereignty is a constant attribute of the state. Of course, in the initial period of development of the concept "sovereignty", which was in the medieval era, it was linked to the monarch, who was considered to be the bearer of that sovereignty. For those who have not done some serious reading about the state in history, particularly about the concept of sovereignty during the medieval period, they need to know that the rule of Atse Isias is the closet living example in terms of the essence of governance, methods, and tools, though it exists in the 21st century. On the contrary, in modern times, the state is the bearer of the sovereignty, not the ruler or the government. In light of this principle, it is appropriate to raise the question: ***Does Atse Isias who rules without people's mandate and representation have the right to give what he does not possess by signing sovereignty-related agreements with Ethiopia?***

With the above raised questions as our points of departure, we proceed to the characteristics of a sovereign state, to show the Eritrean reality against the backdrop of the properties characterizing the legal nature of state sovereignty, using these characteristics as our matrix.

The first essential characteristic of a state, to be recognized as a sovereign one, is a ***real and defined territory***, which means established territorial boundaries. The reason for which the Kurds of Northern Iraq are not recognized as a sovereign state is because they do not have a defined territory they say it is theirs. The Kurds live scattered in Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey. By the same token, the Jewish people did not have a recognized state before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. This will lead us to the question: ***Why did Eritrea and Ethiopia fight a devastating war over Bademe for two years (1998-2000) followed by a 20-year no-war no-peace situation of stalemate?***

Whatever the hidden reason for the Bademe War maybe, what we know is the obvious: the significant meaning of territorial disputes in international society. Accordingly, there are a couple of reasons for the significance of defined territory of a state. The first is that a defined territory is related to the fundamental rights of states, namely, ***sovereignty***. The second reason is that a defined territory is important for international peace. Regardless of all that:

- ***Why did the two governments surprise us, all of a sudden, with a new twist of strategy declaring that borders are no more important for Ethiopia and Eritrea?***
- ***Isn't this too good to be true?***
- ***Can the two governments scrape out a fundamental right of states, sovereignty, by an administrative declaration or a strike of a pen?***

The declaration that borders are meaningless for the two countries was one of the top political headlines of 2018, and is hard to understand. In fact, many Eritreans and very few Ethiopians have been warning that the measure is pregnant with all dangers for the future relations of the two countries, wondering: ***Why did they take this enormous risk? Is the measure a foreign policy malpractice or has a hidden motive?*** Time will tell.

However, it is stunning that the Western media, that takes a vested interest on issues that are the size of a peanut and magnify the problem thousand-fold, seems to ignore this issue, which is the size of a mountain due to its significance and future implications. The apparent reason is that the desirably designed geo-politics of the region, aimed at bringing the Red Sea under the control of the landlocked Ethiopia and ensure the survival of Eritrea's dictator with the help of his partner, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, and the corrupting Gulf money, serves the Western best interest in the region and those of their allies in the Gulf. That is why they exaggerate the significance of the superficial "peace" between Ethiopia and Eritrea, though it was made by the two leaders without the mandate and the participation of the people of Eritrea, turning a blind eye to the rare human tragedy looming there. We have never heard about any pressure from Ethiopia or its allies on Atse Isias to respect human rights, release political prisoners, implement the constitution, allow free press, and change Eritrea from a medieval state to a modern one, parallel to the democratic measures of Ethiopia. In this connection, with great dismay, we ask: ***Where is the Western rhetoric and that of Dr. Abiy Ahmed that they stand up to injustice locally, nationally, and globally?***

Dr. Abiy Ahmed's talk about the necessity of merging the armies of the two countries and that of Djibouti, in some of his recent statements during his European tour, is something that should not be taken lightly. This added to the landlocked Ethiopia's plan to establish a Naval Force, and the insensitive saying of Dr. Abiy Ahmed in a public discourse, "What we are going to share with Isu is Assab", has given Eritreans sleepless nights, taking all these as pieces of evidence for Ethiopia's aspirations to control Eritrea's coast line on the Red Sea.

Further, as the aim of any army and its Naval Force is to protect the territory of the state, which means its sovereignty, it has become logical to ask: ***Whose territory or sovereignty of which state is the desirous would-be merged army and the future Ethiopian Naval Force going to protect? Who can imagine that they are going to protect Eritrea?*** If so, the questions are: ***From whom? From themselves?*** We are justified to

ask these questions because no other country has territorial claim over the Eritrean side of the Red Sea.

Moreover, the widespread circulation and display of the old Ethiopian map, which includes Eritrea as a part of it, the emergence of media outlets and other enterprises taking the names Adulis, Red Sea, and Dahlac (to mention a few), in addition to the messages the new Ethiopian songs coming after the signing of the “Peace” Agreement convey, are indicators of the Ethiopian aspirations, making the Eritrean fears more credible.

Another characteristic feature of a sovereign state is a ***permanent population***. Eritrea has a permanent population that has been reduced only to old men and women, in addition to children. It is the only state in the world that forces its youth to flee the country exactly in the same way Israel has been doing to the Palestinians so that they leave their land and flee. Though the opening of the border, after twenty years, was a positive step highly welcomed by all, hoping that it would lead to its immediate demarcation, the most striking thing that happened was the scary and uncontrolled exodus of Eritrean migrants to Ethiopia, escaping from the country they equate to a big prison and hell on earth. That almost doubled the number of refugees in Ethiopia, beating the margin of 400,000.00, according to some informed sources. The Ethiopian Government turned a blind eye to that alarming exodus, as if nothing has happened. ***Was that a tacit consent from the part of the Ethiopian Government or a joint plan with the ruling gang in Eritrea?***, one would ask.

A host of questions have been raised since then, especially when people attempted to connect all dots by watching all developments happening, the insensitive statements given by Dr. Abiy Ahmed in and outside the country, not to forget the disgraceful behaviours and the irresponsible statements of Atse Isias on all occasions he had with his Ethiopian counterparts. Among the questions raging or continuing with force and intensity among Eritreans are the following:

- ***Why did the new guidelines for the implementation of the Geneva Convention of 1951 concerning the status and***

treatment of refugees become important at this particular time, though Ethiopia is one of the first signatories?

- *Isn't this an attempt to re-settle Eritreans in Ethiopia and prepare them to be a part of the Ethiopian population in the same way Emperor Haile Sellassie allowed and facilitated the migration of many Eritreans before the resolution of the Ethio-Eritrean federation in?*
- *Is Dr. Abiy Ahmed testing the political waters for the next major step to merge the populations of the two countries into one?*

The last characteristic feature of a sovereign state we need to discuss is **independence**. Independence in this sense means the state runs its own internal and external affairs independently. This is another name for self-determination.

Until the present, we did not see any major Ethiopian interference in the internal affairs of the Eritrean state, though the Eritrean people suspect that there are certain Ethiopian troops guarding the Atse, who does not have trust and confidence on Eritreans. If this is true, the presence of any force in the Eritrean territory for whatever reason, including training, is interference or a preparation to interfere in future. This limits the sovereignty of the state, even if it is done with the consent of the government. Nevertheless: ***Who is capable of raising questions and holding the Atse accountable in a country that does not have a constitution in place and has never known the rule of law?***

The most glaring Ethiopian interference that limits the sovereignty of the Eritrean state is in the conduct of the foreign affairs. Last week's agreement of the Ethiopian leader with the Italian Prime Minister about the planned railway, connecting Massawa and Addis Ababa, is a concrete example of the Ethiopian role in the conduct of Eritrean foreign affairs. No matter how useful the project is, entering into any agreement with a foreign nation in the name of the State of Eritrea limits the sovereignty of the Eritrean state, and is a gross violation of the principle of sovereignty. The same thing could be said about the agreement between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ethiopia to extend oil pipelines from

the Eritrean Port of Assab to Ethiopia. This is also useful, but the principle of the sovereignty of the state is grossly violated. Again, the harsh past we had with the Ethiopians and their notorious expansionist aspirations dictate that we have to be very vigilant. Being naïve is like committing suicide, given all situations raising our suspicion about the motives of the Atse and his suspicious relations with the Ethiopian Prime Minister. But the most shocking of all is the statement by Dr. Abiy Ahmed, during the same recent European tour, saying that having separate embassies or diplomatic missions for Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti (maybe Djibouti was inserted as a camouflage, the target being Eritrea) is waste of financial, human and material resources. At best, this could be taken as unprofessional way of looking at the conduct of foreign affairs of states.

Every country has its own national interests, and diplomatic missions are established to promote and protect those interests. ***Who is naïve or ignorant enough to imagine that the Eritrean and the Ethiopian national interests coincide or are not contradictory?*** As the foreign affairs of states are the reflection of their internal affairs, before proposing to have joint diplomatic missions with Eritrea, Dr. Abiy Ahmed would sound more principled, credible and trustworthy had he shown direct and legitimate concern about matters related to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the supremacy of law in Eritrea, and had he worked sincerely towards influencing his “Isu” to bring some basic changes in line of those occurred in Ethiopia. After all, these matters constitute some foundations of international order, and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the Eritrean state. This is to say that this cannot be interference in the internal affairs of the Eritrean state.

Likewise, it should be emphasized that the fallacy of his proposal lies in his failure to see the conduct of foreign affairs is not, has never been, and will never be “YeDabbo Sra” (Group Work). It rather belongs to the individual sovereign state because each state has its own unique national interests and priorities, and that could run counter to the national interests of its supposed partner. I do not want to be rude, but with all respect, Dr. Abiy Ahmed has surprised us with his little knowledge of the principles of the conduct of foreign affairs of sovereign states. If

it is not so, he might have thought the Eritrean state could be measured in the size of the dwarf Atse Isias and could be easily compromised like him. As a matter of fact, we see two Abiys here. This is the side he exclusively displays towards Eritrea and the Ethiopian public does not see much of this.

To be blunt, it could be said that neighbours should have their own independent diplomatic missions, but they can cooperate on certain issues when necessary, regardless of their sizes (the small kingdom of Qatar is equally important as the USA or Russia in international relations.). To show that Dr. Abiy's proposal is absurd, we ask: ***Is it possible for the two countries to have the same diplomatic missions but different ministers of foreign affairs? Doesn't this mean that Eritrea should not enter into relations with another country without the approval of Ethiopia?*** In a nutshell, we should be accused of naiveté or sheer ignorance, if we do not take this statement as an announcement of his intention to merge the two countries. To wind up this part, a couple of questions to be raised are:

- ***What level of lack of sensitivity such ridiculous statements represent?***
- ***Who is to blame for all that type of humiliation our country and people are these days going through?***
- ***Should we take things with a grain of salt and conclude that our African leaders are badly in need of training so that they could know how others would receive their words and behaviours?***

We could see that the “peace agreement” between Ethiopia and Eritrea does not match with its declared reason. Accordingly, the unthwarted and systematic encroachment on the sovereignty of Eritrea, as we tried to show through the characteristics of a sovereign state, is going too far and in the direction Atse Isias wanted, to the extent that we can say, “The Emperor is naked”. It is meaningless, waste of time, and gives the wrong signal to continue urging Dr. Abiy and those in his orbit for a sober thinking. That is a cloud that will never change to rain. We just need to strengthen our struggle against the regime, while doing our best to convince the international community to mount serious pressure on the Atse and

his gang through different means. Ethiopians will change their positions when they know that his downfall is fast approaching and that their interests will be threatened. That is the time they will listen and show readiness to negotiate.

We are daily fighting over petty matters in the facebook and dehumanizing one another, while the regime is getting out of isolation and escalating its attack on the sovereignty of the country. We know that Atse Isias, the source of all Eritrean tragedies and misfortunes, has truly become a stain in the honour of Eritrea and will never be washed off, even hundred years after he leaves. However, if this is the degree of the seriousness of the matter: ***What is our emergency response? What should be the human cost, the material loss, and the political cost before we manage to end this tragedy and send the “Emperor” and his gang to the archives?***

We know the solution: it is pulling all of our human, material and financial resources together, as Diaspora Eritreans, and unite behind our people to enable them to achieve their goals. Of course, many challenges persist, but the question still is: ***Are we doing enough in that direction?*** Though this is the key question raised and analyzed by thousands of Eritreans in different forms and at different depths, we never cease to raise it in order to remind ourselves and to keep the hope alive.

One great recent achievement in our struggle for regime change is the birth of TV Assena, for which the Assenna Foundation should be warmly congratulated and highly supported by all means, wishing it to be the ESAT of Eritrea, while reminding other members of the family of the Eritrean opposition media outlets that it is not too late to celebrate the birth of the new vanguard. I am obliged to say this because I have not seen much celebration, if at all any.

Since the achievement of one member of the family or a contingent within the forces of change will lead to the achievement of all, celebrating achievements (even the baby ones) is the right investment, whereas ignoring it, as if nothing has happened, is an incredible gift to the regime. It is when we, as believers of a cause, value the contributions of one another and work closely with one another

that we reach a common goal, instead of running alone like the billiard balls. Running alone has degraded our capacity to fight and has burned our political energy for nothing. The elephant is still in the room. It is high time to review the way we have done things and related to one another, with the aim of taking individual and collective corrective measures. This is true for all of us fighting to bring change. =====